

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

In recent years, body image issues have become a common and important topic in contemporary society, where social standards highly idealize thin and controlled bodies and exclude those who do not conform to these standards. In Western culture, thin bodies are often idealized with discipline and moral obligations that must be carried out. According to Bordo (1993), thin bodies are culturally portrayed as controllable, so people with bodies that do not conform to this ideal are considered less self-aware and responsible, and less than optimal in caring for their bodies. This reinforces the social stigma against people with obesity, which can lead to discrimination, negative perceptions, and social exclusion, ultimately leading to emotional stress and isolation. In cultural media, films play a significant role in influencing values by normalizing certain body types and marginalizing others that are not ideal. According to Gilman (2008), obesity has historically been associated with laziness and lack of self-care, making physical appearance a primary moral judgment. This topic can be analyzed and explained in more depth through Erving Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma, which is defined as an attribute that demeans and lowers a person's social status. Visible physical differences, or "body abominations" This can lead to a lack of sense of identity, where stigma becomes internalized, resulting in

shame and isolation from the outside world. In the concepts explained, it shows that the film *The Whale*, directed by Darren Aronofsky, tells and depicts that Charlie is a man with extreme obesity whose body becomes the center of social judgment and also his deviation which is judged by tarnishing social morals resulting in his isolation. The isolation he experiences with the reactions of others, such as pity and discomfort, illustrates the process of stigmatization. The film also shows how stigma is seen through the guilt, shame, and self-disgust experienced by Charlie, which exacerbates his psychological distress. Then, from a dramaturgical perspective, Goffman explains how to control their identity through the appearance of "front stage" and "back stage", as seen in the main character's efforts to control his image while revealing his weaknesses in private. Based on this, this study applies Erving Goffman's stigma theory, supported by intrinsic and cinematographic and extrinsic elements, to analyze how social stigma is constructed and represented in the film. (Goffman, 1963).

## **1.2. Research Questions**

1. How does *The Whale* (2022) portray body image and obesity as forms of social stigma through intrinsic aspects and extrinsic perspectives within its cultural context?
2. How does the main character negotiate social stigma through front-stage and back- stage performances ?

### 1.3. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is:

1. To analyze the portrayal of body image and obesity as social stigma in *The Whale* (2022).
2. To investigate how the main character manages and negotiates a stigmatized identity through frontstage and back-stage performances based on Goffman's dramaturgical theory in *The Whale* (2022).

### 1.4. Scope of The Study

This study focuses on the analysis of the film *The Whale* (2022) directed by Darren Aronofsky, which analyzes how social stigma is depicted in the film, particularly through the experiences of the main character. This analysis tells how stigma is used through social interactions, including responses such as judgment, discomfort, and social exclusion, which reflect the process of social exclusion (Goffman, 1963). This study is limited to the analysis of selected scenes that represent stigmatization. It focuses on how identity devaluation and social isolation are experienced by the main character because of societal perceptions toward non-ideal bodies. This study also examines how the main character negotiates his stigmatized identity through dramaturgical performances, particularly through front-stage and back-stage behavior (Goffman, 1959) in order to understand how he manages and presents himself in different social situations. this study relies on analysis of films and

related literature without involving audience-based research such as interviews, in accordance with the library research approach.

### **1.5. Previous Studies**

In analyzing the film *The Whale*, researchers will review several previous studies relevant to the discussion of body image, social stigma, and social isolation. These studies will provide an empirical theoretical foundation for understanding how body images that deviate from social norms and marginalized identities are represented in others. Although most of these studies focus on physical disabilities, the analytical framework of stigma, media representation, and body perception remains relevant to understanding the depiction of extreme obesity in the film's main character.

The first study is Robertson's (2019) thesis entitled “The Effect of Media and Beauty Standards on the Body Image of Women with a Visual Disability”. This first study explains how individuals with the disorder interact with specific beauty standards and the impact this has on their mental health and self-perception. It suggests that persistent acceptance of societal beauty standards can lead to internalized stigma and decreased self-esteem. This relates to the research being analyzed because it demonstrates how social pressures related to body standards can impact a person's emotional state, as seen in the characters in the film *The Whale*.

The second study was conducted by Mark Rybarczyk et al. (2019) entitled “Body Image and Social Stigma among Individuals with Physical Disabilities”. This second study explains that dissatisfaction with body image is closely related to experiences of social stigma, social isolation, reduced participation in social

interactions, and psychological distress. This provides an explanation of how social stigma can lead to social withdrawal, as Charlie experienced.

The third study is an article by Gabriele Giansanti, Yuan Zhang, and José Aguinaga Ontoso (2024) titled “Body Perceptions and Psychological Well-Being. This study explains the influence of social media and physical measurements, such as culturally shaped beauty standards, on self-esteem and psychological health”. The study shows that Western beauty standards often increase negative psychological distress especially for individuals whose body shape does not conform to these standards or is considered non-ideal.

Furthermore, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's (2021) study on “Culture and Body Perceptions Among People with Disabilities” shows that cultural representations often portray different bodies as imperfect or undesirable, reinforcing feelings of inferiority and social exclusion. Another study, by Barton (2022), also explains the role of media in shaping social expectations about the body, simultaneously reinforcing stereotypes and providing a space for resistance to stigma.

In general, previous studies have shown that body image discrimination and media representation impact a person's well-being, identity, and social relationships in everyday life. However, most have focused on psychological impacts or cultural standards, with limited attention to the social use of stigma in everyday interactions and its representation in films. Therefore, this study applies Erving Goffman's 1963 concept of social stigma to analyze how obesity is perceived as a stigmatized attribute and how it shapes identity shifts and social isolation in the film *The Whale*. This

research is limited to an analysis that focuses on narrative, characters, dialogue, and film techniques without involving field research.

## **1.6. Method of Study**

### **1.6.1 Data and the Source of Data**

This study examines issues of body image, social isolation, and stigma in *The Whale* using a library research approach. It applies textual analysis to explore the film's narrative elements, including dialogue, characters, and visual representation, in order to understand how individuals with "non-ideal" bodies are portrayed and how these portrayals reflect societal attitudes. This analysis focuses on dialogue, visuals, and written texts to identify patterns of stigma and isolation. The primary data source is the film *The Whale* itself, including key scenes, dialogue, and cinematographic techniques. Secondary sources such as academic journals, books, and scholarly reviews are used to support the analysis and provide context. By analyzing these sources, this study offers a concise understanding of how the film depicts body image and marginalization.

### **1.6.2 Method of Approach**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a sociological perspective employing Erving Goffman's (1963) stigma theory as the primary framework for analyzing the representation of social stigma and identity discrimination in *The Whale* (2022). This theory explains how individuals whose bodies do not conform to societal ideals are socially marginalized through labeling, stereotyping, and exclusion. In addition, M. H. Abrams' (1999) objective approach is applied to examine the intrinsic elements of the film, such as theme, plot, characters, and conflict, with a

primary focus on the work itself. Furthermore, this study also incorporates basic film analysis, including shot types, camera angles, lighting, and sound, to support the interpretation of its meaning. Through this combination of approaches, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social stigma is constructed and represented in film.

### **1.6.3 Method of Data Collection**

This study uses a qualitative approach focusing on dialogue text analysis with data collected by repeatedly watching *The Whale* to understand its narrative, characters, and visual elements. Important scenes, dialogues, and aspects are identified and highlighted, such as cinematography and lighting, which are closely related to body image, social stigma, and isolation. Relevant dialogues and key scenes are documented with screenshots and timestamps. In addition, secondary data is collected from sources such as Google Scholar and JSTOR using keywords such as "obesity in film," "social stigma," and "Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma."

### **1.7. Organization of The Writing**

#### **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will discuss the research background, research problems, objectives, previous studies, scope, and organization of the thesis. which focuses on introducing social issues of body image and stigma as reflected in *The Whale* and its relevance to contemporary US society.

## CHAPTER II: INTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will analyze the film *The Whale*, focusing on its intrinsic elements (theme, plot, characters, and setting) and how these elements relate to social isolation and body image. The discussion section will also highlight the film's depiction of stigma, intersectionality, and resilience, drawing on theoretical frameworks.

## CHAPTER III: EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will discuss the extrinsic theoretical framework. This section will explain theories from outside the film (such as sociology or psychology) that will be used as "analytical tools" to connect the film to the wider social context.

## CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

This chapter will combine the two theoretical frameworks above to conduct the main analysis and discussion. This chapter will apply the extrinsic theory from Chapter III to the intrinsic elements described in Chapter II to answer the research questions.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This chapter will conclude the research by summarizing the findings and developing an understanding of body image and social stigma in contemporary media and culture.