

## ***The Ambivalent Sexism as Bolstered on Richard Russo's The Whore Child***

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### **Abstract**

*Matters of sexuality push literature to imply gender ideas. Ambivalent sexism accentuates hostile and benevolent ones stated by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske. The Whore Child is a short story written by Richard Russo in 2002 that tells Sister Ursula, a Catholic sister, who is labelled as a bastard child. She is bullied by her superiors but their deeds shape her identity to go beyond any negativity. Then, how is ambivalent sexism bolstered on Richard Russo's The Whore Child? Through qualitative method on cultural studies, this paper underlines how sexism degenerates and regenerates identities. Sister Ursula tries to go deeper to her own bad memories while asserting any positivity through narrative writing gathered in the class she follows. In conclusion, sexism is ambivalent since it follows matters of being good and bad throughout understanding of sexual condition of society. Reflection upon any stereotype could be investigated further by understanding ideas of sexual attributes to both man and woman.*

**Keywords:** *Ambivalent Sexism; Peter Glick; Richard Russo; Susan Fiske; The Whore Child*

### **A. Introduction**

Gender and sexuality asserts that statements about sex is regarded as duality of dissimilarity. However, duality becomes dualism as there is a value normalized higher than the other (Glick & Fiske, 2011). Any sexism remains ameliorative and/or pejorative in its meaning since no literature is gender neutral. *The Whore Child* is a short story by

Richard Russo in 2002 that reveals Sister Ursula's uneasiness as the whore child (Russo, 2011). Her friends in the class start to name her as misogynist, ask about how the father should really come, and even appreciate it as a total fiction. Then, how is ambivalent sexism bolstered on Richard Russo's *The Whore Child*? This paper underlines how Sister Ursula goes deeper to her bad

memories while asserting positivity through narration she writes. Sexism is ambivalent by exploring goodness and badness of sexual conditions of society (Connor et al., 2016).

## B. Research Method

Through qualitative method, online and offline books and journals are used to explain Richard Russo's *The Whore Child* through ambivalent sexism by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske. The data analysis includes attaining sources, reading them, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing in references lists. The analyses involve critical points of hostile and benevolent sexism in strengthening and/or weakening identities.

## C. Results and Discussions

### Sexism and Its Discontent in *The Whore Child*

The story of *The Whore Child* takes focus on how lecturer of fiction writing class draws story of Sister Ursula and how other people think of her situations. In the first part, Sister Ursula is an old Belgian nun living in old house (Russo, 2011). She comes

to the class without any former notice, but the lecturer lets her to stay by following the main rule;

““*This is a storytelling class, Sister. We're all liars here. ... "Never you mind," ... "My whole life has been a lie."* “*I'm sure you don't mean that,"*” (Russo, 2011).

That initial impression of Sister Ursula is her true story as the whore child. She has to accept mockery from her friends and older Sisters. Her shoes are too small that make her walk uncomfortable, then is imitated by her friend as a bullying. Those are shown in here;

“*In the convent, Sister Ursula's first submission began, I was known as the whore's child.*” (Russo, 2011)

“*The shoes she was given were two sizes too small ... before long she developed the tortured gait of a cripple, which was much imitated by the other children ...*” (Russo, 2011)

The intimidations keep coming and she has to get used to the labelled name and harassed not only for her past, but also how that could contaminate others' purity. Those are asserted in the quotations;

“... *she grew accustomed to being referred as "the whore's*

*child,” and ... how deeply it wounded her.”(Russo, 2011)*

*“Only a wicked child, Sister Veronique explained, would foul the shoes she’d been given with her blood, then beg to exchange them for the shoes of an innocent child. Did she think it fair that another child, one who had not only a virtuous mother but also a father, be asked to wear the polluted shoes of a whore’s child?” (Russo, 2011)*

As she grows up, she learns more about Catholic teachings. She practices more prayers even she hesitates to join others. She is a public ridicule outside, but inside she finds calmness in her praying to God and Jesus as her conception of father;

*“And so I became a Catholic ...” (Russo, 2011)*

*“... Sister Ursula was for some time unable to recite prayers with the other children,... of the moral depravity inherent to being the offspring of a whore. (Russo, 2011)*

*“She felt a gentle trust in the Jesus of the Cross ... He seemed to know everything that was in her heart and to understand that nothing dwelt there that wasn’t absolutely necessary to her survival. He wouldn’t begrudge these prayers.” (Russo, 2011)*

*“In truth, Jesus on the cross reminded Sister Ursula of her father ...” (Russo, 2011)*

Her hatred gets her closer to God then she embraces total devotion to God as a Sister. Hence, she could not avoid reality that her life is about bitterness since she could not find her father anymore. Her devotion to God strengthens her own self and being needed by others. Those are explored here;

*“It was my hatred that drew me deeper into the Church ...”(Russo, 2011)*

*“My life as a nun has been one of terrible hatred and bitterness...” (Russo, 2011)*

*“... she had returned to Belgium to search for her father, but she had little money and found no trace of him.” (Russo, 2011)*

*““I am needed. Even a hateful nun is sometimes needed.”” (Russo, 2011)*

In the second part, there are sayings from other students in the class about the story that Sister Ursula wrote before. In the first part of her writing, other persons from the class criticize her story while others appreciate it. Sister Ursula becomes more hopeful in writing (Russo, 2011). She consult to the lecturer about her ideas and he pushes her to write more in the next chapter;

*“‘It’s a victim story,’ one student recognized. ‘The character is being acted on by outside forces, but she has no choices, which means there can be no consequences to anything she does. If she doesn’t participate in her own destiny, where’s the story?’”* (Russo, 2011)

*“... Sister Ursula was much enlightened by unanticipated critiques, and she took feverish notes on everything ... ‘I liked it, though,’ added the student who’d identified it as a victim story. ‘It’s different.’”* (Russo, 2011)

*“The old nun stopped by my office the day after, ... ‘To be so much... a victim,’ she said, ... ‘it is not good?’”*  
*“No,” I smiled. ... ‘But maybe in the next installment?’ ... She looked at me hopefully.”* (Russo, 2011)

When Sister Ursula writes her admiration to Christ compared to her father, the class thinks the story would be happy ending. However, it would never happen since her story as her own life is saddened gradually. It is in following;

*“‘Are we ever going to meet the father?’ one student wanted to know. ‘I mean, she yearns for him, and he gets compared to Christ, but we never see him directly. We’re, like, told how to feel about him. If he doesn’t ever show up, I’m going to feel cheated.’”*

*Sister Ursula dutifully noted this criticism, but you had only to look at the old woman to know that the father was not going to show up.* (Russo, 2011)

Someone speaks Sister Ursula as a misogynist and feminist who raise woman and condemns man. A person is interested to her story and like it. Those are explored in the following;

*“‘Isn’t there a lot of misogyny in this story?’ observed a male student.”* (Russo, 2011)

*“What would you expect, ... The whole thing takes place in a girls’ school. There were only two men in the story and one was Jesus ... No, read correctly, Sister Ursula was clearly a feminist.”* (Russo, 2011)

*“‘I don’t care,’ said another student, ... ‘I like this story. It feels real.’”* (Russo, 2011)

As her story is finished, she thanked the class for the help. Some students like and criticize her writing and she answers by saying that it is fictional after all;

*“... she wanted the other students to know that she had enjoyed meeting them and reading their stories, and thanked them for helping her with hers. ...”* (Russo, 2011)

“... *“But it’s one of the best stories we’ve read all semester.”*

*“I liked it too,” said another, ... “ (Russo, 2011)*

*““But the girl in the story never got it,” she protested.*

*“Got what?”*

*“ ... “About the father,” she said. “He was the mother’s pimp, right? Is there another explanation?”*

*“So,” “I was writing what you call a fictional story after all.”” (Russo, 2011)*

Both aspects above indicate matter of sexism experienced by Sister Ursula. She is a victim who is brave to write her own experience (Russo, 2011). She is degraded but she moves beyond that bad saying. This story is matter of showing sexism and its discontent. Sister Ursula’s story speaks between imagination and reality even between fiction and non-fiction. It moves with two feet in two realms, yet the direction is the same; going forward.

### **Ambivalent Sexism as Epistemological Points of Sexuality**

Sexuality shows differences and differentiations (Rani, 2019; Yumrohtun et al., 2020). This indication presupposes matter of

dualism rather than duality. Dualism in sexuality includes how biological dissimilarities define gender (Amandasari & Margaretha, 2019; Rani, 2019). Sexual differences determine social roles too; things are not free-value but power-related.

Sexism is generalization shaped by epistemological discrimination by sexual conditions of people (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Rani, 2019). As point of view, sexual appearance is the main eyesight to define degrading values from a sex to another. As active deeds, sexism fosters behavior of undermining others through stereotypes of social roles based on sex (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Sexism departs from sex into gender showing unjust distinction by one against another. It indicates fundamental sexual nature of man and woman as there are stable and natural fixed roles that people must play in society (Mastari et al., 2019; Zaikman & Marks, 2014). Meanwhile, its normalcy results to gender bias as unsuited representation of identity. While the deed is intended consciously, the bias stays unconsciously (Gaunt, 2013;

Glick & Fiske, 1996). Sexist behavior usually affects woman under phallocentrism. Woman is victim but wrongly accused as manipulative. Sexism builds intimidation, fear, and insecurities to woman that normalize sexual harassment and violence (Leaper et al., 2022; Mastari et al., 2019).

Besides, ambivalent sexism widens sexism into its goodness. Ambivalent sexism inventory contains hostile and benevolent ones (Amandasari & Margaretha, 2019). The hostile one undermines man and/or woman by same and/or different gender. It represents anger, resentment, and violence based on sex of the target. The benevolent one shows compliments as approval for certain behavior (Amandasari & Margaretha, 2019; Gaunt, 2013). The idea speaks matter of sex to appraise and to recognize positive attitudes.

The interesting part of ambivalent sexism is the benevolent one. The hostile one degrades human beings based on sexual appearance (Agut et al., 2022; Glick & Fiske, 2011). It includes dominative, competitive, and sexual hostilities.

The benevolent one opens further opportunities to assert that speaking of sex could be beneficial (Yumrohtun et al., 2020). From that part, the benevolent one departs into bringing positive impacts towards others. Appreciation of others shows benevolence of being protective, complementary, and intimate heterosexuality (Agut et al., 2022).

However, it is said that benevolent sexism will only make sexism worse by making a sex weaker than before (Leaper et al., 2022). This paper would not state that furthermore, but it would show that being benevolent in sexism could be following amendment to the hostile one. Being benevolent could shift attitude ontologically from having stereotype of man and woman into digging uniqueness of someone out of any stereotype (Yumrohtun et al., 2020). This is crucial epistemologically since it alters dualism of sameness into duality of otherness. Otherness could be acknowledged as subjects that define themselves out of any dictation. Benevolent sexism is ethical since it shows moral points of sexual issues

(Glick & Fiske, 2011; Leaper et al., 2022). Appreciation to gender could show deep sincerity beyond any normalized pattern.

### **Identities of Sexuality in Ambivalent Sexism**

'The whore child' is conscious utterance and unconscious perception given to Sister Ursula (Glick & Fiske, 2011). Woman ideally is pure and born from a pure woman, but she is not. She must live the intimidations even when she was open to write a story. However, that sexism does not work totally to degrade her life. In some ways, her bitterness pushes her to find peace in the hand of God (Russo, 2011). She becomes a Sister afterwards. She is brave in speaking her bad memories in narrative story. People may think that it is a fiction, but not for herself as truth in her story.

The hostile sexism felt by Sister Ursula is prolonged by her friends and the old nuns. She has become public ridicule as that shows dominative deeds (Russo, 2011). She tries to blend with others, but she chooses to be lonely and finds God

by herself. The sexism explains competitive gender differentiation (Dueñas et al., 2020). When she writes her story, her friends at the class may only be curious to the reason behind and future ending of the story, but it is not fiction at all. Some even say that Sister Ursula is feminist and misogynist due to lack of masculine figure in her story. That sexism underlines hostile intimacy (Dueñas et al., 2020). Indeed, she misses her father whom she never meets again. Sexism that she feels as the whore child makes her unable to find another way (Russo, 2011).

The benevolent sexism in this story is accentuated through three matters. The first one is from the lecturer who feels sympathy about condition of Sister Ursula. He firstly thinks herself like others who are liars in every story that they write. Then, he thinks that the story is true and he welcomes Sister Ursula with warmth. It is matter of protective deeds as aspect of being benevolent (Connor et al., 2016; Glick & Fiske, 1996). The second one is from her friends at class who doubt her but some of them truly like it. It gives

hope to Sister Ursula as she is appreciated to tell her own bad memories. They may not know that the story is real, but their initial responses to the story bring better insight for her to go along. That is crucial aspect of complementary gender differentiation of being benevolent (Dueñas et al., 2020; Glick & Fiske, 2011). The third one comes from hostile sexism that she felt before. She could transform what she felt before into things that could make her calmer. She comes to God to pray, even become a Sister. Indeed, her bad memories are intact, but she slowly finds positive aspects that she could find. Suffering may result to peace of intimacy (Connor et al., 2016).

This story is full of sexuality and sexism that show good and bad aspects of it. In a case, any sexism is bad since it says sex as the main perspective for all matters (Dueñas et al., 2020; Glick & Fiske, 2011). In another case, sexual utterance may bring in warmth to others due to appreciations from sexual experience and posture that someone may feel. Ambivalent sexism extends to

identities as it defines hostile and benevolent actions (Connor et al., 2016; Glick & Fiske, 1996). The utterances highlights unconscious perception into conscious sayings.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The story of the whore child tells Sister Ursula, who pours her bad memories into narrative story. She is the target of hostile sexism due to that label. Meanwhile, she feels benevolent sexism from the lecturer who welcomes her, other persons in class who like her story, and her effort to transform the hostile one into the benevolent idea. She reaches better condition by being a Sister and gets closer to God. Moreover, her bravery to write down her bad memories shows her benevolence.

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