CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Women's empowerment is the process of giving women more control over important decisions in their lives and more opportunities to reach their full potential (Chen and Tanaka, 2014:7154). Empowered women are independent, have equal chances, and can make wise decisions in all areas of their lives. Empowering women is crucial for the health and development of families, communities, and nations because women can only reach their full potential when they live safe and fulfilling lives. However, to achieve empowerment, women must overcome various challenges, from gaining equal access to education and jobs to dealing with gender-based violence. Despite these obstacles, women persist in claiming their agency and resiliency, questioning gender expectations, fighting for equal rights, and making room for themselves in fields that have historically been controlled by males.

In United States of America, women's empowerment is intertwined with the broader fight for gender equality, which has a long and complex history. From the suffrage movement of the early 20th century to the ongoing push for equal pay and reproductive rights, women have continually fought to claim space in political, social, and economic spheres (McBride and Parry, 2011: 47). This battle for empowerment is often reflected in movies, which have the power to challenge or reinforce societal norms. The United States of America is consistently ranked

among the most technologically advanced countries in the world. It excels in fields like artificial intelligence, biotechnology, space exploration, and advanced manufacturing. The U.S. placed in second in terms of technological innovation and readiness (World Population Review, 2024). As a global leader in technological innovation, the United States of America also represents a nation where advancements in science and technology can significantly impact gender dynamics, as portrayed in the movie.

As a result, the fighting for women empowerment is mostly carried out through movies. A movie could tells the entire story, from the start of the problem to its resolution, and it often includes messages that make a point to the audience. Movies have a significant social impact, and many of the attitudes and behaviors depicted in movies can be used to understand how the society operates because every movie is set and developed in a particular culture. The state of society and all of its problems can be represented in movies, which in turn will make an impact on society by raising awareness and shifting viewers' opinions especially on this matter, about women empowerment.

One of the movies that addresses women's empowerment is entitled *Ex Machina*. *Ex Machina* is a 2014 sci-fi thriller, written and directed by Alex Garland. The movie focuses on Ava, an advanced robot created by Nathan, a man who keeps her in a tightly controlled environment. Set in a highly advanced technological environment, the movie reflects America's status as a world leader in technology. Ava's creation and confinement in a controlled environment mirror the limitations placed on women in male-dominated societies, but her growing self-awareness

and eventual escape symbolize the fight for independence and empowerment. Throughout the movie, Ava's interactions with Nathan and Caleb, reveal the power dynamics of control and manipulation. However, as she becomes more aware of her situation, Ava, with the help of Kyoko, starts to take control of her destiny. This journey represents women's empowerment, with Ava and Kyoko's struggle for independence mirroring the broader fight against systems that seek to limit and define women's roles. The portrayal of artificial intelligence in the movie also aligns with real-world concerns about the increasing role of technology in American society. As AI continues to advance, questions about the power dynamics between the creator of the robot in the movie and their creations become increasingly relevant. The movie thus serves as a metaphor for both technological evolution and the evolving fight for gender equality. This thesis will examine how the movie *Ex Machina* portrays women's empowerment, analyzing how the movie reflects and challenges societal norms about gender and power.

As a woman, the writer is interested in this subject because the writer is aware of feminists' long history of advocacy of women's rights, which is still being carried out today. Starting from the middle of the 19th century until the present, there have been four waves of feminism that have fought for the empowerment of women. By engaging with this subject, the study aligns with the broader goal of empowering women and promoting gender justice. Through research and analysis, it seeks to raise the voices of women and contribute to the growth of practices and policies that promote equality.

1.2. Research Questions

1. What is the characteristics of women empowerment in Alex Garland's movie *Ex Machina*?

2. What is the causes of women empowerment in Alex Garland's movie *Ex Machina*?

3. What is the impact of women empowerment in Alex Garland's movie *Ex Machina?*

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the characteristics of women empowerment in Alex Garland's movie *Ex Machina.*

2. To analyze the causes of women empowerment portrayed in Alex Garland's movie *Ex Machina.*

3. To analyze the impacts of women empowerment in Alex Garland's movie *Ex Machina.*

1.4. Previous Studies

For this research, it will be carried out by considering some previous studies as a guideline for the writer to determine each important step in this study. The first previous study is a journal article entitled "A Machine Like a Human Being - Transhumanism as New Humanism in the Movie Ex Machina" (2020) written by Aleksandra Sieradzka. The journal article analyzes how transhumanist themes are

present especially on modern movie. It explores whether machines may achieve consciousness similar to that of humans as well as the characteristics that distinguish humans, with Ava as the object of representation.

The second previous study is a journal article entitled "Hubristic Manipulation and Caleb(an) Resistance in Ex Machina" (2021) written by Talaat Farouq, Ashraf Said Qutb Metwalli, and Mohamad Elsebaey. This journal article analyzes how the battle between the human unethical superego and the compassionate alter ego was externalized in the movie.

The third previous study is the journal article entitled "Ex Machina in The Garden" (2016) by Brian R. Jacobson. In the journal article, the writer discusses how the movie is more focused on technical advancement and the potential and capabilities of the digital world. It centers on the nature and circumstances of human existence in a society ruled by big data, monitoring, and smart machines.

The fourth previous study is an undergraduate research thesis entitled "Posthumanism and Science Fiction: The Case of Alex Garland's Ex Machina and Annihilation" (2019) written by Hope Bronsky. This undergraduate research thesis examines the comparison of a trustworthy future for humanity and a commentary on scientific advancements in the movie "Ex Machina," and "Annihilation" which explores concepts in human biology.

The last previous study is a journal article written by Jennifer Henke in her research "Ava's Body is a Good One: (Dis)Embodiment in Ex Machina" (2017). The journal article shows how the movie *Ex Machina* discusses the way Nathan built Ava with a desire for a submissive sex object because he gave the female robot

a fully working genitalia but no morality.

This research thesis sets itself apart from the previous studies primarily through differences in data, theory, and methodology. In this research thesis, the focus to a more in-depth exploration of women empowerment within the context of the movie *Ex Machina*. Previous studies might have touched on various aspects of the movie, such as its technological themes, narrative structure, or philosophical questions. However, this thesis sets itself apart by specifically analyzing three key elements related to women empowerment by analyzing the characteristics, causes, and impact of women empowerment as portrayed in the movie.

1.5. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on how the characters in the movie *Ex Machina* portrays women empowerment. This study will mainly identify and assess several sexist behaviors done by the male characters which will inspire the female characters to empower themselves. In the intrinsic aspect, the writer will analyze the character and characterization of the characters in the movie, the conflict, the settings, the cinematography elements, and the *mise en scene*. Additionally, in the extrinsic aspects, the writer will analyze the characteristics, the causes and the impacts of women empowerment.

1.6. Research Approach

The writer uses a feminist approach to analyze the Ex Machina movie as the movie delves deeply into themes that intersect with gender dynamics, power structures, and the objectification of women. The feminist approach emphasizes the importance of empowerment and agency for women and marginalized genders

which involves not only identifying instances of oppression but also highlighting stories of resistance and advocating for social change (Hooks, 1984:1-5).

1.7. Method of Collecting Data

The writer uses library research as a method of gathering data through studying and comprehending information from textbooks, journals, articles, virtual resources, and documents. Hart (2001:13) states that library research is the process of finding, reading, and analyzing the existing literature on a topic to gather data and insights for a research project.

In library research, there are two sources of data, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data is one which is collected for the first time by the author (Ajayi, 2023:1). The primary data used in this research thesis is Ex Machina (2015) movie. Secondary data, on the other hand, is the data already collected or produced by others (Ajayi, 2023:1). In this research thesis, the secondary data are obtained from books, journals, articles, also electronic sources such as e-book and websites.

1.8. Writing Outline

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the background of the study, research problems, objectives of the study, previous studies, scope of the study, and the writing outline.

CHAPTER II THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter explains the theories and methods used to analyze the data of the research.

CHAPTER III   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter provides the research findings based on data analysis, utilizing theories to examine both extrinsic and intrinsic aspects.

CHAPTER IV   CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the conclusion from the results of data analysis obtained from the research.