

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Movies have remained a crucial component of American popular culture even in the rapidly evolving 21st-century media landscape. A movie is specified as a series of moving pictures added with sound which could deliver stories and is being shown at the cinema (Hornby, 2006). However, movies are drawn from the evidence or phenomenon that happens in society which has the potential to persuade people to understand things.

Many Americans still visit theatres to watch stories come to life on the big screen. Nearly 500 million tickets were sold in cinemas across the US and Canada in 2021. Between 2020 and 2021, box office revenue in the United States and Canada increased by 53% (Navarro, 2022). At the same time, the Academy Awards, the world's most prestigious film awards, attract millions of viewers each year. The sustained popularity of the movie in popular culture places the medium as a vital component of American society and culture (Simonton, 2004).

However, nowadays movies still do not represent most Americans fairly. Over the past few years, several social movements have been inspired by these inadequacies in cinematic representation, including the #OscarsSoWhite campaign. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences committed to double the number of women and people of color in the Academy's membership

by 2020 as a result of the movement, which focused on the lack of racial diversity among Oscar nominees (Yousuf, 2021).

The #MeToo and #TimesUp movements changed the focus to promote and raise awareness of sexual assault victims, particularly women. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the film industry still do not adequately represent women on and off-screen despite these social outcries. Stereotypical portrayals of women and a lack of complex female roles continue to be prevalent in Hollywood and the media (Milburn, Mather, & Conrad, 2000).

These negative portrayals have effects that go far beyond the realm of entertainment. Movies largely reflect prevailing cultural attitudes about gender roles, norms, attitudes, and expectations due to the importance of film in popular culture and society (Simonton, 2004). Since the #MeToo era, the new projects that come from women directors starting to make their big-screen directorial debut. One of the movie examples that bring the issue of the stereotype of women is *Promising Young Woman (2020)* which is the object of this study.

Promising Young Woman (2020) is an American crime comedy-drama thriller film directed by Emerald Fennell; it won the best original screenplay Oscar at the 93rd Academy Awards in Los Angeles. This movie reveals its violent and brutal side using a pastel color-coded system that appears to cloak the entire movie in a veil of feminine purity. *Promising Young Woman (2020)* reveals the stereotype of women as someone related to femininity and how men contribute to women's stereotypes. However, it serves as a reminder that life rarely grants

victory to those who deserve it or retribution to the most deserving. The movie's core themes include sadness, hurt, and the daily abuse women endure at the hands of the patriarchy. Contrary to the movie trailers suggest, "*Promising Young Woman (2020)*" is not about a girl killing men while she runs around. The movie is far more tragic to watch because it is much more realistic.

Promising Young Woman (2020) unveils the patriarchal issue that leads women into disadvantages and oppression. Cassandra at the nightclub randomly targets anyone who tries to take advantage of her. During the night, after pretending to be drunk, she then regains her consciousness amid the perpetrator's actions and confronts them—showing an inverted position of power.

The struggle of Cassandra in trying to negotiate with women's stereotypes is still relatable to be conducted by women in this modern life. While in both physically and psychologically, women are considered weaker than men, or they should have been in a lower position (Sandhya, 2016). By all means, *Promising Young Woman (2020)* tried to deconstruct how gender stereotypes occur by demonstrating them through the struggle of Cassandra to negotiate with all of those stereotypes directed at her.

Besides *Promising Young Woman (2020)*, some movies are also embedded with women's stereotypes. Examples of movies that bring the same issue are *The Assistant (2019)*, *Cat Woman in Batman Films*, and *Jennifer's Body (2009)*. These films are similar to the subject of this study in terms of applying women's stereotypes over the main female character. *Red Sparrow (2018)* directed by Francis Lawrence is another example of a movie that discussed the same topic.

Henceforth, the distinctive genre of *Promising Young Woman (2020)* makes the movie more interesting to be analyzed.

The main theory that will be applied is Woman as the Other by Simone De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex*. The depiction of stereotypes can be seen in modern life because a social construct is based on the male perspective, then women are expected to dress accordingly, and how women do not need to have a high education because they are supposed to get married. In the end, women have to take care of their children (Beauvoir, 1989). Those kinds of stereotypes occur because of the belief in patriarchy, traditional gender roles, and gender stereotypes are still there.

The writer chooses some related studies that discussed gender stereotypes. An example of the related studies is Aviaska Wienda's Diana's *Struggles in Breaking Women's Stereotypes in Wonder Woman Movie Script 2017 (2020)*. The study focuses on how the characterization of Diana shapes her into someone who could break the women's stereotypes while still having the traits of woman in general. The author means that women should have to believe in their power and competence to break the gender stereotypes. From the related study, the writer is able to gain useful acknowledge regarding the gender stereotypes as the effective mediums for the patriarchal system to raise gender inequality and how it is being perceived by applying the approach of Woman as the Other by Simone De Beauvoir.

Another related study is "*Counter Stereotype Depicted In The Movie "I Spit On Your Grave" (2010)" (2016)*" written by Yudistari Firstian Putri. The

study argues that the female character as the object of the study do sadistic things to negotiate with the women's stereotype. The author of related study mentions that traditional gender roles create the stereotypes that women are physically and emotionally weak. The study helps to add more acknowledgment to the writer regarding the relationship between violence and negotiating with stereotype.

The studies mentioned above show that it is possible to apply different methods to investigate the subjects of gender stereotyping and negotiating with those stereotypes. In this instance, the writer uses Simone De Beauvoir's feminism theory and Woman as the Other as the primary theoretical framework to examine the study's subject. Although one of the linked studies also uses a similar theory, this current study can cover the gap left by that study. In this instance, this study's analysis will take from the narrative and non-narrative aspects to discover the issues related to gender stereotyping and how a woman negotiating with them. As a result, this study offers several significances, namely different objects and specific techniques.

1.2 Statement of The Problems

To achieve the goals of this research, the writer creates a question problem that later will be discussed in this thesis, in which:

1. How are gender stereotypes portrayed in the movie?
2. How does Cassandra Thomas negotiate with the gender stereotype?

1.3 The objective of The Study

As it stated before this point in the statement of the problems, the purpose of this study is to analyze the characteristics, behavior, and actions of the main character of *Promising Young Woman (2020)*, Cassandra Thomas or Cassie, from her dialogue or acts. This observation aims to unveil what kind of women's stereotypes occur in this movie.

1.4 Significance of The Study

From the theoretical benefits of the research, the writer expects to give another perspective of seeing how gender stereotypes affect women. Based on this study, hopefully, will create another insight into the relationship between traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes.

Practically, the writer anticipates that this study would be able to provide new inspiration for other researchers who desires to take research the same issue and will be able to develop their studies. Hopefully, this study will also give a little help in educating people regarding the gender stereotypes. For the filmmaker, it is anticipated that this study could offer the idea of bringing another fundamental issue to the movie, to make it more valuable and provide additional acknowledgment of recent issues.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

- a. **Femme Fatale:** The term that originally from French, which means as a dangerous woman (Elhallaq, 2015).
- b. **Gender Stereotype:** Gender stereotypes are generalizations about what men and women are like, and they are typically a great deal of consensus about them. (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

- c. Stereotype:** A stereotype is a fixed, overgeneralized belief about a particular group or class of people. By stereotyping, we infer that a person has a whole range of characteristics and abilities that we assume all members of that group have (Saul, 2017).
- d. Traditional Gender Roles:** Gender Roles is the stereotype that tells women and men what is typical for their sex in a particular situation (Eisenchlas, 2013)