

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Decades ago, before the emergence of the feminist movement in the United States, women were assumed to be dependent on men, especially in financial matters (Saha and Tanishka 2017). They were restricted from going to the workplace because working was a male role. Thus, the tropes of being a good wife and being responsible for the domestic job were also very standardized for women (Dicke, Safavian, and Eccles 2019). Still related to traditional gender roles, women were expected to be submissive and to maintain a good representation of wives and mother figures (Davis 2018). A couple of years ago, there was a significant imbalance in the USA's working men and women data. In 1970, the research found that women's employment reached only 48% with a low payment rate, while men's employment had a higher percentage of approximately 91% (England, Levine and Mishel 2020). However, extreme women's discrimination has finally changed due to the feminist movement that strives for gender equality.

After the feminist movement, the same research has proven a drastic increase in women's employment. In 2000, women's employment rose from 48% to 75% and stabilized over the years until the end of 2018. However, men's employment was still at a higher level but decreased by 84% in 2018 (England, Levine and Mishel 2020).

These facts show that there was still a gender gap in the employment data of women and men, but the increasing graph has demonstrated significant changes in the years of female resistance occurrence and the recent years after. However, the feminist movement has embraced the freedom and rights that finally bring equality to womanhood (Kroløkke and Sørensen 2006). Nowadays, women are involved in decision-making after being unliberated for a long time.

Women's barriers in the economic sphere have long been liberated after the feminist movement, specifically in the second-wave movement. Second-wave feminism centered on the protest of gender inequality and asked for women's rights regarding their sexual freedom and the same work opportunities (Pande 2018). Thus, working women nowadays are normalized because women have legal rights over their choices. Aside from the women's right to the same position in the workplace, the feminist movement also liberated women to express their sexuality without barriers. As it believes in the traditional value, women were expected to maintain the representation of a good mother (Tyson 2014). At this point, society emphasizes that women should have heterosexual preferences and that homosexuality is not something to be glorified for. Hence, the freedom over women's sexual choices is confiscated and restricted. The feminist movement, on the other way, has brought changes regarding this expected notion that homosexuality is a legitimate sexual preference owned by every single person, regardless of whether they are male or female. The lesbian feminists also make proud of their consideration of the sexual revolution that the legitimation of lesbianism is becoming an identity for women to

fight against male supremacy and heterosexuality as the only normal preferences (Valk 2018). Therefore, women's freedom in choosing their own independency and sexuality leads us to the term "women's empowerment," which is considered a new term for equality. The term "empowerment" is closely related to "power." According to Naila Kabeer, power means being brave in choosing our own choices in life (2005). In traditional society, the use of power has always been identified as men's ability and specialty. Therefore, the term "women's empowerment" has become a substantial issue in the modern world because it is considered a new declaration of equality. Women's empowerment is an action against gender stratification by placing full control over women's choices in life that lead them to the truth of their capacity (Chen and Tanaka 2014). To be empowered means creating self-ability to gain achievements in any aspect as a form of change, in this case, changing the inequality between genders (Kabeer 2005). Based on the argument of Srilatha Batliwala, as cited by Cornwall (2016), "empowerment" means looking at the capability of the female figures which portray big power to challenge their oppression and maintain their power in society.

The idea of women's empowerment is widely used to represent a different portrayal of women in media. As a tool of social construction, the media has a significant role in shaping ideology in society (Arias 2019). Hence, the cultural production in the media has been created differently by including women's empowerment values to support the feminist movement in creating equality. The manifestation of women's power varies in the media. It can be about the real power

of strength, such as in the production of female superhero movies like *Wonder Woman* (2017), *Mulan* (2020), and *Black Widow* (2021), or offers a different portrayal, such as the power to look different in appearance, to resist male domination, and to show their integrity, for instance, in *Hidden Figures* (2016), a biographical film by Theodore Melfi that shows the struggle of black women to be part of male-dominated jobs. Moreover, with the same portrayal of women's power, *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) also presents women's ability in the workplace. This film was directed by David Frankel in 2006 and represented dedicated women struggling for "every girl's dream job" in a fashion magazine company. From the several examples above, it can be concluded that the media produces women's movies not only to empower them as brave creatures but also to emphasize that women have the intelligence and rights in any aspect that patriarchal society has seized.

Drawing on the background issue of women's representation in the media, the writer has found a 2020 movie entitled *I Care A Lot* (2020) that brings the issue of women's empowerment cast from her characterization in resisting the traditional value ranging from her sexuality, masculinity, and a business victory, specifically the guardianship business. Guardianship is a system or process of using protection against people who are accused of losing the ability to care for themselves, especially the elderly or seniors. The court will appoint someone known as a legal guardian to be responsible. The legal guardians have a full right and legal authority to live their duties as the caretakers of their ward's medical and property interests. The

guardianship system is a heavenly job for those willing to be responsible for other people's lives.

*I Care A Lot (2020)* is an American film released on September 12, 2020, directed by J. Blakeson, and received 66 Metascore according to IMDb rating. This movie casts Rosamund Pike as the main female character, Marla Grayson. This movie depicts the life of successful businesswoman Marla Grayson. She is a professional legal guardian for older people and has a huge company of her own. She represents herself as an unbreakable woman who is not afraid of anything, including men. However, Marla is considered a con because her job is quite sly for manipulating elderly people. In the film, she insists on persuading and convincing the legal system to give her the right to guard the elderly people accused of having dementia symptoms. For medical reasons, her guardianship is placed in a living facility, and Marla's guardianship company is responsible for taking care of all of the elderly people's houses and properties. At the end of her life, her success attracts media attention. She is invited to such a television program as a speaker and places herself as a business influencer. She also makes it to the list of role models in several famous magazines, such as Forbes. As a result, Marla becomes the most successful businesswoman, leading her to become an empowering icon before she dies from being shot by the family member of one of her wards.

As mentioned above, Marla's background story has a potential issue to be discussed since it contains the idea of feminist goals. This movie is interesting for the writer because it allows the women's empowerment values that are tried to be

emphasized as the main agenda through its powerful female character. Moreover, this movie also justified Marla's achievement, slightly contradicting the core intent of feminism but still perceived as an empowering action because it indicates that women can use their power as a self-weaponized against challenges and realities of patriarchy. Thus, this study examines the signs of women's power that Marla Grayson represents in the movie as a feminist movement, whether it can be justified as the characterization of a powerful icon or not.

In analyzing the study, the writer used the feminist perspective and applied the Power Feminism theory by Naomi Wolf. According to Naomi Wolf, "Power Feminism" is an empowering term to show women's freedom and independence in choosing their own lives, sexuality, and success (1993). In her book, she also scopes the discussion on women and economics. She states that Power Feminism means leaving out the dictator's rules over women's money and power. It is also related to the Liberal Feminism movement, which rejects discrimination against women's bodies and ways of life. Therefore, the theory was used to discover the women's power as an empowerment action portrayed by Marla Grayson in the *I Care A Lot* (2020) movie.

The writer has found several studies related to the current research. Those studies are *Dream of Jazz Bashara: Approaching A Better Life Through Power Feminism in Andy Weir's (2017) Artemis* (Almira 2020), *The Portrayal of Power Feminism in Catastrophe's Character as a Strong Woman in Taylor Swift's Bad Blood Music Video* (Herlina 2016), and *Gretel's Girl Power in Tommy Wirkola's Hansel and*

*Gretel Witch Hunter Film* (Rini 2016). The previous studies mentioned above focused on how the media production represented women's power as strong characters. It also gives the significant finding that women's representation in the media is centralized as the empowered character, not merely portraying women's submissiveness and powerlessness. With reference to the related studies above, this study aims to examine the portrayal of women's power and liberty through Marla's characterizations of her personality, freedom, sexuality, and economic achievement, whether it shows the actual characterization of a powerful icon or not.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

How is the Power Feminism idea reflected through Marla's characterization as a powerful icon in *I Care a Lot* (2020)?

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

To examine Marla's characterization as a powerful icon in reflecting the idea of Power Feminism by Naomi Wolf.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study aims to determine how Marla Grayson represents the values of women's power in the movie. The significance of this study is to examine the empowering actions in the *I Care A Lot* (2020) movie related to the reality of the feminist movement in achieving gender equality and how the representation of

powerful women in media production. The writer hopes this study can be helpful for the readers out there who are currently finishing their studies on the same issues.

### **1.5 Definitions of Key Terms**

**Power Feminism** : The empowering term to show the freedom and independence of women to choose over their own life, sexuality, and success (Wolf 1993)

**Powerful Icon** : A person who admired by others for the significant and greater influence in a specific shere

**Women's Empowerment** : Action against gender stratification by placing full control over women's choices in life that lead them to the truth of their capacity (Chen and Tanaka 2014)