



## GENDER EQUALITY IN TOY STORY 4 MOVIE: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS

Yogi Fajar Darmawan<sup>1</sup>, Suprayogi<sup>2</sup>  
*Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia<sup>1,2</sup>*

yogifajardarmawan@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, suprayogi@teknokrat.ac.id<sup>2</sup>

Received: (April 2025)

Accepted: (May 2025 )

Published : (June 2025 )

### Abstract

This research aims to explore how Toy Story 4 (2019) portrays gender equality using a feminist approach, specifically through the lens of Liberal Feminist theory from Tong. The study focuses on the representation of equal rights between men and women in terms of leadership and gender equality. This descriptive qualitative research analyzes the evolving gender roles depicted in the film, particularly through the main characters: Bo Peep, Jessie, Gabby Gabby, and Bonnie. These female characters actively challenge traditional gender norms by assuming roles that exhibit leadership, independence, and agency. Bo Peep is presented as a strong, autonomous leader who rejects the traditional passive female role, while Jessie and Bonnie also demonstrate independence and challenge gendered expectations. Gabby Gabby, despite being a complex character, illustrates a pursuit of agency and empowerment, further contributing to the film's feminist narrative. Through this analysis, the study uncovers how Toy Story 4 (2019) promotes gender equality and feminist perspectives by portraying women in roles typically associated with male characters, thereby contributing to the larger discourse on feminism and media. By portraying these characters with autonomy and leadership, the film advocates for the equal representation of women, aligning with the Liberal Feminist call for equal rights and opportunities in various aspects of life, including popular culture. This research concludes that Toy Story 4 (2019) plays a significant role in advancing feminist messages and encouraging a more inclusive representation of gender roles in animation.

**Keywords:** animation, equality, feminism, film, gender equality

### INTRODUCTION

Literature plays a huge role in humanitarian causes. Literature discusses various issues. This helps people to understand the various problems that exist in society. With literature, it is expected that the readers can become more aware of the problems that exist and understand the various solutions that can arise (Klarer, 2004). One of the literary issues that can be examined in literary works is the issue of gender equality, which is part of feminist issues. Through literary works, the issue of gender issues that arise in society will be more easily understood. Literature then becomes the key to how equality of gender is communicated in society.

Literature is a creative endeavour that aims to communicate and express human feelings. Because humans are social beings, there are a lot of stories and inspirations out there, including literary works like novels, poetry, and other kinds of expression (Fithratullah & Kasih, 2018). Literary works exhibit beauty in an artistic setting (Novanti & Suprayogi, 2021). Literature is also a language art form. Literary works represent a language or tradition and human traditions (Mahsyur, Fithratullah, Kasih, 2023).

Gender equality in literature can be easily represented through film. Film is considered the most effective communication tool to provide education about gender equality (Sikov, 2011). Through these media, people are expected to understand the conflicts and solutions that may arise in society. Through the expressions of the characters in the film, the delivery of hearing, sound techniques, lighting and other characteristics used in the film (Sikov, 2011). Gender equality refers to ensuring that people of all genders have equal rights, opportunities and treatment in all areas of society-political, economic and social. It includes efforts to achieve equality and justice for all people, regardless of gender, to eliminate prejudice and discrimination that may be directed at a person because of their gender identity or expression. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and

sustainable world. A study by Naila Kabeer published in *Feminist Economics* highlights that gender equality is essential for economic development and social progress (Kabeer, 2015).

In order to achieve gender equality, it is necessary to question established conventions, address structural injustices, support women's emancipation, and fight for the rights of disadvantaged gender identities (Usman, 2021). Feminism is an ideology that has developed in various parts of the world, including in Indonesia. Feminism has also entered the spaces of life, including in literary works. Feminism is an ideology that empowers women. Women can also be subjects in all fields by using their experiences as women and using women's perspectives that escape the mainstream patriarchal culture that always moves from a male point of view. According to different dictionaries, the word "feminist" is frequently understood as a noun or adjective related to feminism (Usman, 2021).

Equality is frequently the motivating factor behind the idea that gender concerns are societal injustices. The social framework of society still harbours a great deal of gender discrimination, particularly against women. The ingrained patriarchal culture in the societal structure is the primary element that frequently justifies this discrimination. Men are the ones who dominate, control, and take advantage of women in patriarchal cultures. Gender discrimination affects many facets of the social network, including politics, education, family, and culture.

*Toy Story 4* (2019) is a 2019 American animated comedy-drama film produced by Pixar Animation Studios for Walt Disney Pictures. It is the fourth instalment in Pixar's *Toy Story* series and the sequel to *Toy Story 3* (2010). The story opens with a flashback where an adult Andy gives his toys to a young girl named Bonnie. Woody, who has not been played with by Bonnie lately, begins to fret, especially when he learns the fact that Bonnie, who is starting school, is not allowed to bring toys. With that anxiety, Woody decides to go to school to accompany Bonnie. While at school, Bonnie made a new toy from a white plastic spoon, which she later named Forky. Because it was made with her own hands, Forky became a very precious toy for Bonnie. Bonnie kept Forky with her even when she slept. However, Forky felt otherwise. Forky felt that he was just trash. Woody, who always loved his owner, tried to convince Forky to stay by Bonnie's side. One day, Forky allegedly ran away. Woody was looking for him, so he had to go through an unexpected adventure. Woody and Forky are trapped in an antique shop called *Second Chance* which makes them have to face Gabby Gabby and his army. This journey also makes Woody reunite with his idol, Bo Peep and various new characters such as Ducky, Bunny, Duke Caboom and Giggle McDimples.

In *Toy Story 4* (2019), the character of Bo Peep undergoes a significant transformation, which illustrates the shift towards gender equality and leadership. Bo Peep evolves from a traditional soft porcelain figurine to a tough, independent character who takes responsibility and leads fearlessly. Her portrayal challenges traditional gender roles and demonstrates the importance of empowering female characters in leadership roles. The film provides a powerful platform to discuss and analyse feminist perspectives on the representation of gender and leadership in animated films, making *Toy Story 4* an interesting subject to explore further.

## **Literature Review**

Previous research on *Toy Story* and gender equality offered a broad spectrum of insights. Li (2022) analysed the application of Foucault's theory to the change in gender representation in Pixar's *Toy Story* series. The analysis and comparison of how male and female characters' power relationships are portrayed in images was the main focus of this study. The power dynamics between the *Toy Story 1* (1995) to *Toy Story 4* (2019) movies were explained by this study. Farhanita and Kurniawan (2024), using Martin & Rose's theory, further analyzed the negotiation of power between the main characters in *Toy Story 4* (2019), showing how Bo Peep asserted her influence. Luisi (2018) used Grounded Theory and Gaze Theory to examine six themes of gender interaction in the *Toy Story* trilogy, revealing how female characters are traditionally portrayed as emotional or romantic supporters of male characters.

The first study, by Mo Xu (2021), explores how female roles in Disney films like *Mulan*, *Frozen*, and *Tangled* influence societal views on gender. The second study, by Ahmad and Murtza (2023), examines women's roles in *The Princess and the Frog*, highlighting gender differences through Jane's Feminist Film Theory. The third study, by Merdeka (2023), analyzes *Brave*, showing its feminist portrayal while reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes. The fourth study, by Susanto and Imanjaya (2022), discusses the evolution of strong, independent female characters in Disney films. The fifth study, by Khalizah et al. (2022), analyzes gender equality in *Mulan* using semiotics.

In contrast, this research applies Tong's liberal feminism to Toy Story 4 (2019), focusing on evolving gender roles through characters like Bo Peep, Jessie, Gabby Gabby, and Bonnie. It uncovers how the film promotes gender equality and feminist perspectives not explored in previous studies.

## METHOD

This qualitative research analyses Toy Story 4 (2019) through a feminist lens, focusing on scenes and dialogues related to feminism and gender equality. By watching the film, collecting relevant scenes, and studying characters like Bo Peep, Gabby Gabby, Bonnie, and Jessie, the researcher organises key data for analysis. Using liberal feminist theory, it examines gender roles and stereotypes, evaluating how the film either reinforces or challenges traditional norms and its cultural impact, especially on young audiences.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is dedicated specifically to providing a thorough analysis of the issue at hand. The author delves into the data, using Tong's feminist theory to dissect the nuances of feminism. Meanwhile, in the cinematic realm, the audience is introduced to the faces of the characters in Toy Story 4 (2019).

### *Gender Equality in the Bo Peep Character*

In Toy Story 4 (2019), Bo Peep undergoes a significant transformation, evolving from a passive, porcelain doll into a strong, independent leader. She is portrayed as resourceful, brave, and capable, can take charge, strategising plans, and fighting off threats. Her new, practical appearance—complete with a blue jumpsuit and versatile shepherd's staff—symbolises her shift from traditional femininity to empowerment. Bo Peep's character embodies feminist values of resilience, autonomy, and leadership, rejecting stereotypes of weakness and encouraging self-discovery, even challenging Woody to redefine his purpose.



*Bo Peep old model with porcelain dresses*



*Bo Peep new model in Toy story 4*

### **The scene when Bo Peep scolds Woody for not following directions (Minute 52:13)**



**Bo Peep:** "What did I say to you? I lead. You follow."

**Woody:** "Bo I'm so sorry. Really -- Just tell me how to help."

**Bo Peep:** "You really wanna help? (spins around) Then stay out of my way. I'm getting my sheep back."

**Woody:** "What about the others?"

**Bo Peep:** "Giggle knows what to do."

In Toy Story 4 (2019), Bo Peep exemplifies assertive female leadership through her interactions with Woody. When she says, "I lead. You follow," she confidently asserts her authority, showing the importance of clear leadership. Her ability to make quick decisions, as seen when she swiftly saves her sheep after Woody's mistake, highlights her responsibility and competence under pressure. While she values independence, as shown when she tells Woody, "Leave me alone. I'm getting my sheep back," she also emphasises collaboration by trusting Giggle's

expertise. Bo Peep's leadership blends decisiveness, teamwork, and resilience, demonstrating effective female leadership.

#### The scene when Bo Peep negotiate with Duke Caboom for help and strategises to save Forky (Minute 56:49)



**Bo Peep:** "So, here's the plan, we have to jump across the hall to Gabby's cabinet. And you're the toy that has to do it."

**Duke Caboom:** "No."

**Woody:** "Please Mr. Caboom, this is really important"

**Bo Peep:** "Forget it Rejean, forget it the comercial. Be the Duke you are right now, that can jump and crash!"

**Duke Caboom:** "Be who I am, right now."

In Toy Story 4 (2019), the scene where Bo Peep, Woody, and Duke Caboom plan to rescue Forky highlights themes of leadership, empowerment, and teamwork. Bo Peep's dialogue, "We have to jump across the hall to Gabby's cabinet, and you're the toy that has to do it," demonstrates her strategic thinking and ability to assign roles based on her team's strengths. She helps Duke Caboom overcome self-doubt by encouraging him to focus on his present abilities, saying, "Forget the commercial. Be the Duke you are right now." This shows her skill in inspiring others, helping Duke regain his confidence and embracing his role. The interaction between the characters underscores the importance of collaboration, with Bo Peep leading decisively while also supporting her teammates. Woody provides additional encouragement, illustrating how leadership and teamwork can empower individuals to overcome trauma and rediscover their potential. This scene showcases Bo Peep's leadership as both strategic and empathetic, helping the team succeed through mutual support and inspiration.

#### Gender equality in Gabby Gabby Character

In Toy Story 4 (2019), Gabby Gabby is a complex antagonist, driven by her desire for love and acceptance due to her broken voice. She exemplifies feminist aspects like leadership and control by leading a group of loyal ventriloquist dolls in the antique shop. Her character showcases strength, complexity, and the capacity for change, highlighting the depth of female characters in the film.



Gabby Gabby in Toy Story 4 (2019)

#### Scene when Gabby Gabby orders the ventriloquist dummies to capture woddy and steal his ballot box in the (Minutes 31:08)



**Woody:** "We gotta go."

**Gabby Gabby:** "You can't leave yet! You have what I need. (points to Woody's chest) Right...inside...there."

**Gabby Gabby:** "Stop him please"

In Toy Story 4 (2019), Gabby says to Woody, "You can't leave yet! You have what I need. Right...inside...there" implying that having a functioning voice would make her equal to the other toys. This reflects a feminist perspective where she seeks equal opportunities to be loved and valued, fighting for her right to personal fulfilment. Gabby Gabby exemplifies female leadership through her control over the ventriloquist dolls, as seen when they obey her command, "stop him please." She uses strategic thinking and manipulation to achieve her goals,

demonstrating intelligence and skill typically associated with male leaders. Her proactive and cunning approach challenges gender stereotypes, proving that women can be just as effective, authoritative, and strategic as men in leadership roles.

#### The scene of Empowerment and Self-Worth is during Gabby's conversation with Woody (Minutes 1:09:02)



**Gabby Gabby:** "You've been there through all their ups and downs...Please. Be honest with me - was it as wonderful as it sounds?"

(Woody takes this in. His eyes can't deny it.)

**Woody:** "...It was."

(Gabby smiles sadly.)

**Gabby Gabby:** "All I want is a chance for just one of those moments. I'd give anything to be loved the way you have."

In her emotional conversation with Woody, Gabby Gabby opens up about her sense of incompleteness and longing for the love of a child. Her journey is not about achieving dominance, but about reclaiming her self-worth. Liberal feminism often focuses on empowering women, ensuring they have the freedom and opportunity to achieve their goals and feel fulfilled. Gabby's dialogue about why she needs the ballot box reveals her struggle to be seen as a worthy and valuable person. When she says, "All I want is a chance for just one of those moments. I'd give anything to be loved the way you have." Gabby is advocating for her own needs and desires, which is a clear reflection of liberal feminist ideals of self-determination and the right to pursue personal happiness.

#### Gender equality in Jessie's Character

In Toy Story 4 (2019), Jessie embodies liberal feminist ideals of female empowerment, leadership, and breaking traditional gender roles. When Bonnie gives Jessie Woody's sheriff badge, it symbolises gender equality in leadership, highlighting that women can hold positions of authority. Jessie, as a brave and adventurous cowgirl, challenges traditional male-associated traits and takes an active role in the group's mission, showcasing female autonomy and liberation from gender expectations.



Jessie in Toy Story 4 (2019)

#### The scene when Jessie takes the lead and strategizes to wait for Woody (Minutes 49:16)



**Jessie:** "We're not going anywhere, if you know what I mean."

**Rex:** "Great"

**Slinky Dog:** "That's genius"

**Hamm:** "Good job, Jessie."

In Toy Story 4 (2019), Jessie demonstrates strong leadership by taking quick and decisive action when she deflates the tires of Bonnie's family camper to buy time. Her confidence and ability to think fast in a crisis highlight her intelligence and initiative. Jessie's peers appreciate her plan, praising her as "a genius," reflecting the recognition of her leadership. Her loyalty and commitment to her friends further showcase her bravery and dedication, making her an effective and calm leader under pressure.

**The scene when Jessie gets the sheriff's badge (Minute 1:26:49)**



In Toy Story 4 (2019), the scene where Woody gives Jessie the sheriff's badge symbolises a significant shift in leadership and gender roles. By passing the torch to Jessie, a strong and capable female character, the film promotes gender equality, breaking away from traditional male-centred leadership. The badge represents authority, and Woody's gesture acknowledges Jessie's readiness to lead, reinforcing her growth and competence. From a feminist perspective, this moment challenges stereotypes and highlights the importance of supporting women in leadership, while also showcasing themes of mutual respect, growth, and empowerment.

***Gender equality in Bonnie Character***

In Toy Story 4 (2019), Bonnie Anderson embodies key aspects of liberal feminism, including gender equality and individual autonomy. As the 4-year-old girl who becomes the owner of Woody and Buzz, Bonnie demonstrates her ability to make independent choices in her play, unbound by traditional gender roles. Bonnie defies stereotypical norms by engaging in a diverse range of toys, both male and female, and is not limited to traditionally feminine items. This reflects liberal feminism's advocacy for breaking down rigid gender roles, so that children can explore their identities freely. Ultimately, Bonnie serves as a symbol of gender equality in childhood, highlighting the importance of personal freedom and choice in play.



Bonnie in Toy Story 4 (2019)

**The scene where Bonnie takes Woody's badge and gives it to Jessie the female cowboy. (Minutes 08:34)**



**Bonnie:** "And the sheriff (while picking up sheriff woddy's badge) okay, bye toys!"

**Bonnie:** "Yee-haw! sheriff Jessie!"

In Toy Story 4 (2019), Bonnie's choice to play with Jessie instead of Woody and give Woody's badge to Jessie highlights the themes of gender equality and female empowerment. This action illustrates that girls can choose toys based on their interests rather than traditional gender stereotypes, promoting autonomy and self-expression. By giving Jessie the badge, Bonnie elevates her to a leadership role, symbolising the belief that women are also capable of holding positions of authority. This gesture challenges societal norms that associate courage and leadership with men, demonstrating that female characters can be inspiring role models. Bonnie's actions reflect a broader societal shift to recognise women's contributions and break down gender barriers. The moment advocates for equality and encourages young viewers to see themselves in leadership roles, the scene embodies feminist principles by promoting gender equality and recognition of women's abilities.

*How can this film influence girls about gender equality and women's empowerment?*

Toy Story 4 significantly influences girls' perceptions of gender equality and women's empowerment by showcasing strong female characters like Jessie and Bo Peep, who take on leadership roles traditionally held by males. By transitioning the sheriff's role from Woody to Jessie, the film sends a powerful message that women can excel in authority positions, challenging stereotypes that confine them to secondary roles. The portrayal of supportive relationships among female characters emphasises the importance of collaboration and friendship, inspiring girls to uplift each other. Additionally, the film encourages self-expression and authenticity, reinforcing that girls can embrace their identities without societal pressures. Overall, Toy Story 4 catalyses discussions about gender equality and empowers young viewers to believe in their potential, ultimately fostering a new generation that values equality and strives for leadership in all areas of life.

## CONCLUSION

Toy Story 4 (2019) serves as a significant cultural artifact promoting gender equality through its portrayal of strong female characters like Bo Peep, Jessie, Gabby Gabby, and Bonnie. By challenging traditional gender norms and showcasing empowered women in leadership roles, the film aligns with liberal feminist ideals that advocate for equal representation and personal autonomy. Bo Peep's transformation into a fearless leader, Jessie's elevation to authority with Woody's badge, Gabby Gabby's complex motivations for self-worth, and Bonnie's choices in play all emphasise that leadership and capability are not determined by gender. This narrative dismantles outdated stereotypes and encourages young audiences to envision a world where both women and men have equal opportunities to lead and make decisions. Overall, Toy Story 4 not only entertains but also promotes feminist values, inspiring viewers to embrace inclusivity and equality in gender roles. Future research could further explore how other animated films contribute to this discourse and influence societal perceptions of gender roles across various cultural contexts.

## REFERENCES

- Cooley, J. (Director). (2019). Toy Story 4 [Film]. Pixar Studio.
- Farhanita, F., & Kurniawan, M. H. (2024). *NEGOTIATING POWER BETWEEN LEADING MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS IN TOY STORY 4 MOVIE*.
- Kabeer, N. (2015). Gender Equality, Economic Growth, and Women's Agency: *the "Endless Variety" and "Monotonous Similarity" of Patriarchal Constraints*. *Feminist Economics*, 22(1), 295–321. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2015.1090009>
- Kasih, E.N., & Fitratullah, M. (2018). Minority Voices in Power Rangers Movie: A Study of Popular Literature. *Journal of Literature and Language Teaching*, 9(1), 9-17.
- Khalizah, S., Sikumbang, A. T., & Harahap, S. (2022, June 30). *Jhon Fiske Semiotics analysis in the theme of gender equality in the film "Mulan."* <https://www.pcijournal.org/index.php/ijcss/article/view/578>
- Klarer, M (2004:1). *An Introduction to Literary Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Li, Y. (2022). The transformation of gender representation in Pixar's toy story franchise. *In Proceedings of the 2022 2nd International Conference on Modern Educational Technology and Social Sciences (ICMETSS 2022)* (pp. 662–669). [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-45-9\\_80](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-45-9_80)
- Luisi, T. (2018). Toys will be toys: gendered interaction frames in the Toy Story trilogy. *Journal of Children and Media*, 13(1), 20–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2018.1513852>
- Merdeka, P. H. (2023). Representation of Feminism in Disney Brave Film: Representation of feminism in Disney Brave Film. *journals.eduped.org*. <https://doi.org/10.56855/jllans.v2i1.279>

- Murtza, M., Ahmad, I., & Lodhi, M. A. (2023). Representation of Women in Film Literature: Application of Feminism Film Theory on “The Princess and the Frog.” *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 7(4), 296–304. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023\(7-IV\)25](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023(7-IV)25)
- Novanti, E. A., & Suprayogi, S. (2021). Webtoon's Potentials To Enhance Efl Students'vocabulary. *Journal of Research on Language Education*, 2(2), 83-87.
- Script Slug. (2023). *Toy Story 4 (2019) - Script Slug*. <https://www.scriptslug.com/script/toy-story-4-2019>
- Sikov, Ed. (2011). *Film Studies: An Introduction Film and culture*. Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Susanto, B., & Imanjaya, E. (2022). The Revolution of Female Characters in Disney Films. In *3rd Asia Pacific International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management*, <https://doi.org/10.46254/AP03.20220661>.
- Usman, A. S., Umar, M. S., Tamola, M. S., & Ishak, R. (2021). An analysis of gender equality of Chinese culture in Mulan Film (2020). *Notion: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Culture*, 3(2), p. 75-80. <http://doi.org/notion.v3i2.4886>
- Xu, M. (2021). Analysis on the influence of female characters in Disney films. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research/Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210806.06>