

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

UN Women reported that women remain underrepresented in several areas, including science, politics, and entertainment (UN Women 2020). This notion illustrates that gender inequality limits females' advancement and success. Sexism in intimate relationships is one example of how gender inequality presents itself. Benevolent sexism in intimate relationships promotes females to assume traditional roles such as caretaker, which are associated with inferiority and the need for male protection in a patriarchal society (Overall and Hammond 2018). Meanwhile, males are expected to provide for their female partners (ibid).

This gender disparity and economic dependence on male partners raise the probability of women experiencing domestic abuse. A study from 2021 shows that physical, sexual, and psychological harm mainly occurs in an intimate relationship (WHO 2021). Hence, in retaliation, females adopt female masculinity in the life-threatening scenario because female masculinity exists independently from male femininity and serves as a counterbalance to dominant masculinity (Hilman 2018).

Hilman argues that female masculinity may be described as a blend of hegemonic masculinity and womanliness exhibited by females—it is neither the polar opposite of female femininity nor the female form of hegemonic masculinity (Hilman 2018). Moreover, Halberstam believes that masculinity is a social and cultural

construct that either males or females' bodies can produce; female masculinity is positioned as a remnant of dominant masculinity, but both females and males contribute to creating heroic masculinity (Halberstam 2019, 1). Halberstam implied that masculinity has little to do with male physiology; weaponry in action films, e.g., James Bond, is 'prosthetic' and merely serves as a special effect (Halberstam 2019, 3). As a result, it is possible to deduce that masculinity is not primarily determined by biological advantages or physical prowess but rather by male and female performance. Many studies discuss the portrayal of female masculinity in media. Hilman argues that the female-masculinity character's cognitive and physical capabilities in the film are still undermined by males, making them vulnerable to patriarchy (Hilman 2018). Meanwhile, Afrina discovers that a female masculinity character in an advertisement, which has physical superiority, is still overpowered by their male counterparts, further perpetuating the stereotype that female femininity is subordinated by masculinity (Afrina 2018).

The preceding arguments have shown that females are more likely to be subordinated by males. It reinforces the association between masculinity and violence, resulting in gender differences; females are inferior to males (Gneezy, Leonard, and List 2009). During the emergence of industrial capitalism, for example, only the majority of women in middle-class white families could sustain their opulent lifestyles entirely on the earnings of their breadwinner husbands without having to work. This creates the misleading belief that females and males are creatures with distinct natures built for separate functions. In other words, masculinity was linked to breadwinning,

while femininity was linked to housekeeping (Kang et al. 2017). It further reflects the patriarchal perception of females as domestic workers and sexual attraction to males (Epstein 2007). American families today generally favor both spouses in earning income and distributing housework equally. However, this situation is only possible with the assistance of the government, which provides paid family leave, child care, and flexible work arrangements. Without government support, it is challenging to create an egalitarian family and avoid reverting to inequity prioritizing male breadwinners (Rao 2019).

In the United States, gender inequality is also manifested in disparities in female representation and participation in the filmmaking industry. According to San Diego University's Women's Study in Film and Television, females are massively underrepresented in four primary categories. First is the representation of females in the highest-grossing films. Second, the lack of various characters' demographic traits, such as age, ethnicity, occupation, and marital status. The third, the roles held by the characters. And lastly, female employment as directors and writers (Lauzen 2020). Female representation in the media, especially in the film industry, is constantly underrepresented and paid less than the average wage (Woodruff 2015). As a result, female protagonists' representation in the movie is rare (Hilman 2018). This may be evident in how horror films portray women—they are often subjected to psychological, physical, and emotional torment, particularly in comparison to their male counterparts (Byleckie 2020).

Consequently, females in films are often depicted as sexual objects or victims of horror and violence (Metz 2018). Although women have become more involved over the years, the numbers are insufficient for equality. On the other hand, males have dominated critical positions in the filmmaking process for decades, including producers, directors, and cinematographers (Lauzen 2013). Because males dominate the film industry, especially in horror, this issue affects how females are represented in slasher films, notably in *Ready or Not* (2019).

The rise of the final girl phenomenon emphasizes the male dominance of the horror film industry. The final girl achieves her pinnacle during the golden period of slasher films in the 1970s, with classic horror films like *Halloween* (1978) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974). Carol J. Clover coins the term "Final girl"—it is an embodiment of distress, fear, and torment personified who witnesses the brutal death of her friends. As Clover suggested, "She alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay with the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B). However, in either case, from 1974 on, the survivor figure has been female" (Clover 1992, 35). Slasher is a horror film subgenre that depicts a serial killer who murders mainly female victims until he is apprehended or murdered, usually by the last girl surviving (Clover 1992, 21). Even though the portrayal of the final girl includes sexist visuals of terrifying and brutalizing females on-screen, Clover claims that the final girl is the only heroine who empowers females. Before the final girl earns respect from the audience by outsmarting the killer; she possesses a virtuous character that sets her apart from the rest of the cast; moral purity, sexual inexperience,

ability to perceive danger before it strikes or active investigating gaze, and her boyish mannerism (Christensen 2010). In reality, the depiction of the final girl has evolved over the years; as they started to bear a resemblance to real-life females (McConnell 2021).

Scholars have debated whether the final girl is an empowered figure. They believe that the Final Girl's new characteristics are incompatible with postfeminist rhetoric. Clover considers the final girl a feminist development that empowers females (Paszkievicz and Rusnak 2020, 3). She also claims that horror films mainly consist of male audiences, forcing the final girl to be boyish (Paszkievicz and Rusnak 2020, 4). However, according to Nowell and Staiger, the film samples Clover used were insufficient to apply across the entire subgenre (ibid). Clover's characterization of the Final Girl as boyish is criticized by Nowell, who points out that many such figures, in actuality, have feminine characteristics and are victimized in film (ibid). Staiger studied 31 more films than Clover and discovered that even though women are portrayed as victims and heroines in slasher flicks, it does not indicate they are "Final girls." They can be quite feminine, yet they learn combat skills from male characters like their father and boyfriend to defeat the killer. They are rewarded for more than just survival; they are also awarded for romance (Staiger 2015, 222). Moreover, according to Wellman, Meitl, and Kinkade, women in slasher films who avoid sex are less likely to be brutalized or killed than those who express their sexuality, meaning that women who embrace their sexuality face severe punishment (Wellman, Meitl, and Kinkade, 2021). In line with Rios, which examines Joey Potter's 2000s teenage television melodrama,

Dawson's Creek as the final girl due to her biblical view of sex, in which she believes that it must be solely based on love (Rios 2015).

*Ready or Not* (2019) was directed by Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillet, co-founders of a filmmaking collective, Radio Silence. Their films are renowned for blending horror, thrillers, and comedy. *Ready or Not* (2019) starred an Australian actress who often makes appearances in gore and slasher films, Samara Weaving. The film was officially released on August 21st, 2019, in the United States, by Fox Searchlight Pictures. In Indonesia, it was theatrically released on August 28th, 2019, in *Cinema 21*. The film received an overall rating of 6.3/10 from IMDb, 88% from Rotten Tomatoes, and 64% from Metacritic. *Ready or Not* (2019) managed to acquire a budget of \$6 million and an accumulated income of \$57,6 million worldwide (Forbes 2019). This film was chosen as the study's subject because it featured a modern take on the final girl's slasher genre. Although some cliches are still being used on-screen, females are no longer traditionally portrayed as damsels in distress; they have evolved into characters that can display masculinity and capability equal to males.

The 2019 slasher film entitled *Midsommar* by Ari Aster addressed a similar issue as *Ready or Not* (2019). The main protagonist, Dani (Florence Pugh), finds herself on a trip to a secluded community of Harga in *Hälsingland*, Sweden, to join a midsummer festival, with her boyfriend, Christian (Jack Reynor), and three friends. It later revealed that the community is on a murderous rampage against the group, targeting every last one of them. Dani, who is still grieving from her family's loss, surprisingly finds comfort in this community. She offered to choose either Christian or

one of the Harga as a sacrifice. The scene continues with her boyfriend burned alive, making her a killer and the group's last survivor. It is inferred that the unhealthy relationship between Dani and her emotionally unavailable boyfriend is the primary cause of the whole conflict; Dani feels isolated in his company and finds herself constantly suppressing her emotions in Christian's presence. Unlike Christian, the Harga genuinely accept Dani as their family. Although Dani and Grace share some similarities, their situations are entirely different. Dani experiences mental distress from her sudden loss of family and intimate relationship with Christian, but she does not experience physical brutalization from Harga. In contrast, Grace struggles to overcome mental and physical brutalization from her in-laws.

Another horror slasher film is *Get Out* (2017), directed by Jordan Peele. The story follows an African-American photographer named Chris Washington who visits his Caucasian girlfriend, Rose Armitage's parents, Dean Armitage, a neurosurgeon, and Missy Armitages, a hypnotherapist, at their isolated estate in the county (IMDB 2017). Although Chris is welcome by Rose's parents—he founds his encounter with three African-American people around the Armitages abnormally strange. Later, without Chris knowing, the Armitages hosted an annual garden party full of white people making odd comments about Chris. After Chris left, this party turned out to be a silent auction for his body. Chris accidentally discovers the truth that Rose had multiple black boyfriends before him. It is too late when Chris realizes how severe the situation he got into. When he tries to leave, he is hypnotized by Rose's mother to prepare for a brain transplant, but he manages to escape with a brutal fight, killing all

the Armatages one by one, making him the only one who survives. Like Grace, Chris also became a victim of brutalization by his girlfriend's family. He emerges as a hero without anyone's help. Chris also embodies the characteristics of the final girl: he is resourceful, sharp, and possesses an active investigating gaze. These two films have similar plots; the only variation lies in the reversion of the protagonist's gender. Unlike Chris, Grace was rescued by a male character many times in critical circumstances, but the prominent difference may be the racial issue that came into play in *Get Out* (2017). Thus, in this film, the writer tries to uncover the effect of Grace's dependency on the male character as empowering figure.

*Ready or Not* (2019) follows a new bride, Grace Le Domas, in a survival game of death. Grace, a woman who comes from a foster home, finds herself marrying a wealthy family man, Alex Le Domas. For generations, Le Domas maintained their wealth by doing a sacred ritual. This ritual is held every time a new person joins the family. Grace has to draw a card from an old puzzle box to play the game. Unbeknown to her, she chooses the deadliest game, hides and seeks, where she has to hide until dawn; otherwise, she could be killed. She tries to run from the mansion several times after being helped by her husband, but she has to go back inside to no avail. The scenes proceed to Grace being brutalized by the members of Le Domas, including being shot and strangled. At first, she fights back in self-defense. However, as the story goes on, her actions no longer serve as self-protection; she purposefully hurts children and, without hesitation, brutally kills her mother-in-law by bashing the previously shown puzzle box in her head several times. After realizing Alex's betrayal, Grace is captured

and presented on an altar as a sacrifice for Mr. Le Bail (aka Satan) by the rest of Le Domas. However, as the sun rises, the ritual is annulled. Since the Le Domas loses the game, they implode one by one. When it comes to Alex's turn, Grace throws a wedding ring at Alex and asks for a divorce. It is implied from this film that the core conflict of the final girl comes from an unhealthy intimate relationship between Grace and Alex; since he is unable to communicate his family situation to Grace before their wedding. Therefore, Grace's resilience in overcoming the obstacles and brutalization from her husband and new in-laws falls under the female masculinity and the final girl characteristics.

The writer chooses the study because it represents the resilient female character who embodies masculinity and a newer version of the final girl. Grace's masculinity is not only defined by her costumes but also by her resilience and willingness to survive the ordeal. At the same time, her attitude is morally distinguishable from the final girl's previous trope, which brings a fresh portrayal to horror cinema. However, Grace's dependence on male figures; and depiction of the final girl's brutalization remain a worrying issue. It raises the question of whether the brutalized final girl is an empowering figure. Rather than empowerment, Grace's vulnerability in enduring violence satisfies male audiences' sadistic voyeurism. From this reasoning, the writer hypnotizes that the portrayal of the final girl through Grace Le Domas is disempowering for females.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

From the explanations above, the statement of the problem is represented as follows:

1. How does Grace portray female masculinity as the final girl in *Ready or Not* (2019)?

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

1. To discover the portrayal of female masculinity through the character of Grace as the final girl in *Ready or Not* (2019).

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

This study made to learn more about how female masculinity is portrayed in today's society. It also provides insight into the portrayal of the final girl in today's popular culture, particularly in gender studies. This research examines how powerful female characters are portrayed in popular culture. The author hopes this study can prompt readers to think critically about females' portrayal in the media and help broaden knowledge and give adequate information regarding females' portrayal, particularly in *Ready or Not* (2019). Furthermore, this research intended to contribute to gender and cultural studies, particularly in the English Department, as a practical resource for students and researchers.

### **1.5 Definition of Key Terms**

Female masculinity : a blend of hegemonic masculinity and womanliness exhibited by females—it is neither the polar opposite of female femininity nor the female form of hegemonic masculinity (Halberstam 2019, 3).

- Final girl : a horror film subgenre that depicts a serial killer who murders mainly female victims until he is apprehended or murdered, usually by the last girl surviving (Clover 1992, 21).
- Masculinity : emotional stability, a propensity toward assertiveness, risk-taking, and superiority found in men (Zegline 2016).
- Slasher : a subgenre of horror that involves a cruel depiction of a murderer who kills a group of people by slashing or stabbing them until just one survivor, typically a woman, remains (Clover 1992, 21).