

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

In the world led by men, feminism was born as a hope to change the reoccurring pattern of the society that caters to men who have ingrained misogynistic behaviors. This phenomenon has resulted in the creation of a patriarchal society that affects both men and women by creating gender performativity that expects men and women to comply with certain gender roles. Historically, feminism develops through three waves of feminism. First-wave feminism focused on initiating women's rights in society. Second-wave feminism put its focus on cultural agenda that emphasized the superiority and distinction of women's culture and focused less on achieving equal rights. However, third-wave feminism rejected the value pursued by second-wave feminism. It argued that feminism should emphasize the inclusion of a variety of women (Parker, 2020).

The current feminist movement aims to solve gender-related problems and create a more gender-equal society. Feminists continue to empower women through their work to achieve gender equality. Furthermore, scholars argued that to achieve the goal of gender equality sought by feminists, encouraging both sexes in the process is important. Sylvia Chant stated that involving men in the process of reaching gender equality will give a higher possibility of success as it will give them a chance to challenge the issues that have been ascribed to them (Chant, 2000). As it is often found, various works that focus on empowering women ended up

disempowering both sexes or a certain group of women due to the lack of inclusion which has been put as the focus of the current feminism.

The feminist movement has also brought women's equality to the movie industry, especially in Hollywood. Unfortunately, some movies representing women have not been successful in representing gender equality. According to research done by Andrea L. Press and Tamar Liebes-Plesner, many Hollywood movies continue to sexualize their female main characters in the movie and still play stereotypes addressed to women by society (Press, 2016). Fortunately, many movies made by feminists have rocketed in popularity with an agenda of promoting feminism to a broader audience and introducing the true idea of feminism and women's true potential in the hope of diminishing the gap between men and women in society.

Unfortunately, feminism has attracted backlash over the years as feminism challenges the already strong power of patriarchy apparent in society. The shift of power in society is expected to attract backlash as it could change the very nature of society (Mansbridge, 2008). However, the feminist agenda sets its purpose in achieving gender equality through ending discriminations addressed towards both sexes (Nerlinsky-Schine, 2019). At the very core, feminism aims to benefit both sexes in a society with gender inequality that has limited both sexes in certain ways and given equal power to both sexes. Feminism could assist us in addressing the problematic assumptions of gender that have been built subconsciously and allow us to gain an objective view of the true problem of the current status quo (Hawkesworth, 1999). Therefore, feminism needs to help assist both sexes in

achieving equality. For feminism could attract resistance against the idea if the feminists' effort only focusses on a selfish intention that only benefits certain groups of people.

However, many feminists have taken an extreme shift and blame men as the source of their oppression. They now use feminism as an excuse to gain a self-centered privilege at the cost of the opposite gender, even to the extent of putting certain groups of women at a disadvantage. From a book titled *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men* authored by Hoff Sommers, it is true that women, especially feminist women, are gaining more economic advantages that put men at a disadvantage (Sampert, 2012). Feminism has turned from achieving equal rights for both sexes to a tunnel-visioned goal in achieving a more beneficial position with a selfish intention, often leading to disempowering women and often at the cost of the rights of the opposite gender. This misunderstanding has led to today's "gender war" (Azimy, 2020). From some male and female perspectives, feminism is seen as condemnatory. Whether a man or a woman, once they claim themselves a feminist, some will see them as a man-hater as a female and a "whipped soy boy" as a male (Azimy, 2020). Despite feminists' success in achieving their goals through their campaigns fighting for equal rights in society, unfortunately, some of the self-proclaimed feminists are still lost on feminism's true purpose.

One of the most successful movie series of feminism is *Charlie's Angels* TV series. Before the 2019 version, *Charlie's Angels* was originally five seasons American TV series that first aired in 1976, followed by its incarnation released in

2000 and 2003 (Levine, 2008) The TV series and the previous *Charlie's Angels* movies taught their audience how society should not underestimate women (Coon, 2005). According to Coon's result of research, the previous *Charlie's Angels* TV show showed women empowerment through their masked femininity that is concealed strategically, implying the rejection of femininity in their feminist agenda. However, according to newer research done for the 2000 and 2003 *Charlie's Angels* done by Elena Levine in 2008, the movie seemed to have evolved and started to accept femininity in their feminist agenda and endorsed a more liberal take of feminism. The new 2019 reboot of the movie seems to continue the endorsement of liberal feminism that accepts femininity. However, the recent reboot shows acceptance of femininity only through its beneficial use as already privileged women in the patriarchal society and use their femininity against the opposite gender and marginalized women. For this reason, the new 2019 *Charlie's Angels* movie then quickly attracted backlash for its bad representation of feminism despite calling the movie itself a feminist movie that is meant to reflect the true vision of feminism in this era.

Charlie's Angels 2019 was directed by Elizabeth Banks, and it received 52 Metascore (IMDb, 2020). This 118-minute-long movie grossed over \$73 million with an estimated budget of \$48 million. Many media have claimed its failure in the movie industry, especially when being compared to the success of the previous *Charlie's Angels* series. This action genre movie, meant to be the reboot of *Charlie's Angels*, was opened in 3,452 theatres with an average run of 3.2 weeks per theatre (The Numbers, 2019). One of the reasons that contributed to its failure

is that the movie completely alienated the opposite gender of the main characters by continuously being apathetic to the male characters, which potentially led to the loss of a possible audience.

Unlike most female-lead action movies, the Charlie's Angels 2019 movie displays non-stereotypical women main characters that do not categorize the movie into a romantic movie which most female lead Hollywood movies do (Press, 2016). However, the movie has sparked critics since its release for its false representation of feminism (Bennet, 2019). The movie creates flawless heroines that might lead to women's disempowerment as the movie imply that perfection is the key to success. The movie also shows apathetic behavior towards the male characters, constantly stereotyping male behaviors with misogyny.

The view of feminism features in the movie has obliterated its main goal of promoting feminism, and rather it created a false image of feminism that celebrates women's perfection that is deemed more superior compared to men's culture and behavior. The movie failed to feature the goal of modern feminism that focuses on achieving gender equality and saving both genders from the expected gender roles created by patriarchy.

Though the movie has evolved from its previous TV show predecessor that is dormant with sexism, male gaze, and racism (Holderbaum, 2019; Wang, 2019), the rebooted version is believed by its director to be an empowering movie for women that might scare men away. The movie then flopped after its release, and Elizabeth Banks continues to blame men for the movie's failure, claiming that '*men don't go see women do action movie* – Elizabeth Banks (Krishnan, 2019)' This statement

has generated critiques over the media as it shows a swayed view of true feminism and contradicts its initial belief that is supposed to aid modern feminism. The rebooted 2019 version of *Charlie's Angels* was chosen as the object of the study, as the movie endorses the common false belief of feminism which endorses the radical view that sees men as the enemy of feminism that has been apparent in this era.

The number of studies solely done for the 2019 reboot for *Charlie's Angels* is extremely limited. One was found, although it does not focus its study on the perspective of feminism nor women disempowerment, rather focusing on its feature of the advanced invention and its relation to the blockchain as a feminist movie (Hardie, 2020). The study of a female action movie is also numerous done, analyzing the display of gender stereotypes in American cinema on its violent female characters (Gilpatrick, 2010). The relation of backlash and feminist agenda in Hollywood movies has been discussed previously through analyzing the key issues of women representation in Hollywood feminist movies (Press, 2016). The issue of women's disempowerment in media is rarely talked about in previous studies as they focus more on women's disempowerment resulting from the culture in rural areas or third-world countries such as India (Sarin, 2001).

None of the studies previously mentioned specifically study the backlash of the feminist agenda in the new 2019 *Charlie's Angels* featuring violent female lead characters through the lens of feminism. Being produced under the big name of its predecessor, *Charlie's Angels* brings a lot of attention to its movie, and with its obvious feminist agenda, the movie can shift how feminism is seen by the world with its messages embedded in the movie.

The Charlie's Angels 2019 movie has failed to give the message of women empowerment and true gender equality through the movie. The lack of inclusion in the group of minorities of women might lead to women's disempowerment toward a certain group. Furthermore, the movie focused too much on its feminist agenda and ended up creating flawless heroines that create a sense of hopelessness for women. The movie also reinforces hate toward the opposite gender throughout the movie by alienating the main male characters. These problems have generated backlash toward the movie since its release as it has shifted the true course of feminism and led to women's disempowerment and hate toward the opposite gender.

To reveal the issue that has attracted backlash in the movie, John Fiske's semiotics approach, *Codes of Television*, was used. Semiotics provides a deep understanding through images that symbolize how feminism is portrayed in media culturally instead of naturally (Godard, 2003). Therefore, semiotics could assist in understanding how the movie capture feminism is depicted culturally and its implications in the society that leads to the movie's backlash. The semiotic analysis will be done through Fiske's *Codes of Television* as it helps to decode the meaning of the images that indicate how the movie depicts its feminist agenda. Fiske's *Codes of Television* could help the researcher to understand how the audiences of the *Charlie's Angels* 2019 reboot process the images shown by the movie that has been processed through layers of cultural values. Finally, the study would be able to reveal how the movie constructs the feminist agenda that attracted the backlash from the audience itself.

1.2 Statement of The Problems

The writer will focus on the women disempowerment in the Charlie's Angels 2019 movie, therefore generating the question within the work of the writer:

1. How are women portrayed in the movie?
2. How does the movie construct disempowerment toward women through its female lead characters?
3. How are the male characters represented in the contribution of constructing the movie's feminist agenda?

1.3 Objectives of The Study

Based on the problem that had been stated above, Therefore, the objective of the research provided by the writer, as follows:

1. To understand the portrayal of women in the movie.
2. To identify the construct of women's disempowerment that presents in the movie which and to reveal the cause of the backlash received by the movie.
3. To identify how the male characters are represented in the movie to contribute to the feminist agenda constructed by the movie.

1.4 Significance of The Study

The result of this research aims to give a comprehensive understanding of the true feminism values in female lead movies toward the readers and how empowering women could be achieved without marginalizing certain groups of women and antagonizing men. This research is also useful as guidance on analyzing and understanding feminist movies and the values that should contribute to them.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

In this research, the writer will focus on analyzing the construct of women's disempowerment that appears throughout Charlie's Angels 2019 movie through its female lead characters using the feminist theories.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

<i>Feminism</i>	: Feminism is a social movement that fights for equal rights between both gender while putting the issues of women's rights at the center of its movement (Chant, 2000).
<i>Feminist</i>	: Anyone who believes in the value of feminism and/or fight for the value of feminism (Delmar, 2018).
<i>Empowerment</i>	: Gaining the power to attain more control over one's life (Edlund, 2016).
<i>Women disempowerment</i>	: Obstruction to women to gain control over their life (Edlund, 2016).
<i>Gender equality</i>	: Equal access to opportunities and rights regardless of gender (Ging, 2019).