

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The way women are portrayed in movies has developed through time. Although women are still represented in movies, in many cases, women are portrayed as the underrepresented on the big screen. They are frequently portrayed in conventionally stereotypical feminine positions in restricted and subjugated ways, such as nonprofessionals, homemakers, wives or parents, and sexual gatekeepers (LUOYING YANG et al. 2020, 2). In particular, many Disney princess movies are stereotypically anti-feminist movies, despite having female characters as their main heroin. Disney princess movies are movies that use children as their target audience, and according to Tonn (2008), women tend to be portrayed well in children's programs in a way that they are affectionate and forgiving. On the other side, they are also portrayed negatively as submissive and having low self-confidence, ambition, dominance, and individualism (Tonn 2008, 7).

The way women are portrayed in movies, including Disney princesses ones, affects how children and people see and treat women in society because it is embedded in the back of their mind that women have such stereotypes, especially when it has always been like this for the last few decades. Disney princess movies are known for their stereotypes since the previous Disney princess films usually depict women as defenseless and in need of male figures to save them (Palupi 2019, 1).

Princesses have always been portrayed as women who are naturally pretty and have a kind heart but are submissive, weak, and powerless. By drowning in their own problems in life, they need princes or knights figure to rescue them and make their life better by marrying them and relying on their physical appearances, naiveness, vulnerability, and their kind heart, and it is known as a “damsels in distress” (Idris 2013, 138). Typical damsels in distress movies are depicted in the classic version of some Disney princess movies such as *Snow White* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), et cetera. In the classic version of Disney princess movies, the term woman has an equal meaning to a victim in a patriarchal society (Maity 2014, 29) because women are depicted as weak, submissive, and they need male figures to help them out of distress.

As time flies, the classic versions of Disney princess movies have undergone many changes and transformations for decades. Since the Disney studio does not own the original story, different versions have been made over the years and taken various forms depending on the place and historical period from which they originate. The new production has been rewritten and recreated in different sets of plots, settings, and other aspects or elements of the movies for the new stories. Hence, the new target audience has also varied following the modification of the stories. Furthermore, a new concept of the word women in movies is born as the stories are rewritten. In some of the remake versions of Disney princess movies, a visible shift is being made because they defy the term “damsels in distress,” as the previous versions in which the main goal is to achieve their dreams by finding

true love and marrying a prince as the solution. Women empowerment traits can be found in some women figures that are portrayed in popular culture nowadays.

The shifting of women's representation in Disney princess movies is now reflected in some of the remake movies. *Cinderella* (2021), as the object of this study, is an example of a film that deals with women empowerment issues with a touch of hybrid classic-modern aspects embedded in the movie. *Cinderella* (2021) is a musical film written and directed by Kay Cannon in a romance genre released on Amazon Prime on September 3, 2021. Known as the writer of famous musical comedy, *Pitch Perfect* series, an American actress, director, producer, and screenwriter, Kay Cannon is also known for her other work, an original Netflix series, *Girlboss* (2017). In 2021, she made the remake version of Cinderella based on Charles Perrault's *Cinderella* which hold the opposite value and message as the new version she recently produced.

The Cinderella movie has a lot of different versions dated from 1950 to 2015, and the latest one was released in 2021. The newest version of Cinderella is clearly a new innovation of Cinderella movie because this movie breaks the old stereotype of Cinderella as an anti-feminist movie for the primary and ultimate goal of this movie. Up to this moment, the movie has never won an award or been nominated for one. However, more than one million households in the United States watched it within the first four days after its debut. According to Samba TV, *Cinderella* (2021) was the most-watched streaming film on the weekend after the film's release. In line with what has been stated by Samba TV, Screen Engine, an analytics company, *Cinderella* (2021) was the most-watched musical movie of

2021. As for the casting, the film features Camilla Cabello, a well-known singer who has just recently entered the acting industry, and this is her first acting role. Despite being her first time in acting, film critic Richard Roeper of The Chicago-Sun Times praised her work as an actress. However, the IMDb rating shows a contradictory result as the positive feedback the movie received from the audience. According to IMDb rating, it only manages to reach 4.2 out of 10 stars, which is also similar to the Rotten Tomatoes ratings. It reveals that every viewer has their own perspective and subjectivity on the movie.

The story itself is about Cinderella's journey to establish her clothing brand named "Dresses by Ella" in the middle of her patriarchal society. Throughout Cinderella's new character's journey, several movie elements signify women empowerment traits through the speeches, thoughts, actions, songs, and dialogues of Cinderella and other female supporting characters. Therefore, this film focuses on the shifting of this Cinderella as a damsel but not in distress and the women empowerment traits shown by Cinderella and other female supporting characters.

Simillary, other movies have shown women empowerment traits as *Cinderella* (2021). For instance, there are *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017), *Black Widow* (2021), and *Cruella* (2021). In terms of how the characters ultimately empower themselves, the films mentioned before have a lot in common with the object of this current study. *Aladdin* (2019), a musical fantasy film directed by Guy Ritchie, is another film with the same issue. Unlike the stereotypical Cinderella movie that many have come to familiarize, it is obvious how distinguishable the new Cinderella movie is. It can be seen from the new Cinderella character who is

self-reliant, confident, and resilient which is the complete opposite from the other previous Disney princesses where the female heroine tends to be powerless, weak, and submissive. Moreover, the primary focus has altered and no longer highlighted the need of a prince charming to rescue and make the female protagonist's life perfect. In this movie, Cinderella's primary goal is to achieve her dream despite her problems within her family and her patriarchal society. Not only Cinderella, other female supporting characters have their own struggles and ways to empower themselves as well, making the film more enjoyable to analyze.

The theory that will be used to analyze the women empowerment that appears in *Cinderella* (2021) movie is Keshab Mandal's concept and types of women empowerment for the women empowerment traits of the female characters. The writer believes that Keshab Mandal's women empowerment theory is suitable for the issue appearing in the movie. It appears that the concept and types of women empowerment discussed in the article includes all the necessary discussions and concepts that can be employed in this study.

The writer had gathered and selected several similar academic publications discussing Cinderella and women empowerment. When it comes to the Cinderella story or movie, it can not be separated from the classic *Cinderella* (1950) and *Cinderella* (2015). In the previous study, a research about Cinderella was conducted by an English Literature student. The first related study has entitled *THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN'S CHARACTERS IN CINDERELLA THE MOVIE (2015): A FEMINIST ANALYSIS* by Herdinda Octari. The study argues that women's stereotypes still exist today even though stereotypic portrayals have been

changed over the last few decades. It is found in the study that Cinderella and other women characters in the movie are still stuck in the negative stereotypes. Nevertheless, the writer agrees that the stereotypes of women in *Cinderella* (1950) can still be found in the *Cinderella* (2015) movie. The second related study is by Radina Tri Cahyanti, entitled *THE PURSUIT OF AMERICAN DREAM IN THE MAIN FEMALE CHARACTER IN JOY (2015) FILM: WOMEN EMPOWERMENT*. The study argued that Joy often denies her ability and is underestimated because of the patriarchal society she lives in. She overcomes those things by going through resources, agency, and achievements that make her able to turn herself into a successful woman who has the power to make a decision in her life and get recognized by others. In this movie, Joy experiences some barriers to achieving her dream because she was born a woman. Women's position is limited by the patriarchal culture including in her own family. This movie shows that women have a right to pursue their careers. The writer can gain more information about how women's empowerment can be achieved through three stages: resources, agency, and achievement by Naila Kabeer's women empowerment theory. The third related study is *GRETEL'S GIRL POWER IN TOMMY WIRKOLA'S HANSEL AND GRETEL WITCH HUNTER FILM*, written by RAHMANIAR ENDITA RINI (2016). The study focused on how Gretel represents girl power as the main character. The main issue of the movie is how Gretel shows girl power by having both masculine and feminine sides. The study argues that Gretel shows her masculine side, such as a woman who is powerful, strong, and rational. On the other hand, she shows her feminine side at the same time as well, such as nurturing and

still needs a man figure in her life at the same time (Rini 2016). The writer can gain a helpful perspective on girl power by using feminism as the theoretical background. The fourth related study chosen by the writer is Friska Anggreanika's *AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER STEREOTYPE EXPERIENCED BY PEGGY CARTER AND HER REPRESENTATION OF GIRL POWER IN MARVEL AGENT CARTER MOVIE* (2017). The study argued how Peggy reacts to the gender stereotype that happened to her represents girl power. The author stated that by showing her masculine and feminine side, Peggy shows girl power characteristics as a result of freedom of choice (Anggreanika 2017, 35). Through this study, the writer gains insight and understanding concerning girl power which can be a response to gender stereotypes by using the girl power theory that is linked to the third-wave feminism era.

We can see from the related studies mentioned above that the issue of women empowerment can be analyzed from various perspectives and approaches. The writer decided to use the concept and types of women empowerment by Keshab Mandal to analyze the object of the study that is focused on investigating the women empowerment traits that are shown by the female characters in the movie with a narrative and non-narrative approach. As a result, the current study uses a specific object and approach. However, there is a gap that can be filled within the current research. The gap in this study is that the writer uses *Cinderella* Disney classic version (1950) and *Cinderella* (2015) to be compared as references, not as a comparison, which will be mentioned several times in this study to show that there are shifts in the *Cinderella* (1950), *Cinderella* (2015) and the 2021 versions. The

focus of the study is not on the comparison. Therefore, this is not a comparative study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, the statement of the problem is as follows:

1. How is women empowerment depicted in women characters in *Cinderella* (2021)?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

To answer the statement of the problem above, the objective of the study intends as follows:

The purpose of the study's objective is to reveal how women empowerment is depicted in women characters in *Cinderella* (2021) movie.

1.4 Significance of the Study

By conducting this study, it is hoped to contribute to the writer and the readers. This study can increase the writer's knowledge about women empowerment. Besides, this research is also expected to help the readers who are concerned about women empowerment issues and to gain more insight and help those who want to conduct further study on the object and topic of women empowerment, especially the undergraduate students majoring in English Literature at Airlangga University.

1.5 Definition of Keywords

Damsels in Distress : In need of a prince or knight's figure to rescue them and make their life so much better by relying on

their physical appearances, naiveness, vulnerability, and their kind heart (Idris 2013).

Disney Princess : A legendary media franchise of The Walt Disney Company (Palupi 2019).

Women Empowerment : The process of empowering women to make more strategic life decisions that affect them and the chance to enable them to fully utilize their abilities (Chen & Tanaka 2014).