

## GENDERED LANGUAGE AND WORKSPACE SEGREGATION IN SMES: A CASE STUDY OF UNPACKING STEREOTYPES IN PEMPEK 26 ILIR PALEMBANG

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Article Info	Abstract
<b>Article History</b> Received: November 2024 Revised: January 2025 Published: April 2025	<i>This research investigates how language use and gender segregation in the SMes of Pempek 26 Ilir Palembang contribute to the representation of gender identity. This phenomenon is significant, as workplaces in Indonesia, especially in Palembang, persistently display notable gender segregation. In the quest for gender parity, employees' identities are continuously replicated, with language being a crucial role. This qualitative research utilizes documentation, observation, and interviews for data collection. Meanwhile, the Miles and Huberman approach, that entails data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing, is used for data analysis. Butler's theory of gender performativity serves as the analytical lens, adopting a case study approach. The results show that most of employees and managers of SMEs in the Pempek 26 Ilir area aware the existing gender segregation. Stereotypes are the cause of this segregation. This division results from assumptions that say women belong in jobs requiring endurance and attention to detail, while males belong in jobs that are more physically demanding. The language used by employees is courteous but informal, and the subjects of conversation differ greatly. Male and female employees typically focus on work or interests, while female employees are more talkative about personal and family problems. Overall, these findings show that heteronormative gender performativity is reinforced in the work environment of Indonesian SMEs, especially in Pempek 26 Ilir Palembang, where males are seen as stronger and more reserved and women as weaker but more communicative.</i>
<b>Keywords</b> Gender identity; Language use; Gender segregation; Gender performativity; Stereotype issues;	
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### INTRODUCTION

The social construction of gender roles remains a powerful force shaping various dimensions of human life, including personal identity, occupational roles, and modes of communication. Within this social framework, men and women are expected to adopt and perform distinct patterns of behavior, attitudes, and appearances. These expectations often become internalized, forming the foundation for how individuals see themselves and engage with others. For instance, women are typically expected to embody warmth, subtlety, and indirectness in communication, while men are generally perceived as assertive, direct, and action-oriented (Coffman & Marques, 2021; Vaezi & Afghari, 2015). Language use plays a pivotal role in reinforcing these norms, as it subtly encodes cultural assumptions about gender roles and expectations. The way individuals introduce themselves, discuss their work, or interact in professional settings often mirrors these gendered expectations, gradually constructing and reinforcing a gendered identity in accordance with prevailing societal norms.

Furthermore, these gendered perceptions extend to the structure of employment. Societal assumptions about capabilities and appropriate roles for each gender lead to the differentiation of job types. As Molina et al. (2021) assert, these assumptions reproduce and sustain workplace gender segregation, shaping the division of labor in both formal and informal employment. Men are more frequently placed in physically demanding or public-facing jobs such as construction, transportation, and logistics, while women are often concentrated in service-oriented and nurturing professions like education, domestic work, and healthcare (Ridgeway, 2011). Such a binary framework not only restricts individual agency but also perpetuates systemic inequality by embedding traditional gender roles within economic structures.

The construction of gender identity, then, is not simply a product of individual choice or biological determinism. Rather, it is a product of a continuous interaction between individuals and their social environment. Historically, gender has been conflated with sex, with the binary classification of male and female understood as immutable and biologically determined. Lindqvist et al. (2021) highlight that this binary conception still dominates many institutional frameworks. Rubin, as cited in Priyatna (2018), supports this view, explaining that sex is linked to biological features, while gender is socially constructed. This notion indicates that although sex may refer to physical differences, gender is a complex and fluid construct shaped by social, cultural, and linguistic practices.

Atmadja, as cited by Nurohim (2018), defines gender as a system of social differentiation that assigns distinct tasks, responsibilities, and characteristics to individuals based on whether they are labeled masculine or feminine. Similarly, Erikson (in Wulandari & Amir, 2023) emphasizes that gender identity influences one's aspirations, values, and worldview. This suggests that gender identity is not a static label but a dynamic process of self-positioning within a particular social context. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1988) pushes this understanding further by arguing that gender is not something one is, but something one does repeatedly through actions and speech acts that are socially regulated. For Butler, gender identity is performative—it is constructed through a series of practices and performances that are socially sanctioned and maintained.

Within the workplace, this construction of gender identity becomes highly visible. Language, interaction, and power dynamics form the core tools through which individuals express and negotiate their gender identities. Daily interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and customers provide the space in which gendered behaviors are either reinforced or contested. Gender performativity in the workplace does not occur in isolation; it is deeply embedded within institutional norms, cultural expectations, and interpersonal relationships that shape how men and women behave and are perceived.

This research applies such a theoretical lens to explore gender performativity and language use within the context of *Kampung Pempek 26 Ilir* in Palembang. Known as a vibrant cluster of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), this area has evolved from its origins as a mattress-selling district in the 1970s into a nationally recognized center of culinary tourism, particularly for its iconic local dish, Pempek (Ramadhani et al., 2022). With its growing popularity among both local consumers and national food vloggers, Kampung Pempek has become an important site of economic activity and cultural production. This makes it an ideal location to investigate how gender roles are performed and language is used within the informal economy.

This study focuses on three prominent Pempek shops, referred to as Pempek A, Pempek B, and Pempek C. These businesses were selected based on their strong reputations and popularity, ensuring that the findings would reflect broader patterns within the SME community of 26 Ilir. Through preliminary observations and interviews, two main divisions of labor were identified within these enterprises: the domestic or production sphere, and the public or service sphere. The domestic sphere, which involves food preparation and back-of-house tasks, is

primarily occupied by women. The public sphere, which includes interacting with customers and handling transactions, is shared by both men and women, though male employees are often more dominant in managerial or visible roles.

Previous research has highlighted similar trends. Larsen (2006) notes that family-owned businesses often distribute work based on gendered expectations, with tasks being assigned in accordance with perceived masculine and feminine roles. Chandra, Wahyuddin, and Rizki (2024) argue that state policy has a significant role in challenging such segregation and fostering gender equity. Meanwhile, studies on gender identity by Maria, Winarto, and Siscawati (2023), Anindya (2018), and Kusuma and Novianto (2023) highlight the ways individuals perform their identities in opposition to normative gender expectations. For example, people often use artistic expression, alternative social networks, or deliberate discursive strategies to craft identities that defy traditional gender binaries.

Despite the growing body of literature on gender and labor, little attention has been given to the intersection of gendered language and workplace roles in the SME sector, especially in the context of local culinary industries such as the Pempek businesses in Palembang. Previous studies by Pratami (2023) and Sauky & Misnawati (2023) have focused more on Kampung Pempek's potential as a tourism destination and the benefits of digital commerce in boosting revenue. What remains unexplored is how these enterprises reproduce or challenge gender norms through everyday practices and communication.

This research thus addresses an important gap by applying Judith Butler's (1988) theory of gender performativity to examine how employees in the Pempek SMEs negotiate their identities through speech, interaction, and social roles. In doing so, it aims to uncover the micro-level dynamics of power that operate within these small business environments. Understanding how language functions as a vehicle for performing gender can reveal not only how segregation is maintained but also how resistance and transformation may occur. Moreover, this study situates itself within broader discussions about gender justice and equality in the workplace. The way that roles are distributed and identities are communicated can either reinforce or challenge patriarchal structures. If women are consistently confined to invisible, behind-the-scenes labor, their contribution remains undervalued and unrecognized. Conversely, when language is used to affirm their presence, agency, and expertise in public and decision-making spaces, it can serve as a powerful tool for empowerment.

This study seeks to unpack the layered realities of gender segregation and language-based identity construction within SMEs in Kampung Pempek 26 Ilir. By focusing on language as a performative act, it aligns with Butler's theoretical approach and contributes to the ongoing conversation about how everyday practices in small-scale workplaces both reflect and shape broader gender ideologies. Through empirical data and critical analysis, this research hopes to offer insights not only into the lived experiences of Pempek workers but also into the larger mechanisms by which gendered power relations operate in informal economies and local culinary industries. This gendered division of labor raises two important research questions: first, how does gender segregation manifest in the workplace in the context of SMEs in Kampung Pempek 26 Ilir? Second, how do employees perform and construct their gender identities through language in daily work interactions?

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This research adopts a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of employees' experiences, perceptions, and social dynamics within the workplace. By utilizing this method, the study aims to explore how gender identities are constructed and negotiated through language use and daily interactions in the Pempek shops of the 26 Ilir area in Palembang. As highlighted by Aprilia, Neisya, and Whariyanti (2023), a descriptive qualitative method enables researchers to provide a detailed portrayal and interpretation of real-life

phenomena, particularly when they are embedded within specific social, cultural, or institutional contexts. Rather than focusing on numerical data, this method emphasizes rich, narrative-based accounts, which are especially valuable for capturing the complexities of human behavior and meaning-making processes. Given the research focus on gender performativity, workplace segregation, and linguistic practices, a qualitative approach offers the flexibility and depth necessary to uncover subtle patterns, discursive strategies, and social norms that influence identity formation. This methodology allows the researcher to examine the lived experiences of both male and female employees in their natural settings, providing a contextualized analysis of how societal expectations, local culture, and workplace roles shape and reinforce gender dynamics in these SMEs. Thus, the qualitative framework is not only suitable but essential for achieving the study's objectives.

### **Research Participants**

This research focuses on three small businesses of *Pempek* in the 26 Ilir area of Palembang. At least 18 respondents, including employees and managers, participated through interviews and questionnaires. This number is considered sufficient to represent patterns of gender formation, observed through the language use and the workspaces segregation, which are the focus of this study. The names of the SMES brands are intentionally omitted to maintain data privacy and objective analysis. Cresswell (2014, pp. 347-348) stated that it is important to protect participant privacy and ensure the transparency about potential risks in research. For this issue, the researchers must be cautious and can make informed choices of confidentiality. It also considers the finding that might impact various groups as well as encourage to handle the results in a way of unintended bias. Therefore, this approach will maintain fairness and ethical integrity in the research process.

### **Research Instruments**

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the gender identity construction through language use and the phenomenon of gender segregation within the work environment of *Pempek* 26 Ilir SMEs, this research uses questionnaires and interviews as instruments. The researchers prepared a series of questions in the questionnaire related to the study's topic. These questions also served as a guide for conducting semi-structured interviews. This method is considered effective for collecting in-depth data.

### **Data Analysis**

For data analysis, the researchers adopt the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman (1992), which consists of three concurrent stages; data reduction, data presentation, as well as verification and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involves summarizing and focusing on the essential points from raw data gathered in the field. This process simplifies and transforms the data into a more manageable form, making it easier to identify the key information relevant to the research focus. Once the data is reduced, it moves into the data presentation phase, where the organized data is systematically arranged. This structured organization allows for clear interpretation, enabling the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions and make informed decisions. The final stage is verification and conclusion drawing, which occurs throughout the research process. During this stage, conclusions are continually tested and validated to ensure they are accurate and reliable. This iterative process helps strengthen the credibility of the research findings, ensuring they are well-supported by the evidence.

Judith Butler's (1988) theory of gender performativity was employed to analyze the data. Butler argues that gender identity is not an inherent trait, but the result of performative actions made by individuals through social interaction. Language plays a critical role in this performativity, as individuals continuously create and maintain their gender identity through their words, sentences, and body language.

Moreover, according to Butler, gender segregation in the workplace is not simply about dividing tasks and responsibilities based on gender stereotypes. It is the outcome of gender performativity sustained by individuals or organizations within a broader social context. Language strongly contributes to the creation and maintenance of gender segregation, as it is through language that gender norms are reinforced, and specific jobs are attributed to gender.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Research Findings

Based on the observations, a series of interviews, and the distribution of questionnaires to employees at three SME in Pempek 26 Ilir cluster, it was found that there are significant differences pattern in work distribution, length of employment, as well as position mobility policies in three *Pempek* shops, *Pempek A*, *Pempek B*, and *Pempek C*. Those factors reflect the diverse working culture and management approach in each shop. *Pempek A*,’s work distribution, for instance, focus on server position (64%), while the remaining roles divided into packing and managerial positions. This composition indicates that *Pempek A* probably handles a high costumer volume that requiring more staff on the service area. Furthermore, this distribution shows a more hierarchical organizational structure where the managerial positions hold by fewer employees.

On the other hand, *Pempek B* designates 80% of its employees in serving roles, with 20% portion in managerial roles only. This distribution likely suggests that the shop has a strong focus on direct customer service with a simplified structure. There is fewer hierarchical levels beyond the serving roles. It may indicate also that *Pempek B* operates on a smaller scale or a leaner organizational structure. Therefore, it does need many different position or specialized positions, such as in packing.

*Pempek C* demonstrates a more balanced and vary distribution. Most of the employees are as general staff (67%) and smaller percentages in serving and cashier positions. This role distribution shows a more versatile operational model, where the majority of employees perhaps hold flexible or multifunctional roles. It allows them to adapt to various operational necessities. *Pempek C* appears to use a more flexible workforce, possibly to accommodate the dynamic needs.

The differences in employment duration also reveal patterns of employee retention and loyalty. At *Pempek A*, a blend of short- and long-term employees suggests an effort to maintain experienced staff while continuing to bring in new hires. Meanwhile, at *Pempek B*, most workers are recent hires, with 40% having worked only a week and 20% just four days. This pattern points to a high turnover rate or a preference for temporary staff, possibly due to seasonal business demands or the need for workforce flexibility. At *Pempek C*, on the other hand, 50% of workers have been employed for over a year, indicating greater stability and retention compared to the other locations. This suggests a more stable work environment that may offer better job security or incentives that encourage employees to stay longer.

At *Pempek C*, most of employees have worked for over a year (50%), reflecting a higher level of stability and retention compared to the other two locations. This could indicate a more stable work environment, possibly offering better job security or even incentives that encourage employees to stay longer.

Lastly, *Pempek A* demonstrates greater flexibility in job mobility, with 50% of employees having changed positions since they started working. This reflects management's efforts to offer opportunities for employees to grow and explore new roles, which can boost their motivation and skills. In contrast, *Pempek B* and *C* have kept employees in their initial positions since they joined, indicating a more stable approach that may, however, offer fewer opportunities for internal career development.

Overall, this data reveals that *Pempek A* tends to prioritize flexibility and dynamic workforce management, while *Pempek B* focuses on direct customer service with a simpler

structure and higher turnover rates. *Pempek C*, on the other hand, appears to implement a versatile work model that offers better stability for its employees. These differences reflect managerial and operational strategies tailored to meet business needs and possibly align with the customer characteristics at each *Pempek* establishment.

Based on the available data, gender segregation in the workplace appears to be perceived and applied variably across the three *Pempek* establishment. At *Pempek A*, approximately 70% of employees feel that gender influences the distribution of labor, while 30% believe it has no impact. Awareness of gender-based separation is also high, with 85% of employees recognizing gender differences in the workplace, and 64% of them believing that this separation is driven by job requirements. This suggests that at *Pempek A*, gender segregation is accepted as a necessary approach to support labor distribution, with only 11% of employees opposing this separation.

However, at *Pempek B*, only 20% of employees feel that gender influences labour distribution, while the majority (80%) believe it has no impact. Additionally, employee awareness of gender separation here is lower, with 40% recognizing a gender-based difference and 60% unaware of any distinction. The primary reason cited for this segregation is to avoid unwanted relationships outside of work, with 60% of employees supporting gender separation and the remaining 40% indifferent. Notably, no employees at *Pempek B* oppose the segregation of genders.

At *Pempek C*, 33% of employees believe that gender affects labor distribution, while 67% feel it does not. Awareness of gender segregation is very low here, with only 15% of employees recognizing any gender-based differences. The primary reasons cited for gender separation are skill-based role allocation (50%) and assigning more physically demanding tasks to men (83%). Like *Pempek B*, no employees at *Pempek C* oppose gender segregation, and all employees agree with its implementation.

Overall, the differing views on gender separation at these workplaces indicate that *Pempek A* has a more systematic policy of role differentiation by gender, justified by the belief that this segregation meets job requirements. In contrast, *Pempek B* and *C* adopt a more flexible approach to gender roles, with segregation only enforced to avoid specific issues or address physical demands in certain roles. The varying levels of support and opposition to gender separation suggest that cultural, religious, and social norms also influence employees' acceptance of gender segregation policies at each establishment.

The rules regarding clothing, behavior, and speaking etiquette are strictly enforced at all *Pempek* workplaces—*Pempek A*, *Pempek B*, and *Pempek C*—where 100% of employees at each location have been instructed to follow these regulations. This demonstrates that all three companies prioritize the appearance and manners of their employees in interactions with customers, reflecting standards of professionalism and company image.

Regarding views on the impact of gender separation on work performance, there are differing perceptions across the three workplaces. At *Pempek A*, only 28% of employees agree that gender separation affects performance, while the majority (72%) believe that gender does not influence work performance. This indicates that employees at *Pempek A* are more focused on individual competence rather than gender roles affecting performance.

In contrast, at *Pempek B*, 60% of employees agree that gender separation can affect performance, while 40% disagree. This suggests a stronger perception that gender separation may influence work dynamics or productivity, possibly because certain roles are considered more suitable for specific genders to achieve optimal results. At *Pempek C*, the view that gender separation influences performance is more dominant, with 67% of employees agreeing that it plays a role in work performance, while 33% disagree.

Furthermore, when considering performance without gender separation, only 13% of employees at *Pempek A* believe that the absence of gender separation could improve

performance, while 87% think the opposite. At *Pempek B*, this view is reversed, with 60% of employees believing that performance would improve without gender separation, indicating that employees there are more open to a more inclusive work environment. At *Pempek C*, 28% of employees believe gender separation contributes to a good work environment, while 72% feel it has no effect.

Overall, the data reveals that while rules regarding behavior and appearance are consistently applied, perceptions about gender separation and its impact on performance vary greatly across the three workplaces. At *Pempek A*, the dominant perception is that gender separation is not seen as a key factor influencing performance, while at *Pempek B* and *C*, the view that gender affects performance is stronger. This may reflect differences in work culture, social backgrounds, or personal beliefs in each workplace that influence how gender separation is understood and perceived by employees.

Regarding communication among employees in the three *Pempek* businesses, there are differences in preferences and habits that reflect the dynamics of each workplace's culture. For example, employees at *Pempek A* use informal language 58% of the time when speaking with colleagues of the same gender, while 23% use formal language, and a small number use polite or casual language. This suggests that employees there are more comfortable and informal in their daily interactions with colleagues of the same gender. However, when interacting with the opposite gender, *Pempek A* employees prefer using polite language (54%) over informal language, indicating a desire to maintain politeness and professionalism in communication with colleagues of the opposite gender.

At *Pempek B*, communication among employees is also dominated by informal language when speaking with colleagues of the same gender (80%), but there is a shift when speaking with the opposite gender, where 60% of employees prefer using polite language. Meanwhile, at *Pempek C*, the use of informal language is prevalent for both same-gender (80%) and opposite-gender (75%) interactions. This indicates a more relaxed and less formal environment at *Pempek C* compared to the other two locations.

Discussion topics also reflect different preferences. Employees at *Pempek A* often discuss personal topics such as family, partners, hobbies, and feelings with colleagues of the same gender (80%), with only 20% focusing on work topics. In contrast, employees at *Pempek B* tend to focus on work topics, whether speaking with the same or opposite gender. At *Pempek C*, the discussion topics are more varied, but there is still a focus on work, especially when interacting with the opposite gender.

Regarding how employees introduce themselves when they first start working, most employees at all three businesses use friendly language (66% at *Pempek A*, 60% at *Pempek B*, and 50% at *Pempek C*). This shows the importance of making a friendly first impression in the work culture at these places, although at *Pempek B* and *C*, some employees highlight their achievements or work experience to establish credibility.

Employees' comfort levels with speaking at work also vary. 67% of *Pempek A* employees have felt uncomfortable speaking with colleagues due to work-related factors or an unpleasant tone, while 100% of employees at *Pempek B* feel comfortable talking to anyone. At *Pempek C*, 38% of employees have felt uncomfortable. This suggests that there are different communication challenges in each workplace, with *Pempek A* seeming to have more complex interpersonal dynamics compared to the other two.

Additionally, views on the use of polite language also vary. The majority of employees at all three locations (89% at *Pempek A*, 80% at *Pempek B*, and 83% at *Pempek C*) are bothered if someone speaks impolitely. This reflects a strong norm of politeness in their work environments, although tolerance for impolite language varies.

In the end, almost all employees agree that the way they speak reflects their identity, with high percentages at all three businesses (89% at *Pempek A*, 80% at *Pempek B*, and 89% at

*Pempek C*). However, when it comes to experiences of unpleasant actions at work, employees at *Pempek A* report more such experiences (67%) compared to the other two places, where no employees at *Pempek C* reported similar experiences. This difference may reflect varying work cultures or conflict management styles at each business, which influence comfort levels and social dynamics among employees.

## Discussion

As previously explained, this study aims to examine social interactions in three *Pempek* shops through the lens of gender performativity proposed by Butler. Through this concept, the audience can understand how gender identity is constructed through actions that are performed repeatedly, not as an inherent identity. Butler defines gender performativity as a construction that emerges from the repetition of certain acts, making gender appear natural due to the repeated actions. It is "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (1988). This means that gender identity is not an innate trait but is shaped through a series of repeated actions that reinforce certain social norms (Linda & Thamae, 2024; Liaw & Huang, 2015). In this context, the gender performativity of employees in the three *Pempek* shops can be seen in how they speak, behave, and dress according to the rules set by their workplace.

For example, the rules regarding dress code, speech, and behaviour that are strictly regulated by the workplace function as "performative guidelines" for employees to present themselves according to the gender expectations in place. In *Pempek A*, *Pempek B*, and *Pempek C*, all employees have been instructed on how to dress, speak, and behave in the workplace. These rules are not only administrative but also reflect the institution's efforts to ensure that employees conform to certain gender norms that have become internalized in the work environment. With these rules, gender becomes not only an individual expression but also an institutional demand, reinforced through social surveillance in the workplace (Jalanmbo et al., 2023). In line with Hefandia et al. (2023) who views, "acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences. In this case, the gender performativity enforced by the institution encourages employees to display gender identities that align with social expectations.

Moreover, verbal interactions among employees also reflect gender performativity influenced by existing social norms. Male and female employees exhibit different communication patterns depending on the gender of the person they are interacting with (Goodhew et al., 2022; Benders, 2012). In *Pempek A*, for example, 54% of employees use polite language when speaking with the opposite gender, while the majority (58%) choose informal language when speaking with colleagues of the same gender. In *Pempek C*, 80% of employees use casual language when interacting with colleagues of the same gender, but tend to use polite language when speaking with the opposite gender. These variations in language choice demonstrate that gender, as conceptualized by Butler, is not only internal but also expressed through specific actions that occur within social contexts. This reinforces Butler's statement that "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (1993). In other words, language choices become a part of gender performativity (Alabi et al., 2024), where employees express their gender identities through communication styles.

The topics of conversation chosen by employees also show how they "perform" their gender. Employees in *Pempek A* and *Pempek C*, for example, often talk about family, partners, hobbies, and feelings when interacting with colleagues of the same gender, while work-related discussions occur more frequently with the opposite gender. This selection of topics is not just a habit but a performative form of gender construction that indirectly reinforces existing gender



norms. As Butler emphasizes, gender performativity happens in and through various "social situations" where subjects act (1988).

Additionally, the survey shows that most employees at the three *Pempek* shops believe that gender separation in job tasks can influence their performance. For instance, 60% of employees at *Pempek* B agree that gender separation can affect performance, while 72% of employees at *Pempek* A feel that gender separation does not influence their performativity. Butler sees these actions as performative, where gender separation at the workplace is a form of social construction that becomes part of gender expectations regarding how one should behave. According to Butler (1993), gender is "a regulated process of repetition", meaning that gender performativity is shaped by the repeated actions that are controlled by social and institutional rules, such as gender-based task separation in the workplace.

Ultimately, Butler's concept of gender performativity confirms that gender identity is not something innate or entirely internal, but something that is produced and maintained through a series of social actions that are continuously repeated. Employees in the three *Pempek* shops show their gender identities through their way of speaking, choices of topics of conversation, and acceptance of workplace rules that govern how to dress and behave. Their experiences demonstrate that gender is the result of "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988). It means that gender identity is formed through repeated actions that align with existing social and cultural expectations.

## CONCLUSION

The comparative study of the three *Pempek* shops—*Pempek* A, B, and C—reveals distinct organizational patterns and gendered work practices that reflect broader cultural expectations. Each shop operates within a unique structure shaped by its business model and customer flow. *Pempek* A maintains a formal hierarchy and a strong focus on serving a high volume of customers, resulting in clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This shop tends to adhere more strictly to gender-based divisions of labor, assigning women to domestic tasks such as cooking and preparation, while men handle public-facing roles like cashiering and customer service. In contrast, *Pempek* B adopts a service-oriented model that emphasizes efficiency and customer experience. While it also acknowledges gendered expectations, roles are assigned more flexibly according to the needs of the task rather than the employee's gender. *Pempek* C demonstrates the highest level of flexibility among the three, allowing workers to rotate across multiple roles regardless of gender. This adaptability fosters a more inclusive environment, where the division of labor is based on skill and availability rather than traditional gender norms. These findings suggest that the organizational structure of each shop plays a crucial role in shaping gender dynamics at work.

In addition to job roles, workplace norms concerning attire, behavior, and language also contribute to the construction of gender identity. In all three shops, there are implicit expectations for employees to maintain professionalism, but these expectations are often influenced by traditional gender stereotypes. For example, female employees are subtly expected to exhibit polite, gentle behavior and to dress modestly, whereas male employees are permitted more assertiveness in their communication. Moreover, the way employees interact with one another—especially when speaking to colleagues of the opposite gender—often reflects ingrained social norms, such as speaking more formally or cautiously. These patterns align closely with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, where gender is not a static identity but a series of repeated actions and behaviors shaped by societal expectations. The study illustrates how daily practices, such as communication styles and adherence to workplace decorum, function as performative acts that continuously reinforce gender roles. Therefore, the everyday operations and social interactions within these *Pempek* shops do more than divide labor—they also actively construct and sustain gendered identities in the workplace.

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