

Exploring Gender-Based Violence through Critical Discourse Analysis in Drama for Enhancing Literary-Based Learning Perspectives

Mahdi Ahmad ^{1*} , Sahrin Sudirman ¹ 

¹ Institut Sains dan Kependidikan (ISDIK) Kie Raha Maluku Utara, Indonesia, Indonesia

* Author Correspondence

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Abstract

This study explores gender-based violence through critical discourse analysis of dramatic texts, aiming to enhance literary-based learning. By examining how language constructs and perpetuates Gender-Based Violence within dramatic narratives, the research seeks to deepen understanding of power dynamics, social norms, and the impact of gender-based violence on individuals and society. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method. This study aims to identify the forms of violence experienced by the main female characters in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as well as the factors behind them. The research data consists of dialogues between characters that reflect the objectives of the study. Data analysis in this research involves three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The findings reveal show that there are three forms of violence depicted by the author in the drama *Streetcar Named Desire*: physical violence, verbal violence, and sexual violence. All forms of violence are fundamentally rooted in the patriarchal culture that is deeply ingrained in American society, which has shaped social cognition with the view that women are inferior to men. The practical implication exploring gender-based violence through critical discourse analysis in drama can significantly enhance literary-based learning by fostering critical thinking, promoting awareness of social inequalities, and empowering students to challenge harmful norms.

Contact : Corresponding author  e-mail: mahdiphenko719@gmail.com

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Introduction

Literary works are not merely writings, but also a form of creative expression that reflects the life and imagination of their authors (Pramono & Fadillah, 2023). In a world filled with various forms of communication, literature stands as one of the most profound and complex mediums. Through literary works, authors can convey ideas, emotions, and life experiences that not only entertain but also educate and provoke readers' thoughts (Supriyantini & Arifin, 2020). Through literary works, authors depict life in society, whether experienced by themselves or others.

The events in a literary work are reflections of events in society experienced by the characters as representatives of members of society who experience them in the real world (Partiti, 2020). If a literary work is born in a certain era, it will certainly reflect the social reality of that era. Thus, literature is also a reflection of the historical reality of a nation or society (Bump, 2022). This is in line with Taufik Ismail's statement that learning history does not necessarily mean reading history books (Salamah, 2016). By reading about characters, events, and literary settings based on specific events, readers are invited to think about and engage with history (Djojuroto, 2006). The literary works in question are novels, plays, or poems.

Gender-Based Violence in A Streetcar Named Desire: A Critical Discourse Analysis based on Van Dijk is related to gender-based violence that occurs in various cultures and societies throughout the world. (Charles et al., 2010). Gender-based violence is a serious issue that includes harassment, physical, psychological, and sexual violence experienced primarily by women and is often hidden behind patriarchal social and cultural norms. (Wondimu, 2022). This phenomenon shows that power structures and social discourses can give rise to and reinforce gender inequality and violence against women.

According to World Health Organization (WHO) reported that globally, 27% of ever-partnered women aged 15–49 years have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence from a current or former male intimate partners at least once in their lifetime, with 13% experiencing it in the year before being surveyed (Zhao et al., 2025). This statistic is even higher in Low- and Middle-Income Countries, with a study suggesting that the prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence reached 37.2% within the 12 months preceding the surveys (Matteo & Scaramuzzino, 2022). Given the constantly high prevalence and far-reaching consequences to the individual, family and society (Banaji et al., 2021).

Exploring Gender-Based Violence through Critical Discourse Analysis in Drama for Enhancing Literary-Based Learning Perspectives. Critical Discourse Analysis in Media and Literature: Critical discourse analysis is used to explore how media and literature represent Gender-Based Violence. For instance, studies have shown that media often perpetuates gender stereotypes and power imbalances through their portrayal of gender-based violence (WOLF, 2013). Educational materials or in educational contexts, Critical Discourse Analysis has been applied to analyze pedagogical materials on gender-based violence, revealing that these often reinforce normative understandings and marginalize minority perspectives (Valtýsdóttir & Halldórsdóttir, 2025).

Role-playing and assemblage: Drama-based learning activities, such as role-playing, have been effective in exploring instances of gendered violence. These activities allow participants to engage with the conditions that permit violence, rather than just the acts themselves, thereby

opening up possibilities for alternative expressions of gender and power dynamics (Imran & Hussain, 2024). Ethical testimony in drama: documentary theatre, like the play "Jauría," uses ethical testimony to present real-life cases of gender-based violence, challenging dominant narratives and promoting social transformation through direct accounts and persuasive discursive mechanisms (Puente & Gelado, 2019).

Critical inquiry and reflection. Drama-based strategies stimulate critical inquiry into constructs of power, gender, and sexual orientation. These strategies help learners understand and question gender constructs, fostering critical thinking and empathy (Gjylbegaj & Radwan, 2025). There is a need for more intersectional approaches in educational materials to effectively address gender-based violence. This includes considering sociocultural and economic aspects, which are often overlooked in generalized descriptions of gender-based violence (Violin & Nafi, 2022).

This research is important to be studied. This issue has been studied by previous research. Critical discourse analysts take an explicit position and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately challenge social inequality (Baker & McGlashan, 2020). Gender discrimination is the difference in treatment between men and women in the fulfillment of their rights in social life (Hasibuan & Sikumbang, 2022). A Critical Discourse Analysis of gender-based violence in *A Streetcar Named Desire* through the lens of Teun A. van Dijk's framework reveals how language and social structures interact to perpetuate violence and dominance (Sasani & Pilevar, 2017). Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis approach examines the text, social cognition, and social context, highlighting how power dynamics are embedded in language use and how these dynamics contribute to the normalization of violence, particularly against women.

The research gap in exploring gender-based violence through critical discourse analysis in drama for enhancing literary-based learning perspectives can be identified through several key points. Previous studies on media coverage of gender-based violence using Critical Discourse Analysis have primarily focused on qualitative analysis, with a notable absence of quantitative evidence. This gap suggests a need for integrating quantitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender-based violence representations (Guaita-Fernández et al., 2024).

Many studies have been perpetrator-oriented, often neglecting the victim's perspective. Addressing this gap would involve incorporating the victim's viewpoint to provide a more balanced and holistic analysis of gender-based violence (Meluzzi et al., 2021). There is a need for further research from diachronic (historical) and reader-oriented perspectives to bring more converging evidence on how gender-based violence is represented and perceived over time and across different audiences (Anitha et al., 2024). Studies have shown the importance of understanding gender-based violence within specific cultural and local contexts. For instance, the persistence of patriarchal values and the effectiveness of strategies based on local knowledge highlight the need for culturally sensitive approaches in Critical Discourse Analysis (Linke & Brune, 2025, Small et al., 2024).

While drama-based learning activities have been shown to open conditions of possibility and shift genre rules, there is a gap in systematically integrating these findings into educational curricula to enhance literary-based learning perspectives on gender-based violence (Kaptani, 2023). The Ontario secondary school curriculum, for example, has limited critical engagement

with gender-based violence concepts to upper-level optional courses, indicating a need for broader curricular integration (Pliogou et al., 2025).

The application of multimodal discourse methodologies to analyze media representations of gender-based violence has been limited. Expanding this approach could provide deeper insights into how different modes of communication (e.g. text, images) contribute to the construction of gender-based violence narratives (Wolf, 2018). Popular literature, such as "Twilight," "The Hunger Games," and "Fifty Shades of Grey," presents significant instances of violence against female protagonists. Analyzing these texts through Critical Discourse Analysis can reveal how such representations perpetuate gender stereotypes and influence readers' perceptions, which is an underexplored area (Pham, 2025).

The use of technological tools like podcasts to enhance argumentative discourse on gender violence has shown promise but requires further longitudinal studies and comparative evaluations to fully understand their impact on students' learning and perspectives (Estrada-Araoz et al., 2023). Based on the user's query, they are interested in understanding the application of critical discourse analysis to explore gender-based violence in drama for literary-based learning. They also seek to know the research gap, key challenges, limitations, and potential benefits of using Critical Discourse Analysis in this context.

The purpose of critical discourse analysis in "Gender-Based Violence in A Streetcar Named Desire: A Critical Discourse Analysis Based on Van Dijk" are: (1) What types of gender-based violence are found in the play A Streetcar Name Desire?; (2) What factors underline gender-based violence in the play A Streetcar Name Desire? Critical Discourse Analysis Framework: Utilizing Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, studies have highlighted the importance of analyzing power imbalances and social inequities in media representations of Gender-Based Violence.

Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with Exploring Gender-Based Violence through Critical Discourse Analysis in Drama for Enhancing Literary-Based Learning Perspectives as object of the research. This play is a compelling choice for study due to its exploration of timeless themes like social class, gender and violence. The data in this study consist of words, phrases, and sentences the dialogue in the play. The data were collected and then selected the relevant ones to the objectives of the study, namely the related texts to the forms of violence, and its social or cultural aspects behind it. The data was obtained using a read-and-note technique, which involved repeatedly reading all scene of the drama and then collecting and sorting the relevant data units related to the research focus, namely violence with gender implications. The data was then analyzed using van Dijk's (1986) Critical Discourse Analysis model, which involves analyzing the text dimension, social cognition, and social context. In the text dimension, it covers the language of the text. In social cognition, it covers the thoughts, knowledge, and beliefs of a writer or producer influence the production of the text or discourse. And Social context refers to the social, cultural, and historical environment that influences how discourse is created, disseminated, and understood.. The research data consists of dialogues in plays that show forms of violence against women, as well as the social and cultural factors that influence them. Data analysis in this study uses three stages, including:

(1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, and (3) drawing conclusions (Alfansyur, & Mariyani, 2020), and (Saleh, 2017).

Results and Discussion

Results

The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* is Williams's most important work among his other works. It was released in 1947, two years after the end of World War II in New Orleans as the setting of the play. The dominant theme in this play is violence. It depicts the reality of life experienced by Williams and his sister in their family life. The main characters of the play can be seen on the table below.

Table 1. The main characters of the play

Characters	Characterization
Blanche DuBois	Stella's older sister who experiences fragility in life. In reality, this is due to the influence of a sad past. She lives with the dream of meeting a good man in her life. Blanche is depicted as experiencing serious mental health issues in her social environment after being raped by Stanley.
Stella Dubois	Stanley's pregnant wife. A woman who is very dependent on her husband.
Stanley Kowalsky	A former soldier and Stella's arrogant husband. A selfish figure who becomes the executor of Blanche's future life. Stanley is portrayed as a violent individual who commits various acts of violence within his family, ranging from verbal abuse to the rape of Blanche.
Mitch	Stanley's poker-playing friend who once had a close relationship with Blanche.
Eunice	A neighbor in the apartment

The play, as explained before, is analyzed by using van Dijk model of critical discourse analysis. Based on the data found in the text of the play, the results and the discussions are as follow: the first, text dimension. In the text dimension, there are 3 levels. They are macrostructure, superstructure and microstructure.

Macrostructure is the global theme from the discourse or text. This part is also called as semantic structure. The dominant theme of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* is violence as the consequence of inequality of gender. The violence forms found in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* are verbal, physical, economical, psychological and sexual violence. The following are some quotes related to these forms of violence.

Data (1)

STANLEY: You hens cut out that conversation in there!

STELLA: You can't hear us.

STANLEY: Well, you can hear me and I said to hush up!

STELLA: This is my house and I'll talk as much as I want to!

BLANCHE: Stella, don't start a row. (*SCENE TIGA: 55*)

Data (2)

STANLEY: What's all this monkey doings?

STELLA: Oh, Stan! *[She jumps up and kisses him which he accepts with lordly composure]* I'm taking Blanche to Galatoire's for supper and then to a show, because it's your poker night. (SCENE TWO: 32).

Data (3)

STANLEY: Her future is mapped out for her.

STELLA: What do you mean? *[Blanche sings.]*

STANLEY: Hey, canary bird! Toots I Get *OUT* of the *BATHROOM!* *[The bathroom door flies open and Blanche emerges with a gay peal of laughter, but as Stanley crosses past her, a frightened look appears in her face, almost a look of panic. He doesn't look at her but slams the bathroom door shut as he goes in.]* (SCENE SEVEN: 120)

In addition to verbal violence, the author also describes other form of violence, namely physical violence. As can be seen in the following data (6) and (7):

Data (4)

STELLA: You lay your hands on me and I'll- *[She backs out of sight. He advances and disappears. There is the sound of a blow. Stella cries out. Blanche screams and runs into the kitchen. The men rush forward and there is grappling and cursing. Something is overturned with a crash.]*

BLANCHE *[shrilly]*: My sister is going to have a baby!

MITCH: This is terrible.

Data (5)

EUNICE *[shrieking]*: You hit me! I'm gonna call the police! *[A clatter of aluminum striking a wall is heard, followed by a man's angry roar, shouts and overturned furniture. There is a crash; then a relative hush.]*

BLANCHE *[brightly]*: Did he kill her? *[Eunice appears on the steps in daemonic disorder.]*

Data (6) describes the physical violence committed by Stanley against his wife, Stella. Meanwhile, data (6) describes the physical violence committed by Steve against Eunice (their neighbor). These data show that physical violence does not only occur at Stanley's place but also in other places. This situation means that (physical) violence occurs everywhere.

Another form of violence is sexual violence. The sexual violence depicted in the drama includes ordinary violence (sometimes referred to as harassment) and high-level violence, namely rape. Ordinary violence (harassment) in this drama can be seen in data (8) below. Meanwhile, data (9) illustrates the form of violence in the sense of rape.

Data (7)

STELLA: Because it is nearly two-thirty. *[Blanche crosses into the bedroom and partially closes the portieres]* Couldn't you call it quits after one more hand? *[A chair scrapes. Stanley gives a loud whack of his hand on her thigh.]*

STELLA *[sharply]*: That's not fun, Stanley. *[The men laugh. Stella goes into the bedroom.]*

STELLA: It makes me so mad when he does that in front of people.

Stella, as Stanley's wife, was treated indecently by Stanley. What's more, this violence was committed in front of his male friends. It is described that his male friends simply laughed at Stanley's actions. This situation indicates that, from a social perspective, such treatment of

women by men is not considered socially unacceptable. Especially since the perpetrator and the victim are bound by the status of a marital relationship.

Data (8)

BLANCHE: I warn you, don't, I'm in danger! [*He takes another step. She smashes a bottle on the table and faces him, clutching the broken top.*]

STANLEY: What did you do that for?

BLANCHE: So I could twist the broken end in your face!

STANLEY: I bet you would do that I

BLANCHE: I would! I will if you-

STANLEY: Oh! So you want some rough-house I All right, let's have some rough-house I [*He springs toward her, overturning the table. She cries out and strikes at him with the bottle top but he catches her wrist.*] Tiger-tiger! Drop the bottle-top! Drop it! We've had this date with each other from the beginning! [*She moans. The bottle-top falls. She sinks to her knees. He picks up her inert figure and carries her to the bed. ...*] (SCENE TEN: 150)

Data (8) illustrates how Stanley commits high-level sexual violence or rape against Blanche, who is none other than his wife's sister. In the context of patriarchal culture, this form of violence demonstrates male domination over women. In this play, Blanche's rape also illustrates the powerlessness of women in the in front of men.

Superstructure. The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* is built around a series of escalating conflicts between Blanche and Stanley, culminating in Blanche's mental breakdown after raped by Stanley. Tennessee Williams divided this play into 11 scenes, with each scene often closing with a dramatic gesture or punchline to heighten tension for the readers. The play moves through distinct phases: the initial setup, the central conflict, and the final consequences, creating a sense of chronological progression and dramatic impact.

Microstructure

Microstructure in discourse refers to smaller aspects of language such as words, sentences, and sentence structures used in a text or conversation. This differs from macrostructure, which focuses on the overall ideas or main themes of the discourse. In the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the author used some diction that give symbol of violence done by Stanley to Stella and Blanche even Eunice. In data (1), (2), and (3) above, Stanley commits verbal abuse by using insulting words. The words that contain elements of insult are like *hens* (female chickens), *monkey* (monkeys), and *canary birds* (canaries). In essence, animals are considered inferior and lowly creatures compared to humans. The word "*hens*" is the plural form of "*hen*." The plural form refers to Stella and Blanche. Meanwhile, '*monkey*' and "*canary bird*" refer to Blanche. The choice of animal words shows Stanley's feeling of superiority as a representation of men being superior to women.

a. Social cognition

Social cognition in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* relates to how the characters understand, interpret, and react to the social environment that surrounds them. This includes interactions, relationships between individuals, and prevailing cultural norms. The play explores how personal views and beliefs about oneself and others can shape individual behavior and influence the dynamics of relationships in complex social contexts. The characters in this

play often have strong stereotypes about themselves and others, which influences how they interact.

Blanche Dubois has a high and idealistic self-image and come from different culture, while Stanley Kowalski has a masculine and rough self-image who try hard to maintain his dominance in relationship with Stella and social environment. Williams, through this work, want to describe the social change happened in America post world war II. This social change put woman in subordinated position that usually bring them to be the victim of violence.

Social context. In the following data (10), the author attempts to describe American women's views on their powerlessness in social life. This powerlessness is a construct of patriarchal culture that has long been ingrained in society.

Data (9)

MITCH: Why did you try if you didn't feel like it, Blanche?

BLANCHE: I was just obeying the law of nature.

MITCH: Which law is that?

BLANCHE: The one that says the lady must entertain the gentleman -or no dice! See if you can locate my door-key in this purse. When I'm so tired my fingers are all thumbs!

In data (9), the author, through Blanche, shows her view of obedience to men. Women are obliged to entertain men. The phrase chosen by the author as the basis for this view is "law of nature." The author chose this phrase to show that the role of women, who are obligated to entertain or make men feel entertained, is a social fact that has been established for a long time. Therefore, it seems to have become a natural state that should be accepted as it is. This is different from the following data, which describes the perspective of men with their role of superiority.

Data (10)

STELLA: Your face and your fingers are disgustingly greasy. Go and wash up and then help me clear the table. [*He sweep the plates away on the floor*]

STANLEY: That's how I'll clear the table! [*He seizes her arm*] Don't ever talk that way to me! "Pig-Polack-disgusting vulgar- greasy!"-them kind of words have been on your tongue and your sister's too much around here. What do you two think you are? A pair of queens? Remember what Huey Long said-"Every Man is a King!" And I am the king around here, so don't forget it! [*He hurls a cup and saucer to the floor*] My place is cleared! You want me to clear your places? [*Stella begins to cry weakly. Stanley stalks out on the porch and lights a cigarette.*]

Huey Long was the governor of Louisiana in the 1930s. He was famous for his motto, "Man is the king." The author also quotes this motto directly as a reflection of male superiority. This view that men are superior beings encourages them to act arbitrarily towards women. Williams, as the author of this play, seems to strongly oppose the social conditions in America. Williams' dream seems to question the essence of a country that claims to be great. America's greatness stems from its victory in World War II in 1945, two years before the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* was released.

Williams shows Americans' view of their country's greatness through the statements of the antagonist, Stanley, as seen in the following dialogue:

Data (11)

BLANCHE: I've said I was sorry three times. [*The piano fades out.*] I take hot baths for my nerves. Hydro-therapy, they call it. You healthy Polack, without a nerve in your body, of course you don't know what anxiety feels like!

STANLEY: I am not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks. But what I am is a one hundred percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don't ever call me a Polack. (SCENE ONE: 21).

Stanley, in this play, is portrayed as Polish (Stella: Stanley is Polish, you know. However, Stanley himself does not admit this and considers himself to be a true American. This is because America is a country that excels in social cognition. People are proud of America and its greatness. This is what the author wants to highlight.

The word "Polacks" used in the above quote is a word borrowed from Polish. However, it is without the "-ck." So, 'pola' is the term for a Polish man. The term for a Polish woman is "polka." However, the word "Polack" in the context of American and British culture is a derogatory term or contains elements of insult.

In the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the author controversially highlights the reputation of Americans as the greatest nation in the world in social cognition. However, on the other hand, the author also depicts various domestic issues in America. These issues include economic problems, violence, oppression, gender issues, and widespread sexual violence in the country. Thus, on one hand, Williams expresses pride in being an American citizen, but on the other hand, he depicts the unhealthy social conditions in America. The portrayal of characters who frequently play poker, despite being factory workers with very low economic status, reflects the real conditions in the United States at that time.

Williams views the position of women in his drama as inseparable from the ideology of American society, which positions men as superior beings. Women, on the other hand, are in a lower position. This view of women's inferior position shapes the unequal relationship between men and women. Men occupy a very free social space, while women occupy limited social spaces. The limitations of women's social spaces, as depicted through the main character Blanche, can be seen in the following dialogue between Stanley and Blanche.

Data (12)

STELLA: How much longer is this game going to continue?

STANLEY: Till we get ready to quit.

BLANCHE: Poker is so fascinating. Could I kibitz?

STANLEY: You could not. Why don't you women go up and sit with Eunice? (SCENE THREE: 51)

Blanche was forbidden by Stanley to join in playing poker. Playing poker was a game that should only be played by men. In fact, this game did not require physical strength. Meanwhile, soccer, which was once considered a men's game, is now played by women. The same goes for boxing. From the above data, Stanley's refusal to allow Blanche to join is explicitly stated in the text because he does not like playing poker with Blanche, as Blanche is very disliked by Stanley. However, his refusal is also implicitly shown by the author, who indicates that women should not participate in games played by men. If there were no gender-based restrictions, Williams would not need to include the word "woman" in the sentence "*Why don't you woman go up and sit with Eunice?*" To convey the same message, within the context of the drama, Stanley could

simply say, “*Why don't you go up and sit with Eunice?*” The message or intent of the statement is essentially conveyed.

Conclusion

The study on exploring gender-based violence through critical discourse analysis in drama for enhancing literary-based learning perspectives concludes that drama-based learning activities can significantly impact the understanding and articulation of gender-based violence. The research highlights several key findings (1) contextual understanding: drama-based activities help in understanding the conditions that permit acts of violence, rather than focusing solely on the acts themselves. This approach aligns with Butler’s argument that understanding violence requires engaging with the conditions that allow it. (2) challenging norms: the use of drama in educational settings can shift genre rules and offer alternative modalities for expressing desires, beliefs, fears, and hopes. This shift can challenge the traditional norms and expectations associated with gender roles, particularly in strongly religious communities. (3) intersectional approach. The study emphasizes the need for an intersectional approach in educational materials to avoid reinforcing normative understandings and marginalizing minority youth. A more comprehensive approach can better address the sociocultural and economic aspects of gender-based violence (4) reflecting social inequities: the inequalities present in the social context of children are often reflected in their educational environment through dramatic themes, play roles, and materials used in dramatic play. However, children also use these dramatic structures to challenge these inequalities (4) media representation. The study also touches on the importance of media representation in shaping public perceptions of gender-based violence. Media can either perpetuate abuse-sustaining discourses or challenge gendered ideologies of male violence against women. (5) educational implications. The findings suggest that drama-based learning can be a powerful tool in education to address gender-based violence by providing a space for critical reflection and challenging existing power dynamics and stereotypes.

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Authors’ Note

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