

CHAPTER I

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1.1 Background

The film *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* explores the ongoing tension between the notions of caregiving and motherhood. There are many ideas about what makes the 'ideal' mother. The 'ideal' is a cultural norm and varies from society to society. Judging mothers based on cultural ideals of motherhood has long been a focus of the women's movement. Before Adrienne Rich published *Of Woman Born* (1976), the ideas surrounding motherhood and the experience of being a woman were never examined and/or defined as a cultural theory. According to Rich, the goal of the feminist movement was to bring more balance to society by engaging in "the study of ways of thinking and feeling about women and mothers and the ways in which these interrelated roles were shaped by society and especially the male dominated social order" (McCabe & Rich 1978). Rich believed that the role of mother, as defined by society, was a condition that all women were bound to. Perreault wrote that *Of Woman Born* laid the foundation for many theories dealing with the role of mothers in the social order and in literature. Ruddick (1989) in her book, *Maternal Thinking* argued that there was more to motherhood than instinct. Using case studies, Ruddick explored the ways in which mothers intuitively think about the well being of children. These case studies showed that motherhood involved three aspects, which Ruddick referred to as "mothering": protective love, nurturance, and training."

Care work is labor that is predominantly performed by women and is not recognized as “official work.” There is little to no data on care work as it is not reported. In 2024, the ILO and Magdalene conducted an experiment to expose care work. Five women from Indonesia documented all care work and household duties for one week. The women reported care work hours that exceeded the legal limit of full-time work. Two of the women documented total work hours (care work and employment) that exceeded 100 hours in a week.

These cases illustrate the extreme situations women are forced into as a result of the inequality they face, and how acceptance of women undertaking a disproportionate share of care work has become the norm. One woman, a food delivery worker and mother of three, who also has full time care work to do in the home, combined all her duties and care work, and logged over 103 hours of care work in a single week. Another of the participants, also a researcher, who combined paid work with unpaid care work for a child and an elderly parent, was nevertheless doing 36 hours of care work a week. If that care work was paid, it would increase her income by 100% (ILO-Magdalene Social Experiment, 2024). Unmeasured and invisible care work by all five participants outweighed their paid work by a significant margin."

These individual cases show just how normalized this heavy burden has become. For instance, a food-delivery driver and mother of three took her toddler along on deliveries while managing all home duties, ultimately logging over 103 hours of care work in a single week. Another participant, a researcher balancing her job with child and elder care, still spent nearly 36 hours a week on caregiving even

with paid help. If compensated, those extra hours would have doubled her salary (*ILO-Magdalene Social Experiment*, 2024). Across all five cases, the value of this unpaid labour far outweighed what the women earned in their paid jobs, yet it remained unmeasured and largely invisible.

The remarkable thing about these figures is not just the huge numbers of hours. It is in how the women related to these. Most of the women in the study felt Caregiving was part of their duty and described it as something women are biologically and psychologically predisposed to do, as part of their role in society as women, and not because of any social inequalities (*ILO-Magdalene Social Experiment*, 2024). Idealized motherhood is a philosophy that gives women prescriptive duties concerning motherhood. Aside from stating these functions, this philosophy raises the self-concept of women to believe that all of these are part of their predisposition, nature and eternal truth."

According to Sharon Hays, in 1996, child rearing in America, as elsewhere, is a hot potato with many players. However, Hays contends that a particular cultural trend in recent decades in the U.S. has placed an increasingly heavier emotional and psychological burden on mothers. Hays coins this cultural phenomenon "intensive mothering." Unlike other mothering ideologies and movements, Hays notes that intensive mothering is driven by best practices, expert-oriented theories and principles rather than values. As one might expect, this reliance on best practices and expert theories rapidly exhausts a mother's emotional and psychological resources. As a result, Ralph LaRossa and Hays, note that there are many contradictions in intensive mothering; the most significant of these contradictions

is the great expectation on mothers to be selfless and to cultivate self-sacrifice in children and to nurture them; yet in the work place (and other public domains) women are expected to be assertive and aggressive. As Henderson, Harmon and Houser (2010) noted, the discrepancy between the ideal and real mother has continued to widen over the years. They are criticized from more quarters than ever before, including through self-help books, Internet chat rooms and the patriarchal standard of the 'super-mom'. The latter is depicted as being effortless and able to achieve the impossible (Henderson et al., 2010). Canadian studies offer a similar insight into the depiction of mothers in the mass media, including advertisements. For example, in a study of television advertisements, De Laat and Baumann (2016) observed that 'caring consumption' portrays a woman's identity in terms of consumer behavior. Overall, the body of research cited reveals the same stereotypes as those examined in *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You*.

It is assumed that mothers are naturally caring, patient, and selfless. As a result, people often assume mothers thrive off of giving and showing love, particularly by putting their children first. People expect mothers willingly sacrifice their own being for their child's being. Many believe that to support and love a child is to give one's all to the child and allow the child to take absolute priority. It is expected of mothers to ensure the well-being of the entire family unit. It is assumed of mothers that they must be the family's emotional supporter and often times, the family's financier (Nichols et al., 2015). All of this creates a standard of what is known as the Ideal Mother. It is believed that Ideal Mothers naturally exist and that they are capable of and responsible for meeting the emotional, physical, and

intellectual needs of their children (Hays, 1996). Intensive mothering expects mothers to be the primary caregivers and to give a high level of care to their children. As a result, there is a high level of judgement toward mothers. The focus in the judgement is on how well mothers have met the expectations. Traditionally, mothers' caregiving roles have been reinforced through representations in movies, television, and other literature. These representations have shaped the societal image of the super mom. The super mom represents the ideal mother figure. In more recent representations of motherhood, there has been an effort to provide an accurate depiction of the emotional and psychological burden of motherhood.

Some more recent movies portray mothers in a different way from the 'perfect mother' figure. Instead they show mothers with immense mental stress and loneliness, and mothers who have lost their sense of individuality. Movies like *Tully*, *Pieces of a Woman*, and *Nightbitch* portray mothers who are not afraid to show that they are tired, both physically and emotionally. In these movies, motherhood is not a state that women effortlessly flourish in, and instead portrays that it takes an emotional toll on women. In the larger context of media, this depiction signifies a shift from the need to portray mothers as ideally perfect figures. This shift will positively alter perceptions of women in the media and thus help in evaluating the roles of women and families in society. Furthermore, realistically portraying mothers in media provides a base to initiate and fuel discourse on modern-day motherhood.

Today's women are much more independent than those of past generations, as seen in the increase in women's access to education and the workforce, as well

as increasing awareness of women's rights. As recently as 50 years ago, women's career and social opportunities were severely limited. Many girls and women have aspirations of making their own choices about work and life. However, most women struggle with the burden of cultural expectations. Traditionally, women are expected to balance their careers with family responsibilities. Many women are also expected to be the primary caretaker of extended family members, including parents and in-laws. Due to limited support for childcare and housework, many women are forced to limit their career opportunities and have to work from home.

Women are always challenged with the double standard of "having it all." The female-centered ideals of our culture constantly show women juggling a successful career and rewarding family life, as well as, appearing thriving and healthy. Women are often depicted in the media as successful women who are also great mothers and wives. Women are consistently challenged to reach the impossible ideal of a perfectly running family and career. A thriving career rarely excuses an underwhelming family. On the other hand, fully committing to a family can diminish a woman's commitment to her career. A woman is continually challenged with devastating double standards.

Women continue to face unrealistic expectations regarding their role in the workforce and in the home. Many expect women to work traditional jobs to bring in an income and still be the primary caregiver and emotional support for children. Women are often left feeling guilty, exhausted and depressed because of the impossible expectations put on them. Women face these expectations globally. There are very few countries where women are not working multiple jobs.

Sometimes a nation's culture may expect men to take on the second shift, but research shows that no culture or country expects or enables men to take on the second shift enough to erase the gender pay gap or close the salary negotiation gap for women. Perfection is demanded of everyone, but especially women. These unrealistic standards force women to cope and escape using unhealthy and often dangerous means. The Stand In presents the mother/daughter relationship in a way that gives men a glimpse into the constant exhausting nature of societal expectations. Mothers give up so much to fulfill expectations; expectations that, often times, serve to give women a reason to hate themselves for not fulfilling them all.

Sex and gender researchers argue that it is social and cultural environments, rather than biology, that shape motherhood. Women are socially mandated to be the primary caregivers, causing their sense of identity to be synonymous with their role as a mother. Therefore, there are times when a woman is forced to choose between her children and her own personal needs and aspirations. Of course, the portrayal of this dilemma in the media must be analyzed in order to determine how films shape and affect the social values, beliefs, norms, and expectations about women, especially mothers.

The social media of the 2020s has largely served to exacerbate this issue. Women are inundated with posts by their social peers who are perceived to be strong, beautiful, and successful, and who effortlessly juggle a demanding career and motherhood. The masculinized ideal of effortlessness has triumphed. The impossibly high standards embodied in these images have pervasively seeped into

all aspects of social consciousness to the extent that women feel the need to appeal to these ideals, and in the process, blame and despise themselves for not measuring up. Ultimately, women end up imprisoned by contradictions and double binds.

The double standards for women today illustrate that outdated gender norms still exist. Despite societal evolution and progress that allows for more professional opportunities for women, women are often judged by men for their success (or lack thereof) in the workplace and motherhood. The truth is women can't 'have it all'. Society expects women to sacrifice their own personal goals and dreams and be the ultimate care-takers and be fully devoted, loving mothers. This is the true standard for modern womanhood. Studying representations of women in the media affords opportunities to consider how women are typically depicted and defined in society as well as how women challenge and make their own definitions of womanhood.

Currently, the discussions concerning post-modern ideologies of gender primarily revolve around the tension women experience in attempting to merge a career and a family. Women have greater academic and career opportunities, but this has failed to change social judgment and criticism of women's behavior as mothers. As always, society has high, and often unattainable expectations of women. If a woman is unable to attain the status of "perfect mother," she suffers from low self-esteem and feels guilty. As a result, many women are torn between their family and career commitments.

The film 2025's *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* vividly depicts this battle. In the film, we follow therapist and mother Linda as she struggles to balance her career with the care of her chronically sick daughter. Linda is almost single-handedly

responsible for all aspects of caring due to her husband's absence and the accumulation of personal issues. Her tension, anxiety, and tiredness mount as the tale progresses as she strives to meet seemingly infinite requests. The film depicts motherhood as a tragic journey filled with emotional anguish, caring stress, worry, and tiredness, rather than a joyful one.



Picture 1. 1 The Film Poster

If I Had Legs I'd Kick You (2025) is an American psychological drama film directed and written by Mary Bronstein an American actress and filmmaker born in 1979 best known for the film *Yeast* (2008). *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* was announced in 2023 and premiered at the 2025 Sundance Film Festival. This film is distributed locally by A24 Films company an American independent entertainment company specializing in film and television production as well as film distribution. They are best known for distributing and producing modern arthouse and cult film. *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* cast is full of known stars such as Rose Byrne the main character that got so much recognition for her acting in this movie, Conan O'Brien a popular American television host and also a

comedian, ASAP Rocky a well known American rapper and record producer, and also other supporting cast such as Daniel Macdonald, and Christian Slater.

According to IMDB an intensive online databased for films, television shows, streaming contents, actors, *etc If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* successfully wins 39 of awards and 77 nominations. In Indonesia itself *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* is being played in an multi-city screening way across a few citys in Indonesia this screening is being played in Jakarta, Bandung, Bali, Medan, and many big city by KlikFilm Showcase in the lineup for Jakarta World Cinema 2025. Jakarta World Cinema or JCW is a premier international film festival based in Indonesia this festival usually features a massive lineup more than 100 global and local movies, dramas, documentaries, etc. This festival is hybrid so Indonesian audience can watch straight in the theatre or online through the streaming platform KlikFilm.

One of the reasons why *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* is worth studying is its strong recognition from both audiences and the film industry. Rose Byrne's performance as Linda received widespread praise, earning the silver bear for best leading performance and the independent spirit award, while also winning a Golden Globe and receiving nomination fo both the BAFTA and Academy Awards. These achievements show that the movie has made a major cultural impact and caught the public's attention. This widespread recognition suggests that its story and portrayal of motherhood truly resonate with modern audiences, making it an important piece to study in media and communication studies.

Critics have also praised the film. On Rotten Tomatoes, 92% of 225 critic reviews are positive, with many calling it a raw and honest look at motherhood.

Instead of pretending that parenting is always joyful, the movie highlights the real stress, exhaustion, and daily struggles mothers face. This glowing response shows that the film offers a deep, realistic view of motherhood.

This movie depicts a number of sick children being cared for by single mothers. It focuses on mothers that are often presumed to be helpless. There is so much creativity in this movie. Mary Bronstein oversees the whole project. In an interview with Cinema Femme, Bronstein said that this movie isn't an autobiography. Instead, she referred to the movie as, "emotionally true, expressively true." In regard to films, the term "expressively true" implies that movie events don't necessarily happen in the real world. John Fiske has a similar view. According to Fiske, in order for filmmakers to portray their real experiences in the film world, they can't stick to realistic representations. Movie representatives must be altered and shaped in various ways using cinematic means like camera work, lights and color. Bronstein expressively shows taking care of sick children using various representations like a sea of red floods in a hospital room that is otherwise dull. Hence, Bronstein's interpretation of expressive truth concurs with Fiske's notion.

1.2 Problem Statement

Traditionally, the media has celebrated motherhood by representing women as selfless caregivers. There has recently been a notable shift in film, especially in the representation of women and children (Liddy & Flynn, 2025). The last few decades of film have shown a growing reluctance to represent motherhood in the traditional sense,

and have tended to represent maternal figures as tired, frustrated and discontent with her social role (Liddy & Flynn, 2025). As ideas about motherhood and social expectations of women have changed, representations of motherhood in film have also shifted. However, many representations in film have been able to break from social conventions and expectations to various degrees, and we have not been able to fully study the representations of motherhood that exist in film. Liddy & Flynn (2025) have cited recent films as showing a shift to more direct representation of maternal figures. The 2025 film, *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You*, portrays a tired and frustrated working mother. Linda is a mother and a psychotherapist to a patient who is also her daughter. The film depicts Linda's emotional exhaustion, and the growing isolation she feels as she is unable to separate herself from her social role. As Liddy & Flynn (2025) note, not all representations of motherhood in film give clear answers about social role expectations and duties of mothers. The film tries to answer the question 'what is motherhood?' through various signs and symbols. Because of a lack of previous scholarship on this film, this research will also answer the same question. This research is divided into two primary research questions based on this gap:

1. How is motherhood represented in the film "*If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* (2025)"?
2. How does "*If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* (2025)" represent motherhood negotiate, challenge, or presenting idealize motherhood ideology?

1.3 Research Purpose

This research examines motherhood as represented in the 2025 film *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You*, and does this using the codes developed by John Fiske for television analysis. First, this study examines how *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* constructs its narrative of motherhood through various film components (e.g. body language, facial expression, setting, film editing, film soundtrack, etc.). This research examines the representation of motherhood and its ideological meaning using the theory of intensive motherhood. It is not assumed that the representation of motherhood in the film is positive. Rather, it will be assessed if the representation is negative, or if the representation challenges traditional expectations and standards of motherhood.

This study will analyze how the *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* (2025) film depicts motherhood and analyzes how vulnerability and agency of mothers are depicted and the presence of the 'ideal' of motherhood in film and other media.

1.4 Research Significance

1.4.1 Academical Significance

This study incorporates and extends the works of other researchers in communication and media studies to analyze film representations of motherhood and their connections to the social and philosophical values of motherhood. Utilizing the theory of John Fiske on semiotic analysis and Sharon Hays's theory of Intensive Mothering, this study attempts to blend the analysis of representations of motherhood with the social values of motherhood. The study builds on the study of representation of motherhood and considers some of the considerations and

limitations that may lead to the representation of motherhood ideology, notwithstanding alternative representations of motherhood. In relation to the representations of exhausted, vulnerable and imperfect mothers, this study takes a different approach from the previous studies and considers whether the representation of these kinds of mothers may challenge, negotiate, or redefine idealized representations of motherhood. This may be useful to the field of communication and media studies to consider other representations of motherhood and gender in films.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

This study is intended to help students and other scholars wishing to write about portrayals of motherhood in the movies. It may help viewers recognize portrayals of motherhood as constructed ideas and ask themselves what ideas about motherhood are being expressed and who is deciding what is expressed. This may help viewers realize some ideas about the “ideal mother” are false and universal ideas about motherhood do not exist. This study may provide other researchers with a basis for thinking about representation of motherhood with regard to ideas of vulnerability and control. Other researchers may also approach portrayals of motherhood by using other theories and methods of analysis.

1.4.3 Social Significance

This study may contribute to understanding representations and negotiations of social layers of motherhood in different media. It discusses depiction of vulnerability in mothers and illustrates some of the often unrealistic expectations of the best form of motherhood. By demonstrating some of the contradictions that exist

in the vision of motherhood, this research aims to illustrate the social and cultural heterogeneity of the experience of motherhood. The research focuses on various expectations of motherhood that are often formed through different representations of motherhood in the media.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

1.5.1 Research Paradigm

This study uses the critical paradigm, this views media representation as connected to social, cultural, and ideological structures. The paradigm is relevant because this study doesn't only examine how motherhood is represented, and questions the ideology underlying that representation. In this study, motherhood is understood as a socially constructed role influenced by expectations of caregiving, self-sacrifice, and responsibility toward children. The research examines how *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* (2025) constructs motherhood through cinematic signs and whether its representation challenges, negotiates, or reproduces the ideology of idealized motherhood. Using John Fiske's levels of reality, representation, and ideology, the researcher critically interprets how the film's representation may provide an alternative image of motherhood while potentially retaining elements of traditional motherhood ideology.

1.5.2 State Of The Art

The analysis that follows draws on the author's review of the literature in the fields related to the subject of the study. A summary of the most relevant literature reviewed is included below:

1. Representation of an Immigrant Mother's Struggle in the Movie Mrs. Chatterjee vs. Norway,” a 2024 study published in the journal TUTURAN: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi, Sosial dan Humaniora by Sukma Radila and Tessa Shasrini, analyzes the movie and communicates the immigrant mother’s struggle in the process of reclaiming her child. In line with research on the meaning of representational signs, Radila and Shasrini apply John Fiske’s semiotics to decode the structures of the movie. Using Fiske’s semiotics, the researchers interpret the signs and signal what the mother in the story really wants. Based on their research, in Mrs. Chatterjee, an immigrant mother moves to a foreign country and, due to cultural differences, is forced to take legal action to defend her parental rights. The researcher describes Debika Chatterjee as a tenacious and courageous character for her determination in protecting her children. From the descriptions of the different structures and signs in the research, the authors draw the conclusion that all mothers want to take care of and protect their children and will face any obstacles for their children. The authors write that mothers are willing to make sacrifices for their children.
2. The second essay is “Mother-Child Relationship in Turning Red.” This essay was published in JIIP: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan in 2023, written by Rafli Fahrezi Syaifullah from Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Jawa Timur. The essay takes a qualitative approach using John Fiske’s semiotic analysis. The focus of the essay is the analysis of the representation of the relationship between a mother and her child in the 2022

Pixar film, *Turning Red*. The analysis shows that, among other things, the film illustrates what it means to have an authoritarian parent. To understand this, Fiske's three levels of semiotics are used. The reality level illustrates what it means to have an authoritarian mother and the relationship between a mother and daughter. The representation level illustrates the different elements of each scene and what they represent. Finally, the ideology level helps to understand the message and meaning of the film, *Turning Red*.

3. Dewi Maulati and Arei Prasetyo's 2017 study, "Representation of Mother's Role in 'Room' Movie (Semiotics Analysis John Fiske's Approach in 'Room' Movie by Director Lenny Abrahamson)," analyzes the representation of motherhood in the film adaptation of Emma Donoghue's novel, *Room*, through the lens of John Fiske's semiotics. The film is inspired by the 2013 case of a woman who was kept imprisoned and abused for seven years in a similar, if larger, confinement. The film portrays the mother's heart-wrenching experience as she is forced to raise her son with no partner and no means of support. This study focuses on the film as a case study in mass communication and explores how Fiske's semiotics helps interpret the level of reality and the level of representation. The researcher also explores how the film offers critique on social issues through its representation and communication. To examine *Room*, the researcher employs methods of literary and sign analysis. The researcher contends that *Room* communicates and presents feminism through various aspects such as the

environment, characters, and social conflicts, and ultimately offers critique on the social injustice of gender inequality.

4. This study is a 2017 publication, "Representation of Mother's Role as a Single Parent in the Film Sabtu Bersama Bapak (Semiotic Analysis of John Fiske in the Film Sabtu Bersama Bapak)," by Widiyanto Andhani and Idola Perдини Putri. Monty Tiwa's *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* (2011) is about a wife who becomes a single parent after her husband dies. To help guide her children, the husband records and sends short videos to the wife to be played and viewed by the children on Sabtu (Indonesian for "Saturday"). The researchers are interested in the role of the husband and the maternity role of the wife in the film and how they are being presented. This study is concerned with three levels, which are the level of reality, representation, and ideology. It is a qualitative study and employs John Fiske's semiotics analysis, focusing on television programs. By analyzing codes of television programs and the films based on the aforementioned levels, the researchers collected data. The researchers found the film contains the idea of liberal feminism.
5. The fifth study is titled "Analisis Semiotika John Fiske dalam Film Just Mom," written by Yana Priana, Irwanto, and Panji Suratriadi from Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika, published in 2024. This family-genre film tells the story of an elderly mother named Siti (played by Christine Hakim), who feels lonely because her children are busy with their own lives. On top of that, Siti's health is weakening because she has cancer. In the

middle of missing her children, Siti decides to take care of a homeless woman named Murni (played by Ayushita), who has a mental illness and is heavily pregnant. Murni's presence brings more color to Siti's days. The film *Just Mom* shows that work made from the heart will reach the heart, through the unconditional love a mother has for her children. From the way Siti treats another human being with care, her love and affection extend beyond her own family to the people around her. Using a qualitative method, this study observes the film to identify the soul of a mother's love, both for her own children and for the people she chooses to care for. This study is considered important because it upholds the idea that a mother's love cannot be repaid with money. In fact, a mother's love overcomes everything and can never be replaced once it's gone.

As discussed, prior studies on the portrayal of motherhood in film have analyzed themes such as legal battles for motherhood, the maternal sacrifice, and the emotional bond between a mother and child. Examples of these studies include *Mrs. Chatterjee vs. Norway*, *Turning Red*, *Room*, *Sabtu Bersama Bapak*, and *Just Mom*. As shown in these analyses, filmmakers have relied on a handful of techniques to represent motherhood, such as depicting the emotional and legal battle between a mother and child, the hardships of parenting as a single mother, and various other aspects of motherhood, such as patience, compassion, and love, using the semiotic approach. Although many of these analyses discuss motherhood as a battle or a sacrifice, very few of them explore the representation of motherhood

as emotional and psychological exhaustion of a mother due to the demand of the role and the expectations of being the “ideal” or “good” mother. Furthermore, no study has assessed the relationship between the intensive mothering ideology and the representation of modern motherhood in films.

Novelty in this study comes from analyzing how the film *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* (2025) portrays motherhood. It looks at representations of motherhood in the film and the ways in which the film portrays motherhood vulnerability. The study explores how the representation of the “good” or “selfless” mother in film and other media puts women in a position of vulnerability and how women in the media are depicted or portrayed to give all of themselves for their children, thus ultimately sacrificing and destroying their own self and physical well-being in the process. The study analyzes the film’s portrayal of motherhood and considers if it reflects and challenges the ideology of intensive mothering.

1.5.3 Theory

This study uses Sharon Hays's theory of Intensive Mothering (1996) from her book *The Cultural Contradiction of Motherhood* (1996). Hays says motherhood has evolved into a set of ideals known as "intensive mothering" in which a child must be the exclusive recipient of his or her parents' love and care. It involves following all expert recommendations, requiring effort and mental and emotional effort from a mother, and ultimately financial cost. It places the responsibility on the mother for the kinds of persons her children turn out to be (Lamar et al., 2019).

This research uses the idea of “intensive mothering” to analyze what the film shows and what the audience can interpret about motherhood. “Intensive

mothering” embodies many expectations of mothers, such as providing around-the-clock care and support for children, as well as providing care for children above that for themselves. Furthermore, the expectations include women’s involvement in children’s education and extra-curricular activities. These elements will assist in analyzing scenes relative to mothers’ emotional exposure and defenses, as well as offensives and mothers’ rights to self-determination.

The goal here is not to show how the film supports or denies the idea of idealized motherhood. Instead, this idea will function as a theoretical tool to look into the ways the film wrestles with or reconstructs the standards of intensive mothering. The theories of representation will be analyzed by looking at the film’s actuality, as well as Fiske’s theory of semiotics.

1.6 Concept Operational

1.6.1 Motherhood

This investigation defines motherhood as the emotional, social, and caring functions that Linda fulfills, and how these aspects are represented in the film via Fiske's three levels of codes. In the realm of reality, motherhood is evident in aspects that are immediately perceivable. Linda's caring efforts, her weary visage, her communication style with her daughter, and the healthcare devices that clutter her home. The representation aspect is determined by the film's stylistic decisions in portraying these moments: intimate shots of Linda's face, the speed of the cutting in caregiving situations, and sound nuances like alarms or sobbing that increase the atmosphere of tension. From an ideological perspective, this amalgamation

articulates a larger commentary on motherhood, highlighting the unequal distribution of responsibilities between mothers and dads, as well as the expectation that a "good mother" should cope with everything autonomously and without grievance.

1.6.2 Media Representation of Motherhood

The depiction of motherhood in media concerns how motherhood is typically represented in mainstream outlets and if *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* conforms to or contrasts with that standard image. The portrayal of moms in the media often presents them as serene, well-organized, and consistently in charge. Conversely, this video often shows Linda in a chaotic condition, looking drained, overburdened, and among disarray and medical devices. The film incorporates current elements that distinguish it from a standard family drama, like unconventional lighting or camera techniques that create a sense of tension or discomfort in commonplace situations. These decisions reveal whether the film is endorsing the media's conception of the "ideal mother" or contesting it by presenting a mother who does not conform to that standard.

1.6.3 Maternal Vulnerability

The term "maternal vulnerability" in this study defines the portrayal of the emotional, psychological, and physical challenges of mothers, and how they encounter and deal with them in the course of their motherly duties and obligations. The challenges may vary from feeling physically drained to feeling emotionally drained and psychologically overwhelmed. In the case study, "Babel," many of these challenges were depicted, including, feeling overwhelmed by a responsibility

that one is emotionally unable to meet, as in the case of the character who is simultaneously trying to care for her children and meet her husband's emotional needs, and feeling drained by frequent and perpetual obligations to give care, as in the case of the character whose child constantly needs her to interpret and break down adults' spoken language. Reality, representation and ideology are the three levels at which the study of depiction of maternal vulnerability in the case studies was done.

1.6.4 Double Burden

Double burden refers to the situation where a mother, and especially a mother-of-many, has to handle a multitude of large responsibilities at the same time. There are a number of responsibilities that come with motherhood. These include taking care of the children as well as providing for the family. Sometimes, a mother has to take care of elderly family members. Often, she is the main caregiver for children, takes responsibility for household chores and may also provide the main source of income for the family. It is important that we understand that caring for children is not the only responsibility of a mother. Motherhood is a 24-hour job and a mother should be emotionally, physically and mentally available to her children at all times. The double burden of motherhood often takes a physical toll on a mother. This is evident in the stress, exhaustion and illness that a mother may experience from constantly providing for her family. Mothers have the physical burden of organizing the family's activities and outings. They also take responsibility for the family's finances, employment and other property. Mothers are constantly worried about the well-being of their children and the family.

Maternal stress and worry are unavoidable burdens of motherhood. Double burden of employment and maternal stress becomes a heavy load for mothers. The demands of a family often limit mothers' choices of employment. The study recognizes the challenges mothers face when trying to find an acceptable balance between being a contributing member of the family, society, and workforce as well as meeting the needs of her children. It explains that some mothers take on part-time work to alleviate the stresses of attempting to perform the role of “ideal” mother while working full time. The study employs a qualitative approach to determine how the double burden affects mothers. The double burden occurs when there are insufficient supports to help a mother adequately carry out both her care responsibilities and other responsibilities. The study makes use of the film *Linda* to illustrate double burden by depicting the simultaneous requirement on Linda to take care of the family and perform other household duties while balancing the responsibility of making the family’s major decisions. The study explores how the film portrays and represents the pressures and responsibilities of modern day mother.

1.7 Research Method

1.7.1 Research Type

This study is qualitative and based on John Fiske's media and TV analysis framework. One advantage of qualitative research is the ability to analyze social phenomena in great depth. This research explores the representations and messages embodied in audio-visual texts and explains the experiences of the target

population. To decipher the symbols and meanings present in a text, one can refer to the different semiotics frameworks. Following John Fiske, meaning can be found by analyzing the codes at three different levels. First, the level of code of reality, encompasses everything that is seen and heard. The second, code of representation, encompasses the ways in which reality is communicated. Lastly, code of ideology, encompasses the meanings embedded in cultural and social texts, as well as the values and beliefs of social formations. This research employs Fiske's framework to analyze how a film communicates the meaning of motherhood and incorporates other social and cultural mean.

1.7.2 Research Subject

The drama film *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* (2025), written and directed by Mary Bronstein, is the focus of this study. The film tells the story of a therapist and working mother, Linda, who takes care of her ill daughter. Linda serves as the vice president of her workplace and is under a lot of professional and personal pressure. Over the course of the film, Linda becomes emotionally and psychologically exhausted, depressed and withdrawn from the rest of the world. The film attempts to capture the sense of emotional and psychological turmoil that working mothers go through due to the responsibilities that come with motherhood and the other duties they have to perform in the workplace. Overall, the film succeeds in capturing what it is like to be a working mother in the current social environment. Thus, an analysis of the film in the context of what it means to be a mother in the 21st century is warranted."

1.7.3 Type of Data

This research is based on qualitative data. Data is taken from film scenes, and from the film's dialogue, in order to demonstrate aspects of Linda's motherhood. The data is drawn from the film's visual and verbal elements. These include film scenes, characters' interactions and dialogues. In addition, they include film characters' facial expressions and body language. The scenes and dialogues analyzed in the research demonstrate aspects of a mother's emotional burden, including feelings of isolation and of being empty. These aspects illustrate how a mother can, and often does, gradually and invisibly, lose her identity. Thereafter, I analyze the film, and other representations of women, in order to describe the aspects and identify what motherhood means within the film and women's experiences, in general, by using John Fiske's theory of semiology.

1.8 Source of Data

1.8.1 Primary Data

The research draws its primary data from the film *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* (2025). The researcher assessed the entire film as the primary data source, and selected scenes relating to the study. This comprises the main field of analysis. The data mainly consists of visual representations such as Linda's situation and expressions. Other data include dialogues, surrounding props and other movie sets. Visual representations of dialogues relating to Linda and expressions of her situation, covering all the ranges of emotions, as well as the contexts in which they occur, are also included in this study.

1.8.2 Secondary Data

This study uses secondary data from various sources (books, articles, etc.) to further analyze and give insight to various findings in this study. This data also serves to provide or demonstrate various theories. This data does not necessarily serve to prove findings, but rather help explain and contextualize them.

1.8.3 Data Collection Techniques

This study utilizes both, document and literature review, methods of data collection. Using the document method, screenshots from the *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You* film that capture different scenes pertaining the research interests have been captured. In particular, scenes relating Linda's experiences as a mother and the challenges and caregiver responsibilities associated with motherhood have been captured. Other elements captured are verbal (dialogue) and visual (expressions) elements of the characters. Each of these elements are documented and researched upon. The literature review method entails identifying and analyzing scholarly literature pertaining to maternity and motherhood, as well as gender representation, from film and other allied fields and scholarly works. During the analysis of the literature and film, John Fiske's semiotic Theory, became the foundation for interpreting the film under study. Therefore, both methods of data collection (literature and document review) combined, will provide ample information for interpreting and describing motherhood as evidenced in the film.