

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Gender stereotypes are an issue that still exists and can be found in everyday society. Stereotypes of gender roles refer to general social expectations that then will be placed on members of a particular gender, and affect the way people view and engage in the world in which they live (Choi et al. 2021). Not only involving women, gender stereotypes also involve men and it can be in the form of what women or men should do through the assessment of the surrounding community in everyday life (Barli, Sili, & Valiantien, 2017). Brannon states that there are two stereotyped values that are formed including masculinity and femininity which threaten society, both men, and especially women, are in a situation of tension and anxiety (Brannon, 2000). Assumptions regarding the characteristic features of masculine and feminine in appearance and behavior can find different stereotypes, it depends on the perception of each individual. The commonly assumed notion is that a man is strong and tough, whereas a woman is soft and weak.

Patriarchy is one of the points that amplify gender stereotypes. The term "patriarchy" is defined as a social structure in which men hold more power than women, which is reflected in the wider society (Choi et al. 2021). Johnson asserts that according to patriarchal for instance, men are aggressive, daring, rational, emotionally inexpressive, strong, coolheaded, in control of themselves,

independent, active, objective, dominant, decisive, self-confident, and un-nurturing. Whereas women, on the contrary, they are described as non-aggressive, shy, intuitive, emotionally expressive, nurturing, weak, hysterical, erratic and lacking in self-control (especially during menstruation), dependent, passive, subjective, submissive, indecisive, and lacking in self-confidence (Barli, Sili & Valiantien 2017). Patriarchal practices remain passed down from generation to generation. Consequently, patriarchal behaviors are still prevalent nowadays and have settled in society's culture.

Women are often placed in lower positions by patriarchal society. As defined by Sultana (2010), 'patriarchy' refers to male control in both the public and private spheres (Fauzia & Anik, 2019). In fact, the existence of patriarchal ideology in society has existed since the history of human civilization until now it still continues to exist in various parts of the world or countries, it's just that the level of attachment is different. As long as society continues to construct gender status and roles itself, this patriarchal culture will continue (Winarsih, Sili & Ariani, 2021).

The continuing patriarchal culture has resulted in feminist issues continuing to emerge and develop. Many cases can be found in general, the salary gap between men and women and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions or in certain sectors is one of them. Such cases clearly reflect this inequality and show how gender norms still influence social structures. Besides, cases of sexual harassment, domestic violence, and related issues are increasingly rampant in various walks of life.

Last October, there were cases of sexual violence against three female students in Bogor City, West Java, who were victims. Two of the perpetrators were boarding school administrators. The head of the Bogor City Police Criminal Investigation Unit said that the two suspects committed the acts in 2019 and 2023 ([Adri, 2023](#)). The case was successfully revealed due to a report from one of the victim's parents after getting a confession from the victim herself. The perpetrator indoctrinated the victim with the lure of affection and religious lessons that would not fade. The doctrine was also to prevent the victim from telling others. However, in fact the victim still revealed the truth of what happened. The victim's decision to report the incident reflects recognition of the freedom to make choices and the responsibility to act against injustice. In line with the case, Beauvoir, in her theory of existence emphasises individual freedom and responsibility. In the context of women, Beauvoir observes that women are often defined by their relationship with men and by social norms that inhibit their freedom. She called for women to realise their freedom and take full responsibility for their lives and choices (Lestari, Aggraeni, & Bowo, 2023).

One of the movies that tackles the issues raised is *Women Talking* by Sarah Polley, which is available on the AppleTV+ streaming platform. In context of this, specifically in Canada there were clear social differences between men and women beyond physical differences a generation ago in the early 20th century, a set of socially determined behavioral norms and performance standards would then be attached to each gender. Legalising married women's property rights was one of the first moves in the direction of equality for Canadian women, and women were

considered "persons" under the law in 1929. Subsequently, Canada started experiencing a major transformation in the field of gender roles/gender equality and relations. With the foundations of gender equality established in the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada has a long-term commitment to gender equality.

However, in 2009 in a Mennonite colony, Manitoba, an archipelago in Bolivia whose inhabitants shun modernity, a group of men were arrested and convicted of the rape and sexual abuse of 151 women and girls including children in this small Christian community. Mennonite colonies are largely self-governing, and they are pacifist, adhere to adult baptism, and think that leading a simple life is necessary (The Rapes Haunting a Community That Shuns the 21st Century, 2019). Based on this event, Miriam Toews wrote a novel titled *Women Talking* which was later adapted by Sarah Polley into a movie with the same title released in 2022 (*Miriam Toews: 'I Needed to Write about These Women. I Could Have Been One of Them' | Fiction | The Guardian, n.d.*).

Miriam Toews is a novelist who was born and raised in the Mennonite town of Steinbach, Manitoba, and currently lives and writes in Toronto. She mostly wrote books about her background. Toews did grow up in a small Mennonite town, but it was clearly very different from the Bolivian colony which was closed to the world. In 2011, the year the trial revealed crimes in Bolivia, Toews decided to live in Toronto. Based on the event: rape and sexual abuse (crimes) that occurred in Bolivia, Toews considered that she needed and was obliged to write the stories of Bolivian women. Therefore, Miriam Toews' eighth novel was born, entitled *Women*

Talking. She easily made the setting in this fictional story naturally because she had the same background as the Bolivian woman, coming from a Mennonite colony. Apart from that, the characters she created were depicted according to how the actual Mennonites lived. Even one of the characters named August was inspired by his own father.

Sarah Polley is a director who was born in Toronto and started her career as a child actress before eventually becoming a director. Polley said that Toews' novel was interesting because the book grapples with many of Polley's questions throughout her life. When reading the book, Polley raised many questions which were then answered and it is such a strong writing in her opinion. Therefore, Polley then executed the novel into a film closely to the book with the same title. She makes a few alterations, such as skipping over further details about the Mennonites' particularities and replacing August as the narrator with Autje. Other than that, Polley's narrative has a more defined conclusion and concentrates more on women and children. *Women Talking* movie tells the story of women in the Mennonite community, a reform movement in the sixteenth century who must make decisions and fight to be free from the heinous crimes committed against them. The issue of gender stereotypes and patriarchy is clearly depicted in this film through the women's oppression which shows that men dominate women.

Study about gender stereotypes and patriarchal resistance has been conducted by several researchers. Barli et al. (2017) analyze the portrayal of the patriarchy system which is portrayed in the Zemeckis' *Beowulf* film, and also analyze the portrayal of female main characters who break the patriarchy system

which is portrayed in the film. The patriarchy system and its four elements such as male dominance, male identification, male centeredness, and obsession with control are promoted in the society which is portrayed in Zemeckis' *Beowulf* film (2007), and female main characters in the film still can challenge and even break the male privileges in the Dane kingdom society (Barli, Sili & Valiantien, 2017).

Furthermore Fauzia and Anik (2019) argues that patriarchy is a political institution and also defines the term politic as the power-structured relationships, whereby one group of persons is controlled by another. By using radical feminism by Kate Millet, in their study Fauzia and Anik (2019) describes the struggle of Afghanistan women in gaining opportunities to move forward in their society. The characters build self-consciousness, to demand autonomy in decision making, to declare resistance to be controlled by the men, and to get their basic rights such as the right to speak, the right to get education, and the right to work to earn money, and that are the women's primary step to get rid of male domination and to proceed in their lives as well as in their society.

Based on the background, this study examines gender stereotypes constructed and amplified by patriarchy of the movie, and also examines the existentialist journey of female characters in the movie *Women Talking* in 2022 directed by Sarah Polley that reflect resistance to gender stereotypes and patriarchy. This study focuses on the female characters who experience the problems related to the issue by using Simone de Beauvoir's theory of existential feminism. The author chose the transcript of the movie *Woman Talking* because it has many problems regarding feminist issues so that the writer raises one of them, namely the existence

of women. Unlike previous studies that analysed Woman Talking in the form of a novel, the author chose to analyse Woman Talking in the form of a movie.

1.2 Research Question

1. How do gender stereotypes faced by female characters portray in the Woman Talking movie?
2. How does the concept of existentialism in the Women Talking reflect the journey of female characters' resistance to gender stereotypes and patriarchy?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to analyze the representation of gender stereotypes that are constructed by patriarchy in the Women Talking movie by Sarah Polley. Apart from that, this study also analyzes the existentialist journey of female characters that reflect resistance to gender stereotypes and patriarchy in the film Women Talking movie by Sarah Polley.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the female characters including Ona, Mariche, and Salome in the film Women Talking by Sarah Polley. The characters are chosen by the writer because they play an important role throughout the whole film and they are directly involved or experience the discrimination and sexual abuse related to

the issue that being discussed. In addition, their character development, society background, their resistance, issues surrounding gender, stereotypes, and resistance to patriarchy have high relevance in today's society and culture so it is hoped that this research can provide insight, reflection, and awareness in responding to these social issues.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, the writers hope this study would be useful to be a reference study or further research in examining the gender issue as the result of patriarchal ideology.

Practically, this research is also expected to raise the awareness that patriarchalism will cause gender stereotypes that result in various impacts to society, certain groups, even to individual life.

