

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Gender roles have become one of the main issues of concern in social and cultural studies, particularly in relation to how societies shape individual identities based on gender. In many cultures, expectations of women and men include not only their roles in the public sphere, but also in the family context. These gender constructions affect various aspects of life, including how a person is shaped, accepted and seen in society based on their gender.

Gender roles in everyday life set expectations and norms about how individuals should act, think, and behave according to their gender. These roles are heavily influenced by prevailing cultural values and social beliefs. In many cultures, traditional gender norms often portray men as dominant figures characterized by strength and leadership, while women are positioned in the role of caregivers and maintainers of family harmony. Although women today are allowed to be the breadwinner, but they are still expected to manage the household by the society at the same time (Putri & Anzari, 2021).

Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1970) explains that the dynamics of men as dominant figures and women positioned in the role of domestic caretakers are part of a patriarchal system, where gender relations are not only biological, but also a political tool that regulates the power structure in society. This can be seen in the scope of the family, which is often one of the main institutions that reinforce this inequality.

Family is the first place where individuals begin to learn and internalize gender roles that are defined by social norms. In this case, society expects women to assume certain roles in the family, such as being a good mother, the primary caregiver, and the keeper of household harmony. The role of mother, child, or other family member often comes with a certain burden, which is related to social expectations of how they should act, feel, and interact with other family members. Traditional gender parenting patterns applied by parents have a significant impact on the development of children's behavior around gender roles (Ullrich, Houtte, & Becker, 2023).

The role pressures of these social norms are often felt more acutely by women, especially in family contexts that reflect how social and cultural norms reinforce gender hierarchies. Expectations on women to be patient, responsible and put the needs of others first are often not matched by the support they receive. This limits women's freedom to make more autonomous life choices.

In the perspective of Bruce J. Biddle (1979), the concept of *Role Theory* explains that social roles are not only passively accepted by individuals, but also constructed by social expectations that are continuously reinforced through communication and social interaction. Biddle emphasizes that social expectations of gender roles are formed through three main elements: roles as social expectations, roles as patterns of behavior, and roles as social interactions.

The issue of role burden can be seen through women who are in strategic positions in the family, such as firstborns who carry out multiple roles that must fulfill responsibilities both outside the home and within the family. The eldest

child is often positioned as an unofficial leader who must shoulder more responsibility than their siblings, emotionally, socially and practically. For eldest daughters, this pressure is often greater, as they are not only faced with traditional expectations as a nurturing figure, but also as a leader or decision-maker within the family structure.

Malibu Rising by Taylor Jenkins Reid depicts complex family dynamics, with Nina as the main character who plays a central role as the eldest daughter. As the eldest child in the Riva family, Nina had to deal with unbalanced responsibilities from a young age by facing the expectations of a society that expected her to act as the emotional and social stability caretaker of her family, regardless of the personal sacrifices she had made. This situation is a clear reflection of the social construction that places women in a subordinate position, where their responsibilities are often not valued equally with their efforts. Through Biddle's perspective, role theory emphasizes that individuals learn and perform their social roles based on the expectations placed on them by their social environment. In this case, Nina's role as the eldest daughter is not just a family responsibility, but also the result of a social structure that expects women to take on the role of caregiver and leader in the family.

The portrayal of Nina's character in this novel reflects the concepts discussed by Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (1970), where patriarchal structures shape and control women's roles in the family and society. Millett argues that gender roles are not natural, but socially constructed to maintain male dominance. The dysfunctional condition of the Riva family becomes one of the main driving forces behind Nina's gender burden. After being abandoned by her

father and later losing her mother at a young age, Nina is left to raise her siblings alone. This situation places her in a fatherless and motherless environment, where no adult figure is present to fulfill the role of caregiver. In this novel, Nina is not only considered as the first child, she is also forced to be a surrogate mother figure for her younger siblings and the head of the family after her parents fail to fulfill their responsibilities. This illustrates how patriarchal family structures place an unequal burden on women by expecting them to sacrificially assume responsibilities that are not theirs and uphold the stability of the family, regardless of their own aspirations and well-being.

In previous studies, *Malibu Rising* has been used as a source of study in various fields, the study by Hendriyani and Pratiwy (2024), “*Illocutionary Speech Acts in Taylor Jenkins Reid’s Novel Malibu Rising*” which focuses on the types of illocutionary speech acts contained in the speech of the main characters in this novel. Using a qualitative approach, this study explores the contextual meaning behind the characters' speech acts and shows how the dialogue between characters reflects family dynamics, personal struggles, and the search for identity using the theory of illocutionary acts. The results of this study highlight that in the novel *Malibu Rising* directive and expressive acts are the most frequently used types of illocutionary acts. The use of competitive and conflicting speech acts is also used in this novel, where competitive acts can cause social tension, while conflicting acts emphasize character commitment and potential conflict. Illocutionary acts help to explore the main themes of the novel.

In the study by Angelina (2023), “*Post Infidelity Stress Disorder Found in Taylor Jenkins Reid's Malibu Rising*” which examines the emotional and psychological experience of the character June who experiences *Post Infidelity Stress Disorder (PISD)* which is the impact of the betrayal she experienced. Using a qualitative approach, this study found that June's character underwent drastic changes after her husband cheated on her. The impact of *PISD* not only affected her mental and physical health, but also impacted her family dynamics, with her children shunning her and feeling ashamed of her behavior. June's *PISD* reflects the gendered challenges faced by women struggling in their roles as caregivers, also illustrating how difficult it is for them to recover from the emotional trauma caused by betrayal in relationships.

As *Malibu Rising* is a recent novel, there is still little scholarly work focused specifically on analyzing the book, particularly within the fields of feminism and gender studies. Although gender questions and the role of women in the family have been thoroughly discussed in feminist theory, discussion of the woman firstborn burden of remains limited. Past studies have mostly focused on the labor of mothers or women in the workplace and home, without necessarily taking into account the particular expectations and responsibilities that are placed on eldest daughters in patriarchal family structures.

Moreover, feminist literary critique tends to speak of the double burden in terms of women balancing professional and domestic responsibilities. However, there has been little debate about how this concept works itself out in familial relationships, particularly for the eldest daughters who will be expected to fulfill both caretaking and leadership roles within the family. This study seeks to fill

this knowledge gap by investigating the woman firstborn burdens of Nina Riva in *Malibu Rising* and how patriarchal family structures impose unequal burdens on eldest daughters and construct their identity and agency and the sociocultural expectations of the eldest daughter in a patriarchal society faced by Nina.

Previous studies on the novel *Malibu Rising* have discussed linguistic aspects such as illocutionary speech acts (Hendriyani & Pratiwy, 2024) and the psychological impact of infidelity on June's character (Angelina, 2023), but there has been no study that highlights the gender burden experienced by firstborn daughters in dysfunctional families. This study offers novelty by examining how these expectations become a gender burden that Nina must live with through the lens of Bruce J. Biddle's *Role Theory* (1979), which explains how individuals respond to social expectations attached to certain roles. The benefit of examining these expectations is to provide a deeper understanding of the often invisible psychological and emotional burdens experienced by firstborn daughters in patriarchal family structures. As the unequal distribution of gender roles is still widely considered normal, these conditions have the potential to reinforce structural inequalities in family dynamics and negatively impact women's personal and psychological development. In addition, Kate Millett (1970) radical feminist theory will be used to highlight how the patriarchal system plays a role in perpetuating the placement of women in subordinate roles, including within the family. Focusing on the character of Nina, this study aims to show how the burden on firstborn daughters is not only a result of family dynamics, but also a product of patriarchal social construction. This perspective aligns with the scholarly consensus in feminist theory, which

emphasizes that gender roles especially those tied to caregiving and familial responsibility are socially constructed and maintained through cultural norms rather than biological determinism. By analyzing this through literature, the study reinforces existing academic discussions on how women's private struggles often reflect larger systemic inequalities.

The novel *Malibu Rising* by Taylor Jenkins Reid selected as a data source because of its strong representation of the gendered burdens experienced by the firstborn daughter in the family. The novel portrays how social expectations shape Nina Riva's roles and responsibilities as the first child, showing the inequality in gendered roles. In addition, *Malibu Rising* offers a relevant context for analyzing how social and cultural constructions affect women's identity and autonomy in family dynamics.

1.2 Research Question

1. How do social expectations shape Nina's role and responsibilities in *Malibu Rising*?
2. How does gender construction shape Nina's role dynamics?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

1. Analyze how social expectations, as explained in Biddle's role theory, contribute to the gender burdens experienced by Nina as the first-born in *Malibu Rising*.
2. Examines the influence of patriarchal family structure on the role of firstborn children.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study analyzes the gendered burdens placed on eldest daughter, in the character of Nina Riva in Taylor Jenkins Reid's *Malibu Rising*. The study explores how the patriarchal family structure assigns parenting and leadership responsibilities to the eldest daughter that will later shape their identity and autonomy. Using a feminist analytical framework based on Kate Millett's critique of patriarchy, and B. J. Biddle's role theory, this study analyzes Nina's role, her experience of broader sociocultural expectations of the eldest daughter in a patriarchal society, and her familial obligations.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study focuses on the gendered burdens experienced by firstborn daughters by analyzing the character of Nina Riva in Taylor Jenkins Reid's *Malibu Rising*, exploring how patriarchal family structures shape the caregiving and leadership roles imposed on firstborn daughters, and the impact this has on their identity and autonomy. Using a literary feminist framework based on Kate Millett's critique of patriarchy and Biddle's social role theory, this study examines the social expectations that shape Nina's role and her family obligations. In addition, it places Nina's experience within the broader context of sociocultural expectations of the eldest daughter in a patriarchal society. Using this approach, this study provides insights into how social expectations reinforce gender inequality in family dynamics.