

Patriarchal Control and Women's Resistance in Olivia Wilde's *Don't Worry Darling*: A Feminist Reading

Gracia Carrollina

Bachelor's Programme in English, Faculty of Humanities and Creative Industries,
Universitas Kristen Maranatha

Jl.. Prof. drg. Surya Sumantri, M.P.H. No. 65, Bandung, West Java

Email: carollinagracia01@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the social conflicts experienced by the female protagonist in Don't Worry Darling, a film by Olivia Wilde, through the lens of Kate Millett's theory of sexual politics. Set in the patriarchal society of the United States in the 1950s, the film portrays the life of a couple, Alice and Jack, in a simulated town called Victory. In the film, Alice attempts to resist and escape the control of the patriarchal system represented by Jack and several other characters, which leads to social conflicts between her and these characters. This study also analyzes the film's cinematography and mise-en-scène to depict these conflicts, particularly through the use of two-shots, over the shoulder shots, medium shots, medium close-up shots, close-up shots, tight framing, central framing, shallow space, as well as low-key and high-key lighting. Ultimately, Alice is depicted as successfully escaping the control of the patriarchal system, signifying the director's critique of patriarchal control and support for women's resistance.

Keywords: *patriarchy, women's resistance, social conflict, sexual politics, film*

Introduction

Patriarchy has become an issue that is inevitable in society even up until today. It is often disguised in a form of perfect and comfortable life, making women unaware of what they are truly dealing with. For instance, a social media content creator, Hannah Neeleman—known as Ballerina Farm, has taken society's attention lately. She romanticizes living as a housewife and claims to happily play the “good wife” role despite the fact that she was a ballerina before getting married (Walters, 2025). However, this rises critiques among society that she may be oppressed but unaware of it since she claims to be a helpful partner to serve and oblige her husband (Beatty, 2024). This similar issue of how patriarchy is naturally implanted in family and society occurs in a film entitled *Don't Worry Darling* by Olivia Wilde.

Olivia Wilde is an American actress and director who is actively involved in organizations, especially those related to feminism (Tikkanen, 2025). She is known for her bravery in voicing her opinion about women's rights and their involvement in the film industry (Tikkanen, 2025). Additionally, Wilde's involvement in feminism leads her to her familiarity with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which explores the struggles of women living as wives and mothers (Tikkanen, 2025). It explains how women are set to such routine—cleaning the house, preparing food, and taking care of the husbands—while being afraid to question if their potential is only limited to domestic matters (Mehrtens, 2022). This issue is believed to be the inspiration behind Wilde's film, *Don't Worry Darling*.

Don't Worry Darling (2022) is a psychological thriller movie set in a 1950s patriarchal society in the United States with strict gender roles: working husbands and stay-at-home wives (Lim, 2024). The movie has been listed for eighteen nominations and won ten awards, including an award given by the People's Choice Award under the Drama Movie of 2022 category ("Don't Worry Darling: Awards," n.d.). The movie itself tells the story of a couple, Alice and Jack, who live in a simulated town called Victory ruled by Frank. Alice and other wives in the town are assigned to do house chores and obey the husbands. This seems like a normal life at first, until Alice starts to experience strange things. She witnesses many weird behaviors of the townspeople and tries to figure out what is really happening in Victory. However, in her attempt to find the answer, she always gets interrupted by her husband, Frank, and other people around her who want to keep her away from the truth about Victory. Eventually, Alice discovers the truth on her own and manages to escape Victory and its patriarchal system.

Through the summary of the film, it can be seen that conflict is the most significant element to be analyzed. Conflict refers to "a struggle between opposing forces – two characters, a character and nature, or even an internal struggle" (Fleming, 2018). The type of conflict that appears in the film is social conflict, which means "the opposition between man and man" ("What Is Conflict in Literature? 6 Different Types of Literary Conflict and How To Create Conflict in Writing," 2021). The story of the film revolves around how Alice attempts to escape Victory and its patriarchal system while other people around her want to keep her there, refusing to let her get her own life back. Therefore, the social conflict in the film is the most suitable element to be discussed in this study.

Since the research object is a film, the visual aspects such as cinematography and *mise-en-scène* will also be discussed in this study. Furthermore, the film addresses feminist issues, making it important to be discussed through the feminist perspective. In this research, the feminist theory that is going to be used is Kate Millett's Sexual Politics.

Don't Worry Darling itself is a film that explores many aspects, including feminism, psychological issues, and the use of virtual reality setting. This makes the film potential to be viewed through many perspectives and studied by various researchers across different fields. Therefore, it is important to examine previous studies that have been conducted on this film to identify possible research gaps.

To begin with, some researchers have studied the film by focusing on feminism issues. For example, Overell (2024) argues that the film serves as an indicator of patriarchal and feminist anxiety after the #MeToo movement, concluding that to overcome patriarchy, women should noisily speak up about the patriarchal problems rather than keep it subtle. Moreover, Booker and Daraiseh (2025) argue that the film is an attention caller of how the fear of losing patriarchal power is a distraction on capitalism's dangerous psychic consequences.

Furthermore, since the film uses virtual reality elements, some researchers have examined the film by focusing on the technology used. Calvete-Lorenzo et al. (2024), for example, focus on how virtual reality is served in the film, pointing out some anomalies and the technique used. Meanwhile, Pack (2025) argues that it is important for consumerism technology and media to admit how control over women's bodies is a common trend and a harmful aspect that is possible to happen in real life.

Different from the previously mentioned authors, Zahira et al. (2025) focus the research on the psychological aspects of the main characters, Alice and Jack. They use Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis about id, ego, and superego. The result of their research is that Alice is proven to be a woman with curiosity while Jack is ambitious yet reckless.

Based on the review above, it can be seen that no attention has been paid to the social conflicts appearing in the film through the perspective of feminism. There is no study focusing on how the protagonist tries to break free from the patriarchal system as seen through the social conflicts. Therefore, this study will focus on analyzing the social conflicts through feminism viewpoints to show a different understanding of the film.

Method

This study employs a qualitative method, which focuses on “collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences” (Bhandari, 2025). The non-numerical data that is discussed in this research is a film entitled *Don't Worry Darling* by Olivia Wilde.

Since the data discussed in this study is a film, it is essential to examine the visual aspects, namely cinematography and *mise-en-scène*. Cinematography is defined as the technique of recording pictures with a camera, especially how the director uses the camera, which includes the camera and lens type as well as camera's distance and positions (Sutandio, 2020, p. 144). Meanwhile, *mise-en-scène* is defined as everything that is placed in the frame, including the visual elements such as properties, costumes, facial expressions, body language, lighting, framing, and depth of space (pp. 160-181).

Additionally, since the data raises the issue of women's experiences in a patriarchal society, it will be analyzed further using a feminist approach, which “examines how women are portrayed in literature and challenges male-centered viewpoints” (Napikoski, 2025). The specific feminist approach that will be used is Kate Millett's theory, which describes how patriarchy is often reinforced through institutions such as family, church, and academy, causing women to possess internalized submissiveness towards men (Tong & Botts, 2018). In the book entitled *Sexual Politics*, Millett explains that men are always dominant and masculine, while women are always inferior and feminine (Tong & Botts, 2018). Moreover, she states that if a woman tries to challenge the patriarchal ideology by removing her femininity [submissiveness], men will use threats, intimidation, and violence to discipline her (Tong & Botts, 2018). Other than that, Millett explains that women who want to survive patriarchy need to possess feminine traits such as submissiveness and passiveness, or else they will be subjected to what she calls “a variety of cruelties and barbarities” (Tong & Botts, 2018). In the end, Millett notes that if women gather their forces and separate themselves from men, the ideal society in which men and women have equal values can be achieved (Tong & Botts, 2018).

Using Millett's theory of sexual politics as the framework, the researcher conducts this study through several steps. First, the researcher begins by doing multiple viewings of the film in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the film. Next, the researcher collects the data needed for the analysis, which are the scenes displaying the social conflicts that appear in the film. The researcher then analyzes the social conflicts as well as the film's cinematography and *mise-en-scène*. After that, the researcher analyzes the social conflicts further using a feminist perspective before finally drawing some conclusions based on the findings.

Results and Discussion

In this section, I am going to analyze several scenes in the film that show the social conflicts experienced by Alice Warren with people around her. At the beginning of the film, Alice is portrayed to live a seemingly perfect life in a simulated town called Victory without realizing she is being controlled under its patriarchal system. She stays at home and does house chores, while her husband, Jack, goes to work in the Victory Project in the town's headquarters every day to support their needs. However, Alice comes to realize that this perfect life may hold secrets behind it as she starts to experience strange things around her. She begins to question what Victory Project is and who the townspeople really are. Alice then slowly uncovers the truth and is determined to escape Victory, but people around her try to prevent her from escaping, causing her to have conflicts with these people.

The first social conflict happens between Alice and Jack on the night after Alice saw Margaret, her neighbor, cut her own throat. That day, Alice is dancing in her ballet class as usual. Suddenly, she realizes that her reflection in the mirror is Margaret and not herself. Alice feels that there is something wrong with Margaret, so she rushes home. By the time she arrives at home, Margaret is already standing on her roof, starting to cut her own throat. Alice gets hysterical and tries to rescue her, but several cops come and drag her away from the scene. Later that night, Alice and Jack are having an argument because Jack insists that Margaret is alright even though Alice knows Margaret nearly died. This strange occurrence then leads Alice to question what Jack and the other men do in the Victory Project. Jack says that he is the technical engineer in the Victory Project. However, Alice feels that Jack is hiding something, so she keeps asking about what Jack and the other men specifically do in the Victory Project. Jack insists that the information is classified, and he cannot discuss it any further. Thus, on the one hand, Alice insists that Jack tell her what he is doing in the Victory Project. On other hand, Jack refuses to tell Alice and explains that it is classified.

This conflict is also supported by the cinematography and *mise-en-scène* below:



Figure 1. Alice and Jack are arguing in the bedroom

Source: Wilde, 2022, 00:45:38

Figure 1 above is taken using medium long shot, which refers to a kind of shot that reveals almost every part of the character's body to give information about what happens in the scene (Sutandio, 2020, p. 148). Here, it can be seen that Alice is positioned slightly behind Jack. Jack seems to turn his back on Alice, suggesting that he is ignoring Alice while she tries to find an answer about the Victory Project. This reveals that Alice and Jack are in conflict.

Moreover, through the use of this shot, the characters' gestures also appear clearly in the scene above. Alice's arms are open wide with her palm facing up, suggesting an imploring and begging gesture ("Palm-Up," n.d.). This shows that Alice demands an answer from Jack about the Victory Project. She needs to know the truth because things start to make no sense after she witnesses Margaret cutting her own throat. On the contrary, Jack seems to turn his back on Alice and looks down, which is a sign of rejection ("Back Body Language," n.d.). Jack keeps rejecting Alice's idea as he does not want further discussion on the Victory Project.

Additionally, it appears that this figure is taken from outside the bedroom through a glass door. Here, Alice and Jack are positioned inside the glass door, which signifies their being inside the patriarchal system represented by Victory. It is also seen that Jack is closing the glass door in front of him with Alice inside the room. This can be interpreted as his way to trap Alice inside Victory and prevent her from escaping it.

Furthermore, figure 1 is taken using deep space, which is a technique when the camera alternately focuses on one subject and the other subject, while showing that there is huge depth between the subjects and the background (Sutandio, 2020, pp. 179-180). It can be seen that the camera focuses on Jack and Alice, leaving a great space behind them. This enables the audience to also see the bedroom behind them vividly. It is said that bedroom is a domestic space that represents privacy (Knight, 2023). The fact that they are near the bedroom once again suggests how Jack tries to confine Alice to the domestic sphere, reflecting the 1950s gender stereotypes embedded in the patriarchal system that dictate how women should only be housewives and remain in the private sphere.

The conflict between Alice and Jack is resolved when Jack shouts at Alice, explaining that he cannot discuss the job or else they will lose everything they have. Alice goes quiet after Jack shouts at her and leaves her. Alice stops voicing her opinion and does not demand more explanation, which indicates that she agrees with Jack not to discuss the matter any further. Therefore, this conflict is resolved by Jack winning the conflict, meaning that he successfully keeps Alice under control.

The resolution of this conflict is also supported by the cinematography and *mise-en-scène* below:

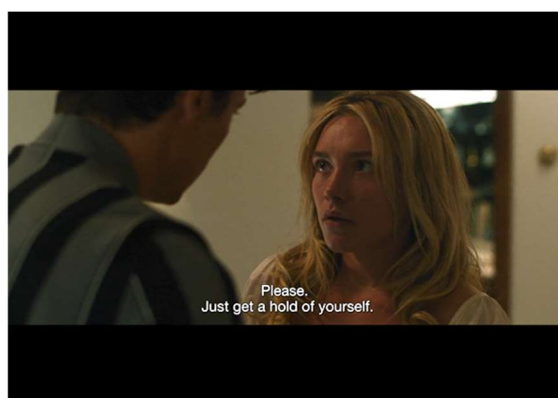


Figure 2. Alice stares at Jack without saying a word

Source: Wilde, 2022, 00:46:23

Figure 2 above is taken using over the shoulder shot, which is used to show a dialogue between two characters that are facing each other (Sutandio, 2020, p. 149). Here, the scene is taken with the camera positioned behind Jack's shoulder. Alice and Jack are facing each other with Jack's being closer to the camera. This makes Jack appear bigger and taller than Alice even though his shoulder is blurred. By this proportion, Jack is seen to be more dominant than Alice, signaling that he wins the conflict. Moreover, this shot focuses on Alice's expression. Her eyebrows are raised horizontally, and her lips are stretched and slightly open, which suggests fear ("What Is Fear?" n.d.). Other than that, Alice's eyes are looking up while her head is slightly lowered down, which suggests submissiveness ("Body Language 20 Language of the Eyes," n.d.). Alice fears Jack after he shouts at her and gets furious about being asked about the Victory Project. She gets quiet and does not ask for further explanation about the project, which shows that she agrees with Jack not to discuss anything further. This means that Alice is being submissive towards Jack, making her appear weaker than Jack.

Furthermore, this scene is taken using tight framing—the positioning of the character filling the frame, leaving almost no background left (Descours, 2017). In this figure, due to the use of tight framing, Alice seems to be squeezed in the frame with her being positioned between Jack and the door frame blurred behind her, while her head is touching the frame. This creates an impression that Alice is unable to go anywhere as if being trapped, indicating that Alice is silenced and being forced to agree with Jack's opinion. She seems to have no freedom in voicing her opinion and figuring out about the Victory Project. She eventually submits to Jack, which means that Jack wins the conflict.

In terms of lighting, figure 2 uses low-key lighting, which is defined as a lighting technique that uses dark tones and emphasizes shadows (Deguzman, 2022). It can be seen that the scene is taken in the same bedroom as the previous figure. The setting is nighttime with low lighting, making the scene dominated by darkness, which usually emphasizes lack of knowledge ("The Symbolism of Darkness (Top 13 Meanings)," 2023). The low-key lighting is used in figure 2 to emphasize Alice being kept in the "dark" since she still has not known the truth behind the Victory Project even after trying to figure it out. Jack has successfully silenced her by yelling at her to stop questioning about Victory, making Alice stay clueless.

In this conflict, Jack represents the patriarchal system, while Alice represents the women who challenge the system. Jack refusing to explain his job serves as a way to control and keep Alice under the system without her knowing. However, Alice keeps asking him questions as a way to fight against being controlled and refuse to just believe what is told.

The situation between Alice and Jack reflects Millett's theory that says patriarchal ideology is often embedded in institution such as society and family, making women possess internalized submissiveness towards men (Tong & Botts, 2018). In this case, the patriarchal ideology is embedded through Jack, a husband to whom Alice gives her respect and obedience. Other than that, Millett argues that men who have dominant roles towards women will discipline women who try to break free from being conditioned by using violence (Tong & Botts, 2018). By demanding to know the truth behind the Victory Project, Alice tries to resist from being forced to be passive and submissive towards everything Jack says. However, Jack tries to hide the fact behind the Victory Project from Alice because he feels his domination over her is threatened if she knows the truth. As a result, he takes disciplinary action towards Alice by shouting and screaming at her to keep her under his control.

The second social conflict happens between Alice and Frank at a dinner hosted by Alice and Jack. That night, Frank, his wife Shelley, and several neighbors are invited to the dinner. After all the guests arrive and chat with one another, Alice decides to continue preparing dinner in the kitchen. Frank approaches her and says that he knows Alice finds Victory suspicious. Frank mocks her by saying that it is a shame for her to have bravely tried to find the truth about Victory but stops and chooses to prepare dinner like a good wife. Frank tells Alice that he expects her to try harder, which triggers Alice to confront him later during dinner. Alice says that Frank is controlling all the townspeople's minds and memories as he tries to make them forget things and only remember what needs to be remembered in Victory. However, Frank responds to Alice's statement calmly, saying that Alice is mentally ill and this issue can be fixed. Here, Alice tries to reveal the truth that Frank is controlling them in Victory, while Frank tries to hide the truth by manipulating her and the others into believing that she is mentally ill.

The conflict is also supported by the cinematography and *mise-en-scène* below:

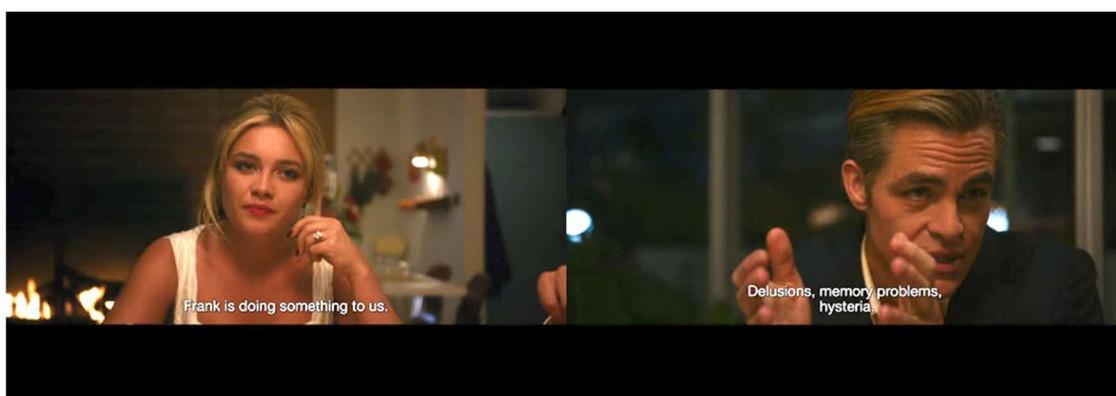


Figure 3. (left) Alice exposes Frank; (right) Frank manipulates her and the others

Source: Wilde, 2022, 01:16:03; 01:16:13

This figure is taken using two-shot, which presents the subjects facing the screen alternately (Sutandio, 2020, p. 149). Both Alice and Frank are facing the screen but are not exactly looking at the camera. By taken alternately, this figure shows that Alice and Frank are actually sitting far across each other on different sides of the dining table and face to face. This suggests that they are having a conflict and confronting each other.

Moreover, their expressions and body gestures are also presented clearly through the use of this shot. In the left figure, Alice leans forward, maintains eye contact, and slightly smiles, which projects confidence (Soni, 2020). Alice calmly exposes Frank to the others, which means that she is confident of what she says and believes that the others would listen to her. Meanwhile, in the right figure, Frank seems to have direct eye contact with the people beside him while pointing at Alice with both hands, which projects dominance, intimidation, and persuasion (Raj, 2023). These gestures indicate that Frank also feels confident when saying that Alice is mentally ill as he believes people would agree with him. Thus, both Alice and Frank have strong contradicting opinions as they are confronting each other.

Furthermore, this figure is taken using central framing, which refers to the positioning of the character in the middle of the frame horizontally (Sutandio, 2020, p. 174). This framing may create duality effect which makes the two characters seem to have a strong conflict (p. 176). Alice and Frank have the same proportion in the figure, which means they are in an equally dominant position. This suggests that Alice and Frank are both dominant in the conflict.

Eventually, the conflict is resolved after Shelly, Frank's wife, ends the argument and decides to leave the dinner. Other guests then follow her out of the house, leaving Alice and Frank alone. Before leaving Alice, Frank mentions that he was expecting much from her. Alice sits motionless and says nothing as Frank leaves, which means that Frank wins the conflict.

The resolution of the conflict is also supported by the cinematography and *mise-en-scène* below:

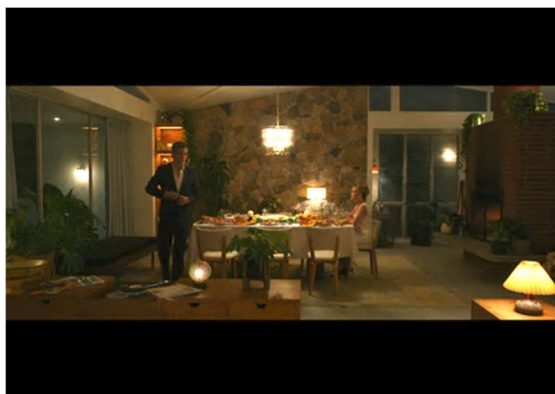


Figure 4. Frank is leaving Alice
Source: Wilde, 2022, 01:20:28

This figure is taken using long shot, which creates quite a huge distance between the camera and the subject, making the audience observe the scene rather than being involved emotionally with the subject (Sutandio, 2020, p. 147). This figure shows that only Frank and Alice are left at the dining table. Frank is standing up while Alice is sitting down across him, which shows that he wins the conflict against her as he appears dominant in the figure above. This shot also enables the audience to see Frank's gesture more clearly. Frank's shoulders are stretched back and appear wide while his chin is up, which projects pride ("Body Language 75 Pride," n.d.). Frank feels proud to have defeated Alice and persuaded others to believe in his words, which means that he successfully keeps Alice under control.

Moreover, figure 4 above is taken using central framing, which refers to the positioning of characters or subjects in the middle of the frame, creating many effects to the audience (Sutandio, 2020, p. 174). In this figure, central framing is used to enhance the discomfort that the subject experiences (p. 175). At first, Alice aggressively tries to prove that Frank is doing something bad to the townspeople, but she gets manipulated and confronted by Frank and Shelly instead. Shelly then leaves the house, followed by other neighbors, leaving Alice and Frank alone as seen in figure 4. It appears that Alice is awkwardly silent and motionless, which shows that she experiences discomfort. Furthermore, being motionless can be a sign of submission as it suggests that the person will not fight back anymore (Francis, n.d.). Alice seems to submit to what happens and does not fight back to prove her point right. She has to accept the situation since she is unable to do anything, which means that Frank wins the conflict against her.

In terms of lighting, figure 4 uses low-key lighting. It can be seen that the lighting comes only from the lamps in Alice's house, which results in more dark tones in the scene. It is known that the "dark" is usually associated with secret and lack of knowledge ("The Symbolism of Darkness (Top 13 Meanings)," 2023). At this point, although Alice confidently confronts Frank in the conflict earlier, she still does not know much about the Victory Project. Thus, this lighting emphasizes Alice's condition of not knowing the truth about Victory yet.

In this conflict, Frank represents the patriarchal system, while Alice represents women who challenge the system. Frank manipulating Alice acts as an attempt to keep her under control, showing that a woman like Alice has no power to rebel against him. However, Alice starts to challenge him and fight against his words as she does not want to stay silent while being pressured and intimidated by Frank.

The situation between Alice and Frank reflects Millett's theory that says if a woman wants to survive patriarchy, they need to act feminine, or else they will be subjected to madness and barbarity (Tong & Botts, 2018). Here, Alice tries to expose Frank and does not want to stay put when Frank intimidates her. This serves as Alice's act to rebel against patriarchy, which does not align with feminine traits such as being submissive. As a result, Frank manipulates her and subjects her to being a mad woman as an act to control her and keep her silent under patriarchy.

The third social conflict happens between Alice and Jack after Alice's memory is erased and she becomes "normal" again. After her previous argument with Frank, Alice gets captured by the cops, gets her memory erased, and starts to live the "normal life" again. However, that night when Jack comes home earlier than usual, Alice hears Jack humming a song that sounds familiar to her. Alice gets distracted by his humming, and her memory starts to return slowly. Jack tries to comfort her when she relapses in the kitchen, but Alice's memory is fully restored already. She remembers that Jack is the one who puts her in Victory, taking away her original life, so she gets angry at Jack.

They argue for quite a long time until Jack finally calms Alice down and starts hugging her while kneeling down. However, hesitating to easily accept everything that has just happened, Alice asks Jack if the other townspeople are also trapped. He tells her that he does not know who they really are and says that the man's only responsibility is his wife. Alice is surprised upon hearing Jack's confession because she realizes that all wives are trapped there. She gets even more panicked because she thinks the children are also trapped, but Jack assures her that the kids are not real in Victory. Jack begs Alice to stay with him in Victory while hugging her, saying that they will be happier there. Alice tells him that she needs some space to process everything, which indicates that she is actually reluctant to stay in Victory. However, Jack keeps hugging her even more tightly, making her unable to breathe. Here, Jack wants Alice to stay in Victory with him, but Alice does not want to stay in Victory with Jack anymore.

The conflict is also supported by the cinematography and *mise-en-scène* below:



Figure 5. Jack is hugging Alice and preventing her from leaving him

Source: Wilde, 2022, 01:43:29

Figure 5 above is taken using close up shot, which zooms the subjects and makes the audience unable to see the background clearly (Sutandio, 2020, p. 150). This shot is used to emphasize the subjects' emotions and expressions because the distance between the subjects and the audience is more intimate (p. 150). In this figure, Alice seems to try to push Jack away with her hand on his shoulder, while Jack keeps hugging her, which suggests that Alice and Jack are in conflict. Additionally, Jack is hugging Alice's waist while kneeling in front of her. This position makes Alice appear bigger and taller than him, which suggests that Alice is dominant in this conflict.

Moreover, through the use of this shot, Jack's expression and body gesture are presented clearly. In the figure above, Jack's eyes are closed and his eyebrows are pinched together, which shows despair ("Emotion Thesaurus: Despair," n.d.). Jack is desperate to keep Alice with him as he is afraid that Alice will leave Victory for good. Moreover, Jack is hugging Alice with his hands clasped together tightly. It is said that hugging is the act of comforting ("Hugging," n.d.), and tight hand clasping suggests nerves (Campbell, 2025). These body gestures, when combined together, suggest that Jack is trying his best to calm Alice down to make her stay in Victory with him.

Additionally, this figure is taken using shallow space, which refers to a technique that makes the subject positioned without depth, creating a claustrophobic effect since the subject has no space to move freely (Sutandio, 2020, p. 181). This scene is also taken using tight framing, which refers to the positioning of the character filling the frame, leaving almost no background left (Descours, 2017). In this figure, Alice is filling the frame with her body being trapped in Jack's hug, which makes her unable to go anywhere. These techniques help to emphasize the tension that Alice is trying to push Jack away while shouting at him to get off her, showing that Alice is being hysterical. It is said that hysterical means someone is unable to control their emotions and behavior as they are afraid (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Thus, it can be argued that Alice being hysterical means that she is afraid upon finding out the truth about Victory and does not want to stay there anymore.

Eventually, the conflict between Alice and Jack is resolved with Alice winning the conflict. Jack fails to calm Alice down and persuade her to stay in Victory because Alice hits him on the head with a glass, which immediately kills him.

The resolution of the conflict is also supported by the cinematography and *mise-en-scène* below:



Figure 6. (left) Alice hits Jack with a glass; (right) Jack is dead after Alice hits his head

Source: Wilde, 2022, 01:43:38; 01:43:43

Figure 6 (left) is taken using low angle shot, which is a shot that is taken from low camera angle (Sutandio, 2020, p. 152). This figure is also taken using central framing, which places the subject in the middle of the frame (p. 174). It is said that the combination of central framing and low angle shot can create an effect to make the subject seem powerful and superior (p. 175). As seen in the figure, Alice's proportion is bigger than Jack's. Alice is standing, while Jack is still kneeling with only the top of his head visible. This shows that Alice is more powerful and superior to Jack, confirming that she wins the conflict. Moreover, Alice's expression is also presented clearly through the use of this shot. It appears that Alice has her jaw tightened, mouth opened with the upper lip snarled, and an intense gaze towards Jack. These expressions show extreme anger and rage (Donovan, 2023). It is said that anger can be driven by many factors, one of which is frustration when someone is disappointed in life (Gagnon, n.d.). In this case, Alice's anger is a built-up anger driven by her disappointment towards Jack after finding out the truth, which then leads her to kill him.

Meanwhile, figure 6 (right) is taken using medium shot, which creates a close distance between the audience and the subject so that the audience can engage with the subject more personally (Sutandio, 2020, p. 148). In this figure, Jack is shown dead with his body lying motionless on top of Alice. Alice, on the other hand, is still alive, as indicated by her left hand's holding Jack's shoulder. Moreover, Alice's gesture of holding Jack's shoulder suggests that she is asserting dominance over him (Parvez, 2021). This indicates that Alice is no longer under Jack's control; instead, she is now dominant over him, meaning that Alice wins the conflict against Jack.

Moreover, figure 6 (right) is captured through a mirror reflection, which often signifies a turning point and a shift in perception ("Why Use Reflections and Mirrors in Filmmaking?", 2025). In this figure, both Alice and Jack are reflected in the mirror, but only Alice remains alive. Thus, this resolution serves as a turning point for her—from being confined within the patriarchal system to boldly breaking free from it and attempting to escape.

In terms of lighting, figure 6, both left and right, use high-key lighting, which refers to a kind of lighting that highlights bright tones (Hara & Waltz, n.d.). It can be seen that this resolution happens in a living room that is exposed to sunlight, making both scenes appear bright. Moreover, on the right figure, the use of this lighting gives a nuance of yellow color on the overall scene. It is said that yellow is a color that represents acquired knowledge and mental clarity ("The Color Yellow," n.d.). Thus, in this case, the yellow color indicates Alice's situation, in which she is now completely exposed to the truth about Victory, confirming that all her thoughts before are true.

In this conflict, Jack represents the patriarchal system by trying to keep Alice calm and hugging her tightly in an attempt to prevent her from escaping Victory. In contrast, Alice represents women who challenge the system by pushing Jack away and fighting for her freedom from his strong control.

This conflict aligns with Millett's theory that says a woman should eliminate men's control in order to be free from patriarchy, and that it is possible for women to regather their forces to overcome the oppression (Tong & Botts, 2018). In this case, Alice killing Jack serves as an act to eliminate men's control over her. She regains her power after being oppressed under his control and manages to overcome the domination.

The fourth, as well as the last, social conflict happens between Alice and the cops after Alice kills Jack. That day, Bunny, Alice's friend, finds out that Alice kills Jack, and she immediately tells Alice to run away. Bunny insists that Alice need to leave Victory through the headquarters—the only way out—before it is too late. Alice gets confused about why Bunny seems aware of everything that has been happening to her lately. Then, she learns that Bunny is the only woman who is aware of being in a simulation because of her own willingness. After that, Alice rushes outside, takes Jack's car, and drives to the headquarters. However, Frank finds out that Jack is dead after the system detects it. He orders the cops to stop Alice from escaping and kill her, so the cops chase Alice to the headquarters. Here, Alice wants to escape Victory and return to her real life. However, the cops do not want her to escape and try to stop her so that she will stay in Victory.

The conflict between Alice and the cops is also supported by the cinematography and *mise-en-scène* below:

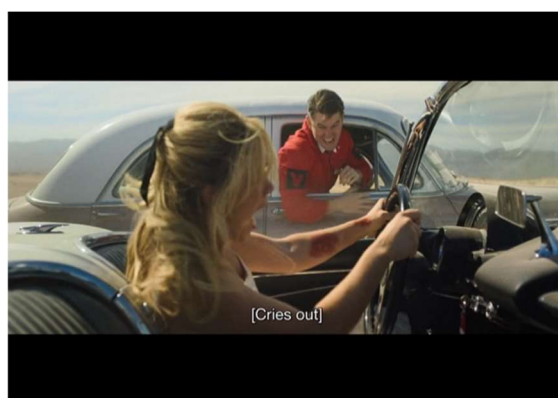


Figure 7. One of the cops is trying to catch Alice
Source: Wilde, 2022, 01:49:53

Figure 7 above is taken using medium shot, which creates a close distance between the audience and the subject, making the audience engage with the subject more personally (Sutandio, 2020, p. 148). It can be seen that one of the cops is trying to get Alice, while she is dodging him. This suggests that Alice and the cop are in conflict. Moreover, this shot helps the audience to see that Alice is placed closer to the camera than the cop. This placement makes the cop look higher than Alice, while Alice looks bigger than the cop. It suggests that both Alice and the cop are dominant in the conflict but in a different way. Alice ambitiously wants to escape Victory after finding out the truth, while the cop eagerly wants to catch Alice because she is a threat to the patriarchal system after killing Jack.

Furthermore, the facial expressions are also clearly present in this figure through the use of medium shot. It can be seen that Alice has her jaw dropped open, which suggests fear ("What Is Fear?", n.d.). Alice is being chased by the cop as she tries to escape Victory. She fears that the cop may get her and keep her in Victory for good, while she wants to escape and get her life back. On the contrary, the cop is furrowing his eyebrows and scrunching up his face, which projects anger (Donovan, 2023). The cop is in anger because Alice, who is a real threat and danger to the patriarchal system, tries to escape Victory.

In terms of *mise-en-scène*, this figure is taken using tight framing and deep space. Tight framing refers to the positioning of the character filling the frame, leaving almost no background left (Descours, 2017). Meanwhile, deep space refers to a technique that shows huge depth between the subject and the background (Sutandio, 2020, pp. 179-180). It can be seen that Alice is positioned inside a car with the cop beside her, which makes her seem unable to escape anywhere. However, the vast desert in the background, which signifies her freedom as it is where the access to the real world is located, can still be seen clearly even if the proportion is smaller compared to Alice and the cop. This combination of tight framing and deep space signifies Alice's life-and-death situation upon trying to escape Victory. She is in a critical circumstance; there is a possibility that she will be caught by the cop and trapped inside Victory for good. However, at the same time, there is also a possibility for her to escape Victory.

Eventually, the conflict between Alice and the cop is resolved when Alice successfully reaches the headquarters and escapes Victory. At first, Alice's car is broken down and blocks the way when she tries to drive up the hill to the headquarters. As a result, she needs to get out of the car and run to the headquarters. The cops keep chasing her and almost catch Alice when finally, she successfully enters the headquarters, and the simulation world slowly starts to fade away. The resolution shows that Alice wins the conflict against the cops.

The resolution of the conflict is also supported by the cinematography and *mise-en-scène* below:



Figure 8. Alice enters the headquarters
Source: Wilde, 2022, 01:54:30

Figure 8 above is taken using medium close up shot, which commonly shows the character from head until shoulders. This shot gives a more intimate effect as it emphasizes the subject's emotions and expressions (Sutandio, 2020, p. 150). In this figure, the camera focuses on Alice who is positioned closer to the camera while the two cops are behind her. This makes Alice appear bigger than the cops, which suggests that Alice dominates and wins the conflict against the cops. Moreover, Alice's expression is also clear in the figure above. Alice shows an intense gaze towards the glass door. It is said that when someone maintains a longer intense gaze towards a thing, it means that they have fixed their decision towards what is in front of them ("Eyes Body Language", n.d.). In this case, Alice has decided to leave Victory for good and get back to her original life through the glass door. She wants to regain her life after being trapped in Victory with its patriarchal system because of Jack. Alice has made up her mind and is now determined to return to her original life and leave the patriarchal world behind.

Moreover, this figure is taken using central framing, which places the character in the middle of the frame, giving the character a spotlight, to create a great effect on the character (Sutandio, 2020, p. 178). In this figure, Alice is positioned in the middle of the frame so that the audience can clearly see her facial expression, which shows her determination to escape Victory.

In terms of lighting, figure 8 uses high-key lighting. It can be seen that this scene is taken at daytime since the sun is shining and the sky is clear, making the figure have bright visuals. Moreover, this lighting highlights the red color that dominates the figure, especially Alice's face. It is said that red color is often used to project strength, power, determination, and passion (Hellerman, 2024). In this context, red color represents Alice's strength, power, determination, and passion as she finally escapes Victory. The headquarters has been her purpose all along, and she finally reaches it after all the manipulation and violence she faces.



Figure 9. The simulation world fades away

Source: Wilde, 2022, 01:54:59; 01:55:06

Furthermore, figure 9 above shows that the simulation world slowly fades out after Alice enters the headquarters. In filmmaking, fade-out is a visual transition that makes an image slowly loses its visibility to enhance storytelling process such as providing the closure of a story ("Fade-Out," 2023). In this context, the director uses fade-out technique to show that in the end, the simulation world is dissolving, indicating that everything in the simulation world is now gone.

In this figure, the director also uses medium long shot, which enables the audience to see nearly every part of the character's body and serves as an informative shot for the audience (Sutandio, 2020, p. 148). As seen in the figure above, parts of the character and the background are clearly visible. This provides information that the character and the background resemble the situation of the 1950s. Two female characters are present in the figure above: one is doing chores, while the other is dancing around and watching her reflection in a room. This aligns with the 1950s situation: women are expected to maintain the house's cleanliness and to look flawless in order to serve the husbands (Lim, 2024). As mentioned before, the simulation world is set in the 1950s; therefore, it is confirmed that it is the simulation world that fades away, indicating that the patriarchal society is crumbling down.



Figure 10. Alice successfully wakes up in real world
Source: Wilde, 2022 01:55:30

Finally, figure 10 above shows a transition called fade to black, meaning that a scene is fading into a black screen to create a sense of closure and indicate the end of a turning point in the story (“Editing Transitions Every Filmmaker Should Know,” n.d.). As seen in the figure above, the screen turns black and Alice is gasping for air. The scene turning black serves as Alice’s transition from the simulation world to the real world. This indicates a closure that Alice successfully escapes the simulation world, in which she was once held captive, and wakes up in the real world, which has been her purpose after finding out the truth about Victory. Therefore, even though Alice’s success in escaping Victory is not explicitly stated, it can be argued that her entering the headquarters, the simulation world fading away, and the black screen appearing signify that she ultimately escapes Victory and finally wakes up in the real world.

In this conflict, the cops represent the patriarchal system, while Alice represents women who challenge the system. The cops act under Frank’s order to prevent Alice from escaping Victory. They do Frank’s order without considering the danger they might encounter including car crashes and deaths. This shows how these men do everything in their power to keep Alice under the control of the patriarchal system. Alice, in contrast, fights hard to reach the headquarters as she no longer wants to remain under the men’s control or be held captive by them.

This last conflict reflects Millett’s theory that says male control must be abolished in order to free women from oppression, which eventually creates a society in which men and women have equal values (Tong & Botts, 2018). Here, Alice successfully eliminates men’s control in Victory by escaping the town. Alice has proven that women have the same value as men: women are not inferior and do not have to possess feminine traits such as being passive and submissive. Women can be dominant and also powerful just like men.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion in the previous section, there are several things that can be concluded. First, all social conflicts happen because Alice wants to escape the patriarchal system embedded in Victory, while the people around her, especially the men, try to prevent her from escaping and are eager to keep her under their control. This mirrors reality that some women may still experience difficulties because of patriarchal oppression.

Second, through the resolution of the first two conflicts, it can be seen that the men always manipulate Alice and use violence to discipline her every time she tries to break free from their control. This suggests that men will do anything in their power, including manipulation and violence, to keep women under their control.

Third, through the film's cinematography and *mise-en-scène*, especially the contrasting use of low-key and high-key lighting, it can be inferred that the women themselves may not realize that they are held captive by the patriarchal system rooted in society. However, it is still possible for women to escape patriarchy by eliminating men's dominance, just like what Alice does in the last two conflicts, once they have been aware of the oppressive patriarchal system.

Ultimately, through the analysis of the social conflicts and the visual aspects of the film, it is clear that the film serves as the director's critique of patriarchal control and support for women's resistance, as well as a reminder for the audience that patriarchy is still one of the major challenges women have to face in today's society.

Lastly, it is important to note that this study only focuses on analyzing the social conflicts through the perspective of feminism. There are several aspects, such as the portrayal of female protagonist and the symbolism in the film, that are also worth analyzing. Thus, further research on these aspects could be conducted to give broader understanding of the film.

References

- Back body language*. (n.d.). Changing Minds. Retrieved November 7, 2025, from http://www.changingminds.org/techniques/body/parts_body_language/back_body_language.htm#:~:text=Techniques%20%3E%20Use%20of%20body%20language,make%20a%20move%20on%20you
- Beatty, J. (2024). *The truth about the past that 'tradwives' want to revive*. Time. Retrieved April 21, 2026, from <https://time.com/6962381/tradwives-history/>
- Bhandari, P. (2025). *What is qualitative research? | Methods & examples*. Scribbr. Retrieved October 21, 2025, from <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/qualitative-research/>
- Body language 20 language of the eyes*. (n.d.). The Trust Ambassador. Retrieved November 17, 2025, from <http://www.thetrustambassador.com/2019/03/23/body-language-20-language-of-the-eyes/>
- Body language 75 pride*. (n.d.). The Trust Ambassador. Retrieved November 21, 2025, from <https://thetrustambassador.com/2020/04/19/body-language-75-pride/>
- Booker, M. K., & Daraiseh, I. (2025). *Don't Worry Darling*: Critiquing the nostalgic cultural logic of late patriarchy. *Intellect*, 44(1), 7-18, Retrieved October 30, 2025, from https://doi.org/10.1386/ejac_00132_1
- Calvete-Lorenzo, S., Rozados-Lorenzo, A., & Sosa-Fernández, R. P. (2024). Imagined reality, the liquid, dystopia, and virtuality in science fiction cinema: *Don't Worry Darling*, a case study. *Artnodes*, 33, 1-10, Retrieved October 30, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10.7238/artnodes.v0i33.415780>
- Cambridge University Press. (n.d.). *Hysterical*. In *Cambridge dictionary*. Retrieved December 21, 2025, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hysterical>
- Campbell, S. (2025). *What do clasped hands mean? Unraveling the secrets of body language, psychology, and genetics*. Owlcation. Retrieved December 21, 2025, from <https://owlcation.com/social-sciences/what-do-clasped-hands-mean>
- Deguzman, K. (2022). *What is low key lighting — Definition, examples in photo & film*. Studio Binder. Retrieved December 10, 2025, from <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-low-key-lighting-definition/>
- Descours, A. (2017). *How composition with tight framing or wide framing enhances the emotions of your photos*. Photo-Video Creative. Retrieved November 20, 2025, from <https://photovideocreative.com/en/how-composition-with-tight-framing-or-wide-framing-enhances-the-emotions-of-your-photos/>
- Donovan, B. (2023). *Essential reference for angry expressions and angry body language*. Bryn Donovan. Retrieved November 20, 2025, from <https://www.bryndonovan.com/2023/03/29/angry-expression-angry-body-language/>

- Don't Worry Darling: Awards.* (n.d.). Imdb. Retrieved December 19, 2025, from https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10731256/awards/?ref_=tt_awd.
- Editing transitions every filmmaker should know.* (n.d.). Indepthcine.com. Retrieved March 26, 2026, from <https://www.indepthcine.com/videos/editing-transitions>
- Emotion thesaurus: Despair.* (n.d.). One Stop for Writers. Retrieved December 21, 2025, from <https://onestopforwriters.com/emotions/despair>
- Eyes body language.* (n.d.). Changing Minds. Retrieved December 21, 2025, from [https://changingminds.org/techniques/body/parts_body_language/eyes_body_language.htm#:~:text=to%20working%20memory\).-,Glancing,Eye%20contact](https://changingminds.org/techniques/body/parts_body_language/eyes_body_language.htm#:~:text=to%20working%20memory).-,Glancing,Eye%20contact)
- Fade-out.* (2023). Cinecyclopedia. Retrieved March 25, 2026, from <https://www.wfcn.co/ccp/article/fade-out>
- Fleming, G. (2018). *Conflict in literature*. ThoughtCo. Retrieved December 18, 2025, from <https://www.thoughtco.com/conflict-in-literature-1857640>
- Francis, A. (n.d.). *Understanding the body language*. MBA Knowledge Base. Retrieved November 21, 2025, from <https://mbaknol.com/business-communication/understanding-the-body-language/>
- Gagnon, D. (n.d.). *Do you recognize the 10 types of anger?* Montreal CBT Psychologist. Retrieved November 20, 2025, from https://www.montrealcbtpsychologist.com/blog/122622-do-you-recognize-the-10-types-of-anger_8
- Hara, H., & Waltz, K. (n.d.). *High key lighting vs low key lighting in videography*. Adobe. Retrieved December 4, 2025, from <http://www.adobe.com/creativecloud/video/discover/low-key-vs-high-key-lighting.html>
- Hellerman, J. (2024). *Why do so many filmmakers use the color red?* No Film School. Retrieved December 5, 2025, from <http://www.nofilmschool.com/red-color-in-movies#:~:text=Associated%20with%20energy%2C%20war%2C%20danger,color%2C%20at%20times%20signifying%20danger>
- Hugging.* (n.d.). Changing Minds. Retrieved November 6, 2025, from <http://www.changingminds.org/techniques/body/hugging.htm#:~:text=Possession,right%20to%20the%20very%20end>
- Knight, B. (2023). *Bedrooms: More than just a sleep space*. UNSW Sydney. Retrieved January 16, 2026, from <http://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2023/03/bedrooms--more-than-just-a-sleep-space>
- Lim, C. Y. (2024). *The role of women in 1950s America: Conformity or change?* The Collector. Retrieved November 11, 2025, from <http://www.thecollector.com/women-role-1950-america/>
- Mehrtens, M. (2022). *The feminist inspiration behind 'Don't Worry Darling'*. Smithsonian Magazine. Retrieved December 12, 2025, from <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-feminist-inspiration-behind-dont-worry-darling-180980810/#:~:text=As%20Wilde%20tells%20Variety%2C%20she,namely%2C%20a%20rich%20white%20one>
- Napikoski, L. (2025). *Feminist literary criticism*. ThoughtCo. Retrieved April 21, 2026, from <https://www.thoughtco.com/feminist-literary-criticism-3528960>
- Overell, R. (2024). *Don't Worry Darling: The anxious question of what women want after #MeToo?* Springer Nature, 29, 343-360, Retrieved December 18, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41282-024-00461-5>
- Pack, T. (2025). *Fictional prophecies: How Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go and Olivia Wilde's Don't Worry Darling foreshadow the threats of biotech and metaverse realities* [Doctoral dissertation, Florida Atlantic University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

- Retrieved October 30, 2025, from
<https://www.proquest.com/openview/1ea720988cbaed3445ed04e0993135e5/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>
- Palm-up*. (n.d.). Center for Nonverbal Studies. Retrieved November 7, 2025, from
<http://www.center-for-nonverbal-studies.org/htdocs/palmup.htm#:~:text=A%20gesture%20made%20with%20the,congeniality%2C%20humility%2C%20and%20uncertainty>
- Parvez, H. (2021). *Pat on the shoulder body language*. Psych Mechanics. Retrieved November 28, 2025, from <http://www.psychmechanics.com/pat-on-shoulder-body-language/>
- Raj, R. (2023). *Body language and persuasion*. Simply Body Talk. Retrieved November 21, 2025, from <http://www.simplybodytalk.com/blog/body-language-and-persuasion/>
- Soni, A. (2020). *The science behind a confident body language explained*. Planet Spark. Retrieved November 21, 2025, from <http://www.planetspark.in/communication-skills/science-behind-a-confident-body-language>
- Sutandio, A. (2020). *Dasar-dasar kajian sinema*. Penerbit Ombak.
- The color yellow*. (n.d.). Empowered by Color. Retrieved December 8, 2025, from
<http://www.empower-yourself-with-color-psychology.com/color-yellow.html>
- The symbolism of darkness (top 13 meanings)*. (2023). Give Me History. Retrieved December 8, 2025, from <http://www.givemehistory.com/symbolism-of-darkness>
- Tikkanen, A. (2025). *Olivia Wilde*. Britannica. Retrieved October 15, 2025, from
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Olivia-Wilde>
- Tong, R., & Botts, T. F. (2018). *Feminist thought*. Routledge.
- What is conflict in literature? 6 different types of literary conflict and how to create conflict in writing*. (2021). MasterClass. Retrieved December 18, 2025, from
<http://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-conflict-in-literature-6-different-types-of-literary-conflict-and-how-to-create-conflict-in-writing>
- What is fear?* (n.d.). Paul Ekman Group. Retrieved November 7, 2025, from
[http://www.paulekman.com/universal-emotions/what-is-fear/#:~:text=THE%20FACIAL%20EXPRESSION%20OF%20FEAR&text=While%20both%20expressions%20show%20distinctly,\(white%20of%20the%20eye\)](http://www.paulekman.com/universal-emotions/what-is-fear/#:~:text=THE%20FACIAL%20EXPRESSION%20OF%20FEAR&text=While%20both%20expressions%20show%20distinctly,(white%20of%20the%20eye))
- Why use reflections and mirrors in filmmaking?* (2025). Beverly Boy Productions. Retrieved November 28, 2025, from <http://www.beverlyboy.com/filmmaking/why-use-reflections-and-mirrors-in-filmmaking/>
- Zahira, A. R., Parthama, I. G. N., & Mulyana, N. (2025). Freud's psychoanalysis of the three different components of the human mind through the main characters in *Don't Worry Darling* movie. *Apollo Project: Jurnal Ilmiah Program Studi Sastra Inggris*, 14(2). Retrieved December 18, 2025, from
<https://garuda.kemdiktisaintek.go.id/documents/detail/5335769>
- Walters, I. (2025). *Ballerina Farm's Hannah Neeleman is the tradwife-mogul taking over Instagram, but what's the truth behind the social media facade?* Tatler. Retrieved April 21, 2026, from <https://www.tatler.com/article/ballerina-farm-hannah-neeleman-tradwife-instagram-social-media>
- Wilde, O. (Director). 2022. *Don't worry darling* [Film]. Warner Bros. Picture.