

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Movies are a form of popular media which serves as a reflection of social values of society, and culture. As stated by Kellner (1995),

“A media culture has emerged in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities. Radio, television, film, and the other products of the culture industries provide the models of what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless.”

Through their narrative, characters, theme, and cinematography, movies can depict important challenges which are on a daily basis. Movies are always influenced by the social, political, and cultural aspects of the conditions in which era they are made. Thus, movies often serve as cultural archives which can capture shifting viewpoints, ambitions, and societal fears.

According Hardcastle, Morosini, and Tarte (2009) coming-of-age movies explore themes such as self-discovery identity, interpersonal relationships, family dynamics, gender roles, friendship, rebellion, and the negotiation of everyday life within broader community values and social expectations. In addition, coming-of-age narratives often engage with educational experiences, cultural practices, and political or social realities, while sometimes incorporating elements of romance, comedy, or tragedy. By presenting these experiences with a sense of realism and emotional honesty, coming-of-age films resonate not only with adolescent

audiences but also with mature viewers, as they reflect universal struggles surrounding identity, belonging, and personal growth.

As been stated by Erik Erikson (1950) teenager play a crucial role in their own identity development. Erikson said, teenager are having their own stage named identity vs role diffusion. This means they will try to discover who they are, which values they will stick to, and how they will blend into society. Teenagers identity are often at risk in many social context since American culture emphasis independence, freedom of speech, and personal achievement. External factors such as family, friendships, school, and the media influence in the identity formation, while internal factors such as emotions, sexual orientation, and personal aspirations add complexity to this process.

One of the coming-of-age movies produced by Olivia Wilde named *Booksmart* (2019) first released in America, March 2019 with the duration of the movie is 102 minutes, the movie tells a story about two teenage girls who are about to finish their high school soon and preparing to go to college. In the movie, the two central characters, Amy and Molly, are depicted as nerds who prioritize their academics more than socializing. One night before their graduation, they immediately get an idea to attend a party, do things they ordinarily not do. Without them knowing, that night they will face their insecurities, challenge stereotypes, and moments of discovery. *Booksmart* (2019) got the attention of the audience because of their fresh, inclusive, and relatable premise. They also offer humour with heartfelt moments, fast-paced dialogue, and a unique style of storytelling that highlights their characters. *Booksmart* (2019) portrays the teenagers' search for

identity, the shift in values from established to more fluid, and the dilemma of balancing social expectations, academic pressures, and the need for personal freedom. More interestingly, identity in *Booksmart* is shown not only through the storyline and interactions between characters, but also through other details such as clothing styles, body expressions, music choices, and representations of sexuality. The characters in this film are come with diverse backgrounds and identities, representing the diversity of today's society. This shows that teenagers' identity in the modern media era is no longer rigid and singular, but rather fluid, flexible, and open to change. Popular media such as movies play a significant role in portraying teenager on how they understand who they are, how they are seen by others, and how they adapt to the various norms and cultural influences around them.

Thus, discussing *Booksmart* (2019) in relation to teenagers' identity is relevant, especially when connect to the context of postmodernity, which emphasizes fluidity, fragmentation, and the play of identities. The writer will analyze the movie including dialogues, scenes, which explain the development of Molly's identity. Also to explore its storyline, characters, and key points of the movie. This film not only provides entertainment but also provides into identities. Therefore, examining *Booksmart* (2019) may improve our understanding of how identity representations are created in movies while reflecting broader sociocultural factors.

1.2 Research Question

Referring to previously stated studies, the writer vows that there is a connection between *Booksmart* and teenage identity. The writer formulates the following questions; they are:

1. How is Molly characterized in *Booksmart* (2019)?
2. How does Molly struggle to find her identity in *Booksmart* (2019)?

1.3 Research Aims

This research aims to associate both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of *Booksmart* (2019). The movie's narrative and cinematography are related to the concept of teenage identity. While the intrinsic aspects point out how the character is portrayed as a part of postmodern society, the extrinsic aspects point out how the character is portrayed of her struggle in the postmodern society. By combining the two aspects, the connection between the character in the movie and the teenage identity in postmodern society will be identified. Therefore, the research aims will be divided into the following points:

1. To describe how Molly is characterized in *Booksmart* (2019).
2. To describe how Molly struggles to find the identity in herself in *Booksmart* (2019).

1.4 Scope of the Study.

This study focuses on the characterization of Molly, one of the main characters in *Booksmart* (2019) directed by Olivia Wilde. The analysis aims to explore how Molly is portrayed through her behaviors, dialogues, and emotional development in finding her identity throughout the intrinsic elements of the film. The study examines how her characterization reflects the internal and external struggles she faces as an academically smart yet socially isolated teenager, as well as how these struggles influence her identity development.

Furthermore, this study extends its discussion to the extrinsic aspect, specifically through the lens of postmodern identity theory as discussed by Douglass Kellner in his work, *Media Culture: Cultural studies, identity and politics between the modern and the postmodern*. In the postmodern era, identity is no longer fixed or singular but rather fragmented, fluid, and multiple.

Through this perspective, Molly's identity is examined as a representation of how young individuals navigate the instability of identity within contemporary culture. This study consequently concentrates on the combination of intrinsic story development and postmodern identity discourse. The analysis is limited to exploring how Molly is characterized within the film, how her struggles reflect her process of identity formation, and how her characterization challenges or diverges from the postmodern stereotypes of identity described by Kellner. This study will only be focusing on Molly's character.

1.5 Previous Studies

Booksmart (2019) talks about the struggles of teenagers in America. There are several previous studies which the writer found to support this research, mainly talking about the movie, teenagers in America and other topics which still revolve around teenage postmodern identity. The writer will try to give a short explanation about the previous studies:

The first one is “Feminist and fun? Humour and ambivalence in *Booksmart* (Olivia Wilde, 2019)” from Kyra Clarke and Jennalee Donian. These studies explore the intersection of humor, feminism, and teen identity in the movie. Focusing on the main character, Amy and Molly, two best friends who are ambitious in their academics. The studies show how the movie challenges how intelligence and fun cannot exist together. It also shows how the movie’s humor is shown as a tool to express feminism and postmodern identity complexities.

Second goes to, “Good Morning, Winner: Subverting Girl Nerd Stereotypes in *Booksmart* (2019)” written by Andrea Sofia Regueira Martín. This study analyzes *Booksmart* (2019) as a film which shows nerd stereotypes but lack focus on nerd’s identity by featuring two nerd main characters. It also explains the long-standing portrayal of “nerds” in teen movies, who are often intelligent but socially awkward and unpopular. It points out that female nerds are rarely represented, mainly due to beauty standards and stereotypes about women’s interests in science and technology.

The third is from Nadila Salsabilla, Chyntia Heru Woro Prastiwi, and Oktha Ika Rahmawati entitled “Analysis of Taboo Words Used by The Main Characters

of *Booksmart* Movie.” This study examines the use of taboo words in the movie *Booksmart* (2019), focusing on the main characters Molly Davidson and Amy Antsler. Using Jay’s (2009) theory to classify types of taboo words and Swan’s (2005) framework to analyze their functions, the research applies a mixed-method approach. The data consists of all utterances containing taboo words spoken by the two protagonists and does not include teenage identity.

Next is “English-Indonesian Translation Deviation Found in Amateur Subtitles of The Movie *Booksmart*” written by Mega Zasmi Wahidatunnisa examines various types of translation deviations that appear in the amateur Indonesian subtitles of *Booksmart* (2019). The article lacks focus on the main character, Molly and her identity but they used Newmark’s theory of translation deviation. The research analyzes the film’s English transcript and its translated version. The findings reveal five main types of deviation: grammatical and lexical errors as the most common, followed by omission, different point of view, individual language use, and sentence shift. The study concludes that most variances are caused by linguistic errors and limited translation strategies, suggesting that improving translators’ writing skills, vocabulary mastery, and the use of proper translation method can improve subtitle quality.

““Girls on Film” A Critical Discourse Analysis on the Screenplay of *Booksmart* (2019)” written by Hanna Rapo analyzes the screenplay of the 2019 coming-of-age film *Booksmart* through the lens of critical discourse analysis, particularly using Fairclough’s three-dimensional method, to examine how girls are represented both in the film’s text and in audience reception. Drawing on Steiner’s

(2014) feminist media theory and gendered language theory, the research investigates how word choice and dialogue structure contribute to the portrayal of gender and power relations. The findings reveal that the film deliberately constructs distinctions between its two female protagonists through their speech patterns and personalities, which in turn shape the power dynamics between them.

The next is from Nathan Burns entitled “It Means Possibility: Manifestations of Isolation in New Queer Cinema” This article does not focus on *Booksmart* (2019) but the writer examines themes of isolation in New Queer Cinema, a movement that emerged after the AIDS crisis of the 1990s, when independent filmmakers began challenging heteronormative narratives and redefining queer representation in film. By exploring how queer identity often exists in tension with mainstream society, the study highlights the resulting sense of disconnection and loneliness experienced by queer individuals. Using selected New Queer Cinema films and contemporary examples like *Booksmart* (2019), the article connects past and present depictions of queer life, offering insight into how isolation continues to shape queer identity and cultural expression, particularly in the context of global crises such as COVID-19.

Manu Yáñez Murillo, José Teodoro, Nicolas Rapold, Steven Mears, and Naomi Keenan O’Shea (2019) entitled “Film Comment” inserting Cassie da Costa’s review of *Booksmart* (2019), directed by Olivia Wilde, in their “Short Take” section. Da Costa examines how the film reimagines the coming-of-age genre by portraying two academically driven best friends, Molly and Amy, who find themselves in a high school environment where traditional social hierarchies have shifted. The review does not focus on identity but highlights that *Booksmart*,

unlike others teen movie, presents a world in which popular students are also intellectually accomplished and socially aware, reflecting the values of a new, inclusive generation. Her commentary situates *Booksmart* within a broader cultural moment, suggesting that it challenges outdated stereotypes about teenage identity and achievement in contemporary American society.

In the journal article “Complex Connections: Bullying, ‘Drama,’ and Friendshi, Katherine A. Phelps (2019) explores the complex dynamics between tween girls, social media, and relational behaviors, focusing on cyberbullying, interpersonal conflict (“drama”), and homosocial support. Phelps contrasts the moral panic that often frames social media as harmful to adolescents with the nuanced realities of tween girls, who experience digital spaces as both sources of conflict and vital tools for maintaining friendships and emotional connection. Using textual analysis and qualitative interviews, the study highlights how behaviors adults may perceive as bullying often function as part of everyday social negotiation among peers. The article only use *Booksmart* (2019) by Olivia Wilde as an example illustrating tensions in female friendship, competition, and identity formation, though the film is not its central focus but rather serves as a cultural example of broader discussions surrounding girlhood and social relationships.

In the book chapter “Queer Twine and Camp” from “Twining: Critical and Creative Approaches to Hypertext Narratives” (2021), Anastasia Salter and Stuart Moulthrop discuss how the storytelling platform Twine is closely connected to queer expression in digital media. Although the chapter does not focus on Olivia Wilde’s *Booksmart* (2019), it briefly uses the film as an example of queer

sensibility and performance, connecting it to the larger idea of how different types of media, from games to movies, can reflect and celebrate queer creativity and identity.

The article written by Alex Leininger for “PopMatters” is a film review of Olivia Wilde’s *Booksmart* (2019). Leininger praises the movie as one of the best comedies of the year, highlighting its sharp humor, strong performances, and refreshing take on the high school genre. The review notes how *Booksmart* (2019) presents a more inclusive and progressive setting, featuring queer and diverse characters, yet argues that these aspects remain mostly on the surface. Instead of offering a deep political or social commentary, the film is seen as portraying a light-hearted, idealized version of teenage life. Overall, the review focuses on the film’s tone and storytelling rather than exploring issues of identity or representation.

Through this, we can conclude that the previous studies divided into two section, the direct and indirect, while the top of five previous studies mainly talked about *Booksmart* (2019), the other five uses *Booksmart* (2019) as an example for their related studies. The similarity of the ten previous studies, they still have a relevance with the concept of postmodern identity.

1.6 Research Method

1.6.1 Method of Collecting Data

Library research according to George (2008) is a methodical process that gathering and analysing existing data, determining what is unknown, speculating,

carefully applying logical techniques, verifying, evaluating, repeating, and finally interpreting results to increase understanding. The writer would use library research, looking for materials that were relevant and helpful for the study. This included finding theories and perspectives to support the analysis.

The primary data for this study will be *Booksmart* (2019) movie. The writer collected the secondary data from books, journal articles, and other sources related to identity and postmodern theory according to Douglass Kellner as well the *Booksmart* (2019) movie. To gather the data, the writer will watched, identified, and marked each scene and dialogue which was relevant with Molly's identity. After the data was gathered, the writer would describe, interpret, explain, also connecting the data with postmodern identity theory.

1.6.2 Method of Approach

According to Sugiyono (2022), descriptive research is a method of gathering information on events, processes, procedures, and other aspects of a phenomenon being studied. Descriptive research does not aim to test hypotheses or make generalisations, but rather to provide information on the studied phenomenon. For this research, the writer would use a descriptive approach to look at the narrative elements of the film. This approach helps to provide a clearer understanding of the issues related to the topic, focusing on how the story is explained and the themes that are shown. The writer chooses this method because it focused on how the identity of the main character, Molly, is formed in the movie *Booksmart* (2019) as the research emphasises the meaning, representation, and the interpretation in the movie.

The components of the movie and how they contribute on the development of character identities are methodically explained using a descriptive technique. Interpreting dialogue, actions, settings, and character connections that are important to the concept of postmodern identity is how the analysis is worked out.

1.7 Organization of the Writing

The organization of the writing of this thesis includes five chapters, including:

I. INTRODUCTION.

This first chapter shows the Background of the Study, Research Questions, Research Aims, Scope of the Study, Previous Studies, Research Method and Organization of the Writing.

II. INTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS.

The second chapter of this study explains the general description of theories that are implied in the study, including intrinsic elements, such as narrative, character and characterization, and theme. The writer will also talk about the description of cinematography elements, including the camera shots.

III. EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS.

The third chapter of this study explains deeper the extrinsic theories which identity in the postmodern era stated by Douglass Kellner in his book, that are implied in this study.

IV. DISCUSSION.

In the fourth chapter, this study focuses on the result and discussion of intrinsic and extrinsic elements, focusing on the main character, Molly, as well as

how the postmodern era in America. In the fourth chapter, the content will be filled only with the author's analysis. The results of the analysis will be combined with the theory used, which is from Douglass Kellner.

V. CONCLUSION.

The last chapter of this study consists of a conclusion of the identity in the postmodern era that happened in America as mainly focused on the teenager as represented in the movie.