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## Gender stereotypes in Nancy Meyers’ “The Intern” (2015): A study of film audience response

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### Abstract

*Previous film studies focusing on gender stereotypes have been sufficiently conducted, yet what remains understudied is the study of film audience about dynamic gender stereotypes shown in one film. Conducting film audience study with the issue of dynamic gender stereotype allows discussions about audience’s perceptions, awareness and underlying knowledge of gender stereotypes. This study attempts to unravel responses collected from thirteen audience of Nancy Meyer’s “The Intern” (2015) and formulates two research objectives i.e. first, to discuss how the audience of “The Intern” perceive the dynamics of gender stereotype depicted in the film and, second, to examine the underlying insights of their perceptions. The incorporated theories are film audience study, serving also as methodological approach, and the discourse of gender stereotype and its changing perspectives. The finding and discussion show that the audience of “The Intern” perceive the inclusion of gender stereotypes and its dynamic change in the film, and their perceptions are followed by several reasons and insights: the story-line of “The Intern” and the audience’s prior knowledge about gender stereotypes. Awareness and sensibility of gender stereotypes are also revealed after watching “The Intern”. Lastly, discussion about the intersection of the audience’s prior knowledge with the exposure about gender stereotype from various resources is also carried out.*

**Keywords:** film audience; gender stereotypes; perceptions; dynamics; “The Intern”

### INTRODUCTION

Generally associated with inaccurate, biased, stereotypical generalizations, or attributes of women and men about their different gender roles that are shared in a society (Baxter, 2018; Ellemers, 2018), gender stereotypes become one interesting and mind-opening issue that is repeatedly studied and discussed. One of the reasons is because gender stereotype is rooted, perpetuated, and constructed in the society. As a result, practices, portrayals, and perceptions about gender stereotypes can always draw academic attentions to conduct further research.

Studies about gender stereotypes vary from discussions of how gender stereotype is portrayed in various media and how gender stereotype actively constructs perceptions about gender roles in the society. An analysis of representation of females in James Bond films has ever been conducted, and it suggests that Western society's patriarchal and individualistic culture promote stereotypical representation on female characters in such films (Neuendorf & Gore, 2009). Another study about gender stereotype on television advertising in Ukraine recently shows that women in Ukrainian commercials are mainly portrayed as households, nurses, guardian, servant or as decoration to power men (Kitsa & Mudra, 2019). This study seems to confirm perpetuation of the existing problem of gender stereotypes as global character across time and space (Nesterova & Baranov, 2017). The latest study also shows that social reproduction of stereotypes happens through movies and books after a substantial portion of narratives that shapes the modern collective memory of gender roles and stereotype has been studied, including 7,226 books, 6,087 movie synopses, and 1,109 movie [scripts](#) (Xu, Zhang, Wu, & Wang, 2019). Focusing on the repeated narratives of gender stereotypes in their contents, the study emphasizes that the "Cinderella complex", referring to the supposition that women's pursuits of happiness highly depend on men, is observed to exist widely across periods and contexts, and this fact reminds everyone how gender stereotypes are deeply rooted in the [society](#) (Xu, Zhang, Wu, & Wang, 2019, p. 1). Thus far, the abovementioned studies put forward their concerns of gender stereotypes that are depicted on the content of the texts or the media; thus, the nature of the content analysis is carried out in those studies. Consequently, such studies disclose opportunities of examining gender stereotypes from audience's perception or from perspectives of the audience of such media.

Latest studies on gender stereotype have been conducted by involving audience of television shows, films, cartoons or even advertisement. In 2009, [Meyer](#) conducted a study on viewers of *Girls Town* (1996) to know their responses about gender stereotypes of violent female characters in the [film](#) (Meyer, 2009). The result shows that reproduction of traditional gender ideology is prevalent when the female characters are punished and condemned for violating gender norms and, on the contrary, rewarded for following them (Meyer, 2009, p. 71). This study clearly aligns to perpetuate the stereotypical binary of women that women with non-violent characterizations are more preferable among the audience. One study on gender stereotypes involving British, Polish and South African students reliably reports more favorable feelings and judgements in response to the non-traditional 'paternalistic' advertisement with portrayals of househusband than to the traditional 'envious' advertisement with portrayals of businessman (Zawisza, Luyt, Zawadzka, & Buczny, 2016, p. 12). Consequently, this study suggests that breaking male gender stereotypes does appear to pay cross-nationally in The United Kingdom, Poland and South Africa.

Meanwhile, studying the audience of women-led television comedies in the United States, Robyn Stacia Swink figures out that the audience demonstrate ambivalence understanding on gender dynamics of the [shows](#) (Swink, 2017). The fact that the women-led television comedies are dubbed as a challenge toward the stereotypical perception that women cannot be funny as men is clearly overlooked by the audience. In this study, the participants did not see

them as favorites for their comedic skills, but they identified them for other reasons. As a result, these women characters from the shows may still be persistently read in relation to humorless stereotype of women despite their popularity. At last, one study is done by [Kassay](#) (2018) involving children audience who consume cartoon heroes and unveiling the relation of gender roles, locations and social background that can shed the light on perceptions of gender roles. Children from the two different locations could see different gender models: a more patriarchal, traditional community was found in children of the village whereas a more complex one could be found in children from the city. The social background is also reflected in parents' occupations and in the family models. Such social background is manifested in the hero preference: in general, children and parents from the city show more receptivity for today's changing gender roles and for feminist trends in cartoons (Kassay, 2018, p. 14). Since this study examined the audience of cartoon heroes and resulted in dynamics and changing notions of gender perceptions, this study might amplify the beginning of dynamic perceptions of gender roles and gender stereotypes that are actually going to be explored in the current study.

The aforementioned studies on gender stereotypes and the audience's perceptions demonstrate slightly dynamic responses and suggest possibilities of different results, perspectives, and insights about issues of gender stereotypes when dealing with audience. Further studies on gender stereotypes and audience perceptions, thus, need to be explored and carried out within a specific setting of audience—film audience, for instance. Previous film studies focusing on the issue of gender stereotypes have been sufficiently conducted, yet what remains understudied is the study of film audience on the dynamic gender stereotypes shown in one film. Conducting film audience study with the issue of dynamic gender stereotype allows discussions about audience's perceptions, awareness and underlying knowledge of gender stereotypes that cannot be detached from the social background of the audience and the exposure that they have encountered with.

In a nutshell, film audience studies put the locus of the analysis of meanings on the audience or the spectators. Also known as film reception studies, film audience studies can be considered as a methodological approach that is concerned with "viewers' meaning-making processes" (Barker & Brooks, 1998); consequently, this study accounts for viewers' agency whose active observations are much needed (Staiger, 2000). Despite being identified as an under-examined area of research (Staiger, 2005), film audience studies, as part of film studies, are increasingly likely to center on local, small-scale and precise groups of people who share, perhaps, some social or political 'formation' (Nelmes, 2012, p. 118). Consequently, gathering a group of film audience and centering on their responses and perceptions about gender stereotypes of the film under the study becomes one pivotal step to make meaning of such 'formation' in this current study. Jill Nelmes details further that the formation can be from diverse ideology and cultural stance depending on oneself who makes particular intertextual references to the film based on "the bank of material" and "the private self" owned by each spectator (Nelmes, 2012, p. 119). The audience's responses are going to be linked with their "social self", "cultural self", "private self" and "desiring self" of each audience (Nelmes, 2012, p. 119). He also adds that each own personal 'formation' responded to the film is the

result of one's life experiences that can "predispose the audience to certain interpretations of character" along with certain attitudes towards moral and political issues and certain emotional responses (Nelmes, 2012, p. 130). As they come from one's life experiences, thus varied and multifaceted, the film audience study anticipates audience react in very different ways, too (Nelmes, 2012, p. 130). In this current study, Nelmes' concepts of drawing the audience responses to give meanings of the film is adopted to discuss further the audience's formation about gender stereotypes after watching Nancy Meyers' "The Intern" (2015).

Raising the film tagline i.e. Experience Never Gets Old, "The Intern" directed by Nancy Meyers' in 2015 is noticeably about Ben Whittaker (Robert De Niro), a retiree who seized an opportunity to get back working as a senior intern with an online fashion site, owned by Jules Ostin (Anne Hathaway) ([imdb.com](http://imdb.com)). As mentioned in the movie review by The New York Times, Meyers' "The Intern" is actually about inaugurating a work relationship that soon turns into a friendship between Ben and Jules. Ben was portrayed as an intern who served as a kind of Mr. Fix-It equipped with quiet confidence, paternal competence and a driver's license. As a senior intern, he could help Jules get on track at work and home. Meanwhile, a working woman, Jules was narrated as someone who fitted into the idea of the successful, independent woman, yet she also ardently wanted to make room for daddy's attention (<https://www.nytimes.com/>). As the film delves into deeper working relationship and friendship between the two, layers of complicated relationships at professional and domestic levels are also being demonstrated in the film. When Jules was struggling to professionally handle her own business and stabilizing her domestic relationship with her husband, the narrative of gender stereotype and its dynamics are actually being exhibited in the film. This covert issue of gender roles and, thus, gender stereotypes in "The Intern" becomes a worthy field of study that needs to be further analyzed by involving the audience of the film.

The current study focuses on the audience of "The Intern" and their perceptions about the gender stereotype where the notion of dynamic gender stereotypes is raised by the audience; in other words, this current study is a film audience study. The fact that the audience involved in this study could actively identify the notion of changing and dynamic gender stereotypes in "The Intern" is expected to further contribute to the existing scholarly discussions about gender stereotypes, perceptions about gender stereotypes, and their interplays with the study of film audience. Having thirteen respondents and qualitatively examining their perceptions about the issues of gender stereotypes in "The Intern", this study, therefore, aims to discuss how the audience of "The Intern" perceive dynamics of gender stereotypes in "The Intern" and to examine the underlying reasons and insights from their perceptions. While probing these two objectives, this current study also attempts to discuss the audience's awareness and sensibility of gender stereotypes and the intersection of the audience's prior knowledge about gender stereotypes with their exposure about gender stereotypes from various resources and media.

## **METHOD**

Under the methodological framework of film audience study, this research involved thirteen viewers of “The Intern” who happened to be university students and were fluent in English to give their responses about gender stereotypes in the film. Thirty-five viewers initially watched and responded to the film, yet only thirteen viewers’ initial responses were satisfyingly well-matched with the ultimate consideration to select the participants i.e. their prior knowledge on gender issues. In this respect, the participants’ prior knowledge on gender issues became the final consideration of embarking them in this study because it needs to be in line with the notion of self-formation and intertextual references shown by their initial responses about gender issues in the film. Their ability to primarily define and to identify the gender issues clearly showcased their competence to comment and to respond to the dynamics of gender stereotypes in the film. This reason accordingly excluded other considerations such as the participants’ age gaps or sex when selecting the participants. Further, English fluency became another measure because the data collection was thoroughly done in English to fulfil the requirement of English as the official medium of instruction in this research. At last, the completed requirement was the informed consent given by each participant to be involved in the research. Despite their informed consents, the participants and their identities remain confidential, so their names are numerically initialized when being mentioned in this study.

As this current study shifts the focus of attention from a content analysis of the film to a film audience study, data and data collection are drawn on the qualitative research that is defined as “a field of inquiry in its own right” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012, p. 28). The nature of qualitative research employed in this current study is in accordance with the fact that qualitative research involves “a variety of empirical materials” where “personal experience” and “interview” are among those materials and thus “a wide-range of interconnected interpretive practices” is deployed to get better understanding of the subject matter at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012, p. 30). In this current study, the inquiry about perceptions of gender stereotypes is conducted where data are in the forms of utterances, statements, and responses that are collected from the interviews with the audience.

There were two phases of interviews, and all of them were conducted digitally due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The first phase was the structured, written interview by using Google Form that resulted the thirteen participants giving their responses and informed consents. The questions in the written interview deliberately aimed at gathering the audience’s responses about gender stereotypes in “The Intern” and checking the audience’s former knowledge on gender issues and understanding about gender stereotypes. The structure-questions were listed as follows: What do you know about the term: stereotype? What do you know about the term: gender stereotype? Do you think that the movie depicts the issue of stereotype? What kinds of stereotypes? Do you think that the movie depicts the stereotype about working mother? Explain your answers by providing/ mentioning the scene/ dialogue from the story; Do you

think that the movie depicts the stereotype about stay-at-home husband/househusband? Explain your answers by providing/ mentioning the scene/ dialogue from the story; Do you think the issue of stereotype is well-resolved until the end of the movie? explain your answer; and the last question was Do you agree to be involved in this research as the interviewee?

The collected data from the first phase interview were then classified and critically analyzed to answer the objectives of the study i.e. the audience's perceptions about gender stereotypes and the reasons behind such perceptions. Some questions about the scenes of "The Intern" that portrayed gender stereotypes were intended to examine the reasons behind their perceptions and their solid understandings about the issue. Additionally, to confirm the underlying reasons of their perceptions, questions of asking the definition of gender stereotype and the kinds of stereotypes depicted in "The Intern" were intentionally asked. Finally, the last question in this phase was to ask their willingness and readiness to be involved in this current study that could be seen as their informed consents.

The second phase was another digital interview by utilizing Whatsapp group room where chat and call features were used to ask further questions and clarify their statements from the first interview. Clarification was needed to confirm their perceptions about the dynamics of gender stereotypes that the audience could identify from the film and had mentioned in their first written interview. Also, clarification was intended to confirm that the participants' awareness and sensibility were clearly present after watching the film. As the interviews employed the chat mode, semi-structure interviews were done within one week as the researchers and the audience needed to adjust their schedule to conduct the interviews. The following were some guided questions that were asked to the interviewees: Do you agree that gender stereotypes (GS) in "The Intern" cover both points: GS with the traditional perspective and GS with the more reversal/ subverted perspective? In your previous answers, it is recorded that you can critically and precisely identify the portrayals of gender stereotype practices from "The Intern". Can you self-analyze yourself why you can do that? Why can you identify/ answer the gender stereotype in "The Intern"? After watching the film, do you feel more aware about the issue of gender stereotype? Explain your answers; and the last: Do you think watching "The Intern" raise your awareness about the gender stereotype issues? Explain your answers. The data collected from this phase were very pivotal and substantial. They could further answer the objectives of the research in general, and they provided some new insights that could be linked to the previous studies about film audience and gender stereotypes, in particular.

Finally, after collecting all the data taken from the two phases of interviews, the last step of the research method was to thematically organize the analyzed data into the results and to explain them in details in the discussion. The thematic organization of the audience's response and perceptions was written based on the critical analysis by employing theories and discourses about gender stereotypes and the dynamics of gender stereotypes.

Consequently, the presented result and discussion in this current study were aligning with the proposed theoretical framework.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, result and discussion are divided into two parts. First part is mainly about perceptions of the audience about gender stereotype and its dynamics as depicted in “The Intern”. The discussion of their perceptions is also linked with the fact that the audience demonstrate awareness and sensibility towards gender stereotypes and their dynamics. This part can be arguably seen as expressions of self-formation shown by the audience. Meanwhile, the second part is to discuss the reasons and insights of the audience’s perceptions. There are two reasons i.e. the audience are apparently cultivated not only by the story-line of the film but also by the audience’s prior knowledge about gender stereotypes. The latter is even worth discussing when the audience’s prior knowledge intersects with the exposure about gender stereotypes that they have learnt and encountered from various resources and media.

### **“Jules breaks the generalization that ladies are feeble and need men to settle on the correct decision”: Audiences’ perceptions of gender stereotypes in “The Intern”**

Audience’s perceptions of gender stereotypes after watching “The Intern” are clustered into two points. First, the audience perceive portrayals of dynamic gender stereotypes in “The Intern” and relatability to the current situation. In this respect, the coined term of dynamic gender stereotypes refers to the portrayals of gender stereotypes that progressively change from the traditional generalizations of gender roles into a more dynamic positioning of gender roles between men and women that are depicted in “The Intern”. The agreeable definition of gender stereotypes and its dynamics are actually concluded from the first phase interview, and thus all participants are well-informed prior to the second phase of interview. Second, the audience mention about awareness and sensibility of gender stereotypes due to “The Intern”. The audience’s awareness and sensibility about gender stereotypes are initially captured and eventually confirmed in their responses, and this perception is further discussed by looking into the audience’s exposure towards the issue of gender stereotypes in the second part of this result and discussion section.

The audience’s perception of dynamic gender stereotypes in “The Intern” is consequently concluded from their responses after watching the film, especially the ending of “The Intern”. The audience initially could identify generalization and bias that Jules as a working mom and her husband as a househusband had to encounter in the film, and they critically dubbed them as gender stereotypes. However, the audience eventually shifted their perception about such stereotypical generalization after knowing Jules’ decision in the end of the film. The notion of dynamic gender stereotypes that is raised within the audience’s perceptions of “The Intern” suggests that their responses are critical and aligning with the discourse of dynamic gender stereotypes previously

discussed by [Wilde](#) and Diekman (2005) and [Zafra-Lopez](#) & Garcia-Retamero (2012). These scholars have argued that their further studies have shown a deeper insight of dynamic gender stereotypes from various societies. Such dynamics are due to "changes of political and social landscapes [...] in tandem with changes in individual opportunities" (Zafra-Lopez & Garcia-Retamero, 2012, pp. 180-181). In this case, the audience perceive Jules as a woman with more opportunities to decide what is best for her life in the end of the film; thus, the notion of dynamic gender stereotype is evident.

The initial identification of gender stereotypes by the audience can be seen in two stances e.g. direct and indirect responses. The perception that the gender stereotypes is instilled in the film is directly shown in the following statements:

"About gender stereotype which is the wife works for a family instead of the husband" (D2, 2020)

"Those stereotypes are gender, working mother/woman, househusband" (D6, 2020).

"The movie depicts an issue of stereotypes. There are two of them; one is a gender stereotype, and more mature/senior citizen stereotype" (D7, 2020).

"In my opinion and my perspective, The Intern movie depicts gender stereotype, working mother stereotype and stay-at-home dads/house husband stereotype" (D10, 2020).

"The Intern depicts some stereotypes. Some of them are gender stereotype, age stereotype, and groups of individuals stereotype" (D12, 2020).

"In my opinion, of course this film contains issues about stereotypes. From what I have found here, one of them is the issue of gender stereotypes" (D13, 2020).

The audience's statements above capture the straightforward mention of the term: gender stereotype. The direct mention of gender stereotype is taken into account as a pivotal indication that the audience could critically recognize the issue since they are aware of the term used to refer the issue and the vivid portrayals of gender stereotype that are implanted in "The Intern". Such direct reference can also suggest that D2, D6, D7, D10, D12 and D13 are knowledgeable to understand the term and the practices of gender stereotypes. Besides, their responses are simultaneously expressed as they identify other types of stereotypes depicted in "The Intern". The ability of mentioning the term and distinguishing gender stereotypes from other instances of stereotype in "The Intern" may confirm that their making perception of gender stereotypes is supported by adequate background knowledge about this particular issue.

The identification of gender stereotypes from the film is also shown through some indirect responses, namely by not referring to the exact term of gender stereotype. Instead, the perception of the instilled gender stereotypes in "The Intern" is stated by describing and explaining the practices of generalizations and bias based on the gender roles as shown in the following quotations:

"It's about the stereotypes that women/moms cannot lead such a big duty in the company" (D1, 2020).

“This movie actually shows about stereotype of working mother and stereotype of househusband. But this movie shows that the stereotypes circulated in society are wrong” (D3, 2020).

“It depicts that a woman should stay at home and don’t go work and also woman should able to cook” (D4, 2020).

“The stereotype of a full working woman (and as a mother), a stay-at-home husband, and the stereotype of old people” (D8, 2020).

The term gender stereotype is absent from the responses above. However, the audience’s responses clearly discuss what gender stereotypes are commonly associated with. To refer to the issue, D1, D3, D4 and D8 conveyed that the film depicted a working woman and a househusband who were unfairly judged based on what was believed in the society. Such stereotypical practices of labeling man and woman based on their stereotypical roles in the society are used to channel the audience’s perceptions about the gender stereotype in “The Intern”. Consequently, the audience’s perceptions of gender stereotypes can be obviously seen despite the absence of the overt term. In fact, without such term, the quotations above showcase not only the audience’s perceptions of gender stereotypes from “The Intern” but also their critical judgment and identification of the issue.

Perceptions of gender stereotypes, either overt or covert, are evident, and certainly convey further interpretation about “The Intern”. The audience’s perception is meant to vocalize their opinions that “The Intern” presents one important issue that is not yet much discussed and may not become the ultimate topic when mentioning “The Intern”. This is because “The Intern” presumably focusses on ‘the intern’, as the title suggests, an old-retired gentleman who was still eager to work as a volunteer and the issue of ageism and his competence. However, its audience in this current study could highlight gender stereotype as another issue that is raised in the film.

Furthermore, approving that the film is packed with the issue of gender stereotype is not the only perception that can be gathered from the audience of “The Intern”. Their responses about the inclusion of gender stereotype in “The Intern” is also followed by their critical identification and evaluation about how the gender stereotype is progressively narrated in the film. In other words, the story-line of the film shapes the audience’s perception that the dynamic gender stereotypes are instilled. The notion of the film’s progressive narrative and portrayal of gender stereotype is based on the finding that the audience similarly perceived about the film. The audience claimed that “The Intern” gradually demonstrated different practices of gender stereotype.

The perception of dynamic gender stereotype is revealed by several audience whose responses are both explicitly and implicitly shown. The former is concluded from their critical identification and evaluation as they label the portrayals of gender stereotype in “The Intern” as “demonstration of reversal of common gender stereotype” (D1, 2020), “slightly debunked [stereotype]” (2020, D2), “reversed gender stereotype” (D3, 2020), “breaking the stereotype” (D10, 2020), and “slightly different” [stereotype] (D13, 2020). These quotes are explicit, firm, and critically sharp to immediately pinpoint that gender stereotype is differently demonstrated in the film. These audiences are critically aware that the traditional gender stereotype of being woman and wife and of being man and

husband is shifted and debunked; consequently, the portrayals of reversed (henceforth dynamic, changing) gender stereotypes are also narrated following the traditional ones. A more detailed perception of dynamic gender stereotypes is exemplified by D13 in the following quotation:

"Because the role of the husband in this film is slightly different from the beliefs/views of people about the role of the 'husband' in life. Thus, the gender stereotype or profiling stereotype that always says that the husband is the backbone of the family is finally disputed" (D13, 2020)

What can be inferred from D13's response is the identification of how the stereotypical generalization of a husband as a breadwinner is 'disputed' in the film. A husband is no longer portrayed as the one who should be earning in the family; he can take his role as the househusband when the wife is the breadwinner. D13 critically highlighted this point from the film and employed this issue as the turning point of perceiving that the gender stereotype in "The Intern" is 'different' from the common practices in the society.

Meanwhile, the latter is expressed in a subtler statement that the gender stereotype is the type that "does not confirm to the stereotypes" (D7, 2020). Reading this statement alone without looking at the context of the conversation may lead to misunderstanding and confusion. However, since D7 elaborated further and exemplified cases of gender roles in the society and in the film, the statement can be understood that what has been presented in "The Intern" is actually not adhering to or moving away from the traditional gender stereotype e.g. stereotypical generalizations of being husband and wife. When D7 explained by specifically referring to the ending of the film where Jules chose to maintain her position as the CEO and her husband was committed to their family (D7, 2020), her critical evaluation of the gender stereotype can be clearly understood. D7 conclusively perceives that "The Intern" portrays gender stereotype that is not commonly found; thus, it is changing and dynamic.

The audience's perception of dynamic and changing gender stereotypes in "The Intern" is further confirmed in the second phase of the virtual interview. The second interview not only results the communal agreement that "The Intern" progressively portrays dynamic gender stereotypes but also elicits profound perceptions of how the dynamics of gender stereotypes could happen. The progressive portrayals are concluded from what has been narrated in the film. Scenes of working mother and househusband are narrated since the beginning of the film and even have been recognized as "the start of the reversal gender stereotype when Jules personally could make a company of her own from zero" (D5, 2020), yet these scenes are also followed by the fact that Jules and her husband are negatively stereotyped due to their different gender roles. Jules was being underestimated as the CEO of her own business; she was criticized by other mothers at her daughter's pre-school. Jules' househusband encountered low self-confidence. Also, by having love affair with another woman, Jules' househusband affirmed the negative gender stereotype of being a househusband who was longing for his wife's affection and attention. Observing such scenes, the audience understand that Jules and her husband are being stereotyped as they are against the traditional gender roles of being

husband and wife. Commenting on this negative stereotype of working mother and househusband, the audience have similar reasonings that are represented by several the following quotations. D3 responds that such traditional gender stereotype is prevalent because the belief that “a mother should take care of her family rather than put her job first because they think it should be her husband's duty” (D3, 2020). D5 critically argues that it is because “this traditional perspective is attached to everyone’s mind [that] there is a natural rule that woman is better to stay at home, deal with the youngsters, do the housework, and let the man finds money, to work to live the family” (D5, 2020). Similarly, D10 states that the traditional perspective that “women should take care of the children and do the housework, while men go out there and make money in order to provide the family” remains strong among the mothers in “The Intern” (D10, 2020). D3, D5 and D10 exemplify the underlying and existing belief that such traditional gender stereotype is perpetuated and, in fact, also demonstrated in “The Intern”. Interestingly, at this point, although “The Intern” seemingly depicts a modern family with a working mother and a househusband since the beginning of the film, it blatantly perpetuates the implanted traditional gender stereotype at the same time.

As the story develops and showcases more portrayals of gender roles in “The Intern”, dynamics of gender stereotypes can also be seen and identified by the audience. The ending of the film apparently becomes the ultimate scene that helps stimulate the audience to perceive the reversed gender stereotypes. The ending that shows resolutions to the conflict of “The Intern” simultaneously conveys how the traditional gender stereotypes are debunked and, thus, the traditional generalization of working mother and househusband is narrated to be less bias. Quoted from the second interview, the audience’s communal perception that the gender stereotype in “The Intern” is shifted and dynamic is mainly due to Jules’ ability, confidence and independence depicted in the ending. The audience’s similar reasonings are summarized in the following quotes:

“For the reversal perspective [of gender stereotype], we can see very clearly how Jules can do her job properly even though she's woman” (D2, 2020)

“Even though Jules was a woman she could lead her work very well and also strived to do her duty as a good mother to her daughter” (D3, 2020)

“She also breaks the stereotype that women are weak and need men to make the right choice” (D10, 2020)

“Jules breaks the generalization that ladies are feeble and need men to settle on the correct decision” (D6, 2020)

“The reversion of gender stereotype [...] the ending shows that despite all things that happened to her, both work and family matters, she decided to keep her job” (D8, 2020).

“In the end [of the film], the stereotype that gave rise to the prejudice/perspective that a woman's role only worked at home (taking care of the household) was finally broken” (D13, 2020).

The audience's perceptions are much triggered by how the portrayal of Jules as a working mother is solidly tough and consistent to stand on her own feet. Although the film also showed her ups and downs, yet the audience perceived her final decision to remain working and handling her own company as the 'breaking point' of the traditional gender stereotypes that wife should be at home and working woman is less qualified to lead the company. In other words, the progressive changes of gender roles that eventually vocalize Jules' freedom of choice and supports from her surroundings provided in story-line of "The Intern" have engaged the audience to identify and to perceive the instilled of dynamic gender stereotypes in "The Intern".

When giving their perception of dynamic gender stereotypes, the audience also indicated, and then confirmed, that after watching "The Intern" their awareness and sensibility of issues pertaining to gender stereotypes are likely to grow. During the second interview, the audience's awareness and sensibility of the issue were confirmed through their statements that not only convey their agreement but also echo their good initiatives dealing with gender stereotypes. For instance, "I could speak more carefully about this gender stereotype topic and understand more about it" (D6, 2020) and "I'm just hoping that we can erase stereotype, any kind of stereotypes, and hopefully in the future time we can live and work with a fair condition and not judge people of what they are wanting to become" (D1, 2020). These statements can be seen as practical actions that the audience may do in the future as a form of channeling their awareness and concern about gender stereotypes. Among the thirteen audience, one person claimed that "The Intern" did not help grow the awareness and sensibility of gender stereotype because such awareness and sensibility were previously grown away before she watched "The Intern" (D8, 2020). This finding may suggest that "The Intern" fails to effectively raise its audience's awareness about gender stereotype because it does not work on D8. However, the fact that D8 recommends "The Intern" to be watched by her family members, especially her mother, as quoted that "I think it would deliver some awareness to her and open a little bit of her mind about the problems we are still facing even in these days of 2020" (D8, 2020) subtly confirms that "The Intern" can be employed to raise the awareness of gender stereotypes. To conclude, this current study, thus far, reveals the audience's perceptions of "The Intern" that consist of both the inclusion of dynamic gender stereotypes and demonstration of awareness and sensibility of gender stereotypes.

### **Underlying reasons and insights of audience's perceptions of gender stereotypes in "The Intern"**

This section unravels the underlying reasons and insights from perceptions and awareness of gender stereotypes given by the audience of "The Intern". The finding shows that two main reasons are the story-line of "The Intern" and the audience's prior knowledge about gender stereotypes.

When delivering their perceptions of dynamic gender stereotype in "The Intern", all audience oftentimes refer to the structure of the film i.e. by quoting

story-lines and scenes of “The Intern” that both explicitly and implicitly represent issues of gender stereotype. Consequently, the story-lines and scenes have directed the audience to identify portrayals of gender stereotype and its dynamics until the audience finally perceive the occurrence of such pertaining issues in “The Intern”. Their ability to recognize and identify the portrayals of gender stereotypes and their dynamics is remarkably relevant to their background knowledge that is also vividly shown through the audience’s answers. This part is later explored in the end of this section.

Based on the audience’s responses, story lines and scenes of “The Intern” that are related to gender stereotypes are divided into two main issues. They are the stereotypical concepts of man and woman positions at the domestic and professional levels. The first is linked with gender stereotype that man should be the breadwinner and woman should be the caretaker. Such stereotypical division of man and woman is actually debunked in “The Intern” by characterizing Jules as the working mother and her husband as the stay-at-home husband although there are conflicting judgments directed at them by other characters. The second is about stereotypes of female leaders and directors that are embodied in the figure of Jules as the director of her company. Such stereotypical divisions of gender roles have been repeatedly quoted by the audience to label that the occurrences of gender stereotypes and its dynamics are shown in *The Intern*. As a result, story-lines and scenes about Jules and her husband within their positions at the domestic sphere and Jules as the female CEO altogether with scenes of other characters’ reactions and comments thrown at Jules are taken as resources of reasoning and justifying the audience’s responses to perceive that gender stereotypes are apparent in the film.

One of the most frequently quoted scenes is when Jules was humiliated by some mothers at her daughter’s preschool because Jules was not able to provide the homemade food for the school gathering due to her busy schedule as a working mother (00:44:52). Most audience quoted this scene and exemplified it as an instance of stereotypical judgement about working mother that is completely unfair for Jules and other working mothers in general. When responding, most audience argue that this particular scene represents the traditional stereotype of woman that “a working mother had no time for their family” (D1, 2020) and “a woman should stay at home and also woman should able to cook” (D4, 2020), for instance. The fact that this scene is mostly discussed by the audience as an obvious stereotypical judgment given to Jules can suggest that the audience is not only well-informed but also mindful by the reoccurring bias that is commonly labeled to a woman, a wife and a working mother. Also, by quoting this upsetting scene, the audience simultaneously vocalize their objection that working mothers should not be unfairly criticized by their domestic routine e.g. cooking for their family.

In addition, scenes of the family morning routines “When Jules was preparing to go to company meanwhile Matt cooked in kitchen, made a coffee and took care of Paige” (D3, 2020) are frequently discussed by the audience. Such scenes are identified as the dynamic gender stereotype with both positive

and negative meanings. This is an instance of positive representation of dynamic gender role because Matt performs house chores to support the wife to go to work (D5, 2020); consequently, the scene has indicated to be reversing from the traditional gender stereotype where husbands oftentimes do not support their wives' decision to work, and they even refuse to do the house chores. However, when Jules' husband commits an affair, his positive portrayal of a good and supportive househusband is scrambled. In fact, it turns upside down that the character of Matt actually conforms to another instance of stereotypical image of male masculinity. The love affair is arguably perceived by the audience to show a different image of Jules' husband in their domestic sphere. As a husband who mostly stays at home and handles the household matters, his position shows that "his manhood is threatened" (D10, 2020) and having more successful wife has caused him jealousy (D1, 2020). By committing an affair, his action is arguably seen as "the justification of showing his masculinity" (D10, 2020) and "that he can feel more like a man by having a new girlfriend" (D11, 2020). At this point, devotion to equal gender roles where a househusband can abundantly support the working wife is immediately discredited and is presumably not easy to achieve because in the end he superiorly insists to showcase his masculinity and dominance in front of his wife that is by committing an affair. Besides, such stereotypical scenes about working mother and cheating househusband also confirm the social labels that working mother is incapable of taking care the unity of the family and that househusband is prone to commit affair due to the lack of attention.

Furthermore, dynamics of gender stereotypes at the professional sphere is also caused by the story-line and scenes found in "The Intern". Jules' position as the CEO of her own company becomes another consideration to elicit the occurrence of dynamic gender stereotypes: the positive one. Some scenes that showcase her ability to manage her company and handle some technical problems in the production process have been signified by the audience that the film positively portrays a woman director who is competent and professional. The audience perceive such scenes and then critically notify that "working women have the same hard-working ethic as men" (D1, 2020) and "Jules is still at his office, working hard as the CEO of her company, as professional as she is" (D6,2020). However, the story line that there were all recommended-men CEOs to substitute Jules' position is also highlighted and quoted by the audience. They argue that the scene is an attempt to distrust Jules's competence as the woman director. At this point, the portrayal of Jules as the CEO is included to glorify the power of woman leader, yet the incident to remove her position has been understood by the audience to show "the bigger issue that Jules is portrayed as an incapable boss of her own company because she is a mother- or even a woman in particular" (D8, 2020). This stereotypical incompetence attached to a woman director is critically noted by the audience, and it influences the audience to perceive that such scenes are about gender stereotype.

Finally, the dynamics of gender stereotypes at professional sphere is perceived to be more positive when reversal of traditional gender roles is more

apparent until the end of the film. Scenes shown in the ending of the film are highlighted to be the reasons to justify that traditional gender stereotypes are eventually being debunked, and that is why the dynamics of gender stereotypes are more apparent in the film. The audience argue that this is because of Jules' decision for her company demonstrates solid messages that "a woman also can do a man job like leading a company and I think [Jules was] more capable than man itself" (D5, 2020), "Jules chose not to give up her work" (D8, 2020), and "she breaks the stereotypes and it makes her become a representative of a modern woman" (D10, 2020). These quotes can be seen as affirmation that in the end "The Intern" has attempted to vocalize more positivity to support gender equality between man and woman at any domains.

The last discussion is to link the audience's perceptions, their underlying reasons and their satisfactory background knowledge about gender stereotypes. This finding is concluded from their clear and sound statements that undoubtedly show their ability to critically define and elaborate the term of gender stereotypes and validly provide instances of such pertaining issues. The audience's sufficient background knowledge is thus arguably associated with their advance exposure of gender stereotype from various resource and media.

Thirteen audience participating in this study have sufficiently defined gender stereotype in their written interviews. Among their statements and explanations about gender stereotype, there are repeated words or phrases reoccurring to refer to the term. Similar words such as "assumption", "generalization", "judgment", and "assessment" are repeatedly used by the audience to define gender stereotype. For instance, gender stereotype is explained as "an assumption about the characteristics and role that the men and women own" (D1, 2020). The word 'assumption', altogether with other three words, is preferably employed to emphasize that the term is negatively associated with false belief about what men and women can do and perform based on their gender roles only. D1's description of gender stereotype is identically similar to what is claimed by most audience that the term is misleadingly credited to "attributes, characteristics, and roles that are possessed and performed by women and men" (D6, 2020). The stereotypical assumption about what men and women can do is also clearly exemplified as false belief that "a woman should have a gentle attitude, should work as a housewife who works to take care of her children, cook and not work at the company after marriage and the task of men is looking for money and become a leader in all situations" (D4, 2020). D4's examples of stereotypical misconception have notoriously become the accepted meaning of gender stereotype.

All of these definitions of gender stereotype provided by the audience are taken into account as sufficient and satisfactory explanations because they align with the scholarly discourse of gender stereotype. Some of them are Ellemers (2018) who argues that gender stereotypes are inaccurate, biased, or stereotypical generalizations about different gender roles; Baxter (2018) who also links gender stereotypes with generalization shared in the society where men and women are attributed for their descriptive components (i.e. describing

how women and men are) and prescriptive components (i.e. prescribing how women and men should or should not be) (Baxter, 2018, p. 24); and all of these have labeled men and women into certain jobs, positions, etc. as Brown has exemplified that gender stereotypes allow people to label "only men should do certain jobs such as a construction worker, doctor, or president of the United States while labeling only women should be a nurse, house cleaner, or babysitter. They also said that only women can be kind, gentle, and take care of children" (Brown, 2014, p. 11). These definitions are reflected in the audience's answers about gender stereotypes; consequently, it confirms that the audience are so well-informed and knowledgeable. Such adequate background knowledge has actively reinforced the audience to produce valid and acceptable perceptions and reasons of gender stereotypes in "The Intern".

Furthermore, the audience's prior knowledge intersects with their advance exposure about gender stereotypes that they have learnt and encountered from various resource and media. It means the audience's ability to perceive the occurrence of dynamic gender stereotype in "The Intern" is due to their profound knowledge about the pertaining topic that the audience have learnt from different intakes. At this point, the intersection of perception, underlying knowledge, and advance exposure of relevant media that shapes each audience's experiences about gender stereotypes confirms what is said about "film and personal formation" argued by [Nelmes \(2012\)](#). Nelmes emphasizes that "each of us comes to a film with our own personal formation—the result of all our life experiences [...] that will predispose us to certain interpretations of characters, certain attitudes towards moral and political issues of a film" (Nelmes, 2012, p. 130). The intersection has shaped the audience's life experiences about gender stereotypes. Therefore, once the audience re-discover similar experiences of gender stereotypes in "The Intern", their perceptions and interpretations about gender stereotypes are prevalently formulated and expressed through their responses.

Details of various resource and media that shape the audience's experiences are explained and confirmed during the follow-up online interview. The audience clarified that that they have respectively learnt about gender stereotype from watching popular media such as movies, news, and influencers, from reading articles, and from their surroundings e.g. family situation and self-experiences. Some of their statements are quoted below:

"I watch a lot of movies, YouTube videos, news, and follow up a bunch of influencers on Instagram [about gender stereotypes] (D1, 2020),

"Some of "The Intern" scenes and the gender stereotype happened in my life" (D5, 2020),

"It is not an issue that I am unfamiliar with" (D7, 2020), and

"I often find them even in this real life we are living. We still have so many problems regarding of this issue that I cannot help but often stumbling over them, both in my personal experience and in the fast world of internet" (D8, 2020)

The quoted data above clearly show how the audience's exposure about gender stereotypes are evident in their lives. They encountered this issue not only through natural process i.e. learning from their own surrounding and self-experiences but also through the so-called constructed media that are presumably created to teach the society about gender stereotypes i.e. film, YouTube, Instagram's influencers. Finally, their statements also confirm that information and knowledge the audience have consumed help construct their perceptions of dynamic gender stereotypes. They learn negative stereotypical assumptions about man and woman through the process of making life experiences, yet in the process of making interpretations of "The Intern" they positively learn to appreciate more and to be aware as shown in their responses.

## **CONCLUSION**

Perceptions of gender stereotypes given by the audience of "The Intern" are prompted both by the story-lines and scenes of "The Intern" and by the underlying and profound background knowledge about gender stereotypes owned by the audience. Also, perceptions that dynamics of gender stereotypes is instilled in "The Intern" are due to the progressive narrative and portrayals of gender stereotypes that cover both domestic and professional spheres. The audience of "The Intern" have notified that the film demonstrates developments of stereotypical assumptions about men and women from traditional to less bias depictions of gender stereotypes. They are also much influenced by the ending of "The Intern" that liberates women to decide their own choices. One pivotal conclusion from this current study is the audience's profound knowledge and their vast exposure of gender stereotypes have formed their life experiences to respond to issues of gender stereotypes and even to own better awareness and sensibility about gender stereotypes.

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**Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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