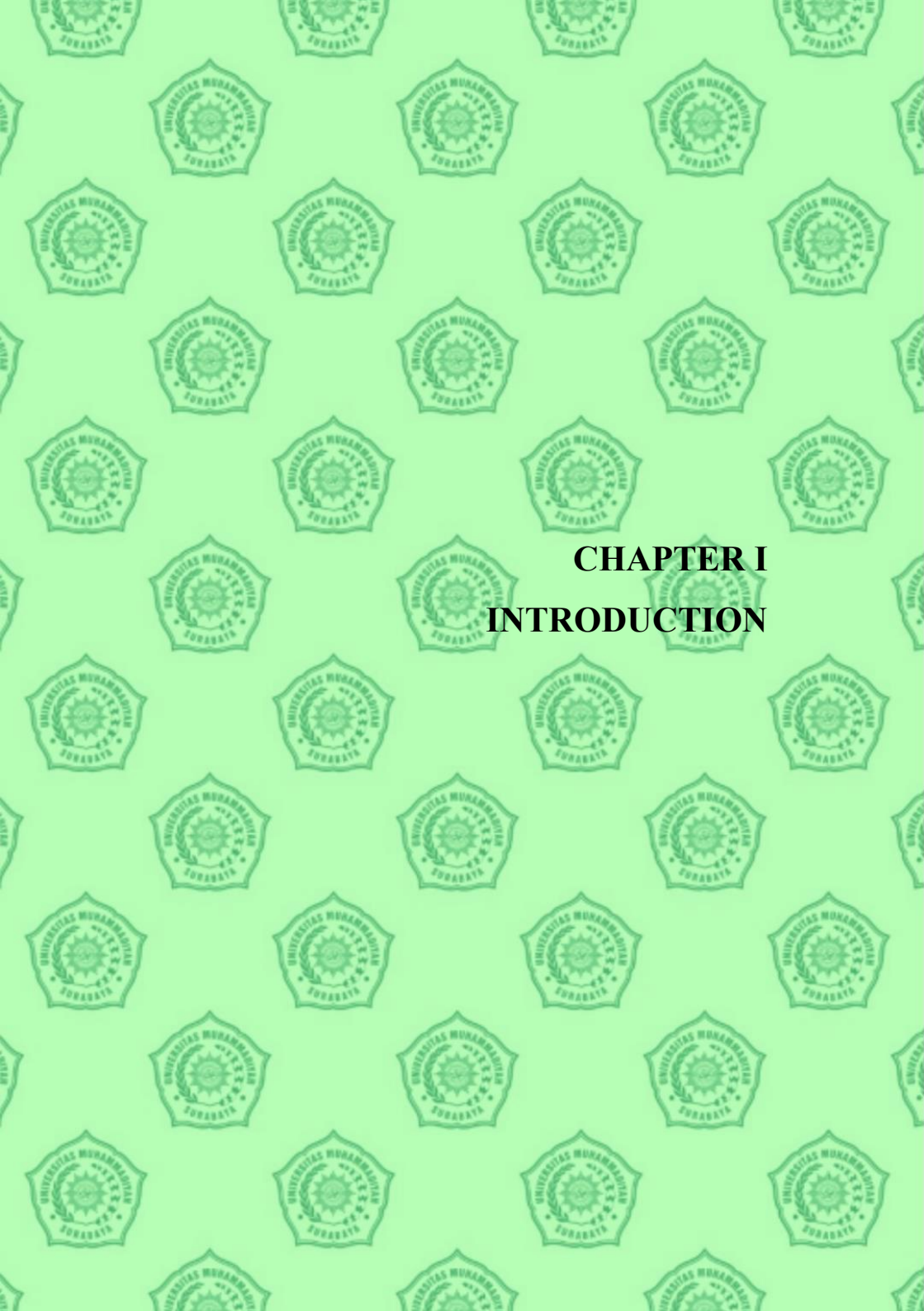




CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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This chapter presents some points of this part as the introduction in this thesis. The researcher organizes this chapter by dividing six parts; the first part is a background of research, the second is research questions, the third is research purpose, the fourth is scope and limitation, the fifth is a significance of the research, and last is the definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

Gender stereotypes continue to pervade contemporary media, shaping societal perceptions of women's roles and capabilities across cultural contexts. These stereotypes, defined as "generalized beliefs about the attributes that characterize women and men" (Ellemers, 2018) manifest particularly in cinematic representations where female characters are often confined to traditional roles that emphasize domesticity, emotional vulnerability, and subordination to male authority. The film industry, as a powerful cultural institution, both reflects and reinforces these gendered expectations, making it a critical site for examining how women are portrayed and the implications of such portrayals for broader social understanding (Ladzekpo et al., 2024). During the 1930s in the United States, gender stereotypes were deeply rooted within a harsh social hierarchy that was further compounded by racial segregation under Jim Crow laws.

Women, particularly Black women, were expected to conform to domestic roles and were largely excluded from public intellectual life, higher education, and professional spaces. Black women occupied a uniquely marginalized position like they faced not only the patriarchal expectations imposed on all women but also the dehumanizing racial stereotypes that cast African Americans as intellectually inferior and socially subordinate. Stereotypical images of Black women during this era, such as the "mammy," the "jezebel," and the "sapphire" served as controlling images that justified their exploitation and exclusion from spaces of power and knowledge (West, 2008). These intersecting oppressions meant that Black women experienced discrimination that was qualitatively different from that faced by white women or Black men, a

reality that would later be theorized as intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989).

One of the ways to analyze gender stereotype is using intersectionality theory, that developed by legal scholar Crenshaw (1989), provides a crucial framework for understanding how multiple forms of discrimination and identity intersect to create unique experiences of marginalization and privilege. Crenshaw's groundbreaking work emerged from her analysis of Black women's experiences in anti-discrimination law, arguing that traditional feminist and anti-racist frameworks failed to adequately address the specific challenges faced by individuals who exist at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities (Crenshaw, 1991). The intersection of race and gender in literary representation carries particular significance given persistent global inequalities in how women, especially women of color, are represented in cultural texts.

Research on women's representation in media consistently demonstrates that women, particularly women of color, continue to face systematic underrepresentation and stereotyping across literary and cultural productions (Kaur & Kanwal, 2025). These patterns reflect broader inequalities in how women's voices and experiences are marginalized, and the specific experiences of women at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities receive even less representation. Scholars across disciplines have brought renewed attention to systemic gender and racial biases in cultural industries, highlighting the urgent need for intersectional analysis of how marginalized groups are portrayed in literary and dramatic texts (Cho et al., 2013). Understanding how dramatic scripts construct characters at these intersections contributes to broader efforts toward more equitable and authentic representation in literature and media.

This study chooses film, specifically the movie script, as its object of analysis because film occupies a unique position at the intersection of literature and visual culture. Film, as a narrative art form rooted in dramatic literary tradition, functions both as a product of social reality and as a medium that actively shapes reality by constructing and disseminating representations that influence audience perceptions

(Nagnath Ramrao, 2016). By analyzing the movie script as a literary text, this study examines the foundational textual blueprint through which characters and social dynamics are constructed before they reach audiences through performance. This approach allows the researcher to investigate how stereotypes are embedded at the level of language, dialogue, and narrative framing like elements that are fundamentally literary in nature.

This study takes the position that film is simultaneously a product of and a contributor to social reality, for example is *The Great Debaters* reflects the historical realities of racial segregation and gender oppression in the 1930s, while also actively constructing representations that shape contemporary audiences' understanding of race, gender, and intellectual agency. *The Great Debaters* (2007), directed by and starring Denzel Washington, represents a significant contribution to American cinema's treatment of African American history and intellectual achievement. The film dramatizes the true story of Melvin B. Tolson, a professor at Wiley College, a historically Black college in Marshall, Texas, who led the debate team to unprecedented success during the 1930s, a period marked by severe racial segregation and systemic discrimination under Jim Crow laws. The film received critical acclaim for its powerful depiction of Black intellectual excellence and resistance to racial oppression, earning numerous accolades including NAACP Image Awards for Outstanding Motion Picture and Outstanding Actor for Denzel Washington.

What distinguishes *The Great Debaters* from other historical dramas is its centering of education and rhetoric as tools of empowerment and social change, demonstrating how young Black students used eloquence and argumentation to challenge white supremacy during one of America's most oppressive eras (Rifqi et al., 2025). The film's commercial success is grossing over \$30 million domestically and its adoption in educational curricula nationwide underscore its cultural impact and relevance for contemporary discussions of race, education, and representation. Within this narrative of collective struggle and achievement, the character of Samantha Boone, portrayed by Jurnee Smollett, emerges as particularly significant for intersectional analysis.

Samantha is the only female member of Wiley College's debate team, navigating not only the racial hostility of 1930s America but also the gender expectations that sought to exclude women from public intellectual discourse and competitive academic spaces (Bogle & Donald, 2003).

Her character embodies what Crenshaw (1989) identified as the unique position of Black women who face discrimination that is "greater than the sum of racism and sexism". Samantha's presence in the debate team challenges multiple stereotypes simultaneously: the notion that women lack the rationality and assertiveness required for formal debate, the racist stereotype that Black individuals are intellectually inferior, and the intersectional assumption that Black women should confine themselves to domestic or service roles (Davis, 2015). What makes Samantha's characterization particularly compelling is her negotiation of these overlapping constraints while maintaining her intellectual prowess, emotional depth, and personal agency, there's a complexity that invites closer examination of how the film script constructs her identity and experiences.

The focus of this study is worthy of scholarly attention for three key reasons. First, it addresses a significant gap in existing scholarship by providing the first systematic intersectional analysis of gender and race in *The Great Debaters* script, contributing new knowledge to literary studies, gender studies, and African American studies. Second, analyzing character construction at the script level reveals how stereotypes are embedded in the foundational textual blueprint before reaching audiences through performance, offering insights that can guide more equitable representation in future literary and dramatic works. Third, this research has practical pedagogical value for educators teaching intersectionality and critical literary analysis, while also contributing to broader social conversations about diversity and authentic representation of marginalized groups in literature and media. In an era where representation matters profoundly for shaping cultural understanding and social justice, examining how dramatic texts construct complex characters like Samantha Boone (a Black woman navigating intersecting oppressions in an intellectual space) provides essential knowledge for

both theoretical advancement and practical application in education, creative writing, and cultural advocacy.

1.2 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do gender stereotypes depict women in the movie script during 1930s as represented by Samantha Brooke in the Great Debaters?
2. How do gender stereotypes intersect with race in shaping Samantha Brooke characterization in society as portrayed in the movie?

1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the research question, this study aims to:

1. To disclose the picture of gender stereotypes during the 1930s era as represented by Samantha Brooke in the movie script of The Great Debaters.
2. To reveal the intersection of gender stereotype with race, that shape Samantha Brooke characterization on society as depicted in the movie.

1.4 Significance of the Research

Some purposeful research is expected to have benefits on the audience of the research. It is also expected to benefit the writer or researcher himself. Accordingly, the writer wishes this to be significant from both theoretical and practical point of view.

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

This study makes significant theoretical contributions to academic scholarship in several ways. First, it fills a critical gap in existing research by providing the first comprehensive gender-focused intersectional analysis of Samantha Brooke's characterization in The Great Debaters movie script. While previous studies have examined racial

themes in the film, none have systematically analyzed how gender and race simultaneously shape female character construction at the textual level.

Second, this research contributes to multiple interdisciplinary fields including literary studies, gender studies, African American studies, and cultural studies by demonstrating how dramatic texts construct complex female characters who resist simple categorization and challenge multiple forms of oppression simultaneously. The study extends existing theoretical frameworks by applying Crenshaw's intersectionality theory to dramatic script analysis, providing a methodological model for examining characters who embody multiple marginalized identities.

Third, this study advances theoretical understanding of how literary texts represent Black women in intellectual and competitive contexts, historically male-dominated spaces. By focusing on a character in a debate setting, this research illuminates how dramatic texts negotiate the intersection of gender, race, and intellectual authority, contributing to ongoing theoretical discussions about agency, resistance, and the politics of representation in African American literature.

Finally, the findings inform future research directions on representation of women in competitive academic contexts and historical period literature, demonstrating the value of script-level textual analysis for understanding how gender and racial stereotypes are embedded in the foundational construction of literary characters.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

Practically, this research offers valuable applications for multiple stakeholder groups. For educators and teachers, this study provides pedagogical resources for teaching intersectionality, gender studies, and literary analysis. The detailed examination of Samantha Boone's characterization offers concrete textual examples that can be used in classroom settings, and the analytical frameworks developed here can be adapted to guide students in conducting their own intersectional analyses of literary texts. This supports the development of critical reading skills and awareness of how stereotypes operate in literature.

For screenwriters, playwrights, and creative writers, this research offers insights into character construction practices. Understanding how *The Great Debaters* script constructs Samantha's character, including both its successes and limitations that can guide more authentic, multidimensional, and equitable portrayals of Black women in intellectual roles, historical contexts, or competitive spaces in future creative works.

For literary scholars and researchers, this study provides a detailed methodological example of how to conduct intersectional textual analysis of dramatic scripts. The analytical frameworks, coding protocols, and matrices developed here can be adapted and applied to other literary texts, facilitating more systematic and rigorous intersectional literary criticism.

Finally, this research has broader social implications for conversations about diversity, inclusion, and representation in literature and culture. By revealing how gender stereotypes operate at the intersection with race in literary representation, this study supports advocacy efforts aimed at promoting more equitable representation of women of color in literary works and other cultural forms. The findings can inform discussions about the social responsibility of writers and cultural producers in challenging stereotypes and creating more inclusive literary landscapes.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

1.5.1 Scope

This study focuses specifically on the analysis of Samantha Boone's character as represented in the movie script of *The Great Debaters* (2007). The scope of analysis is delimited to the written script rather than the filmed performance, allowing for examination of how gender and race are constructed through textual elements including dialogue, character descriptions, and narrative framing. The temporal setting of the study is at around the 1930s era as depicted in the film, with particular attention to how this historical context shapes the portrayal of gender roles and expectations.

The primary theoretical framework employed is Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, focusing on the intersection of race and gender in Samantha's characterization. While other analytical lenses such as feminist film theory and characterization theory inform the analysis, intersectionality remains the central interpretive framework. The study examines Samantha's interactions with other characters, her participation in debate activities, and her navigation of social constraints, but does not extend to comprehensive analysis of all female characters in the film or comparative analysis with other debate films.

1.5.2 Limitation

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study analyzes the script as a textual artifact and does not examine performance elements, directorial choices, cinematography, or audience reception, which constitute separate dimensions of film analysis. Second, the focus on one character, while allowing for depth of analysis, means that findings may not be generalizable to other female characters in the film or in other historical dramas. Third, the study's reliance on intersectionality theory as the primary framework, while theoretically hard, may not capture all dimensions of Samantha's characterization that other theoretical approaches might reveal. Finally, access to the complete shooting script versus the final edited version may affect analysis, as scripts often undergo revisions during production.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To avoid misunderstanding to understand this study, the definition of terms which are often found in this study as follows:

1. Gender Stereotype

In this study, gender stereotypes refer specifically to assumptions about women's intellectual capabilities, emotional nature, appropriate social roles, and behavioral expectations during the 1930s era as portrayed in the movie script.

2. Movie Script

The written text of a film containing dialogue, character descriptions, stage directions, and scene settings that serves as the blueprint for film production. This study analyzes the movie script of *The Great Debaters* as a literary text to examine how Samantha Boone's character is constructed through textual elements.

3. **Characterization**

The process by which a character's personality, traits, motivations, and identity are revealed through textual elements including direct description, dialogue, actions, and interactions with other characters. This study examines how Samantha Boone's gender and racial identity are constructed through both direct and indirect characterization in the script.

4. **The Great Debaters (2007)**

A historical drama film set in 1935 that tells the true story of Wiley College's debate team, an all-Black debate team from Texas who challenged Harvard University. The film depicts the team's journey through racial segregation and social challenges during the Jim Crow era, focusing on their intellectual achievements and resistance to oppression.

5. **Samantha Boone**

The only female character on the Wiley College debate team in *The Great Debaters*. As a Black woman in the 1930s participating in competitive debate (where male-dominated intellectual space) her character represents the intersection of racial and gender oppression, making her central to this study's intersectional analysis.

6. **Women's Presence**

The representation and participation of women in spaces and activities from which they have been historically excluded. In this study, it refers to how Samantha Boone's presence as the only female debater challenges both gender and racial boundaries in 1930s academic and intellectual contexts as depicted in the movie.

7. **Society**

The social environment, cultural norms, power structures, and interpersonal relationships depicted within the movie's 1930s setting. This study analyzes the fictional society portrayed in *The Great Debaters*, not real-life contemporary society, focusing on how gender roles and racial discrimination shaped women's experiences during that historical period as represented in the script.

