

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Gender stereotype is a stereotype based on social expectations of traditional gender roles which have been debatable until nowadays. Sara Mills (2008) defines gender stereotypes which also stated Bourdieu's (1991) habitus concept that gender stereotypes are started from hypothesis or assumptions from community which brought to "arena" and became common understanding in society. This stereotype comes from traditional gender roles (Jenainati and Groves 2007) when people form roles for women and men to behave with the expectations within patriarchy values. This stereotype has been debatable because of the raising of this issue in media institutions.

In mainstream media such as news articles or magazines, gender stereotypes tend to be affirmed passively. Mainstream media such as newspaper, magazine, television, or radio tends to be controlled by the journalist, so the individual does not have high ability and power to control their understanding and evaluating the contents (Kim 2014). For example, there are some media that tend to be patriarchal so this provides a great opportunity for men (Creenshaw 2018) so that this will influence the audience's thinking to support stereotypes and the response given does not have diversity. Compared to social media, the audience has much more credibility for the audience to be consistent with their own opinions to negotiate or accept the message (Kim 2014). Moreover,

Purcell et. al. (2010), Bruns (2005), and Gilmor (2006) explains that the public has less participation directly to controversial issues in news content because social media tends to have more precise news algorithms and reach an audience larger than mainstream media.

Unlike mainstream media, social media gives a space for everyone to respond to the issue actively. McGregor (2019) describes that social media represents public opinion and it is even used for data for journalists nowadays to analyze how the public opinion is shaped and its effect on the media in US elections. Moreover, it is stated by McGregor's study that social media has an important hybrid role because social media can associate interactions between political actors, the media, and the public (Chadwick 2013), so social media is not only exists as a medium for reacting, but also freedom of speech for society and disseminate issues including gender stereotypes (Fernandez and Menon 2022). Regardless of whether awareness of gender stereotypes is successful or not, Guo (2022) explains that social media can be used as a place where awareness of this issue arises, gain awareness, and how they understand the text in their own response or reaction through posts of pictures, videos, comments, advertisements, and others.

Audience nowadays responds actively on social media, which can be analyzed through encoding and decoding. The audience's response to the issue is called audience response which is the process of interpreting the meaning through encoding and decoding. Stuart Hall (1980) describes this active response process as the encoding-decoding process. In this process, the media

owner encoded the message, and the audience responds to the received text in the decoding process with social factors as the main factor of interpretation. Furthermore, the audience has three categories of responses; there are dominant, negotiated, and oppositional representatives (Hall 1980). For instance, a study written by Briandana and Azmawati (2019) analyzes the response of the audience or the millennial generation in social media, showing that the audience has a high tendency to be in a dominant position regarding gender issues in the media. It does not only happen passively, but in the case of this study, it shows that gender issues depart from the content found in the press, instead providing space for people to respond actively in social media.

Gender stereotypes are an issue that still occurs in the media due to patriarchal ideology. This stereotype comes from traditional gender roles (Jenainati and Groves 2007), when people form roles for women and men to behave with the expectations within patriarchy values. In this case, women are always associated with being emotional and weak (Lakoff 1979) in Sabilurrosyad (2018), while men are strong and dominant. This problem forms the idea of patriarchy which is generalized and spread by media, such as the extent of sexism in women (Sara Mills 2006). It is found that the existing factors are institutional relations dominated by male executives (Creenshaw 2018) in both broadcast and film media, so the problem of patriarchy occurs. Eventually, there is an imbalance of power relations between men and women in the current media because of the stereotypes. One of the examples of gender stereotypes is that women are always portrayed as emotional or not funny. This stereotype

causes problems that limit women's ability to be led in humor presentations (Spektor et al. 2022) because of patriarchal surroundings.

The stereotype of unfunny women related to the value of traditional gender roles in America appeared in Sigmund Freud's work entitled *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* in 1905 (Jean 2019). In his book, Freud explained how stereotypes about women's capabilities can influence American views. It is related to the history of how women are taken seriously based on the humorous works of American literature. Caliskan (1995) explains how women writers from literary canons are marginalized as non-humorists. In addition, female figures often appear as ridiculous characters and often laugh in stereotypical comics. Another reason is explained by Caliskan (1955) about the existence of myths which is also discussed in Barbara Welter's essay entitled "Anti-Intellectualism and The American Woman 1800-1860" explaining that ideal women like Earth-mothers that means women do not have high sense such as humor.

The beginning of the emergence of this stereotype of traditional gender roles was the concept of womanhood since the Victorian era, which marginalized American women. This issue was conveyed in Abrams' book (2019) that showed several American women, such as Barbara Welter in her book "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," which explains that women are formed into persons who hold spiritual values and moral foundations while men are always supported in education. At that time, laughter and humor, which were signs of intelligence, were permanently attached to something subversive and

masculine, so women often became storytellers rather than comedians, said Nancy Walker, an American comedian. In addition, American society considers that female humor is only limited to communication rather than an accepted self-achievement skill, while male humor is considered superior and symbolizes intelligence. As time passed, the women's thing began to rebel using humor. However, women's humor is labeled as transgressive humor, which rejects patriarchy and challenges stereotypes (Abrams 2019).

This phenomenon appeared in a *Vanity Fair* article by a British journalist entitled "Why Women Aren't Funny" written by Hitchen (2007), which described a controversial debate about humor as a parameter of success in attracting women. The article further explained that women do not need to be funny because they are already attractive from a men's perspective. In addition, Hitchen (2007) explained the real social expectations of men who do not want women not to be funny because they want women as their audience rather than competitors. However, it does not significantly prove that women are not funny because of their limited abilities. It can be concluded that Hitchen (2007) views this phenomenon as an old gender role tradition and a stereotype that women are not funny, which the public believes. Kim (2019) further explains this stereotype which views that producing humor is not described as a feminine value because women are taught more by their families, such as mothers, aunts, and others, to provide these opportunities for men. This old culture that teaches or forces women to be feminine also makes women follow the stereotype of being ladylike (Kim, 2019). This old gender role problem also causes women

to have an excellent opportunity to appear with their humor so that men are still dominant in the end. This belief creates a negative stigma that women are considered less funny than men. It comes from the glorification that men have a greater sense of humor, which is seen from comedians dominated by men, almost 90% compared to women, quoted from Zippia data. This stereotype becomes a debate for people who see which gender is superior in humor. It will become a mistaken urgency if people believe that women are not funny as a reality.

Even though the response from American society today is various, many people still believe in stereotypes of traditional gender roles. Several groups in American society have started to be progressive, comedic women and feminists keen to support funny women who can share the value of women's awakening in terms of abilities, for example, Amy Schumer, Alisa Wong, and other comedians (Evans 2017). However, the demand in American society builds the image of women who must be beautiful (Kein 2015). A study by Simmons and Rich (2013) explains how the *Vanity Fair* article influenced comedians to be asked to look attractive by the industry and society, such as America's funny girls in 2008. Instead of acknowledging their ability, women get the burden to keep looking attractive. In addition, in a study from Oxford, Hong (2019) explained that American society still labels Asian American women as not cute, which creates a stereotypical influence not only limited to gender but can also affect ethnicity or race in America.

This belief will give limited opportunities for women to improve their skills and careers in the entertainment world or else it can be act of gender violence. Mills (2008) explains that this stereotype can lead to consumption of sexism by society, which in turn can also become part of gender violence. Even though sexism is clearly different from hate speech, sexism is clearly dangerous because it can spread widely in communities and normalization strengthens power to create new narratives (Mills 2008). This problem exists in the status quo, in which Driscoll (2014) explains that male comedians obtain a more incredible opportunity because people are more accustomed to male humor and stick to old stereotypes, so the problem of the humor gap from the early 21st century until now still cannot be solved. Moreover, people have been bringing up discussions with the hashtag *#Womenaren'tfunny* lately through social media, which further exacerbates the goal of gender equality.

This issue is depicted in social media, such as Tiktok, influencing audiences more significantly. TikTok has changed society's lifestyle, and everyone can be the creator or even the audience by seeing the content of the video. One of the platforms that has been used frequently for several years is TikTok. Li et al. (2021) stated that Tiktok had become the most popular platform, which could score the highest number of downloads nowadays. TikTok analysis of content with hashtags equipped by sociotechnical (duets, stitches, visuals, images, and audio) is much more complex. Hence, analyzing responses and audiences' expressions is more accurate (Krutrok 2021). In addition, Krukot (2021) explains that hashtag algorithms and other features, such as top videos on

TikTok, are easier to create engagement or social connections to form a space for people to respond within the hashtag. In addition, the TikTok algorithm (such as top videos and for your page) gets a broader network and community response because it is based on following and followers (Tolentino 2019 in Anderson 2020). Compared to other social media such as Instagram, where audiences respond primarily based on images (Chang and Yen 2019), Twitter, and Youtube which adapts content models from several other platforms such as Snapchat, still does not provide a significant audience engagement or response (Feldman 2016 in Anderson 2020).

Fifty million active users from America use TikTok, so this can prove that this application is a good platform for the community to respond actively to this issue. In addition, *#womenaren'tfunny* was found to have a million viewers, with many users who actively create this content in response to the problem of gender stereotypes. In addition, the response of American tiktokers to this issue has pros and cons in the videos found. However, from most of the responses, there are still lots of tiktokers who are against the unfunny female narratives, where the average creator is male. On the other hand, female creators build meaning to reject this gender stereotype through the video hashtag *#womenarentfunny*.

Several previous studies had similar issues and topics related to unfunny female stereotypes. Previous studies, studies have found that use audience assessment methods such as Hooper's (2016), Jean's (2019), and Caldwell's (2019) by interviewing and providing strong justification for how this narrative

is formed and the audience's responses. From the results of previous research, it was found that the narrative of women not being funny restricts women in the professional realm (Caldwell 2019), such as women comedians (Jean 2019). However, Hooper's (2016) study explains that this narrative is a movement for women, not normalization. Based on previous explanations, none of these studies can explain how this narrative stops and spreads at the reality level. However, this stereotype or narrative continues to spread in social media or virtually, which significantly influences culture. In addition, previous studies discussed the negative influence of stereotypes that limit women's access (Jane 2019) but did not explain in detail how this could ultimately be affirmed as an act of sexism and gender violence. Therefore, the author are here to answer the gap in these studies.

In this study, the author uses the top-selected TikTok videos found based on the criteria of the object of this research. Furthermore, the author will conduct an audience study using the encoding-decoding theory from Stuart Hall (1980) to know the response from male participants, which can be categorized into three positions which are dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional position. Furthermore, the audience response is supported by Sara Mills' theory about gender violence and indirect sexism to get the detailed meaning of the gap between gender portrayed from society's perspective.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

1. How is the gender stereotype issue encoded in the article *Why Women Aren't Funny*?

2. How is the gender stereotype issue decoded in the TikTok videos?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. Analyzing the gender stereotype issue which is encoded in the article *Why Women Aren't Funny*
2. Analyzing the gender stereotype issue which is decoded in the TikTok videos.

1.4 Significance of the Study

In this study, it is significant to increase analysis and awareness through cultural studies theory. It is hoped that this research will help future research to contribute more in looking at socio-cultural issues that are still developing today, such as gender stereotypes. By using the perspective of cultural studies, future research is expected to be more critical by using cultural studies theory and looking at social phenomena in a community.

This study is purposed to share awareness about gender stereotypes in humor which portrayed women are not funny on social media. Moreover, this study is hoped to help the readers as the guide be more critical and perceptive in encountering the same issue in the future. This study is hoped to contribute knowledge to the English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga. Furthermore, this research. In addition, it is hoped that this study will help future researchers to find supporting sources for their research. Not only useful for future researcher but this study is also expected to provide benefits for teachers and other administrators to find out how gender issues are

still unresolved even in small narratives about humor. It is useful to know the side of human behavior in consuming text and how they perceive it as the truth at this time.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Humor:	Humor is an emotional situation with a multifaceted concept that is expressed with positive feelings, such as joy that is expressed explicitly through a smile or laughter as a response to something funny or uplifting (Sabilurrosyad 2018).
Encoding:	Encoding is the process of the production of meaning which is articulated by signifiers from the owner media to the readers (Stuart Hall 1980)
Decoding:	Decoding is the process of audiences interpreting the meaning and ideology constructed by the producer or the owner of the media (Stuart Hall 1980).
Gender Violence:	Gender violence is a violence that discriminate and oppress individual or community based on their gender, which can be in the form of physical and mental form of abuse (Dlamini 2021)

Sexism: Sexism is not solely an individual oversight or unintentional action but a manifestation of broader social dynamics, institutional power imbalances, and conflicts over rights and resources, akin to racism and other discriminatory language practices. (Mills 2008)