

## **Masculinity in The Character of Sally and Jo in the Film *Misbehaviour***

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the masculinity of the female characters, Sally Alexander and Jo Robinson, in the film *Misbehaviour*. Thus, this article aims to analyze the masculinity within women by focusing on the characters' analysis of Sally Alexander and Jo Robinson. The article uses a descriptive qualitative method and takes the data from the film in the form of captured scenes and dialogues. The article uses the theory of character and characterization from Boggs and Petrie to find out the masculine characteristics of Sally and Jo and also the concept of masculinity by Peter Lehman to support the argument. Based on the findings, this research shows that Sally and Jo live in a patriarchal society and establish characteristics that can be considered masculine. Sally's ambitious, forward-thinking, well-organized, activeness, and negligence, and Jo's daring, indiscipline, nonchalance, aggressiveness, and independence, establish their masculinity in the form of courage, heroism, and leadership, appearance, and other behaviors, for instance, smoking. Moreover, their characteristics have both merits and shortcomings. Indeed, their experience, environment, and societal factors influence their masculine characteristics

**Keywords:** Female characters, masculine characteristics, masculinity.

### **Introduction**

In a patriarchal society, they view women as solely caring for children, bearing children, and being obedient while serving their husbands for many years. As a result, obtaining a higher education, better employment, a fair income, and so on, are tough for women. Furthermore, having certain attributes associated with women leads to expectations. Women are perceived as being incapable of performing particular tasks in the same way that men are. Irresolute, caring, passive, obedient, indecisive, weak, bashful, and a follower are some of the feminine attributes that women typically embody. Men, on the other hand, possess masculine attributes such as power, courage, sagacity, decision-making, confidence, outspokenness, persistence, self-reliance, assertiveness, and leadership.

In London in 1970 issues regarding inequality in education, job opportunities, unfair wages, sexual objectification, contraception, and unequal rights arise and become a problem at the time. Feminism in 1970 is the phase where the feminists increasingly demand equal rights for minority groups (Rampton, 2015). This is illustrated in the film *Misbehaviour* (2020). This drama-comedy film is based on a true event which happened in 1970 in London. Feminists in that era succeed in achieving fame overnight by taking protest and disrupting the event Miss World 1970. *Misbehaviour* provides us with an intersectional story that takes several events that intersect each other in a particular setting. Protesting against sexism, equal opportunities, rights, and sexual objectification of women in Miss World are the concerns of feminists in that era. As masculinity is not only for men, women can also be considered masculine. Such an issue can be seen in the film *Misbehaviour*. The two female

characters in the film, namely Sally Alexander and Jo Robinson, present unique characteristics that can be considered masculine.

Masculinity frequently refers to the embodiment of socialized expectations for those inhabiting men's bodies. However, masculine performances vary and are not limited to men's bodies only (Guckenheimer & Schmidt, 2013). Each individual can have both, with one being dominant. There are a few situations where an individual possesses both equally. Thus, masculinity is not just owned by men, but can also be owned by women. In contemporary culture, masculinity links to notions of power, legitimacy, and privilege (Mankowski & Smith, 2016). Moreover, masculine attributes are typically associated with power, courage, heroism, sagacity, and leadership. Thus, masculinity is a complicated concept that is always shifting since gender is significantly affected by time and society. Masculinity may be defined as ideals that shape a person's identity in society (Lehman, 2001).

Indeed, there are already many researchers who analyze the masculinity within women, such as Retno Sulistia who analyses the female masculinity within the character Fa Mulan and how it influences Fa Mulan in the way she sees the opposite gender in the Disney Movie Mulan (Sulistia, 2016), Siti Wulandari who finds out the masculinity of Alanna Trebond from Tamora Pierce's Alanna: The First Adventure (Song of the Lioness) and what causes Alanna to have such masculine characteristics (Wulandari, 2019), Haswari Zahra Demanty analyses the significance of female masculinity portrayed by eight female main characters in Ocean's 8 Movie (Demanty, 2019), Lestari et al. who analyses the masculine traits of the female character, Margo Roth Spiegelman, in Paper Towns novel (Lestari et al., 2018), and Siswantia Sar who explores the female masculinity in Indonesian folklore from Central Kalimantan, Nyai Undang Ratu Rupawan dari Pulau Kupang (Sar, 2020). However, the research on the film *Misbehaviour* has not yet been conducted. Although the focus of these previous researches is akin, that the masculinity of the female character, the theory and the corpus in each researcher use are different. Therefore, the film *Misbehaviour* is chosen to be analyzed with the same topic that is masculinity within female characters in the hope to find out and describe the masculine characteristics.

### **Theory and Method**

To describe the masculinity within Sally Alexander and Jo Robinson in the film *Misbehaviour*, this article uses a qualitative method with descriptive analysis. Qualitative research is a way to explore and understand the meaning of individuals or groups to social or human issues (Creswell, 2018). Thus, descriptive qualitative research is characterized by an inductive approach to building knowledge whose purpose is to acquire meaning. This approach serves to investigate and study phenomena that occur in society and uncover the meaning that is ascribed to people's lives. Using an inductive approach requires three steps starting from specific observations to general conclusions, that are observation; identification of patterns from observation and drawing conclusions in general based on these patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Also, this article does observation as one of the qualitative data collection techniques in qualitative research that used by researchers in gathering the descriptive data (Bhat, n.d.). Therefore, several stages are implemented, starting with the observation concerning the issue in the film; second, retrieving the corpus and secondary sources; third, watching thoroughly the corpus and reading the secondary sources to understand the issue; and last, analyzing the data using the theory and concept. Moreover, in analyzing this article, the researcher uses the concept of masculinity from Peter Lehman to find out their masculine characteristics. Thus, the masculinity of Sally and Jo can be seen in the form of courage, heroism, leadership, and other behaviors.

## Findings and Discussion

Masculinity refers to attributes, behaviors, and roles that are associated with men, and this gender characteristic is constructed and accepted by society (Merdeka & Kumoro, 2018). This is in line with the statement that masculinity is not necessarily attributed only to men (Sulistia, 2016). The idea of masculinity and femininity appears a long time ago. The idea of traditional masculinity emerges in 1900's, particularly in the 1960's and 1970's. At first, it talks about only men. As time goes by, masculinity is not only for men, but women can also have masculinity because this gender construction is always changing with time and culture. Therefore, masculinity may appear in various forms. It can be in a form of physical or non-physical. For physical, the appearance can be seen clearly whilst for non-physical, it includes numerous common characteristics. As Lehman argues, some values consistently appear, which later became essential characteristics in the conventional definition of masculinity. Furthermore, the notion of gender itself is always changing over time (Lehman, 2001). Thus, either a woman or a man can embody both gender construction depending on which one is more dominant. Essential masculine characteristics by Peter Lehman are power, courage, heroism, and leadership. Sally and Jo in the film *Misbehaviour* own these masculine characteristics, except for power. Their appearance may not look like very manly men, but they have various characteristics that can be considered masculine because masculinity is not only about the appearance that has to imitate men. The portrayal of Sally and Jo's masculine characteristics is described below explanations.

### a. Courage

Sally and Jo are two distinguished characters. Their characteristics are clashed but complement each other. Sally Alexander is a single working mother who pursuing her study further despite her not-young-age. She has one daughter and lives under the same roof with her daughter and her boyfriend. Sally shares the responsibility of taking care of her child with her boyfriend and her mother. Meanwhile, Jo Robinson is a single woman who lives together with other commune girls under the same roof. She does not have family or a partner. The commune girls are the ones she has been closed with. In performing their daily lives, both Sally and Jo are courageous. Both of them are feminist activists who in carrying out their actions, dare to speak up and act.

The story sets in London in 1970 when second-wave feminism and Miss World 1970 happened. The issues of inequality between men and women and also sexual objectification have become a concern for Sally, Jo, and other feminist activists at the time. Both Sally and Jo have their way of protesting the issue. Before Sally met Jo, Sally's style of protesting is more organized and composed. Since she is a well-organized woman, she participates in activities such as women's gatherings, volunteering, and any other social activities. Thus, she is more eloquent in public speaking than Jo. Then, she met Jo. Jo does more daring and risky actions. Nevertheless, they both are courageous.

Courageous is one of the essential characteristics a masculine must have. Having courage means dealing with fear, danger, or any other uncomfortable situation (Lehman, 2001). There are some scenes showing Sally and Jo's courage. One of the scenes is where Sally has to come as a guest speaker for BBC television. The decision of Sally's participant is the solely a one-sided decision by Jo. Although Sally seems reluctant, she still does it. At that time, the other speaker asks Sally about what her girls trying to convey by their previous actions. Sally then explains their aim,

*"Women are not an object. We are not ornaments. We not here for the pleasure of others. We are not attacking Marjorie or any other contestants. We are protesting to this competition because it symbolizes exploitation. Then why should Marjorie had to earn*

*her place in the world by looking like particular way? Why should I? Why should any women? You do not. He does not. Why should we? The only forum in which women participants are weighed, measured, and publicly examined before being assign of their value is a cattle market.”*

("Misbehaviour" 00:17:50)

From the quotation above, it shows that Sally has a courage to speak up about women which neglected and being looked down. At the time, women are considered as inferior. Their voice does not be heard since they are seen as subordinate and insignificant. Their choice of choosing occupation is limited, and there is unfair wage given between men and women. The event of Miss World is seen as sexual objectification on women. Sally and Jo do not agree with this. For them, beauty cannot be merely judged by their outer appearance. Sally and Jo see it as exploitation on women because they must walk in front of many audiences elegantly with bright smile, their body size is measured, and their face is judged in front of many people and broadcasted on television. They make it a public consumption under the name of family entertainment, and let children watch it. It creates beauty standard and stereotyping. Strangely, as it exploits women in sexual way, it has big audience around the world. It is no wonder because in 1970, the patriarchy is still solid. There has to be a revolution in accordance with Sally and Jo. This is the fundamental that makes Sally and Jo chose Miss World event to carry out their protest because they want people in the world know about what is happening.

Before Sally speaks up in front of BBC media about their concern. Sally's courage can be seen from the moment she enters the studio. During the time where women do not much participate in public affairs or even rarely appear on television for talking such heavy topics, it is unusual and quite uncomfortable to appear in public as appearing on television where at the time television is more supportive towards men establishment. Sally's decision to enter the studio and to willingly speak up is the example of the courage of hers that gives her mental strengths to enter the battlefield that is the studio which dominated by men at the time.

Indeed, Sally's courage can be seen by her choice to pursuit her study further in a university that is reputable for men establishment at the time. Since she likes to read about women labors and she has background as labor union that is as equity member, she takes history as her major in hoping to give contribution in future about the revolution that always failed in UK. Joining in a university where is dominated by men does not intimidate her. In this sense, she can overcome the difficulties because she has courage.

This is in line with Lehman that courageous people are those who can conceal their fear until they can control and overcome it, rather than the other way around. However, it does not mean they will not have fear anymore (Lehman, 2001). Sally shows that she can overcome the difficulties she faces. Once, she is in dilemma deciding whether she keeps doing as planned. She indeed takes time thinking on her mind considering which one is the right decision. Eventually, she chooses to do as they have planned. Moreover, Jo's courage can be shown by the way she carries her action. The moment Jo hears that their plan to infiltrate the contest almost failed because another group planted a bomb a night before the contest.

Sally : *“Jo, they increase security. Somebody planted...”*

Jo : *“A bomb, yeah. We heard. It was The Angry Brigade. That is not going to change anything for us, is it? We are not going to let their action crush ours.”*

("Misbehaviour" 01:03:58)

From the conversation above, it can be seen that Jo Robinson is determined to carry out their plan even though it has a big risk for her and others. In order to fight for equality, she risks her life to participate in the plan where it might cause loss to her in the future. The courage she has made her brave to take the risk and step up the game.

Jo Robinson, indeed, has daring and aggressive characteristics. These characteristics support her to have courage. To perform the action of protesting, she needs her daring and aggressive characteristics to obtain the courage. If Jo is meek and coward, she may not be a feminist activist that protests in radical way. She may not do vandalizing. Vandalizing is one of the ways she protests for the unfair system in her society. Before she meets Sally, Jo and the girls never get involved in media. Then she meets Sally. The idea to attract media comes up after Jo meets Sally. They think, through media their message can reach wider audience. People around the world might notice as the event Miss World is very famous entertainment at the time.

#### b. Heroism

From the beginning, the character of Sally and Jo develop heroism. Their initial intention to fight for equality and women lead them to do heroic action. According to Lehman, to do heroic action, one must not expect something in return and at least possess courage, empathy, care, and compassion for others. Being a hero means to sacrifice yourself in order to help others (Lehman, 2001). Heroism as one of the masculine characteristics is necessity for a masculine, because a masculine must at least active, daring, and empathy towards others. Sally is active, well-organized, and has empathy and compassion. Meanwhile, Jo is daring and has also empathy and compassion. Thus, they can be considered as masculine.

Sally and Jo Robinson know that the social system is bad, the marginalized people cannot freely express their idea and cannot have their rights equally. Sally and Jo live in a society dominated by men. Thus, a patriarchy is very solid. Sally and Jo also experience injustice through their lives. Thus, they can empathize and care for other people whose condition is same or event worse than them. They also are courageous to perform their heroic action by taking a risk to expose themselves later in front of media in the Miss World contest. Although they know that the consequence they have is they must go to trial or even can affect their future, it does not stop them to spread awareness to the world about the injustice and to put women liberation on the map.

The heroic action of Sally can also be found where Sally and Jo are talking after run away from the police officers.

Sally : *"I am busy on Wednesdays."*

Jo : *"You do homework?"*

Sally : *"Leafleting"*

Jo : *"Leafleting?"*

Sally : *"We helping cleaners union. You should come along."*

(*"Misbehaviour"* 00:17:50)

After Sally saves Jo from the police chase, they hide in an alley and have little chat. Seeing Sally is also interested in injustice for women, Jo asks Sally to come join her group on Wednesday. Nevertheless, Sally refuses she cannot come every Wednesdays because she has a plan. From evidence above, it shows that Sally does little heroic action by helping cleaners union. She indeed does some social activities to help people, especially when she is interested in women labors. Sally's well-organized and activeness make Sally has heroism within herself. By participating in helping cleaner's union, she gives hands to needed people, and because Sally is well-organized person, she does things organized. Leafleting and

helping leaner's union are considered organized for Jo Robinson. Contrary to Sally, Jo does not do organized things like that. Jo is inclined to do daring, undisciplined, and aggressive action. She has her own group and protest in radical way.

However, both Sally and Jo succeed to infiltrate the contest and expose their intention to the media. The media later airs the event globally. It makes many more people who go through the same struggle know and come to support them. Women's groups, and other minority groups come to in front of Bow Street Magistrates' Court and cheer them up by shouting "Justice for women!". Later on, they get to go to trial and get punishment. That does not make them regret what they did. The look on their face is happy and relieved because even though they get punishment, more people get to know and participate in fighting for equality and justice in future. After their trial is finished, the other justice partisans welcome Sally and Jo like some heroes because their courage to do such heroic action representing minority groups to fight for inequality and injustice and to bring down the patriarchy.

### c. Leadership

Masculinity and leadership are inextricably linked. Leadership is the process of influencing another individual or group of people. It seeks to accomplish the same goal between the leader and his followers. Not everyone can be a leader because it is the ability to lead other people, to influence, to gain trust and to be respected by other people (Lehman, 2001). Furthermore, Burke and Collins add that leadership is a component of a masculine character that denotes responsibility, capacity to lead, and independence (Wulandari, 2019). Jo Robinson proves her leadership by forming a group and becomes the leader. The group stays in Grosvenor avenue. In the stay, there are more than ten people, and Jo is the leader.

*Jo* : "I formed a group. Every Wednesday, 29 Grosvenor avenue, Islington. At 6 o'clock. You should come."  
("Misbehaviour" 00:17:50)

Jo Robinson forms a group, she has people under her influence, she leads them and she is trusted by her people. Jo and her group also have the same goal that is to put women liberation on the map and to end every forms of injustice. Her people listen and follow her. The group admire Jo Robinson as the leader. It can be seen from Sarah's statement, one of her people, when telling Sally that Jo paints scenery and she is very creative.

*Sarah* : "Jo paints scenery. She went to art college. She very creative."  
("Misbehaviour" 00:23:27)

Sarah admires Jo Robinson as a creative leader and a friend. They get along very well and caught to be together in most scenes. Jo's creativity helps the group in designing and painting their leaflet in order to be spread out. Also, Jo's leadership is not demanding and strict. She is the type of leader that is chill, flexible, friendly, and welcome of any opinions.

*Jo* : "I am just saying you can talk as you like. Unless we got to take action, nothing is going to change."  
("Misbehaviour" 00:21:45)

When Sally first joined Jo's group gathering, Sally feels awkward. Then, Jo introduces her to the group, and then people welcome Sally. Jo then says Sally can give opinions as much as she likes. Jo encourages her people to speak up and to convey their idea. In doing the actions, Jo Robinson actively involves her people. She does not order her people around too. She actively participates in every plan. Instead of seeing her people as followers, she

considers them as friends equally. They discuss, they laugh, and they do their action together. This is the reason her people like her.

Meanwhile, Sally does not form any group. She later joins with Jo and became friends. However, Sally is responsible and sensible. She can make her own decision. As Lehman proposes that has leadership also means to influence, to gain trust and to be respected by other people (Lehman, 2001). Sally Alexander succeed influence and gain trust the people in the group. She influences the group to be involved with media even though the group does not like it before. Because of Sally's influence and participant, they can infiltrate the theater successfully and demonstrate there. Also, being a masculine means to not depend on others, to take care of yourself, and can make decision by yourself.

Other masculine characteristics of Sally and Jo are from their behavior and appearance. In the film, Sally does not cook. The one serves the food daily is her boyfriend. As cooking is related to femininity, Sally does not show her femininity in her domestic affair. She prefers to be active, participate in public affair, working which these activities are considered what a masculine does. Masculine attributes commonly associate with active, hard-working, ambitious, and does not participate much in domestic affair. For her appearance, Sally dresses like middle-class woman. She sometimes wears skirt, but mostly pants and coats. Contrary to Sally, her mother is a true feminine figure. Her mother does not like the idea to oppose men establishment. She accepts everything as it is. However, Sally thinks different way. In order to bring patriarchy and injustice down, she believes she has to participate on the table by being active, smart, and courage. Sally's experience and environment unconsciously helps build Sally's masculinity. She may not look like a man in terms of appearance, but she has the characteristics that a masculine must have from her activeness, ambitious, forward-thinking, courage, and the way of thinking.

Meanwhile, Jo Robinson's appearance does not follow the mores of society, her appearance inclines to be a hippie. Hippie appears for the first time in 1960's and 1970's. Hippie is a countercultural movement that defied mainstream values ("*Hippie*", 2021). They dress quite eccentric and practice communal living way. Jo Robinson never wears a skirt or feminine dress in her daily lives. She always wears pants, shoes or boots, and loose clothes.



**Figure 1.** Jo Robinson's fashion style.  
 ("*Misbehaviour*" 01:53:37)

Jo Robinson's style and her group are similar. In a scene where they get ready to go to the theater, Sally suggests them to dress like the guests in the event Miss World in order to blend with them. Once they try the dress Sally suggested as 'lady-like', Jo and the girls show unhappy and uncomfortable reaction. One of them says "*I look exactly like my mother.*", another one says, "*I look like my mother sofa.*", and Jo says "*I look like a kind of woman that I never want to be.*" ("*Misbehaviour*" 01:52:51-01:52:60). Therefore, Jo Robinson's appearance indicates that she likes to dress not like 'lady-like'. She prefers loose clothes, pants and boots. At the time, it is quite rare to see women in pants. Women in 1970's mostly wear skirt, lady-like dress, high heels, and tight clothes. Women who smoke are also

considered unusual because smoking tends to symbolize men. Thus, in terms of appearance and behavior of smoking, Jo Robinson is also can be considered to have masculinity.

To conclude, Sally Alexander and Jo Robinson have masculinity in the form of courage, heroism, and leadership, appearance, and other behaviors. The previous characteristics of Sally Alexander and Jo Robinson help in building the masculinity they have. Unfortunately, they do not yet have power considering them living in a society with men establishment. This is why they fight for it in hoping to be treated equal and receive fair treatment. However, their masculine characteristics are adequate to consider Sally and Jo as masculine. From their characteristics, appearance, and behaviors, show that Sally Alexander and Jo Robinson are masculine and embody masculinity. The essential characteristics of courage, heroism, and leadership are notion of masculinity from Peter Lehman. As he argues that some values consistently appear, which later became the essential characteristics in the conventional definition of masculinity (Lehman, 2001). This is in line with the statement that being a masculine is not always related to physical appearance or physical activity (Merdeka, 2013). Thus, although Sally and Jo still show characteristics associated to women, their masculine characteristics are more dominant than their femininity.

### Conclusion

*Misbehaviour* is a film with drama-comedy genre. It is directed by Philippa Lowthorpe and released in 2020 by Motion Pictures UK. *Misbehaviour* is based on true event at the time where second-wave feminism happened in the world, particularly in UK. The story takes setting in London in 1970. It tells about the struggle of women as marginalized group. Sally Alexander and Jo Robinson as two feminist activists fight for inequality and injustice they felt in their social system. The issues Sally and Jo fight are about inequality, injustice, sexual objectification, discrimination, and demand to put the women liberation on the map.

During 1970 in London, issues regarding unequal pay, unequal work, discrimination, sexual objectification, unequal rights are arise. Thus, second-wave feminism comes around and the activists demand the equality. Some groups try to against mainstream society in the name of protesting the bad system in society, and some fight for it by demonstrating. The patriarchy during this time is still very solid, for instance in an academic institution. Also, women are considered as object and inferior to men.

The characters of Sally and Jo come from different background and have different characteristic. Both of their characteristics are affected by their past experience and social environment. Moreover, their masculinity can be found in the form of traditional masculine characteristics, that is in the form of courage, heroism, and leadership. Unfortunately, they do not embody power because during this time, both Sally and Jo still fight for injustice the women received. In order to gain power, they must bring down discrimination in patriarchy. Thus, Sally and Jo do not embody all four of the masculine characteristics. However, it still can be said that Sally and Jo have masculinity within themselves. Since being masculine is not always dress up like a man or imitate their outer appearance, Sally and Jo as women embody masculinity in the form of traditional masculine characteristics. Their characteristics support the masculinity they have.

Sally's activeness, outspokenness, ambitious, and Jo's daring, aggressiveness, make them have courage to perform their lives in a patriarchal society. The heroism characteristic is supported by their courage, well-organized, daring, and aggressive characteristics. Then, the leadership is supported by their independency, daring, activeness, and forward-thinking characteristics. Jo as a leader considers her people as friends. Thus, her people feel welcomed and equal. Meanwhile, although Sally is not a leader, she is responsible, sensible, and



decisive. Other characteristics like smoking and their preference to dress up in loose clothes, pants, shoes are also considered as masculine. Thus, they can be considered as to have masculinity. Both Sally and Jo have their merits and shortcomings of their characteristics. Their merits and shortcomings what make them unique and contrast. Nevertheless, they have masculinity and they complete each other as friends.

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