

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Femininity and masculinity are terms of gender identity used in society to define man or woman. Gender refers to cultural concept that attempt to distinguish the terms of roles, behavior, mentality, and emotional characteristics of men and women in society. Meanwhile, sex is defined as the biological attributes of humans that comprise the differences between males and females (Browne 1992, 78). Thus, sex and gender cannot be separated since it is consistently related to one another. In defining these two terms, sex can be denoted by the anatomical differences between the sexes, whereas gender is shaped by social and the cultural environment. Traditionally, gender is identified into two types, namely masculine and feminine. Masculine is assigned for men, while the feminine is for women. Femininity and masculinity influence how people perceive themselves, act and react. The term masculinity is described as a comprehended culture of traits given to men in different contexts emphasizing assertiveness, toughness, independence, and material rewards for success (Stets and Burke, 1985).

According to Hofstede (2001), femininity is a trait of a society where social gender roles overlap. This social construction of femininity and masculinity causes problems and bias in society. For example, a human being born with a vagina is considered female, and as they get older, society expects them to grow and behave like a woman

and be feminine. Meanwhile, a human being born with a penis is considered male, and as they get older, society expects them to grow and behave as a man and adopt masculine traits. Nevertheless, men can embrace feminine behavior rather than masculinity, and a woman can be more masculine than feminine (Hofstede, 2001). Femininity and masculinity refer to the stage where people see themselves as feminine or masculine, considering what it means to be a man or woman in society. According to Parvathi (2017), masculinity and femininity are not constructed by sex but by our society. Female masculinity refers to a range of masculine-chained identities and recognition. The patriarchal society formed the meaning of what being male or female is. Males are often defined as masculine, while females are defined as feminine since society generally constructs them (Halberstam, 1998).

The traditional perception of masculinity construction focuses on the male body form and sex roles attached to their sex (Wickman, 2003). In the book *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam stated that masculinity is not chained within male bodies; both men and women can perform masculinity, and both sexes can define themselves as masculine or feminine or a combination of both, such as female masculinity. It is a repetition of acts where females perform masculine performatives (Halberstam, 1998).

According to Parvanthi (2017), masculinity and femininity are not constructed by sex but by the society we live in, while female masculinity refers to a range of masculine-chained identities and recognition. It is a repetition of acts where females perform masculine performatives, bringing new perspectives that the trait of masculinity is not bound within male bodies; instead, masculinity can be performed

without male body form, which challenges gender dichotomy and the representation of sex in society.

Nowadays, the concepts of gender have been influenced by society's point of view and the making of modern media. Women in American movies have always been considered an essential issue in scientific discussion since it reflects gender equality in daily life. In modern media, including films, women are often depicted as the physical subjects that could be disregarded more than men (Bazzini et al. 1997, 532). The representation of women in American movies has also created a new beauty standardization for women. According to Silverstein, Perdue, and Peterson (1986), in American movies, popular female characters are portrayed as having thinner bodies compared to men. This portrayal implies that the main subject here is men, and women are only seen as the objects of fulfillment.

Moreover, American movies often portray women as weak, dependent on male characters, emotional rather than logical, and fated to possess lower-status jobs than men (Kidwai and Ahmad, 2016). This portrayal represents that American movies tend to portray women characters only as the female supporting character for the male characters. It creates a perception of how social and cultural norms related to gender and gives a perception of the progressive ideas of what is contemplated by men and women. More specifically, women in American movies are mostly objectified from the patriarchal perspective (Montasseri et al., 2020).

According to Kristeva (1980, 104), patriarchy defines women as feminine or masculine which are seen as social differences rather than biological differences

because of the substantial effects on women in the real world. Consequently, women have always been depicted as passive people and mother figure who adopts the traits of nurturing and caring for the household. The patriarchal society also defined women as people who cannot build up social management because society taught them to focus only on household issue (Ariani, 2013).

Therefore, the representation of women, particularly in films, needs to be studied further because women are often seen as the male character's supporting character rather than the main character itself. The film is an essential and helpful media can influence and deliver new perspective and ideologies which all fictional meanings have been constructed from the patriarchal perspective (Gurova 2006, 91). According to the study of Gender Inequality in 500 Popular Films by Stacy, Marc Chouetti, Elizabeth Scofield, and Dr. Katherine Piper, female characters are grossly under-represented in American movies in 2012. Of the 4,475 speaking characters on movie screens, women characters were only 28,4% of them. Moreover, in terms of gender portrayal, in the top-grossing movie in 2012, female characters are more likely to be shown in sexy attire and partially naked compared to the male character (Smith et al., 2013).

Based on the research above, we can conclude that women's representation in American movies is considered minor. The proportion of women being the main characters in the film is not equal to the portion of men being the movie's main character (Bielby, 2016). What has happened in the women's portrayal in American movies is a factual representation of women in everyday life. From the data of the research above, we can see that women have not undergone life the way they are

supposed to, and not the way the patriarchal society told them to, as what happens in the portrayal of women in modern media, including films. It is strengthened by Lois Tyson's statement, "*in every aspects of life where patriarchy is in charge, women is the other: she is objectified and marginalized*" (Tyson 2006, 92).

In the context of the female heroine character in the movie, women are most likely not being represented as people that can dominate the situation, particularly in the film's plot that is controlled and dominated by men. Female characters are often portrayed as an object of pleasure. In contrast, female characters are a media result represented through the male character's perspective and the male gaze, which then ends up as an act of objectifying women (Mulvey 1989, 59). However, as time passes, there are changes in female heroine character portrayal in Hollywood movies. It has been represented that female heroine characters can appear beyond their typical gender stereotype. Many films have portrayed the non-traditional femininity of women, including female masculinity, which has become an enthralling topic to analyze in the field of gender studies and cultural studies. Considering the object of cultural studies is not just culture in a narrow sense, but it is understood as the practice of everyday life (Cahyo, 2014). For instance, Retno Sulistia of the State University of Surabaya conducted female masculinity research on one of the Disney characters in the Disney movie *Mulan* titled "*Female Masculinity of Fa Mulan and its Impact towards Her Relationship with Male Characters in Disney Movie Mulan.*" This study examined the dominant masculinity traits in the female lead character, Fa Mulan, and analyzed how her masculinity traits impact her relationship with the male lead character, Li Shang.

Other than that, in 2019, Maulany Nabilla from the Indonesia University of Education conducted female masculinity research with the title “*Masculinity of a Major Female Character in Joel Coen’s The Big Lebowski.*” This study proves that the female lead character in *Joel Coen’s The Big Lebowski* movie has depicted masculine traits rather than feminine traits in the form of self-reliance, aggressiveness, power, and domination (Nabilla, 2019).

Furthermore, this study will analyze one of the movies depicting female masculinity, *Underwater* (2020). In this movie, there are several characters, Norah Price as the female protagonist, Captain Lucien as the male protagonist, Rodrigo Nagenda, Paul Abel, Liam Smith, Emily Haversham, and the appearance of *Cthulhu* and the Old Ones as the main antagonist of the movie.

Underwater (2020) is an American science fiction action horror movie released on January 10, 2020. It is directed by William Eubank and stars Kristen Stewart as the main character, Norah Price. The movie was nominated for Fright Meter Award 2020 for Best Special Effects, Hawaii Film Critics Society 2020 for Best Horror Film, International Online Cinema Awards 2020 for Best Visual Effects, Chainsaw Award 2021 as Best Wide-Release Film, and winner of the 2020 Newport Beach Film Festival for Festival Honours Award. *Underwater* (2020) follows the story of a group of workers on Kepler822, an underwater drilling and research facility by Tian Industries located at the bottom of the Mariana Trench. Norah Price leads the story as the movie’s main character, and the film’s main antagonist is the monster of *Cthulhu* and The Old Ones.

Norah Price, a gritty mechanical engineer, and her colleagues try to find ways to survive in a drilling facility at the bottom of the Mariana Trench that is struck by a strong earthquake. Norah Price's character is depicted as a tough engineer with a survivor instinct who is also an emotional caregiver who tries hard to save her colleagues. Price's character rejects the superficial of womanhood with her masculine physical appearance, but on the other hand, she expresses her femininity through her action. Her female masculinity traits can be seen when the disaster hits, Norah immediately risks herself and her safety to lead her fellow companions to find the escape pods on the Roebuck Station. Once the surviving crew finally arrived at the Roebuck Station and found the escape pods, Norah made her ultimate sacrifice and risked her survival by letting her companions use the left escape pods for them. Norah decides to overload the power core of Roebuck Station, destroying *Cthulhu* and *Clinger* and letting her companions make their way to the surface. Without the support of enhanced powers and advanced technology like most action heroes possess these days, Norah's character also breaks the underrepresentation that extends beyond gender. Norah proves that the female heroine in the movie could achieve victories through ambitious, dominant, decisive, and independent traits rather than only physical strength and powers. Her character conveys that female heroine power can be instinctual and assertive, dominance and decisive, which innates female masculinity traits.

The character of Norah Price in *Underwater* (2020) movie brings a new perspective of women. Her character expresses a new idea of women in the context of sex and gender. Women have been adapted to believe that they are inferior compared

to men, and they have assumed that it is a form of nature. However, in the concept of gender, a human being born in a female body form does not necessarily make them behave in a particular way (Holmes, 2007). Women can perform both femininity and masculinity since femininity is not chained with female bodies and vice versa; masculinity is not chained in with male bodies; instead, masculinity can be performed with the absence of a male body (Halberstam, 1998). Therefore, this study aims to break the skepticism, mistrust of women's ability to lead, and the stereotypes and prejudices about women's role in the society and their lack of suitability for leadership roles and decision-making through the portrayal of female masculinity in Norah Price's character.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background study above, the statement of a problem that can be formulated as follows:

1. How is masculine physical characteristics in *Underwater* (2020) movie through Norah Price's character?
2. How is masculine mental characteristics in *Underwater* (2020) movie through Norah Price's character?

1.3 Objective of the Study

To answer the problem above, the objective of this study is to reveal how masculine physical and mental characteristics are portrayed through Norah Price's character in *the Underwater* (2020) movie. By answering the statement of the problems

in this study, the writer hopes to reveal how masculine physical and mental characteristics of Norah Price's character breaks woman representation in film.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is anticipated to contribute to the upcoming research concerning female masculinity issues. In the patriarchal society, female masculinity is accused of rejecting the female role and femininity. Therefore, breaks the skepticism, mistrust of women's ability to lead, the stereotypes, and prejudices about women's role in the society and their lack of suitability for leadership roles and decision-making through the portrayal of female masculinity in Norah Price's character.

Moreover, this study benefits those who intend to discuss female masculinity. It benefits the readers in comprehending female masculinity based on the social construction and the female masculinity reflected in *Underwater* (2020) movie through Norah Price's character. Lastly, this study is expected to support literature to cultural studies research, especially to the English Department, Faculty of Humanities, and Universitas Airlangga.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Female Masculinity : Female masculinity is the evolving roles in traditional masculinity and the dominance of males; and shape-shifting in modern sexual and the definition of gender (Halberstam 1998, 380).

- Female Heroine : A female individual who elevated moral stature and has the superior ability to pursue her goals indefatigably in the face of potent antagonist(s) (Bernstein, 2002).
- Masculinity : Masculinity is a stereotype of man which based on masculinity, power, and the dominance of male (Hermawan, 2017).
- Savior : A person who saves someone or something from danger, harm, failure, ruin and death (Fikzia, 2019).