

BAB 5

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the portrayal of body image and social stigma in *The Whale* (2022) by applying Erving Goffman's theories of stigma and dramaturgy, supported by intrinsic narrative elements and cinematographic analysis within the perspective of American Studies. Based on the findings, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the representation of obesity, stigma, and identity negotiation in contemporary American society.

First, this study finds that *The Whale* portrays extreme obesity as a major source of social stigma in contemporary American culture. Charlie's body is not merely represented as a physical condition but as a socially judged identity that triggers rejection, discomfort, emotional distance, and discrimination. Through dialogues, characterization, setting, and cinematographic techniques such as the confined apartment setting, close framing, and limited movement, the film visually emphasizes Charlie's isolation and social exclusion. Stigma toward Charlie appears both explicitly through verbal expressions such as "disgusting" and implicitly through avoidance, discomfort, and negative assumptions from other characters. As a result, Charlie is frequently judged based on his physical appearance and sexual identity rather than his personality or emotional experiences.

Furthermore, this portrayal strongly reflects the broader American cultural context surrounding body image and obesity. In contemporary American society, dominant body ideals often associate thinness with discipline, self-control

productivity, and attractiveness, while obesity is frequently linked to weakness irresponsibility, and moral failure. As discussed through Bordo's perspective, body image in American culture becomes socially meaningful because physical appearance is often used to evaluate personal worth. Therefore, *The Whale* functions not only as a cinematic narrative but also as a cultural representation of how obesity stigma operates in American society, particularly through public judgment, emotional distancing, and internalized shame.

Second, regarding the negotiation of stigma, this study finds that Charlie negotiates his stigmatized identity through frontstage and back-stage performances, as explained in Goffman's dramaturgical theory. In the front stage, Charlie carefully manages his public image, particularly during online teaching sessions, by turning off his camera, controlling communication, and presenting himself as calm and professional in order to avoid negative judgment regarding his body. Meanwhile, in the backstage, represented through intimate interactions inside his apartment, Charlie openly reveals vulnerability, guilt, emotional suffering, and insecurity regarding his body, failed family relationship, and past decisions. These private moments demonstrate Charlie's authentic self, where he no longer performs socially acceptable identities. Ultimately, *The Whale* (2022) demonstrates that stigma toward obesity extends beyond physical appearance and becomes deeply connected to morality identity, family relationships, and social acceptance. Through Charlie's experiences, *The Whale* shows how cultural values can marginalize individuals with obesity and encourages audiences to see obesity beyond physical appearance.