

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Feminism is a movement and a way of thinking that advocates for gender equality, particularly in relation to women's rights in various aspects of life. It also emphasizes the freedom of individuals to define their identities and social roles without being constrained by patriarchal pressure. According to Johnson (2005), patriarchy is not merely a pattern of individual behavior but a form of social organization that systematically privileges men. In male-centered societies dominated by cisgender heterosexual masculinity, women's identities and roles are continuously shaped by norms constructed to sustain male dominance. Women are expected to conform to feminine roles, submit to beauty standards, and fulfill restrictive social expectations, which limit their autonomy and self-definition.

Initially, the feminist movement focused on achieving legal equality between men and women. However, it has gradually expanded its scope to address broader issues of identity and structural oppression. Freedman (2002) argues that feminism has evolved toward a deeper analysis of patriarchy, identity, and intersectionality as part of the struggle to dismantle systems of power that oppress women in multiple dimensions, not only within the legal sphere. Patriarchal oppression operates across interconnected social, cultural, and psychological domains. Socially, women are confined to domestic and

nurturing roles that restrict their participation in public and political spaces. Culturally, media and traditions perpetuate idealized images of femininity and beauty that dictate how women should look and behave. Psychologically, these pressures generate internalized inferiority and body dissatisfaction, reinforcing patriarchal norms from within. Therefore, feminist thought extends beyond legal struggles toward resistance against deeper patriarchal structures that shape identity, representation, and self-perception.

One of the feminist approaches that addresses these issues is postmodern feminism, which emerged as a critique of earlier feminist perspectives that treated women's identities as fixed and universal. Such perspectives often generalized women's experiences and reduced womanhood to a single definition. Beauvoir (1956) asserts that womanhood is not a natural or biological essence but a result of social construction. Similarly, Butler (1990) argues that gender is a performative construct, emphasizing that gender identity is produced through repeated social practices rather than rooted in biological determinism. This perspective highlights that women's identities cannot be reduced to a single universal model but are shaped by diverse cultural and social contexts.

Postmodern feminism rejects the notion of a singular truth about what it means to be a woman. Postmodern feminism sees identity as fluid, complex and diverse. It argues that being a woman cannot be defined by biology alone, because every woman's experiences are shaped by their background, culture, class, and social context. It focuses on questioning how society constructs the

idea of gender and challenges the boundaries that define what women should be or do. Butler (1990) states that gender should not be seen as merely the expression of biological sex. Rather, sex itself is constructed through language and culture, gender is something that is socially “performed” and “do” repeatedly rather than “being”. Pinasthika et al (2024) similarly emphasize that gender is not naturally given at birth but is performative and socially constructed, continuously shaped through individuals repeated daily acts. This means that gender is not a natural result of biological sex but a socially constructed classification of what it means to be a woman or a man. Postmodern feminism also broadly rejects trans-exclusionary radical feminist (TERFs) ideologies that define womanhood solely based on biology. According to Pearce et al (2020), such TERF positions ignore decades of feminist scholarship which argue that sex and gender are discursively co-constituted, and that womanhood cannot be reduced to biology alone. These views are considered discriminatory because they replicate patriarchal logic by regulating who is entitled to the category of “woman,” thereby excluding transwomen and reinforcing essentialist norms. Identifying as a woman is not determined by one’s biological anatomy, but by one’s gendered experience and performance.

Women’s bodies also cannot be separated from the influence of social, cultural, and political forces. The representation of the body is not simply a physical matter, but rather the outcome of ongoing social construction, continually reinforced through media, advertising, and dominant beauty norms. Bordo (2003) states that while beauty ideals may change over time, they

consistently function to discipline and control women's bodies in accordance with patriarchal expectations. Women's bodies have become political sites and symbolic terrains regulated by cultural discourse. Widiyanti (2024) emphasizes that the representation of women's bodies is never neutral but always mediated by cultural narratives, turning women's bodies into symbolic spaces where meanings of gender and power are inscribed. This condition illustrates how the pressure placed on women to achieve an ideal body image, slim, youthful, white, and symmetrical is not merely a matter of aesthetic preference, but rather a mechanism of control within modern patriarchal systems. These beauty standards shape the way women understand and perform their gender, turning the body into a space of performativity that is filled with demands, surveillance, and disciplinary practices.

The socially constructed representations of gender and body image are consistently reproduced through popular media, particularly in movie. Mulvey (1975) states that in many movies, men are portrayed as active subjects, while women are rendered passive objects of visual pleasure. This highlights how women are frequently positioned to satisfy the male gaze, often reduced to decorative or secondary roles. Feminist cinema, however, has the potential to subvert this structure by granting women control over their own narratives and representations. One such feminist work examined in this study is "Barbie" (2023) movie, directed by Greta Gerwig.

"Barbie" (2023) movie is chosen in this study because it presents postmodern feminist discourse through its narrative, characters, and visual

language. The iconic doll long associated with blonde hair, a slender figure, and a constant smile, is reimagined as a symbol of resistance against stereotypes. Furthermore this movie is relevant for this study because it deconstructs such gendered symbols, critiques social expectations, challenges dominant norms, and reexamines what it means to "be a woman" in modern society.

1.2 Problems of The Study

Based on the background explained above, the problems of the study are:

1. What is forms of resistance to gender performance and stereotypes are presented in "Barbie" (2023) movie?
2. How does body image and beauty standards is being critiqued in "Barbie" (2023) movie?

1.3 Objectives of The Study

Based on the background and the problems, this study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze the forms of resistance to gender performance and stereotypes in "Barbie" (2023) movie.
2. To examine the body image and beauty standard critiques in "Barbie" (2023) movie.

1.4 Limitation of The Study

This study focused on analyzing the forms of resistance to gender performance and stereotypes in “Barbie” (2023) movie and how does body image and beauty standards is being critiqued in “Barbie” (2023) movie. The analysis is supported by gender performativity theory by Butler (1990) and feminist body theory by Bordo (2003), which provide frameworks to understand how gender identity and body representation are socially constructed and performed within patriarchal culture.

1.5 Significance of The Study

The results of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically.

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

This study is expected to contribute to the development of knowledge, particularly in the field of gender studies. The findings may also serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in postmodern feminism, gender performance, and body discourse.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

This study is also expected to help readers and future researchers critically understand gender and body representation in media. Furthermore, this research is intended to raise awareness of the importance of creating

feminist discourse that is inclusive and diverse, rather than confined to patriarchal and exclusionary narratives.



CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE, CONCEPTS, AND THEORIES

This chapter provides a review of previous researches and discusses the concepts and theories that support this study

2.1 Review of Related Literature

This study reviews five previous researches consisting of two theses and three journal articles that discuss gender performance, stereotypes, body image, and feminist perspectives in movies and media.

The first thesis was written by Cahya (2024), entitled “Deconstructing Gender Stereotypes in the Barbie Film”. This study focused on the construction and resistance to gender stereotypes experienced by female characters in Barbie Film, directed by Greta Gerwig. The analysis emphasized scenes and dialogues that reflect gender stereotypes. The study applied gender stereotype theory by Deaux and Lewis (1984), which categorizes stereotypes into four aspects: traits, behaviors, physical appearances, and occupations. It also employed resistance theory from Brinkman and Hamilton (2022), which includes active resistance, fluid resistance, and negotiated resistance. The research used a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. It concluded that the female characters in Barbie face various forms of gender stereotypes and actively resist them, reflecting efforts to deconstruct gender

norms. This study is relevant to the current research because both examine Greta Gerwig's Barbie film as the data source and explore resistance to gender stereotypes beyond just the main character. Furthermore, both studies address the concept of body image and beauty standards although from different theoretical angles. While the first study employs a general gender approach, this study applies a critical and performative lens through theory of gender performativity.

The second thesis was written by Iduwan (2022), entitled "Breaking Gender Stereotypes in the Baby Blues Movie". This study identified gender stereotypes assigned to the main characters Dika and Dinda, and analyzed how they challenged these roles through a body swapping experience in the film. The study used Butler (1990) theory of gender performativity, gender stereotypes theory from Martin & Dinella (2001), Evans and Davies (2009), and Copenhaver (2002) to classify masculine and feminine traits. A descriptive qualitative method was applied. The findings revealed that prior to the body swap, Dika embodied stereotypical masculine traits strong, dominant and financially responsible while Dinda was portrayed as gentle, emotional and domestic. After the body swap, both characters performed roles that contradicted these stereotypes, indicating that gender roles are not fixed but negotiable. The relevance of this study lies in its use of Butler's gender performativity theory and its focus on characters who subvert gender roles, which aligns with the present research. The differences between these studies lie in the focus of analysis, which is situated in different domains.

The third article was written by Traesar et al (2025), titled “A Gender Performativity Analysis on Gender Norms Portrayed in Louisa May Alcott’s Little Women”. This study examined gender norms and gender performativity in 19th-century America, focusing on how the characters Jo March and Theodore Laurie Lawrence reject gender roles. Using Butler (1990) gender performativity theory and a feminist literary approach, the study explored how these characters “perform” gender rather than embodying it naturally. An intertextual and historical perspective was integrated into the analysis. This study is relevant because it shares the same theoretical framework and demonstrates how repeated social acts construct gender identity. The differences between these studies concern the data used by the writers and contextual focus in different time periods.

The fourth article was written by Pitaloka (2025), entitled “Media Influence on Unrealistic Beauty Standards and Their Effect on Body Image.” This study analyzed how various forms of media, films, television, advertisements, and social media shape societal perceptions of the ideal body and how this affects different gender groups, cisgender and LGBTQ+ individuals. It used feminist theory from Beauvoir (1989) and Butler (1990), applying a qualitative method. The findings emphasized media’s significant role in reinforcing unrealistic beauty standards and their impact on mental health, body image, and gender identity. The study suggested increased media literacy, inclusive body representation, and media accountability as possible solutions. This research aligns with the current study in its use of

Butler (1990) theory and its critique of beauty standards. However, it differs in focus, as the present study specifically uses a single movie as its data source, while previous study covered various media types.

The fifth article was written by Sirait et al (2025) entitled “Subversion and Gender Performativity in the Film *Clueless* (1995): An Analysis Based on Judith Butler’s Theory.” This study focused on how the main characters Cher, Tai, and Christian subvert and construct gender identity through performative actions. It emphasized how film can challenge rigid gender norms through costumes, behavior, and symbolism. Using Butler’s (1990) gender performativity theory, the study applied a descriptive qualitative method with hermeneutic analysis. The similarities with the present research lie in the use of Butler’s (1990) gender performativity theory and the view that gender is socially constructed through repeated acts. However, the studies differ in their thematic focus and representational context.

2.2 Concepts

Concepts are a crucial component in academic writing. They help the writer understand the subject thoroughly and provide a foundation for analyzing data. This study uses three concepts: Resistance, Stereotype and Movie.

2.2.1 Resistance

Resistance refers to an attitude or response toward injustice. In social and cultural contexts, it involves opposition or refusal to submit

to power, policies, and norms that are oppressive, unfair, or enforced. Scott (1985: 290) states that "resistance includes any acts carried out by members of subordinate groups to reject or reduce the demands of dominant groups or to reinforce their own claims to resources, status, or space". In patriarchal societies women, queer, and non-normative gender identities are often positioned as subordinate.

2.2.2 Stereotype

Stereotype is a common phenomenon in social life. Stereotypes may occur consciously or unconsciously. Saguni (2014) explains that a stereotype is a belief or assumption about specific traits associated with a group of people, generalized without considering individual differences. These beliefs are often not based on direct experience, but are shaped by culture, media, and social constructions. Stereotype also contribute to how society defines femininity and masculinity, shaping expectations about body image, behavior, and social roles. Such constructions are not merely harmless ideas but powerful narratives that influence how individuals see themselves and how they are treated by others.

2.2.3 Movie

Corrigan (2012) defines a movie as a form of visual storytelling that communicates ideas, emotions, and experiences through images,

dialogue, and sound. Movies function not only as entertainment but also as cultural texts that reflect and shape social values, ideologies, and identities.

2.3 Theories

There are two main theories used in this study. The first is Gender Performativity Theory by Butler (1990), explained in the book “Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity”. This theory is used to identify and analyze forms of gender performance. The second is Feminist Body Theory by Bordo (2003), found in the book “Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body”. It is used to examine the film’s critique of body image and beauty ideals.

2.3.1 Gender Performativity

Gender performativity theory explains that gender is not an inherent or biological identity. Unlike sex, which refers to biological categories such as chromosomes and reproductive organs, gender is the result of a series of actions, behaviors, and expressions that are shaped and repeated within social structures. According to Butler (1990), the gendered body does not possess a fixed or natural status. It becomes meaningful as gender through the accumulation of repeated performative acts. In other words, gender is produced through social

action, not biologically inherited. This means we are not born as men or women, we become so through roles and acts we repeatedly perform consciously or not. As such, gender can be disrupted or redefined through subversive repetition.

2.3.1.1 Gender as Performance

In everyday life, most people unconsciously follow social rules that shape how they speak, dress, and behave according to norms aligned with cisgender and heteronormative standards. From childhood, these norms are instilled in how one walks, talks, or even laughs based on societal expectations of one's gender. Boys are expected to be assertive, unemotional, and masculine, while girls are taught to be gentle, graceful, and feminine. These behaviors become what is known as gender performance, which refers to how gender is displayed through repeated behaviors shaped by social norms.

This idea is explored further by Butler (1990) in *Gender Trouble*, where they argue that gender is not a naturally embedded identity but a form of performativity a set of socially repeated acts that come to be seen as truth or essence. Butler (1990: 43) states that “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame.”. This implies that what is perceived as “woman” or “man” is the result of consistent performance, not something essential or biologically determined.

A similar notion is presented by Newton (1972) in her book “Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America”. Newton studied how drag queens construct their gender expression through performance, costume, body language, and humor demonstrating that gender identity can be produced and negotiated. Newton (1972: 5) observed that “they always use some props which help to create the partial or complete visual appearance of a woman.”. This shows that being a woman, in this context, is not based on biology, but something that can be created, played, and performed just as Butler (1990) suggests in their theory of gender performativity.

2.3.1.2 Social Construction

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” is a famous statement by Simone de Beauvoir (1956) in her book “The Second Sex”. Beauvoir argues that being a woman is not a biological destiny, but the result of social construction that imposes meaning and value on women’s bodies. She shows how history, myth, and social institutions shape gender identity unequally, positioning women as “the Other” in contrast to men as the default subject. This foundational idea greatly influenced Butler’s formulation of gender performativity in Gender Trouble (1990).

2.3.1.3 Gender Subversion

In a social structure where cisgender and heteronormativity are dominant norms, gender expression is often positioned as a reflection of fixed biological identity. However, certain social practices show forms of gender appearance that deviate from dominant gender representations, opening space to reinterpret those constructions. Newton (1972) argues that the impersonation of women by homosexual men is not merely entertainment, but a symbolic representation that challenges the boundaries between masculinity and femininity. Deliberate and exaggerated imitation in drag reveals that gender is a social construct that can be manipulated and performed. Butler (1990) affirms that such performative acts carry subversive potential disrupting and dismantling normative gender structures by exposing the imitative nature of identities that are otherwise seen as essential.

2.3.2 Feminist Body Theory

Feminist body theory explains that women's bodies cannot be understood merely through a biological lens, but must be seen as socially and culturally constructed sites that are ideologically charged. The body becomes a contested space where power and control operate. Body image and beauty standards are not neutral or natural; rather, they are the result of historical and cultural processes that regulate how women should appear, move, and feel about their own bodies. Bordo (2003: 152) emphasizes that "our bodies, too, are trained through culture," indicating that bodily behaviors, habits, and ideals are not

instinctive, but shaped through cultural conditioning. These practices are often internalized and perceived as natural by women, when in fact they are constructed invisibly by dominant norms.

Beauty standards such as being slim, youthful, white, and flawless, are not merely aesthetic preferences, but powerful cultural codes used to discipline how women behave and perceive themselves. Through practices such as dieting, makeup, compulsive exercise, and cosmetic surgery, women often internalize these standards as part of their personal responsibility. However, this internalization reflects conformity to patriarchal and consumerist norms. As such, the body becomes a political site, demonstrating how power operates not only through external force but also through self-regulation and normalization.

2.3.2.1 Cultural Body

The body is not merely a biological entity that exists in isolation, it is a cultural construct produced through social relations and discursive practices. The way bodies are understood, moved, and oriented is shaped by gender norms and structures of power. The body becomes a medium through which symbolic systems operate, including patriarchal ideologies that inscribe limitations on the expression of women's physical presence. Young (2005) states that women's bodily comportment, motility, and spatiality are not the result of natural

weakness, but are shaped by social constructions rooted in patriarchal culture. These structures condition women to be hesitant, closed off, and perpetually self-aware under the gaze of others. In this context, women's bodies are constrained not by biological inferiority, but by internalized social norms that restrict how women present and express themselves in public space. Furthermore Young (2005: 42) emphasizes that "Women in sexist society are physically handicapped. Insofar as we learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified." This statement underscores the concept of the cultural body. A body shaped by dominant norms and discourses that place women in both physical and symbolic subordination.

Wollstonecraft (1792), in her foundational feminist work "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman", critiques how girls are taught from a young age to prioritize beauty and obedience. As a result, their bodies become passive and disciplined through repeated practices that suppress intellectual potential and autonomy. According to Wollstonecraft (1792), women are taught to decorate their "gilded cages" rather than escape them, suggesting that the female body is socially produced as a site of patriarchal compliance. Bordo (2003: 20) expresses a similar idea by stating, "Our bodies are necessarily cultural forms; whatever roles anatomy and biology play, they always interact with culture." In patriarchal culture, women's bodies are subjected to constant

monitoring, modification, and discipline to align with idealized forms both beauty ideals and body ideals, that are socially constructed. Therefore, the body is never formed neutrally, but is always the outcome of complex historical and social arrangements a cultural construct.



UNMAS DENPASAR