

## CHAPTER 3

### EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

#### 3.1 Gender Roles

Gender and sex are two different things. According to Lindsey (1997: 11), sex, by definition, refers to the biological, hormonal, and chromosomal factors that determine whether a person is male or female. These physical and genetic characteristics classify individuals into male or female categories at birth. Meanwhile, according to Eagly (1987:18), gender refers to the social and personal aspects that people and society must consider based on traits typically associated with being male or female. Gender refers to the roles, actions, and expectations that society assigns to people based on their perceived sex, making it a social construct rather than a biological one. In short, while sex is rooted in biology, gender is shaped by societal norms and personal identity.

This thesis uses Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to discuss how both Samantha (as an AI) and human women perform their gender roles in different ways in the movie *Her*. Judith Butler challenges the assumption that gender is biologically determined and argues that gender is a repeated social performance. In her words, "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" (Butler, 1990: 43).

Butler questions the feminist assumption that there exists a unified or single category of "woman", claiming that this view ignores people who deviate from

accepted norms, such as queer women, trans women, and women of color, and strengthens exclusive structures (Butler, 1990: 5). Instead, she proposes that gender should be seen as fluid, constructed, and performative, rather than natural or biologically predetermined.

Butler further argues that gender is not something one is, but something one does, a performance that gains meaning through repetition and social regulation (Butler, 1990:25). These behaviors are shaped by what society sees as normal or acceptable. When repeated over time, they start to feel “natural.” But according to Butler, there’s no real or original gender, just repeated actions and roles that are copied and supported by culture and language.

Additionally, *Gender Trouble* connects gender identity with power. Butler draws from Michel Foucault's ideas to explain that gender norms are created and enforced through social institutions, language, and daily practices, and these norms dictate what identities are seen as real or acceptable. This is important when analyzing fictional characters like Samantha, because even though she lacks a physical body, she still performs gender in ways that are recognizable to the audience: through her voice, her nurturing behavior, and the emotional labor she performs for Theodore. In this way, Butler’s theory helps us understand that gender is not confined to biology; it is a social script that can be learned, enacted, and even programmed, making it applicable to an AI character like Samantha.

Gender roles can be understood as expectations for behavior based on biological sex. Traditionally, men are expected to embody masculinity by showing

traits like strength, power, and competitiveness, while being less expressive of emotions and affection, particularly towards other men (Fawkner, 2012:194). Masculinity is often characterized by the presence of instrumental traits such as autonomy, dominance, and assertiveness, while expressive traits like empathy, nurturance, and sensitivity typically define femininity (Blashill, 2011:3). Men are generally expected to be more independent, self-reliant, and strong. In contrast, it is more acceptable for women to express a broader range of emotions, be mindful of their feelings, and seek support from others (Greenglass, 2001:6027). Based on all of the statements above, it can be concluded that traditionally, men are expected to be more dominant and independent, whereas women are expected to be more mindful and empathetic.

Gender roles in movies can be analyzed through the characters' behavior throughout the film. This research will use Theodore Twombly as the one portraying the male character and Samantha, the AI, as the one portraying the female character in the movie *Her*. This research will also compare Samantha's role as a female AI with female humans such as Amy and Catherine.

### **3.2 AI and Society**

According to L. Chen, P. Chen and Z. Lin (2020:4) AI is described as enabling machines and systems to demonstrate human-like cognitive abilities, including learning, adaptability, and decision-making. AI is commonly used in today's society, including America. AI is known to help humans with various tasks, whether it is a simple everyday task, a complicated task, or even decision-making.

People use AI to help them with something, not only regarding their work or school, but sometimes they also use AI to accompany them. Research suggests that some consumers (of AI chatbots) use AI companion apps to alleviate loneliness, as some expressed loneliness-related thoughts explicitly in conversations with an AI chatbot (Freitas et al, 2024:51). This means that AI is gradually changing how society behaves.

According to Manyika (2022:1), AI is not just a technological tool but a force that challenges traditional notions of human creativity, ethical responsibility, and societal organization. This means that with the appearance of AI, humans tend to grow a dependency on it because AI helps humans work things faster and possibly better.

### **3.3 Gender in AI**

This study draws on Vallverdú (2023), to analyze gender roles in an AI character. This collection explores how AI and robotics are often designed with gendered features that reflect and strengthen human gender norms.

AI systems are gendered by design, such as voice assistants like Siri, Alexa, and Cortana typically have female-coded voices and personalities, reinforcing stereotypes of women as helpful, compliant, and nurturing (Vallverdú, 2023: 3). These feminized AIs are often placed in service roles, while male-coded AI and robots are assigned tasks related to authority or control, such as in security or management systems (2023: 14).

The book explains that body and voice are important in how people see the gender of AI. People often assume a robot's gender based on how it looks, acts, or sounds. These design choices reflect and repeat common ideas about what it means to be masculine or feminine (2023: 14).

By combining Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity with insights from, this thesis situates gender as a social construct performed both by humans and by artificial agents. While Butler focuses on how power and norms shape gender identity in humans, Vallverdú and contributors extend that conversation into the realm of technology, showing that AI can also perform and reinforce gender roles through design and interaction.