

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the last few decades, pop culture and gender are increasingly linked to each other. Pop culture is a mass culture that is recognized by many people. Therefore, pop culture is an important medium that has a big role in influencing human perspective on issues such as gender, especially women. Women have been objectified and exploited in the movie for years through the story and the lens. The male gaze is a theory that refers to how men view women through the media and put them as sexual objects. Sexual objectification is an experience of being presented as an object for men's pleasure or for the consumption of the male gaze (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, 173). In popular movies, women have been objectified and exploited. It is a phenomenon which able to cause the destruction of the positive image of women in society (Ahmed 2016, 15). The male gaze is identified as a gaze that glorifies men and controls women. This can be seen through the scene that displays women from the men's perspective and emphasizes a woman's body.

In a world that occurs sexual unbalance, pleasure in looking has divided between active men and passive women. In the traditional role, women are continuously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for visual and erotic effect so that they can be said *to-be-looked-at-ness* (Mulvey 1975, 19). The camera enacts the male gaze, panning up and down the women's bodies and moving

in for close-ups of various fragments of the female body (Oliver 2017, 451). The movie played in cinema is about a woman's body that intrigues men's attention and their desire to possess the woman. This voyeurism in the movie industry is called the male gaze, the theory rooted in Laura Mulvey in her book. In 1975, Laura Mulvey confirmed that the dominant male gazes in mainstream Hollywood movies reflect and satisfy the men unconscious because most filmmakers at that time were men; thus, the result is movie narratives that marginalize women.

Mulvey also argued that patriarchal hegemony dominating Hollywood made it impossible for women to be free of men constructs (Cooper 2000, 277). The male gaze is when women are assigned the passive status of being looked at, whereas men are the subjects who stare. Women are forced to identify with a passive object to be looked at (Mulvey 1989, 14). The male gaze already occurs for a long time in the media. Nowadays, access to movies is easier because there are many movie platforms. Every movie platform has its original movie, which only aired on their platform. One of them is Netflix. Netflix is one of the biggest movie platforms internationally. They have released their original movies, and *Blonde* (2022) is one of them.

Blonde is directed by Andrew Dominik. The movie was rated NC-17 by Motion Picture Rating for sexual content such as nudity and sexual scenes. NC-17 means no children 17 and under, advised that people under 18 will not be admitted to watch the movie. Andrew Dominik previous movie, *Killing Them Softly* (2012), has become a nominee for Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival, a prestigious nomination in the movie industry. He also received a Stockholm Film Festival best

script winner for the same movie in 2012. Andrew Dominik's *Blonde* was released on September 28, 2022. The movie's story is an adaptation of Joyce Carol Oates's fiction book with the same title. *Blonde* is a movie about Marilyn Monroe's life since she was a kid, how she became a star, her struggle in the movie industry, and until she died. However, one is not a creation without critics. *Blonde* received backlash due to the exploitation of Marilyn Monroe's figure, played by actress Ana De Armas. *Blonde* shows nude scenes, erotic moments, and the forced abortion of the actress Marilyn Monroe. *The Blonde* movie gained critics for the objectification of Marilyn Monroe's figure. According to movie critics Roger Ebert, *Blonde* abuses and exploits Marilyn Monroe. The top critic on Rotten Tomatoes wrote that *Blonde* is condemned for exploiting Marilyn. New York Times movie critic Manohla Dargis wrote that *Blonde* indeed portrayed a super-talented actress. However, the movie director is more attentive to examining Monroe's body than getting inside her mind. Dargis also stated that *Blonde* is a necrophiliac entertainment to exploit Monroe. As Los Angeles Times movie critic Justin Chang stated, the *Blonde* movie is not about Marilyn Monroe but about making her suffer. The audience critics say that no matter how well the acting or the movie is, watching *Blonde* is an unpleasant experience. Another audience member commented that the movie is brutal, but it is the director's artistry.

Blonde is a docudrama, which means a motion picture that represents the two forms that are documentary and drama. The documentary is a documentation of factual events, and drama is the impersonation of life, docudrama can be described as a hybrid genre (Ogunleye 2005, 479). The movie is based on Joyce

Carol Oates's book that tells the fictionalized story of Marilyn Monroe or Norma Jean. However, not all of the part in the movie was fictionalized. The events in the movie were hybrid with factual events. *Blonde* movie telling the life of Marilyn Monroe started with Marilyn Monroe's childhood in the United States of America, 1933, to her career as a well-known actress until her death. However, despite her phenomenal career, Marilyn Monroe must face men's objectification all over her career as an actress and singer. The docudrama movie portrayed her life as an actress where she must perform seducing, even nude, and it made men gained pleasure by looking at her picture. She keeps doing this throughout her career. Her stardom affects how the movie industry treats women as sexual objects. Marilyn Monroe is also known as 'Blonde Bombshell,' the name that becomes a stereotype of blonde women who seduce and perform sexy behavior in the movie industry. Marilyn Monroe is known not only for her sex appeal but also for her iconic looks that became a reference for other women, such as her dress and hairstyles. However, even at her death, Marilyn Monroe is still remembered as a sex icon, in which media and movies still portrayed her with objectification. This objectification can be seen in the *Blonde* movie when telling the story of her career beginning. Although Marilyn Monroe objectification helped her to be a famous celebrity, she also became an example of how Hollywood used and treated women. This caused the problem of gender and women in the entertainment industry.

The significant reason to choose this movie as an object is that the male gaze is still relevant today while women's bodies are not available for public consumption at all times. Women are also treated unequally than men in the movie.

It is a fact that the number of Hollywood men directors is more than women; thus, the movie they create usually contains the male gaze. The male gaze is how women are objectified through the camera lens in movies. This occurs because men are in control of the movie industry. The unequal number of men and women directors, scriptwriters, and movie production teams is dominated by men. Since the production process, every decision is based on their point of view. Studies of gender inequality in movies have recorded the dominance of men in creative roles, commonly as director, producer, and writer, and in some important creative roles, women have become marginally worse over time (Verhoeven 2020, 2). In comparison to men, women are systemically marginalized in professional roles that hold decision-making power (Ehrich 2022, 1). In addition, Martha Lauzen, the executive director of the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, stated that it is crucial to understand that women's underemployment is beyond directors, producers, editors, and cinematographers but in every business.

Marilyn Monroe is one of the most recognizable and well-known actresses in Hollywood history that appeared in various films over her acting career. She is credited in 30 movies but only starred in 12 of them. In early of her career, Monroe starred in *Don't Bother to Knock* (1952). A suspense genre movie about a young woman named Nell who works as a babysitter and meets a pilot while staying at a hotel. Later, the pilot man discovered that Nell was mentally unstable and threatening the baby she cared for. Monroe's character here is not the typical dumb blonde compared to her other movies but rather a haunting and scary woman. Since this is her early movie, Monroe has not yet set her iconic typical trophy wife blonde

character. This 1952 released movie contrasts with *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), where Monroe started her debut as a gold-digging blonde character. This movie is about a showgirl named Lorelei who falls in love with a wealthy man, but the man's father disapproves of her love because he thinks Lorelei is after the money. Thus, the father hires a private detective to stalk her. Although Lorelei's character seems like a dumb blonde, she is witty and plans a scheme to marry a rich man (Elliott 2017). Unlike *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953), whose character is an archetypal dumb blonde, Lorelei gives a perspective of being a materialistic woman who is logical in society rather than being naïve. However, *How to Marry a Millionaire* is the most significant movie for Monroe due to the iconic dumb blonde archetype character she played, and the movie was a massive success in Monroe's career, proving her a powerful player in Hollywood and a significant asset for 20th Century production (Elliott 2017). The next movie about Monroe's biographical movie, *My Week with Marilyn* (2011), is starred by American actress Michelle Williams. The movie is set in 1956 when Marilyn already being an actress. Unlike *Blonde*, this movie is not about the dynamic life of Monroe but about the people who are close to Monroe telling who is Monroe in their eyes. The movie is not telling the story chronologically as *Blonde* but is non-linear because of the adaptation from Volin Clark's journal under the same title. This movie does not expose Monroe's character's body as *Blonde* did. The latest documentary about Monroe is *The Mystery of Marilyn Monroe: The Unheard Tapes* (2022). Unlike *Blonde*, which tells about Monroe's life since childhood, the story is about Monroe's death in a crime documentary genre. Similar to *My Week with Marilyn*, this crime

documentary is not focusing on exposing Monroe's character body but instead on the interview of people who knew Monroe and were interviewed about her death. Thus, from the similar movies above, the genre distinguishes *Blonde* from the first. *Blonde* is a drama about Monroe's life from childhood until her death. The movie tells the overview of her life, including her marriages and possible affair. Second, the most significant comparison between *Blonde* and other movies about Monroe is the primary character's race. This movie is the first to cast a Latina actress to play an American woman.

Another film released in the same year as *Blonde* but contrasting in every aspect is *She Said* (2022) movie. The movie is about two reporters that revealed Harvey Weinstein's sexual assault case against Hollywood actresses. As an adaptation from the New York Times newspaper investigation and the book under the same title by the reporters, *She Said* setting is happening around the emergence of the #MeToo movement (Ramnath 2022). The movement encourages women to expose sexual harassment, rape, and abuse in the workplace. This investigation movie aims to give a stage for the sexual harassment survivor and open the door for conversation about women's negative experiences (Coggan 2022). Both movie releases can elicit a comparison between how they portray women. In contrast to women empowerment in *She Said*, *Blonde* shows that the Hollywood industry still needs to depict Marilyn Monroe in trauma rather than her triumph as entertainment (Fenwick 2022). In relation to this, contemporary male gaze discussion extends beyond the experience of being seen through the lens of all people to the pressure to conform to the patriarchal view, such as how women must endure being seen

under the male gaze, how women think about their body, and how heterosexual white men see the world (Wells 2022). Hollywood already produced many movies that tell the story of Marilyn Monroe. Thus, *Blonde* retelling of Marilyn Monroe highlights the objectification and sexualization of women in modern Hollywood, despite the social progress that has been made.

The male gaze would focus primarily on women's bodies, and the story would be less about women's thoughts and feelings. In this research, the writer will analyze how the male gaze operates to exploit Marilyn Monroe's figure in the 2022 movie. The Hollywood movie industry back then until today is still dominated by men, and many of the portrayals of women are produced from men's point of view (Grunberg 2020). In the early days of Hollywood movie production, women were often portrayed as passive people with little independence and often as an object of desire. One of the famous directors in the past Hollywood was Alfred Hitchcock, and his movies mostly placed women characters play as a damsel in distress with no character development, such as *North by Northwest* (1959) and *Psycho* (1960). However, sexual objectification in Hollywood movies can still be found in recent movies. A lot of movies such as *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015), *365 days* (2020), and many more gained men audiences while locating them as the subject while women as the object and *Blonde* movie is one of them.

To pursue the aim of the study, the writer will use Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory to determine the findings through the narrative and non-narrative approach. The writer will analyze the scenes that are relevant to the aim of this study. The data will be retrieved from the movie itself. There are several previous

research regarding the male gaze in cinema. In analyzing this topic, the researcher found several previous studies related to the theory of the study. First, Shuo Xu (2022) examined a journal on *The Male Gaze in Hitchcock's Movies*. In Hitchcock's suspense films, the "male gaze" hypothesis is heavily employed. The researchers examine Hitchcock's subconscious voyeurism due to the fact that Hitchcock's actual life and works differ greatly in their treatment of women and use of the male gaze. The second related research is a study by Fajar Mahanani, Safa Aqilla D, and Salsabiela Aurelia P. B (2020) about male gaze representation towards women in Dot Dodo advertisements. The research discovered that women are often becoming the object of exploitation, how a woman in seductive clothes and how the camera spotlight focuses on the woman's curves. This research uses Roland Barthes's Semiotics to explore the issue. The third related research is by Tazkia Safira (2020), which declares gender and sexuality through the male gaze by analyzing *The Favourite* movie. The research found that the movie still perpetuates the male gaze through women characters. The study uses Roland Barthes's Semiotics to explore the issue. Another study is authored by Sharon Perera's (2020) work titled *A Perpetual Subject of Male Gaze: An analysis of Amal Neerad's Malayalam Movie Varathan*. In this study, Perera argues that the female main character is always positioned as inferior to her husband and other men in society. The research uses semiotic and psychoanalytic methods to analyze *Varathan* movie.

The following research is *The Image of Woman and the Concept of Male Gaze in George Bernard Shaw's Arms and the Man*. The research discovered the representation of women characters in George Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894).

This study employed Mulvey male gaze theory and Freud's scopophilia. The study found that there is inequality between the men and women characters. The research argued that the male gaze exists in the movie and a play. The next study is *Quenching the Thirst of the Male Gaze* in 2021. The research is about the campaign of India's Tropicana Slice Juice and how the campaign use women's bodies as marketing technique. The research shows that the camera gaze enhances the sexual objectification of the actress by delivering a shot of the actress's body and pose.

Lastly, *Framing Women: Examining The Male Gaze in Nadine Labaki's Films*, written by Elie Harfouche, is a study that inspects the use of the male gaze to understand the representation of women in movies. This research used the discourse analysis method to reveal the social perspectives of the way women are depicted in Nadine Labaki's movies.

The related study above differs from the writer's research because the writer will explore the depiction of the male gaze using Laura Mulvey's theory and analyze it using the narrative and non-narrative approach. This research will focus on how the male gaze toward Marilyn Monroe's figure is still represented in the 2022 movie.

1.2 Statements of the Problems

According to the Background of the Study above, Marilyn Monroe's character depiction in *Blonde* (2022) has male gaze issues in how the director created it. There are interesting notions that need to be discussed:

1. How does the male gaze operate and its impact in the *Blonde* movie?

2. To what extent does the male gaze in the *Blonde* movie signify the current woman objectification issue in the Hollywood movie industry?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the statement of the problem, the objectives of this research are:

1. To explore and analyze how the male gaze works and impacts in the *Blonde* movie.
2. To understand the length of the male gaze issue that is still practiced in the Hollywood movie industry from the signification of the male gaze towards Marilyn Monroe in the *Blonde* movie.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research aims to boost the understanding of the male gaze in movies displayed in *Blonde* (2022) by analyzing related scenes. This study helps to enrich the knowledge about the male gaze in the movie. For the reader, this study can help them understand the male gaze on gender representation and show objectification towards women in the movie. Moreover, the research could help people interested in studying the male gaze in movies.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

This study is concerned with the issue of women objectification depicted in the *Blonde* (2022) movie towards Marilyn Monroe's figure. The narrative and non-narrative approach will be used because the object of this study is a movie, and the theory to analyze the findings is Laura Mulvey's male gaze. However, this study will not discuss other issues irrelevant to the study's topic.

1.6 Method of The Study

To pursue the aim of this research, the theory of the male gaze by Laura Mulvey is used together with the qualitative method. The qualitative study focuses on the deep analysis and interpretation of text and images of the object (Creswell 2007). The writer chose this method because the object of the study is a movie that needs to be interpreted through text rather than numbered data. The research will use the narrative and non-narrative approach. The narrative will be applied to analyze the movie's structure, including the story's narration that is limited to the main character scenes. The non-narrative will be applied by analyzing the *mise en scène* aspects, such as the cinematography, setting, and angle of shots.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Women objectification : An idea central to feminist theory which means seeing and/or treating person, usually woman, as an object. Objectification happened in the sexual realm (Stanford 2010).

Male gaze : Women in art that are placed as objects of attraction and assigned the passive status of being looked-at, whereas men are the active subjects who look (Mulvey 1989).