

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Society has treated women as oppressed for centuries since strong beliefs of superiority naturally given to men have existed. In ancient Greek civilization, the struggles of women are considered real because of the restrictions on their roles played outside households. Several consequences of the precedential statement are found, such as a controversy considering women a part of the nation's apparatus, and restrictions on women's rights by involving *kyrios*—a male figure who is in charge of control and protection (İŞIKGİL 2017). The responsibility of bearing and educating children, including a must to capable being a slave at home were normal (Seitkasimova 2019). This is seen as the opportunity of men groups to be overpower as the conception of masculinity in ancient Greek thickens because of lacking female voices. Masculinity at that time is not problematic, but obviously intuitive (Rubarth 2013).

In the present, the continuity of women's oppression is still evident in every sphere of life. Gender hierarchy can be found and sadly has already implanted to the societal system. Male-biased work culture constantly exists, giving such a pressuring struggle to women as they keep being treated unfairly. Scholars have mentioned some statements on behalf of this issue. The unfairness of women within their workplace is analogous to how they are willing to work in three fourth fields, getting half paid from

the dreadful job, and never reaching any opportunity to even own the land they are working for (Seitkasimova 2019). Thus, society keeps finding a way to search for any mistake, and pressures women with a lot of stereotypical judgment they actually do not require to follow. Physical appearances, namely binary oppositions can lead to parameters of role every human should obey, e.g., strength capacity or different body parts. Men and women are defined against each other in a binary gender perspective; men are not women, and women are not men. It formulates the influence of understanding of men through the understanding of women (Kang et al. 2017). However, it is inappropriate to determine what should and what should not be done by both parties as they have an innate right to explore the world in every way possible.

In developed countries such as the United States, gender inequality still occurs despite the advanced education the community earns. Some gender inequalities simultaneously exist and persist in different varieties of forms such as cultural and political rights, norms, and institutional rules in the United States by the twenty-first century (Wright and Rogers 2015, 364). The transformations of gender relations in presenting the equalities include legal rights, paid labor force, distribution of domestic household labor, sexuality and family structure. It is driven by statements that women are less autonomous, irrational and easily controlled by emotions (Wright and Rogers 2015, 370-387). Right after three decades of the American Revolution, New Jersey had the honor to be the first state allowing women to vote before the 19th Amendment states about gender equality in the United States Constitution. It lasted until 1807 when

the state eventually released the restriction to white men only (Schuessler 2020). Regardless, as the time passes by, the inequality is reduced to some extent that enables women more actively to participate and provides capacity for change, even though the roots of disparities are still held by those who embrace the traditional gender roles. Inequality based on gender remains critical in the contemporary United States, as gender is utilized as an important motive to interrelate workplace relations, household and family management, which is somehow beneficial for the male's dominance in public places, the recovery of the male as the family's provider, and supporting the degradation of value in child caretaking (Ridgeway in Blair-Loy and Harron 2012).

Women's struggle has never gone too far from the notion of male dominance and patriarchy system, which values traditional gender roles more than developed one. The duration of these inequality systems indirectly affects almost all society elements in behavior and definitely treatments to both genders, whether men or women. It leads to a sexism attitude, which is an act that embraces men as superior individuals. Sexism occurs when prejudice and discrimination are based on individual's gender (Leaper and Brown 2014). Sexist practices advance confinement of women to naturalness—for them being in home serving their husband and child, and decline of women's self-development (Johnson 2012). Certain studies display a result of high scores of sexism in men denoting high self-concept, while women do not have that sort of comparison (Ruiz et al. 2017). An act of sexism then views women less normally than men, considering that it is common to do such othering based on gender first. According to

Johnson (2012), issues in the interpretation of sexism range from gender-based moral divides, attitude towards women's physical appearances, masculinity and political representations. An act of sexism is delivered by two notions regarding male dominance which both radiate the same exercise of power, which are explicit derogatory and positive nurturance that further become types of sexism. Glick and Fiske (1996) see this opportunity to propose ambivalent sexism, a theory that incorporates both two types of sexism above and put them in a relation of interrelated coexistence. Both sexism types exist to serve justification in a patriarchal social system even though the implications are different. Ambivalent sexism is composed as a result of synchronous male dominant power and dyadic female strength (Glick and Fiske 1997).

Although the era of feminism has arisen, it still involves the inequality and spotlight of men as canon, which is found in the book entitled *The Boy from the Woods*. *The Boy from the Woods* is written in 2020 by Harlan Coben, a mystery and thriller novel writer in America. In his every work, Coben commonly involves a typical mystery trope, in which engages an unsolved or misinterpreted past reenactment, and murders with fatal incidents. Furthermore, an involvement of characters' disappearances and problematic issues are always done by female characters, as if indicating that the female ones are usually weak the male characters have to play as a hero for them. His recently released book, *The Boy from the Woods*, similarly reflects his preference for masculine characters over female ones. Because the author is well-

known for his interest of creating mystery fiction, it's no surprise that this book has drawn so much interest from readers. The general rating for this book of his that has acquired popularity on Goodreads is four out of five stars, and the majority of readers appear to be interested by his approach of presenting many perspectives that continue to overlap in order to highlight some significant links between them. Therefore, this novel is interesting to be discussed because of the possibility of oppression and unspoken acts done by the female characters despite of decent position or logical reason that can be examined from those connected links appeared in the novel.

As in his recent book, he also tries to imply the canonical notion of male dominance and problematic issues accused of female characters. Although the novel mainly talks about the main character named Wilde whose background is more or less similar to that of the infamous children's story entitled *The Jungle Book*, oppression of female characters is implicitly evident as the story proceeds with his involvement in resolving the issue of the high school girl's missing case that invite such strong female character to be the lead investigator and him being the second in command. However, all the male characters including him are prevalent in superiority considering dependency of female characters towards them. Two main female characters that are investigated are Hester Crimstein and Delia Maynard. Crimstein is an infamous county attorney who also runs a television show which takes interest in crime investigation. She also happens to be recruited by one of the presidential candidates as the investigator for terrors towards him and being head of operation in Wilde's case. On the other side,

Delia Maynard is the wife of an infamous tv producer, who unexpectedly has a troublesome past that is assumed to ruin her husband's career if the public knows what happens. In solving the issue, both characters experience oppression by several factors such as ignorance, rejection, and inferiority. Besides these main characters, several other female characters are also seen experiencing sexism, which supports the women's oppression more evident.

Since *The Boy from the Woods* was recently published, it is not common to find previous studies analyzing the book. However, related studies that discuss inadequate treatment towards women are found. Research conducted by Afroni (Afroni 2013) entitled *Analysis on the Issue of Women Oppression in F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*, which the novel is written in 1925, portrays women as stereotypically submissive to males. The result presents that woman accepts all nourishment and allow men to be accountable in the public domain to the scale that they are not required to work in order to meet their basic needs. They are, nonetheless, subconsciously oppressed by the system, dependent on their husband for comfort, and unable to perform tasks independently (Afroni 2013). Research conducted by Eka Wilany in 2017 entitled *Feminism Analysis in the Novel Woman at Point Zero* shows the women struggle against the equality by an act of passiveness since the amount of inequality is outweighing to be resolved by rage. This research also supports the argument in *Theme of Oppression of Women in Naguib Mahfouz's Realistic Novels: An Analytical Study* by Hezam in 2018. Hezam exhibits that several female characters written by Mahfouz

in 1940-1950 have unpleasant experience regarding oppression within household until workplace, in which hold a conclusion that those discrimination still happens until present days. In *Feminism: Silence and Voicelessness as Tools of Patriarchy in Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus* by Ifechelobi in 2014, it highlights silence as a tool for patriarchy. The novel itself uses silence to describe the unequal atmosphere as well as the cultural background in African literature which elaborates the same idea of oppression.

This study analyzes the oppression experienced by women characters in Harlan Coben's mystery novel, *The Boy from the Woods*. An injustice is performed by male characters and the female ones are seen choosing to be passive so that the male characters can take over the role and create the evidence of the patriarchal system clearer. Therefore, in order to analyze the issue, ambivalent sexism will be used as the theory. Discussed by Glick and Fiske in 1996, ambivalent sexism is appropriate to be the main theory of the study since it supports the possibility of ambivalence in male characters' attitudes of seeing female ones performing their traits. Moreover, the theory is also seen as compatible with identifying the female characters' responses and portrayals of experiencing sexism, either they accept or oppose the disparities. Correspondingly, ambivalent sexism is important to be known and considered because it educates women to not fall for men's behavior of excessing power and unconsciously leads to othering gender.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background above, the problems of this study are as follow:

1. How do female characters experience sexism in the novel?
2. How do male characters maintain sexism in the novel?

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follow:

1. To analyze how female characters experience sexism in the novel and
2. To analyze how male characters maintain sexism in the novel.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Gender inequality endures to the present day, generating anxiety among oppressed women since it continuously disadvantages them, despite having happened in prosperous countries. Sexism is the advanced outcome of gender discrimination, and it treats women in both a nurturing and hostile manner, which has the same destructive effect on women's rights consolidation. The study is significant in providing a better understanding of sexism concerns since they are prevalent in everyday situations. The analysis is also carried out to raise awareness of the growth of sexism in society in order to become more cautious in perceiving and evaluating the men's movement, as well as to educate women, particularly those who are vulnerable to men's abuses of power. Finally, the writer hopes that this study can make contributions to the English Department of Universitas Airlangga by broadening the knowledge of sexism issues

through arguments, elaborations, and analysis as well as inviting various viewpoints to promote interest in the specific subject.

1.5 Definition of Key-Terms

The followings are the terms used in this study:

Ambivalent Sexism:	Ambivalent sexism refers to a set of discrimination behaviors that have both positive and negative implications for the perpetrator. What is meant by "positive" and "negative" are two ways of delivering sexism attitudes, both of which are equally dangerous to the perceiver (Glick and Fiske, 2001).
Gender inequality:	Gender inequality is a treatment that undermines one gender based on merely binary oppositions and excluding the individual's capability. It drives disapproving treatment in life (Wani and Dastidar 2018).
Oppression:	Oppression refers to unfair justification towards one party which as an injustice does not emerge merely because it is victimizing several groups of people, but also based on a reason that unchallenged societal norms and laws (Hammell 2006).

Sexism: Ideologies and behaviors that label and marginalize particular abilities and personal qualities as gender-constructed characteristics (Johnson 2012).