

Katara liberation from gender stereotypes in Avatar the Last Airbender movie 2024: A feminist analysis

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Abstract

Film is an effective tool for inserting teachings and propaganda. Films always influence and shape society through the messages they convey. This research is a feminist study of Katara's character and her liberation from gender stereotypes in the film Avatar the Last Airbender Season 1, 2024. This research aims to see how Katara's character challenges the traditional gender norms that have long been established in society, as well as to examine how Katara's character develops in the film to the point of how she breaks free from these gender stereotypes. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. The data consists of conversations containing issues of patriarchy and gender stereotypes. The data sources are videos/films and conversation scripts within the film. Data collection was done through observation by repeatedly watching the film and then analysing it. The results show that Katara's character challenges gender norms by applying characteristics such as overcoming fear and embracing self-expression, defying the need for a handsome hero, embracing personal power and autonomy, and empowering brotherhood over romantic love. This is followed by Katara's character development, which eventually frees her from gender stereotypes, gains recognition from society, and creates equality for herself and future generations.

Keywords: *Feminist, Gender, Katara, Liberation stereotypes.*

1. Introduction

In this era of communication and information technology, various interesting entertainment content has emerged, accompanied by advances in digital technology (Haleem et al., 2022). This development makes it easier for people to access entertaining and inspiring content, such as movies that can be watched on various platforms. Movies, as a form of audio-visual mass communication (Dhungana, 2024), were initially seen as entertainment for people who enjoyed engaging stories, complex characters, and experiences that fostered emotional connections.

As movies evolved, they gained a greater influence in shaping public opinion and social norms, thus becoming more than just entertainment. Movies now play a significant role in providing content that influences societal ideologies (Hasnain, 2023). They support the circulation of information and produce values, ideologies, and knowledge that can sometimes show partisanship. Through diverse stories and information, movies raise various issues such as social, cultural, political, economic, and gender issues (Hillman & Radel, 2023).

Consequently, gender injustice and patriarchal culture are often reflected in movies, influencing and shaping society through their messages (Sobur, 2013, p. 127) The movie becomes an effective propaganda tool to insert teachings and propaganda.

Patriarchal culture is frequently embedded in movies, portraying women as inferior and men as dominant. This supports Raharjo's view (Anggreni, 2015, p. 57) that culture defines the roles and status of women, who are expected to be submissive and supportive, while men are depicted as knowledgeable leaders. The ideal male role includes being a breadwinner, protector, and head of the family (Raharjo, 1995). The animated series "Avatar: The Last Airbender," with characters like Katara, challenges these stereotypes by featuring strong female protagonists who fight for justice and equality. This reflects modern society's resistance to patriarchal constructs, as seen in films like Watchdog Documentary, founded by journalists Dandhy Dwi Laksono and Andhy Panca Kurniawan, which promote gender equality through powerful female characters.

This research aims to examine interactive storytelling elements as implemented in the novel; however, it is important to acknowledge its limitations to ensure feasibility (Deli et al., 2021). The study focuses specifically on the character of Katara in the film Avatar: The Last Airbender and provides a feminist analysis of her liberation from gender stereotypes. It centers on Katara's portrayal and the significance of her character in challenging traditional gender norms but does not include a detailed analysis of other characters or explore additional narrative elements. Furthermore, this research is limited to Katara's depiction in the adapted movie Avatar: The Last Airbender Season I, released in 2024, and does not consider her character development in later seasons (II or III) or in other adaptations such as stage performances or storybooks. These limitations define the research parameters and help contextualize the scope and applicability of the findings within the specific framework of Avatar: The Last Airbender and the objectives of this study.

2. Theoretical Framework

There are also reviews of related literature that revolve around examining previous studies conducted in the realm of interactive storytelling and identifying the gaps within this body of research. Literature is a collection of written works that express human thoughts, experiences, and creativity. Literature can be defined in many ways Rainsford (2014, p. 8) provided various meanings of literature based on five categories. Based on the first category, form, and content, literature is defined as a kind of writing in which the way that something is said matters as much as what is said or where the way that something is said is part of what is said (Burke, 2023), showing the close relation between form and content in literary works.

The film presents many true stories, true stories of community people while emphasizing the traits, dispositions, and personalities of each performer or role (Schweinitz, 2011). Whereas the character and attitude of the character as interpreted by the reader, more references to the personal qualities of the character. It is possible to say that characters are essential to a literary work because they allow the plot to be explained. The film is a work of fiction.

The film is a work of fiction that relies on the author's imaginative power in the process of its creation. Character is generally in human form, but there is also an animal or object which is humanized. Character is the person shown in a narrative or play by the reader and is interpreted to have quality certain morals and understanding. According to Nurgiyantoro (2015: P. 247) the individual, the story's actor, is referred to as the character.

To understand gender dynamics, it is essential to recognize that gender refers to the social categories of male and female that are distinguished from one another by a set of psychological

features and role attributes that society has assigned to the biological category of sex, for example, emotionality is a trait we ascribe to women, and competitiveness is a trait we ascribe to men (Helgeson, 2020) which underscores the socially constructed nature of gender roles and expectations. Wulandari also says that some women are identified with beauty, gentleness, and emotion, men's appearance and money are women's temptations, a woman is seen as a doll, a woman is easy to tease, and the double burden of women is a common thing (Wulandari & Arvianti, 2017).

Gender inequality arises because of a misunderstanding of the concept of gender which is equated with the concept of sex, even though the words "gender" and "sex" in language do have the same meaning, namely gender (Azhari, 2021). The concept of sex, for feminists, is a natural quality, carried from birth and cannot be changed. The concept of sex is only related to sex and the functions of that sex difference, such as that a woman can get pregnant, give birth, and breastfeed, while a man cannot. The concept of gender, according to feminism, is not a natural or natural trait but is the result of social and cultural constructions that have been in progress throughout human history (Chornodon et al., 2021). Emphasizing the role of societal influences in shaping gender roles and expectations.

3. Research Method

This type of research is a qualitative descriptive study. Qualitative researchers study things in a natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Sugiyono, 2019). This research is conducted by using the content analysis method. It is used by sociolinguistics to analyse social life by interpreting words and images from documents, books, newspapers, films, arts, music, and other cultural products and media. For example, responses to open-ended questions are based on content analysis (Hancock et. al., 2009 Mohajan, 2018, P. 16). Then get the required information. The research data is in the form of speech, behaviour, and context. Which is displayed by the characters through visualization in the film. The procedure of data collection is done by observing repeatedly and noting the aspects of the film that are relevant to the purpose of the research. The methods used to collect research data are library research, structural approach, and coded content analysis approach. This research uses feminist critical theory to explain gender stereotypes.

The author employs a method of data collection that involves gathering information directly from the movie novel "Avatar the Last Airbender" Movie, Season 1 2024. Information gathered may include the film itself, script, reviews, scholarly articles, and other relevant materials. Through the analysis of these documents, the study aims to gain insight into the portrayal of Katara's character and her journey of liberation from gender stereotypes. includes film observation. This method involves watching the film "Avatar the Last Airbender" Season 1 2024 and engaging in careful observation of specific scenes, dialogues, and visual elements that pertain to Katara's and her representation of gender stereotypes.

This approach focuses on the character of Katara to understand the initial construction of the character and how gender stereotypes may manifest within her. The researcher will identify the traits, emotions, and actions, of Katara at the beginning that reflect to expected roles or limitations she faces within the context of gender stereotypes.

The writer will use a feminist approach to analyse Katara's liberation from gender stereotypes in the film "Avatar the Last Airbender" the Feminist approach will assist the writer in analysing how the film highlights feminist issues and offers an alternative narrative that liberates Katara from gender stereotypes.

The data in this study is presented mainly through tables. Data can also be displayed in various forms; charts, graphs, maps, and tables, to make the data more communicative, concise, and interesting (Alwasilah, 2005, p. 80). By showing information differently, people can understand it more easily.

4. Findings and Discussion

Feminism is a movement against patriarchal culture. Women are no longer discriminated against, nor are women restricted in their roles. Who are limited in their roles? Women have the right to reject and even fight to get their rights to equal access with men, this is what is highlighted in *Avatar the Last Airbender*.

Feminism in this movie is shown through Katara's two attitudes. First, Katara is a woman who can lead herself so that she challenges the gender rules that have been established or built-in society. Second, Katara can control herself and not submit to gender stereotypes given to women. She can also release herself from stereotypes that limit her ability to learn and contribute more to her people.

4.1 Katara Challenges Gender Stereotypes

In *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, Katara shows many traits that are often linked to traditional ideas about women, but she shows them in a strong and complex way. Katara shows femininity through her kindness and care for others. For example, when Prince Zuko captures Aang, Katara speaks kindly and tries to stop Sokka from handing Aang over because she feels sorry for him. Aang has lost everything. Even though she is caring, she is not weak. She is also strong and brave. At minute 51:05, she uses her waterbending skills to save Aang from Zuko, showing that she can protect others too. Katara's character shows both gentle and strong qualities, and she supports equal rights for women.

When it comes to being submissive, Katara does not just follow orders, especially when they stop her from growing. In Episode 2 titled "Warrior" at minute 1:52 to 2:49, Sokka tells her it's time to go home, but Katara disagrees. She wants to help Aang and believes their job is to save the world, not just protect their village. She wants to learn and become better.

Katara is not weak. In Episode 1 titled "Aang" at minute 39:07, she proudly says "I'm a warrior." Later, in Episode 7 titled "The North" at minute 38:54, Master Pakku tells her she is an excellent waterbender. This shows that she is powerful and skilled.

Katara is also not passive. She often speaks up when things are unfair. She doesn't wait for others to act. During a big fight in "The North," she quickly offers to help and says "I'm here to help." She also wakes Aang up from a 100-year sleep in Episode 1 at minute 26:43, which is very important.

Some people think women are more intuitive, or that they just follow feelings. But Katara shows that her feelings come from being smart and aware. In scenes from minute 23:51 to 24:44 and 39:32 to 40:14, she figures out a puzzle by using her instincts. She realizes that the right path comes from love and not just what she sees. This shows she is thoughtful and insightful.

While some say women are too emotional, Katara shows that she can think clearly even in hard times. In one moment from minute 21:07 to 22:27, she helps Aang face his fears and tells him how to connect with the past Avatars. She stays calm and gives good advice. Even though she saw her mother die, she doesn't let her feelings take over. She chooses not to take revenge, which shows her self-control.

Lastly, about being communicative, Katara doesn't just talk, she takes action. She says she wants to help Aang save the world, and she does. She helps save Omashu and fights in the

North. Katara is active, brave, and always ready to help. She is a strong and inspiring female character.

4.2 Liberation Katara from Gender Stereotypes and Her Character

Development

To be free from gender stereotypes, Lloyd argues that societal recognition is expected (Lloyd, 2007, p. 64). Thus, we are compelled to act out our expected gender identities to become signified in society (Yaghoubi-Notash et al., 2019). The journey and development of the character Katara will be discussed in this essay, exploring how she dismantles the patriarchal culture that once constrained her and imposed stereotypes upon her. Throughout her journey, Katara faced numerous challenges alongside Team Avatar. This journey made her a brave woman, both in expressing her opinions and taking action. The turning point for all of this is highlighted in episodes 7 and 8, where gender stereotypes are discussed in detail and convincingly demonstrate that initial social constructs do influence stereotypes about women, as experienced by Katara. Katara is highlighted in the series as the only woman challenging these cultural norms.

Katara hails from a distant place, the Southern Water Tribe, traveling to the North. There, she encounters elders of her kind residing in the North, where it is clearly stated that men have long constructed women as weak and incapable fighters without verifying the facts.

People in the North do not object, as they believe this is their culture and not up for debate. They accept that their only role is in healing. Katara's development in asserting her right to equal recognition is highlighted here. As a form of protest, Katara challenges Master Pakku, an elder and water-bending instructor.

Katara demonstrates her exceptional water-bending abilities. Despite initial rejection, she is eventually accepted into a combat position. On the day of the battle, Katara is appointed as a Master, and this recognition continues even after the war ends. Others seek her out to learn from her abilities, marking a significant milestone in Katara's journey as she is finally acknowledged by society and accepted by Pakku.

Furthermore, subsequent generations of women in the North are now liberated from these stereotypes due to Katara's courage. Katara's actions not only liberated her from societal constructs but also created new opportunities, new chances, and a new life in the North—the opportunity to be on equal footing with men.

Long-standing constructions that have become cultural norms eventually crumble, and through her character challenging gender stereotypes and her journey of personal growth, Katara finally breaks free from gender stereotypes in the 2024 series "Avatar: The Last Airbender," Season 1.

4.3 How Katara Challenges Gender Stereotypes in "Avatar the Last Airbender"

Season 1

4.3.1 Overcoming fear and embracing self-expression

From a young age, Katara was taught to fear and suppress her powers due to the potential harm they could cause. However, as the story progresses, she learns to harness her abilities and accept herself. Katara's bravery is evident when she decides to join Aang on his journey to save the world a monumental decision considering she had never left her home island before. Despite her brother Sokka's opposition, who advised returning to their home at the Southern Water Tribe, Katara understood that remaining in her safe zone would hinder her growth.

4.3.2 Defying the Need for a Handsome Hero

Katara is the daughter of a leader, lord Hakoda, but during that time, Katara and her tribe experienced difficult times due to the actions of the Fire Nation, which destroyed Katara's life and that of her tribe. As a female character prominently featured in the series.

Katara is not depicted as a weak woman waiting to be rescued by a handsome hero or prince; instead, she steps forward to discover her strength and potential to save herself and her tribe. In episode 1, titled "Aang," at 39:07, Katara says, "I'm a warrior. I should be able to do more for our people." Katara asserts that she is a warrior.

4.3.3 Embracing personal power and autonomy

Katara's character embodies the idea of female empowerment by embracing her unique abilities and personal power. She has magical powers related to water and ice. Throughout the film, Katara learns to use her powers, and from episode to episode, her abilities improve. Even though her progress doesn't skyrocket immediately, there are still significant advancements, showing that Katara is a determined learner who never gives up.

4.3.4 Empowering brotherhood over romantic love

The bond between Katara and her older brother Sokka is highlighted very interestingly in the movie. In one episode the relationship between the two is portrayed as strong, stronger than it seems, supportive, and ultimately.

By prioritizing sisterhood and familial love over romantic love, "Katara" challenges the notion that a woman's worth is only determined by her romantic relationships. Katara's liberation comes through her realization that love and support from brothers are more important than conforming to society's expectations.

4.4 Katara's Journey and Character Development in Her Liberation from Gender Stereotypes Throughout the Movie.

4.4.1 Early Signs of Gender Stereotypes in the Southern Water Tribe

In the first episode, Katara subtly challenges the rules imposed by her older brother, Sokka. Initially, Katara hides her powers as by Sokka. This lack of support leaves Katara with no space to grow, as even the boys are taught to fight while she is not allowed to do anything despite her inherited powers as a waterbender.

4.4.2 Training in the Northern Water Tribe

When Katara was living in the Northern Water Tribe with Aang and Sokka, she was eager to learn waterbending from Master Pakku. However, she was silently dismissed simply because she was a woman.

Katara faced many rejections, but Katara still did not back down. Then, Katara challenged Master Pakku to a fight, demonstrating that she was strong and capable of becoming a waterbending master.

Despite proving her worth, Katara was still rejected because of the deeply ingrained cultural belief that women were not allowed to fight. Despite this, Katara has become an inspiration to others because of the unique techniques she uses.

4.4.3 War Against the Firebenders

During the war, when the enemies arrived, Katara gathered the women to fight, and even Yagoda, the healing trainer, joined in. They wanted the same opportunity to gain freedom from the Fire Nation.

4.4.4 Katara Become a Master

During various battles against the Firebenders, Katara often took on leadership roles. She no longer hid or submitted to restrictive orders; instead, she led attacks and battle strategies. In many critical moments, Katara demonstrated her courage and strength. For instance, she

saved Aang and his friends from dangerous situations, faced powerful opponents like Azula, and made important decisions in battle. By taking an active role in training, combat, and leadership, Katara succeeded in freeing herself from gender stereotypes and showed that women can be strong, brave, and competent in all aspects of life, including those typically dominated by men.

The findings of this study reinforce the notion that film as a form of mass communication plays a pivotal role in either perpetuating or challenging prevailing gender ideologies. Dhungana (2024) argues that films not only reflect societal values but also shape social consciousness, influencing how gender roles are perceived across various cultures. This influence becomes evident in how cinematic representations sustain or subvert patriarchal norms.

As demonstrated by Ananda et al. (2020) in their analysis of the film *Kartini*, patriarchal values are deeply embedded in Indonesian cinema. This study echoes their findings, showing how female characters are frequently positioned in traditional domestic roles or depicted as subordinate to men. Similarly, Oknadia et al. (2022) and Trianita and Azahra (2023) highlight the ongoing dominance of patriarchal themes in contemporary Indonesian films, where male authority is upheld while female resistance is either romanticized or undermined.

The philosophical foundation of gender representation can be explored through Cassirer's (2023) concept of symbolic forms, where culture consists of symbolic systems that shape human understanding. Films, as symbolic texts, become cultural artifacts reflecting ideological tensions. Burke (2023) adds that narratives, through their form and rhetorical structure, influence how audiences interpret social realities including gender norms.

Although Eagly et al. (2020) found that public opinion regarding gender roles has evolved, such shifts are not always mirrored in film narratives. Stereotypes concerning competence and warmth continue to shape audience expectations (Kotzur et al., 2020). Helgeson (2020) notes that binary representations of gender remain dominant in popular media. Dewi et al. (2022) support this view in their analysis of the character Giselle in *Enchanted*, who embodies idealized femininity with limited personal agency.

From a feminist perspective, Felski (2020) and Federici (2018) emphasize that literature and film should be analyzed not only as aesthetic texts but also as ideological instruments that support existing power structures. Cinematic elements such as *mise-en-scène* (Seilatuw et al., 2020) and film scoring (Phetorant, 2020) also contribute significantly to the encoding and decoding of gender ideology within films.

Grant (2006) and Reicher (2023) highlight the need for feminist discourse to critically examine internal exclusions, especially concerning race and class. This is essential in intersectional analyses where gender intersects with other identity markers. Findings from this study affirm the relevance of such approaches, as characters from minority or marginalized backgrounds often face layered stereotypes, consistent with insights from Merma-Molina et al. (2022) and Lomotey and Chachu (2020).

Cultural pedagogy, as discussed by Isro'iyah and Herminingsih (2023), allows students to explore global perspectives on gender through literature and film. The pedagogical function of cinema is further supported by Haleem et al. (2022), who argue that multimedia platforms can promote deeper engagement with topics like gender equality. However, the continued presence of gender stereotypes in film reveals a gap between digital advancement and ideological transformation.

Ultimately, gender representation in cinema remains a contested domain where traditional and progressive narratives coexist. Films such as *Marlina si Pembunuh dalam Empat Babak*

(Sumakud and Septyana, 2020) and *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (Marlasari, 2021) demonstrate the possibility of feminist narratives that challenge patriarchal structures and empower female agency. Conversely, *200 Pounds Beauty* (Natalia et al., 2023) illustrates how issues like body image and normative femininity continue to dominate screen portrayals.

This study encourages critical engagement with film as a cultural text that shapes societal values. As Yilmazçoban (2020) suggests, reconciling Eastern and Western approaches to gender can help dismantle essentialist stereotypes and foster more inclusive cinematic narratives.

5. Conclusions (and Suggestions)

Based on the formulation of the problem and the result of the discussion about Katara's liberation from gender stereotypes in "Avatar the Last Airbender" Movie, 2024: A feminist analysis, the writer can conclude that gender stereotypes are social constructs built by society. Katara's character in "Avatar: The Last Airbender" shows a strong, multi-dimensional woman who defies gender stereotypes by combining empathy with strength and assertiveness. Through her actions and character development, Katara challenges societal norms and liberates herself from patriarchal constraints, ultimately breaking free from gender stereotypes and paving the way for future generations of women.

Society considers that women are weak and cannot do anything other than take care of others, this makes women feel unfair and limits their potential and it can continue to the next generation women have to be brave to break these stereotypes to create a better future.

Women have the freedom and do not need to be guided by society's standards. Women can express themselves without any stereotypes or limitations from anyone, and every woman has the same opportunities as a man in educational and social status.

It is hoped that all members of society, especially women, will be able to apply the same rights and opportunities as men. This application should be instilled in various social aspects of daily life as well as in films, to have a positive impact and become ingrained in the character and personality of each individual and group in society, thus creating an equitable life.

The writer hopes that more films will feature characters like Katara so that society can become accustomed to gender equality through film. Through this medium, she hopes that people can truly understand the release of gender stereotypes and use these examples in education and everyday life.

The writer hopes that every woman, wherever they are, can understand their potential not follow gender norms, and can express herself without facing limitations from family, environment, or society.

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