

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Since the twentieth century, American society experienced major changes, especially in the roles and social statuses of women in their fight to gain rights and equality with men. These transformations were closely linked to larger social changes, including the women's suffrage movement, increased access to higher education, and the slow entry of women into professions previously dominated by men, like law, politics, and academia (Roth, 2004:11-13).

However, despite these developments, by the mid-twentieth century gender inequality was still on the rise, particularly within legal structures that continued to enforce and assign social roles and rights based on traditional gender norms. Women were frequently reduced to the status of secondary citizens whose primary duties were relegated to domestic responsibilities, while men were formed into financial providers and legal decision-makers. Women who wanted to participate in public and professional life often faced structural barriers that created inequity in the legal system (Kerber, 1998:196).

These persistent inequalities helped provide the increase to organized feminist movements that challenged institutional discrimination and attempted to remake women's legal and social status. Feminism aims to eliminate sexism and the oppression of women and has therefore been an important force for social

change. Feminism is not only about achieving the goal of formal equality; it is also about the visibility of social structures that silence women's lived experiences and that limit their ability to participate in public life. Hooks (2000:1) defines feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression". The definition highlights that feminism is based in justice and ensuring the protection of human rights, especially for those who have been historically marginalized by patriarchal systems. Feminist movements have aimed to identify and challenge legal and institutional practices that continue to encourage gender inequality in education, employment, law and other aspects of American society. But feminist advocacy in legal institutions often experiences resistance because discriminatory laws are frequently defended on the grounds of tradition, social order, or legal tradition.

Liberal feminism is one of the main perspectives within feminist theory, liberal feminism is particularly relevant to this study as it focuses on social transformation through legal reform and policy reform. This approach addresses the challenge of gender inequality by targeting discriminatory laws and advocating for equal rights and opportunities in education, political representation and economic participation (Kuersten, 2003:4). Liberal feminists do not seek to eliminate existing institutions but rather to reform them through legal advocacy, constitutional arguments, and litigation. Thus, legal reform is an important means of eliminating institutional discrimination and achieving equality before the law.

The relevance of liberal feminist theory becomes more obvious when it comes examine through cultural representations of legal struggle. One such representation is the film *On the Basis of Sex* (2018) showing Ruth Bader

Ginsburg's struggle against gender discrimination in the American legal system, while also emphasising more general social problems of inequality and access to justice. The film portrays her efforts to navigate and challenge a male dominated legal world through constitutional reasoning and strategic litigation.

On the Basis of Sex (2018) explores a number of social and legal issues related to gender discrimination in American society from the 1950s to the 1970s. The film illustrates the unequal treatment of women in educational institutions, the workplace, and the legal system. Through the portrayal of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's early legal career, the film reflects broader issues of equality, justice, and women's rights in American society. These issues are closely related to the principles of Liberal Feminism, particularly legal equality, individual rights, and institutional reform. Therefore, the film provides an important representation of how legal advocacy can be used to challenge gender discrimination within the American legal system.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on these issues, the research questions of this study are formulated as follows, based on these problems:

1. How is Ruth Bader Ginsburg's fight for gender equality portrayed in the narrative elements of the film *On the Basis of Sex* (2018)?
2. How does *On the Basis of Sex* (2018) portray Ruth Bader Ginsburg's legal strategies against gender-based discrimination within the American legal system?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the research problems, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To analyze how Ruth Bader Ginsburg's fight for gender equality is represented through the narrative elements of the film *On the Basis of Sex* (2018).
2. To analyze the portrayal of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's legal strategies against gender-based discrimination in *On the Basis of Sex* (2018) and examine how these strategies reflect the principles of liberal feminism within the American legal system.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the representation of legal advocacy in pursuing gender equality as portrayed in the film *On the Basis of Sex* (2018). The analysis is limited to Ruth Bader Ginsburg's legal strategies in challenging gender discrimination within the American legal system. Particular attention is given to her involvement in the Moritz case, which serves as the central legal case in the film and provides the foundation for her efforts to challenge discriminatory laws based on gender.

Intrinsically, this study examines characterization, conflict, dialogue, and setting that contribute to the representation of Ruth's legal advocacy and struggle for equality. These elements are analyzed to understand how the film constructs the narrative of gender discrimination and legal resistance.

Extrinsically, the film is analyzed using Liberal Feminist theory, particularly the concepts of legal equality, individual rights, and institutional reform as proposed by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill. Therefore, this study is limited to the analysis of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's legal strategies, the significance of the Moritz case, and the representation of legal advocacy as a means of pursuing gender equality within the legal and social context presented in the film.

1.5 Previous Studies

In analyzing this film, the writer reviews several previous studies related to this research. The analysis presented in this section supports the scope of the study. The studies are organized based on the similarities of object and theoretical focus in order to show the development of discussion surrounding *On the Basis of Sex* (2018) and liberal feminism.

The first study was analyzed by Christina Schönberger-Stepien entitled *Making Her Case: Dramatisation, Feminism, and the Law in the Ruth Bader Ginsburg Biopic On the Basis of Sex* (2021). The research is concerned with the dramatization of the legal system and the portrayal of Ruth Bader Ginsburg as a feminist icon in the film. The research deals with cinematic representation and public discourse on gender inequality. However, it is more focused on representation and dramatization than legal advocacy as a formalized liberal feminist strategy.

The second study was analyzed by Tasia Dena Pangestuti and Ruth Mei Ulina Malau entitled *Representasi Feminisme Liberal dalam Film On the Basis of*

Sex (2021). This research discusses liberal feminist values reflected in the main characters struggle against gender discrimination. Even though it uses a liberal feminist perspective, the analysis leans more toward recognizing feminist concepts rather than offering a comprehensive examination of legal advocacy as a constitutional instrument.

The third study was analyzed by Lia Dewinta and Thifal Naurah entitled *The Harmony of Familism and Feminism in Biopic On the Basis of Sex* (2022). This research is focused on the relationship between the family support and feminist struggle in this film. It shows that familism strengthens Ruth's ability to challenge barriers to patriarchal structures. However, the legal aspect is not considered as the primary focus of analysis.

The fourth study was analyzed by Asrita Hana Salsabila entitled *Woman Discrimination On the Basis of Sex: A Critical Discourse Analysis* (2021). This research applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to identify sexist language and gender bias in the film. The study highlights how discrimination is constructed in discourse but does not analyze legal advocacy as a strategic feminist effort.

The fifth study was analyzed by Dewi Ayu Rengganis et al. entitled *Gender Discriminations as Reflected in the Film On the Basis of Sex* (2023). This research examines the depiction of gender discrimination in the American legal and social systems in the film. The study highlights Ruth discrimination in education, employment and legal institutions due to the patriarchal norms. However, the study is mainly related to identifying discrimination and stereotypes rather than

examining legal advocacy as a structured liberal feminist strategy for institutional reform.

The sixth study was analyzed by Sahira Meidina Jasmin and Muhammad Jailani entitled *Representasi Feminisme dalam Dua Film, yaitu “Enola Holmes 2” dan “On the Basis of Sex”* (2024). This study uses qualitative and semiotic methods to explain women’s struggles against patriarchal systems in different historical contexts. The research highlights the feminist movement struggle and the women rights portrayal in the two films. However, the study is less concerned with legal advocacy and institutional reform as liberal feminist strategies and more concerned with feminist representation and semiotic meaning.

The seventh study was analyzed by Murtadho et al. entitled *Analysis of Auli’i Cravalho’s Character Related to Liberal Feminism in Moana Disney Movie* (2024). This research examines liberal feminist values through self-determination and individual freedom. The study highlights breaking gender stereotypes but does not explore institutional law as an instrument of equality.

The eighth study was analyzed by Lugina Ayu Salamina and Tatan Tawami entitled *Depiction of Feminism Concept in Disney Animated Movie: Encanto* (2021). This research concerns the representation of feminism in a patriarchal-based narrative. The emphasis continues to be on empowerment and emotional resistance, rather than institutional legal reform.

The ninth study was analyzed by Sangeetha et al. entitled *Liberal Feminism: Emphasizing Individualism and Equal Rights in Meena Kandasamy’s When I Hit*

You (2022). This study discusses liberal feminism in a literary context and emphasizes individual rights and autonomy in resisting patriarchal oppression within domestic settings.

The tenth study was analyzed by I Gusti Ayu Mahatma Agung entitled *Feminism and Female Autonomy in Short Stories from Hogwarts: Minerva McGonagall* (2025). This research highlights women's autonomy, intellectual authority and personal agency to examine authority in literary fiction. The study emphasizes women's ability to act alone and go against the male power structure through personal agency. However, the research is not about institutional legal transformation and legal advocacy; it is about empowering individuals in literary narratives.

Based on the studies above, research on *On the Basis of Sex* (2018) mostly focuses on representation, discourse analysis, familism, or general liberal feminist themes. Other studies on liberal feminism emphasize empowerment, autonomy, and resistance to patriarchal norms in both film and literary texts. However, limited research specifically examines legal advocacy as a structured and strategic manifestation of liberal feminism within institutional legal systems.

Therefore, this study contrasts from previous studies in that it focuses on Ruth Bader Ginsburg's legal advocacy as a realized representation of liberal feminist principles, in particular, the ideals of equality before the law and individual rights. The focus of this research is on law as the primary field for the pursuit of gender equality rather than merely the setting.

1.6 Method of Study

1.6.1 Data and Resources of Data

The data for this study were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were sourced from the film *On the Basis of Sex* (2018). The film's dialogue, characters, and visual elements represent legal advocacy, gender discrimination, and liberal feminist ideas. Secondary data consists of academic journals, books, and scholarly articles on liberal feminism, legal equality, gender discrimination, and the life and career of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. These sources provide a theoretical framework and contextual support for the analysis.

1.6.2 Method of Data Collection

The data were collected by repeatedly watching *On the Basis of Sex* (2018) and identifying dialogues, scenes, character interactions, and visual representations related to Ruth Bader Ginsburg's legal strategies, legal advocacy, and gender discrimination. Relevant data were then selected, classified, and documented based on the objectives of the study. In addition, books, academic journals, and other scholarly sources related to Liberal Feminism, gender equality, legal advocacy, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg were collected to support the study.

1.6.3 Method of Approach

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore how the film *On the Basis of Sex* (2018) depicts Ruth Bader Ginsburg's legal system struggles. As a result the primary goal of this study is to examine meaning in the narrative context,

character development, and visual aspects of the picture, rather than to collect quantitative data.

The analysis is based on liberal feminist theory as expressed by John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and supported by the ideas of Harriet Taylor Mill in *The Enfranchisement of Women* (1851). The theory emphasizes the importance of equality before the law, individual rights, and the necessity for legal reform to fight gender discrimination.

Through this theoretical framework, the study examines the construction of the narrative, the characters and the cinematic techniques in the film to represent the liberal feminist ideas and the main objective of gender equality. This approach causes it possible to concentrate the research on feminism and law and is not dependent on a general sociological framework.

1.7 Organization of the Writing

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, objectives, scope, previous studies, research methods, and the organization of the thesis.

CHAPTER II: INTRINSIC FRAMEWORK

This chapter discusses the intrinsic elements of the film, including theme, plot, characterization, setting, conflict, resolution, dialogue, and cinematography.

CHAPTER III: EXTRINSIC FRAMEWORK

This chapter discusses the extrinsic aspects related to the film *On the Basis of Sex* (2018), including the American social and cultural background, the concept

of American national ethos, and liberal feminist theory. These aspects provide the theoretical and historical foundation for interpreting the film.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the main analysis of this study. It explored the representation of feminist conflicts in film through intrinsic characteristics and explored these findings using liberal feminist theory with a primary focus on legal advocacy and institutional gender discrimination.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This chapter presents conclusions drawn from the analysis and offers suggestions for future research in the fields of feminism, the study of film, and the analysis of literature.

