

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

As the world keeps evolving, the term gender is socially constructed and influenced by several factors. Many factors shape and differentiate someone's gender based on social construction (Giuliano 2020). Although sex differentiates between male and female, gender is contemplated as masculine or feminine. Men are expected to have manly characteristics at all times, whereas women ought to be feminine. The term gender roles is the expected attitudes and behaviors of a society associated with every sex (Lindsey 2015). Following that statement, gender role constructs individuals to act based on their sexes, whether men or women. As stated by Tyson, traditional gender roles depict men as logical, powerful, dominant, and determined; in the meantime, women are portrayed as emotional (irrational), fragile, nurturing, and subservient (Tyson 2015). Following the statement from Tyson, the traditional gender roles are one of the factors that socially construct the gender itself. Thus, the perspective help to create the narration of society's assumption that men should be masculine and girls should be feminine. Therefore, as society is having difficulties separating sex and gender, the film industry is also shaping society to differentiate gender between men and women as they represent someone's identity through film.

Disney became one of the crucial influences on the film industry. The Walt Disney Company is a multibillion-dollar entertainment and media conglomerate based in the United States. The founder, Walt Disney (1901-1966), is an American

animator and film producer with Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, and Pluto as one of his most significant and famous creations. The Walt Disney Company is one of the world's most well-known and well-recognized brands (Bryman 2004). The cultural domination of Disney characters is still showing up today. Disney culture influences are a phenomenon (Griffin et al. 2021). According to Barnett et al., cultural dominance exists because, whether kids are enjoying the animations effortlessly or attentively, it is evident that they can have a substantial impact on them, teaching about various forms of behavior and ways of acting (Barnett et al. 2006). Furthermore, Disney's work appears to have at least enough cultural authority and validity when establishing particular roles, attitudes, and ideals (Giroux 2010).

Following statements from scholars above, Disney's film impacts the film industry and its audiences. Disney, as the media tool, has the power to shape the social constructions as it is today because it has the potential to modify social evolution (Cardoso and Trindade 2019). The use of Walt Disney company as one of the tools to shape society's minds in the context of globalization and a projected global culture, a global media conglomerate, indicates representative diversity (Anjirbag 2018). To put it simply, Disney's film, as one of the Disney global company production branches, also put in charge of the framing of how gender is being represented despite the company's intention towards diversity and multiculturalism.

As mentioned before, the writer aims to examine gender performativity as performed and portrayed by Gabriel, a protagonist character in the film called *The*

Little Prince(ss) (2021) by Moxie Peng (IMDb n.d.). *The Little Prince(ss)* is one of the Disney Launchpad film series projects, which was released on May 28th, 2021, on Disney+, a digital streaming service and one of the Disney corporations' branches. The Disney Launchpad film series project is a collection of six short films. It is also made from an underrepresented background of six filmmakers to share their perspectives and creative visions to show audiences what it means to be seen (IMDb n.d.). Moxie Peng, the director of the film, is inspired by the actual events of his childhood stories, which is reflected in Gabriel's story. Peng explained in one of the interviews about the released film that it is based on the true story of when he was a child and into feminine stuff. One day, when little Peng is confronted by his neighbour, Peng's father defends him and says that Peng is normal and does not need to be fixed. Therefore, *The Little Prince(ss)* is so close to Peng himself that everyone can learn more about his childhood memories that inspired the film (Reif 2021).

The Little Prince(ss) was produced by Jason Alvidrez, Chris Caraballo, and Julie Ann Crommett. The film stars Kalo Moss, Ching Yin Ryan, Evan Lai, Brian Wang, and Lynn Chen. This film depicts the life of Gabriel (Kalo Moss), a seven-year-old boy continuously showing his feminine side through appearances. Gabriel is a Chinese kid and becomes the only boy who joined the ballet class in his school. Someday, Gabriel meets Rob (Ching Yin Ryan), another Chinese kid from school, instantly befriend him. However, when Rob's father, Mr. Chen (Evan Lai), gets suspicious about Gabriel's feminine behaviour, he decides to intervene in Gabriel's choices and constructs Rob's mind to stay away from Gabriel. When Mr. Chen

decided to tell Gabriel's parents that their child is abnormal and atypical, Gabriel's parents defended their son that it is normal for a boy like him to learn ballet and play barbie dolls. Thus, Gabriel's performance as a boy who shows his feminine sides opened and triggered society to react to his nonstandard appearances and acts. To put it simply, the film *The Little Prince(ss)* (2021) attempts to challenge the traditional gender-roles beliefs that have been entrenched for many years that are constructed in society.

Furthermore, in *The Little Prince(ss)*, the Asian character is discussed in the film as Asian Americans are the third largest racial group in the United States, accounting for roughly 6.4 percent of the overall population in 2015 (Shih, Chang, and Chen 2019). This demonstrates that Asian-Americans are no longer an outsider in the United States but rather a developing racial group, with some having been born and nurtured in the country. As stated by Chua (2011) in her book entitled *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, Asian American parenting is quite different, almost the polar opposite of western parenting philosophy. She said that Asian American parenting models are stereotyped as dictatorial, homogeneous, and static. Additionally, this reveals how Asian American parents understand gender, including in Chinese society, which will be examined later in this study. According to Chou and Feagin (2008), gender and generational hierarchies are part of the model minority, which has been imposed on Asian Americans as a racial framing. This demonstrates that Asian Americans have likewise faced framing and stigma from Whites in their culture, where gender is still regarded and formed traditionally.

Another Tuan (1998) statement also added that Asian Americans are racialized as "forever foreigners" in the United States.

According to Jiang (2019), modernization rhetoric has transformed Chinese people's parent-child relationships and how they are introduced to Western parenting beliefs that may be radically different from traditional Chinese gender roles. Jiang also noted that the film industry's success and widespread exposure would aid in spreading the idea that traditional gender norms in Chinese society should be revisited. Chinese parents frequently compel their children to perform things they do not want to do (Wakefield 2013). Furthermore, compared to parents who have already learned Western ideals, the difference between parents who still use traditional Chinese gender roles is more likely to be controlling (Jiang 2019). Mr. Chen's depiction of a Chinese father also exemplifies customary Chinese parental power by insisting that a son obey his father. Chinese parent, according to Jiang, sees their children's achievements as a chance to gain acclaim and boost their social status. As represented in *The Little Prince(ss)* film, Rob's parents practice Chinese parenting, in which the family norms are established regarding what to eat, wear, and even do at home (Liqui 2015).

Some films also cover an identical issue, similarly to countering the negative stereotypes from society if someone behaves outside their traditional gender roles. The first one is *Mulan* (1998), an animation film by Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook. As for the record, *Mulan* (1998) appears once in a sequence in *The Little Prince(ss)* (2021) when Gabriel watches Television in the living room. *Mulan* (1998) retells the old Chinese folktale about a young Chinese woman named Mulan,

who disguises herself as a man to replace his father in an army. Mulan breaks the stereotypes of what women cannot do. The film explores Mulan's journey in performing her female masculinity to be accepted in the army. There is also a live-action remake of *Mulan* (2020), directed by Niki Caro, with the same premise and story (IMDb n.d.). Despite being produced and distributed under the same production company, Walt Disney Animation Studios and Walt Disney Pictures, both Mulan films also use the exact Disney Formula (Negara 2021). The Disney Formula is the element that is usually used in Disney's work which contains several elements such as 1) the theme of a character that becomes a hero or heroine, 2) a visual image to describe an evil or villain character through facial expression, behavior, dialogue, and its stereotype, 3) the main character showed that they are brave, strong and intelligent, 4) some love line between the main character. In addition, *The Little Prince(ss)* (2021) by Moxie Peng, which Walt Disney Pictures are also making, also contains the Disney Formula to build its film.

The definition of sex itself is already set at fertilization and disclosed at birth (Griffin et al., 2021). Taking the notes from Griffin, it is indivisible that sex is binary, suggesting that there are two opposites of sex: male and female. As sex relates to being biologically determined or given at birth and gender is socially constructed, gender identity, as mentioned by Temple Newhook et al. (2018), is viewed as someone else's internal sense of being a man or a woman. Thus, what makes someone else's identity is determined by their sex and gender. As sex determines us as male and female, gender differentiates male and female into masculine or feminine. If sex is an ascribed status due to the fact someone is born

with it, gender, on the alternative hand, is an accomplished status because it must be learned (Lindsey 2015). According to Connell (2005), the construction of masculinity is not thought to be static and uniformly manifested in all-male bodies; instead, masculinity constructs are sufficiently varied. Society tends to make someone stick to one gender, such as a boy from the beginning until they grow up should act masculine, play basketball, make black and every other darkish color as their preferred and boys do not cry might be their national anthem. As masculinity is formed through society to all men; or born as a male, it is not manifested in all-male bodies. Some of them do not consider masculinity to be a part of their lives. Meanwhile, the notion of the feminine is continually connected to women. Beauvoir's famous words, 'One is not born a woman; one becomes one.' Meanwhile, Tyson argues that women are not born feminine but instead conditioned to be feminine due to the patriarchal society, and it is one of the social constructions. When a person is born a girl, society makes them follow the conventional gender roles in which they have to wear pink and do domestic chores as their duty. Born as a male or female genuinely does not restrict people from doing something outside their gender box. Nevertheless, gender identity is more or less to fulfill what society thinks and wants. As patriarchy defines the way, women relate to sex (female) and gender (feminine) as if they were the same thing at once (Lindsey 2015).

However, as a result of someone being born with their sex, male or female, and gender is learned and constructed by society, it means that someone's surroundings play a vital role in shaping their gender identity. In shaping someone else's gender differences, there is also the role of the family, peers, and teachers or

role models (Giuliano 2020). The notions of society here must be from their close relatives or someone they look up to. Parents that still believe in traditional gender roles; therefore, when the world is already evolving, it is likely possible to have children with gender-typed shapes by society. Thus, the gender-typed implies that if a boy were born, the parents would associate their children with the images of fire hats and hammers with males or masculinity. As for girls, dolls and teddy bears would still be considered girly or feminine (Eichstedt et al. 2002). All those statements from scholars show that someone's identity is already formed by their closest environment, family, since the beginning of their life.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

From the background study that has been stated before, the statement of the problem of this study is how gender performativity is represented within Gabriel's character in *The Little Prince(ss)* (2021).

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the problem statement above, the objective of this study is to find out the gender performativity representation within Gabriel's character in *The Little Prince(ss)* (2021).

1.4 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, the writer hopes this study confirms the theories of gender performativity analysis. Moreover, to strengthen the previous study that uses the same object. At last, this study also aimed to be used as a reference for subsequent research. This study wanted to add another perspective on gender performativity representation, especially on a young-age subject. Next, the writer wants to make a

meaningful contribution to readers interested in gender performativity within a character in the film. At last, the writer aimed to conduct this study to give additional information to English Department student of Airlangga University, especially the one who take Cultural Studies as their subject and focuses on this study issues.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

- Gender Performativity: the act of repeating, citing, and imitating practice to become a particular gender (Butler 1990)
- Traditional Gender Roles: depict men as logical, powerful, dominant, and determined, whereas women are portrayed as emotional (irrational), fragile, nurturing, and subservient (Tyson 2015)
- Portrayal: a public description to give the concept of understanding the term (Jo 2003).