

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The definition of women ranges from feminists to feminists. If it is seen in terms of biology, women are those who are capable of reproduction. Psychoanalyst describes women as those with no possession of a phallus. However, sociologically, women are those who are oppressed by men's objectification (Schonig 2020). In retrospect to the word "women," Judith Butler in her book "Gender Trouble (1990)" differentiates the meaning between sex and gender. She says that regardless of how biology defines sex, gender is constructed by culture. As a result, gender has no cause-effect relation with sex, and gender cannot be fixed as sex. As stated by her, "gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way" (Butler 1990). Therefore, gender is a social and cultural construction in society (Titika, et al. 2020).

Regarding gender and sex, there is a term called "gender role." It is what society expects a certain gender to do or not do. Women are supposed to care for children and be housewives, whereas men are expected by society to become the family's breadwinners. As the name implies, gender roles are applied to the roles that a certain gender is supposed to feature (Hegelson 2012). This notion of gender roles has been portrayed many times in the media. In the study that was done by Collier-Meek et al. in 2011, regarding gender roles, they examined the depiction of gender roles by the characters in movies that were produced in the span of the 90th until 21th centuries. They found out that even though female characters had some

assertiveness, which according to their study was grouped into masculine traits, their assertiveness was limited only to animals and children, and rarely to the male characters. The assertive traits that they possessed suggested a fairly submissive way of being assertive, exhibiting a traditional gendered message. (Dawn, et al. 2011). In another study conducted by Jocelyn Nichole Murphy (2015), the top grossing movies from 1993 until 2013 were examined. It was revealed that even though women got much greater representation in roles that valued their intelligence, strength, and independence more frequently compared to earlier films, they were still not seen as important, if compared to the men in the movies.

This traditional notion of gender roles, however, does not go unchallenged as time goes by. In a study of more recent movies, Michele Fry (2009) found that both male and female characters exhibited dualistic characterizations of being feminine and masculine. In more recent movies, such as Harry Potter series and the Disney Series in the 21st century, female characters were depicted as stronger and more active, whereas male characters were passive and gentler (Dawn, et al. 2011). This was the movie author's way of getting the readers to see how the notion of traditional gender roles was challenged in their work. From these two comparisons, we can see that throughout time, the notion of gender has been challenged more and more. Women do not only have 'feminine' criteria, whereas men do not only possess 'masculine' criteria. Sometimes, they exhibit both criteria and challenge the existing stereotypical gender roles. Butler (1990) says that gender is something that is socially constructed; therefore, because there is no continuity between a

sexed body and a socially constructed gender, it does not follow for ‘men’ to accrue to male bodies and ‘women’ to be interpreted only for female bodies.

A gender role can also be called a gender stereotype, in which the stereotype itself is a set of beliefs regarding people of a certain group (Hegelson 2012). This is deemed problematic because not all people act the same as how the gender role is described. Some women may have masculine features, whereas some men may also have feminine features. The existing gender roles also put a great deal of pressure on people, so they behave in their respective gender roles, as written by Vicki S. Hegelson in her book titled “Psychology of Gender”:

The prescriptive component of gender-role stereotypes says that men should be masculine and women should be feminine ... If you are a man who does not want a career but would prefer to stay home and take care of a family, how will other people react? If you are a female who wants a career and does not want to have children, how will others react? (Hegelson, 80)

According to Tyson on her book *Critical Theory Today* (2006) traditional gender role cast women as emotion or irrational, nurturing, weak, as well as submissive; whereas men, protective, decisive, rational and strong. Behaviors forbidden to men are usually considered as “womanish,” thus signifying feminine attributes as inferior toward masculine attributes. Tyson (2006) further elaborates that whenever patriarchy wants to undermine a behavior, it declares the said behavior as feminine.

This study used a Netflix TV series titled *Shadow and Bone* (2021) as the object. The series is about the story of Grishas, a ‘witch’ who can manipulate elements ranging from fire to the beating of humans’ heartbeats. The conflict revolves around

a Shadow Summoner (the Darkling or Kirigan), whose ancestor is assumed to have created “the fold,” a black mist that separates West Ravka and East Ravka. The myth tells us that only a Sun Summoner can erase the fold, as the fold itself contains many dangerous creatures known as Volcra. The Volcra does not hesitate to kill any human who dares to cross the fold. However, the main problem is that to get to East Ravka, people in West Ravka have to cross the fold, and so do people in East Ravka. Alina Starkov, the main protagonist, is discovered to be the Sun Summoner, and no Grisha has ever held the power of summoning the light until now. As she is declared as the only one who can erase the fold, she is then taken to a little palace to train, meet Kirigan, and leave Malyen Oretsev, her childhood friend, behind. Alina is depicted as a hero, the chosen one, and a protector of others. In this study, she is assumed to have challenged the notion of traditional gender roles and performs gender role reversal by being masculine instead. The same goes for Mal. He is assumed to have challenged the notion of traditional gender roles and performs gender role reversal by being feminine instead.

The researcher compared the chosen movie, *Shadow and Bone* (2021), to another movie which has the same genre, fantasy-scifi, and a strong female lead, *Twilight Saga* (2008-2011) by Stephanie Meyers. Contradictory to Alina, who protects Mal and challenges the traditional gender roles, Bella can be seen as a damsel-in-distress. In this narrative trope, damsel-in-distress refers to a situation in which a woman has to be rescued by a man or a group of men from kidnapping or being placed in general peril; the motivation for the rescue must be love, lust, or kinship (Feminist Frequency 2013). Both movies focus on their romance.

Moreover, the relationship between Mal and Alina has a role reversal in traditional gender roles, whereas the relationship between Bella Swan and Edward Cullen follows the notion of traditional gender roles. In the movie, Bella is constantly attacked by her enemies and must always rely on Edward for assistance, adhering to the traditional gender roles in which men are seen as stronger than women and women are seen as weaker, requiring strong men to protect them.

There are several occasions where Bella is seen as helpful, but only if she is aided by the models of male success: the chivalrous and domineering characters, even though their traits scream danger toward women, including Bella. The *Twilight Saga* (2008-2011) series imply that women should follow Bella's model of being the damsel-in-distress, which discourages female independence and encourages female helplessness without the presence of a man (Hendricks, 2001). However, in the *Shadow and Bone* (2021) TV series, Alina can be seen as a character who saves Mal's life countless times. The relationship between Alina and Mal can be assumed to be a role reversal between traditional gender roles, unlike in the *Twilight Saga* series.

A few previous studies have been done to analyze how female and male characters challenge the notion of traditional gender roles in movies. This study chose five related studies to give further understanding of the topic: three international studies and two local studies. The international studies are *Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses* by Dawn Elizabeth England, et al. (2010), *Animus, Anima, And Shadow: Gender Role Representation In Fantasy Films Of The Third Wave Feminist Era* by Caroline Lopez (2010), and *The Rise of*

the Androgynous Princess: Examining Representations of Gender in Prince and Princess Characters of Disney Movies Released 2009–2016 by Benjamin Hine, et al. (2018). The local studies are *A Depiction of Gender Role in the Movie of Incredibles 2 (2018)* by Nurul Fahira, et al. (2020) and *Gender-Role Portrayals in Indonesian Movies* by Alfy Amanda (2017).

Based on the previous studies mentioned above, which is over the years 1937-2018, gender role reversals have been found more and more in movies. However, the most recent movie based on the previous studies mentioned, the subject of challenging gender roles is *The Incredibles 2* (2018). This study provides an analysis of portrayal of gender role with the newest object, *Shadow and Bone* (2021) which is analysed using Butler's performativity.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background given, here are the issues that the writer proposes:

- a) How gender role is portrayed in the relationship between Alina and Mal in *Shadow and Bone* (2021)?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study proposed by the writer, based on the statements of the problems above, are as it follows:

- a) Analyze how gender role is portrayed in the relationship between Alina and Mal in *Shadow and Bone* (2021)

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to benefit society and readers by raising awareness about the traditional roles of gender. Moreover, this study gives an understanding of how traditional gender roles can be challenged through the depiction of women in the media. Gender role itself is important to address because traditional gender roles put pressure on women or men about what the 'ideal' woman or man should be according to that notion; it also puts restraint on women and men's full potential (Inge, et al. 1972).

This study can also be used for further reference for the researcher who wants to use the same object, as the object is new and no other study has chosen *Shadow and Bone* (2021) TV Series as an object of study so far. For those who want to use and see the depiction of gender roles between the two characters (Alina and Mal), they can also use this study for their references. Hopefully, this study will bring some benefits in the academic field.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Gender Role : Gender role are what society is expecting a certain gender to do or to not do. Women are supposed to care for children and be housewives whereas men are expected by society to become the family's breadwinners. Gender roles, as the name imply, apply the roles that a certain gender is supposed to feature. The feature itself are not assigned to their biological sex, but because of the social roles which both gender hold. (Hegelson 2012)

Performativity: Something that produces a series of effect. The way people act, speak and talk in ways that make the impression of being a man or being a woman.
(Butler 2011)