

Legally Blonde:
A Challenge on Blonde Stereotype

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

“A stereotype is a standardized conception or image of a specific group of people or objects. It exaggerates and exploits one or two attributes of a given group or class and applies to all member of that group without any distinction. It has a purpose to set that group apart from the mainstream.” (Jack Nachbar and Kevin Lause, p. 336). Jokes about the stereotypes are always present in everyday life and these stereotypes may affect these people’s lives and view on them. As we know that stereotype of something is not true, but some still believe that there is something behind this stereotyping.

Movie is one of the biggest influential media in society. It can affect society’s beliefs and values. There are many different harmful stereotypes today that are exposed in the media, including movie. These stereotypes can result in name calling, prejudice, and hurt feeling. “Dumb,” “ditzy,” “fun-loving,” and “flirtatious” are the attributes which follow the blonde women. The most popular stereotype about blonde women is “*the dumb blonde*.” There are a lot of jokes about this which is

known by the society. People think that blonde women are stupid and empty headed. However, this stereotype refers to the beautiful one, the ugly does not count. This stereotype has been believed by the people since so many years ago.

One of the movies that take the theme of blonde stereotypes is *Legally Blonde*. This movie is very straight to strike the stereotype of blonde women; we can clearly see it from the title. This movie is based on the novel of the same title by Amanda Brown. This movie is directed by Robert Luketic and has been released in 2001 by the MGM. The script is written by Karen McCullah Lutz and Kirsten Smith. This movie was nominated in 2001 Golden Globe Award for The Best Picture and The Best Actress for Musical/Comedy film. The main character of this movie is Elle Woods played by Reese Witherspoon.

The movie tells about a girl named Elle Wood. She is the girl every girl wanted to be. She is beautiful, sexy, popular, rich girl, and above all she is blonde. Elle Woods is a description of blonde woman in California. She loves shopping. She also loves all the hair cares and body treatments. In California, appearance becomes the first thing to be popular. And Elle Woods is an example of popular girl in California. She is the president of her sorority, The Homecoming Queen, Miss June in her campus calendar and also plays in Ricky Martin's video clip. She has a gorgeous boyfriend named Warner Huntington III. She dreams that she can be Mrs. Huntington III. One day she knew that Warner's grandmother is coming to the town brings a diamond ring. She is so happy because she thinks that Warner will propose her to be his wife because he asks her for dinner that night. All of her friends give a

congratulation card to her. She goes to boutique to buy a new dress for that special day. She is so happy that day.

Unfortunately, it is not a marriage proposal that she get that night but a break up words from Warner. When she asks why, Warner said that he has to go to Harvard Law School to reach his dream to become a senator, just like his father and brother. That is why he needs a Jackie and not Marilyn. Elle is shocking to hear that. She cannot believe Warner breaking her because she is too blonde.

After that she makes a plan to win Warner's heart again. To do that she must go to Harvard Law School just like Warner's does. However, all of her friends, teacher, and also her parents think that it is impossible for her to go to Harvard. Her friends and parents do not agree because they think Harvard is a place for nerd people. While her teacher does not agree because even though she gets A mark but that is for her merchandising design mark. However, she does not give up. She studies hard and not plays around like her friend to get a high LSAT mark. Finally, she is accepted in Harvard Law School.

However, a life in Harvard is not like what she imagines. She is treated like an alien. She is called Malibu Barbie when she gets there, just because she looks different. She becomes the one who is poked fun by everybody, just one man named Emmet who treated her differently. He always treated her nicely even in an embarrassing situation, for example he does not laugh at Elle when she dresses up like a playboy rabbit after she was cheated by Vivian and her friends. Vivian says that there will be a welcome party for the fresh men, and she says that Elle is invited. She tells Elle that it is a costume party. That is why Elle goes there wearing a playboy

rabbit costume. Even though everybody poked fun at her but she does not care. She only thinks how to get her love back. Then she gets so upset when she knew that Warner already has a fiancée.

Warner's fiancée is a Brunette girl named Vivian Kensington. Vivian is described as a serious and smart girl. Like another movie, if one character is blonde, Elle, then the other must be brunettes, Vivian. They become a rival in this movie. Elle always tries to get Warner's attention, but then she realizes that her school is more interesting than that. She tries so hard to get a good mark and always studies at the library. She does not care if everybody thinks that she is weird or what so ever. She even becomes one of the internship students in a murder trial and becomes the one who is trusted by the suspect because they are from the same school. In this case all the overripe students look jealous to her because their lecturer, Prof. Callahan, always asks her about anything. But that does not let her down. She always tries to be nice to everybody, and finally everyone becomes nice to her too, including Vivian who at first becomes her love rival. However, some people still looking at her as a dumb blonde, especially people in the court room. That is why she is still trying to prove that she is not dumb and cheap just because she is blonde.

This movie is not a stereotypical movie. Indeed it is a satirical one. This is a movie where the blonde is laughed at and in the same time it helps to clear misperception in this stereotype. This is an interesting theme for the reader because most women in America are blonde. That is why it looks so strange for the reader how come this stereotype exists in a community where most people in that community are looking like that. According to that stereotype, it means that most

people in America, especially women, are stupid because most of them are blonde. That makes the researcher wants to know further what is behind that stereotype.

B. Scope of Study

The writer wants to give a limitation in this research to avoid the bias that can exist. This research will only focus on Elle Woods Character as the main character eventhough there are many other blonde characters.

C. Research Question

The problem statement in this research is:

How does *Legally Blonde* The Movie challenge the blonde stereotype?

D. Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to describe how *Legally Blonde* The Movie challenges blonde stereotype.

E. Benefits of the study

The purpose of this study is to give an understanding that stereotypes often harm people so we cannot judge people from its characteristics as a result of stereotypes.

F. Research Methodology

a. Source of Data

The source data is the *Legally Blonde*'s film directed by Robert Luketic. The script is written by Karen McCullah Lutz and Kirsten Smith. This film is created based upon the book with the same title by Amanda Brown. The movie was released in 2001 by the MGM.

b. The Data

1. Main Data

The main data are the dialogues, attitudes, body languages, facial expressions, setting of time and place, and also the cinematic elements in *Legally Blonde* film which are significant with blonde stereotype as the main issue to answer problem statements.

2. Supporting Data

The supporting data will be taken from reference books, website, articles and criticism from the internet which relates with *Legally Blonde* film and blonde stereotype as the object of this research.

c. Technique of collecting and processing data

The technique of collecting data is using purposive sampling. The researcher begins with watching the movie carefully and repeatedly to understand deeper about the movie. The researcher then collects the data in form of dialogues and clips of picture from the movie which relevant with the blonde stereotype as the issue. It is using as a starting point to analyze the issue. After collecting the data, the researcher then studied the data and classified the data. After that, the researcher analyzes the

data based on the theory used in this research. Finally, the last step is drawing a conclusion from the analysis.

G. Theoretical Approach

This research belongs to American Studies. It means that it needs interdisciplinary approach to search the relation between the work of art and the experiences of American life. The researcher uses interdisciplinary approach namely semiotic film theory and sociological approach to be applied in this research.

Movie is one of the biggest influential media in the society. It can affect people's beliefs and values. As many social scientists and historians believed that the movies somehow reflect the desires, needs, fears, and aspiration of a society at a given time. (Robert .C Allen and Douglas Gomery, 1985, p. 154) Semiotic Film Theory is needed to find out the deepest meaning of the movie and also to dig out some information from it, through its characters, actions, settings, and even the soundtrack of the movie. It is because film usually reflected the conditions, the norms and values of that society. By seeing a film we can get information and also understand the condition of such society.

In this research, the researcher needs to understand the social condition of American society, blonde women in particular. As Warren and Wellek stated that "much of most common approach to the relation of literature and society is the study of works of literature as social documents, as assumed pictures of social reality. Nor can it be doubted that some kind of social picture can be abstracted from literature."

(Warren and Wellek, 1962, p. 102) The researcher wants to see the connection between the movie and the reality that exists in the society referring to blonde women. That is why the researcher uses sociological approach to analyze the movie. It is because movies usually reflected people's beliefs and values. We can not understand the movie without understanding the social condition, beliefs and values of the society that are reflected in the movie. Sociological approach is needed to find out the social background of the society regarding to the blonde stereotype exists in the society and how it affects the blonde women's life as reflected in the *Legally Blonde* movie. By applying this approach, the writer will see how the society thinks about the stereotype of blonde women.

H. Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized into four chapters. The first chapter is Introduction which consists of Background of the Study, Scope of the Study, Research Question, Objective of the Study, Research Methodology, Theoretical Approach, and Thesis Organization.

The second chapter is consisting of five sub chapters. The first is sub chapter A, which explains about Popular Culture. The second is sub chapter B which discusses about Semiotic Film Theory. The third is sub chapter C which explores the Blonde Phenomenon. The fourth is sub chapter D which discusses about the Stereotyping of Blonde Women. The fifth is sub chapter E which explores about Blonde Women social condition in America.

The third chapter explains *Legally Blonde the Movie challenges the blonde stereotype*. This chapter is divided into two subchapters. The first subchapter discusses *The Movie: Legally Blonde*. The second subchapter describes *Elle's challenges toward blonde stereotype*.

The last chapter is chapter four that is Conclusion.



