

**STEREOTYPING OF SINGLE PARENT REFLECTED IN
STEVEN SODERBERG'S "ERIN BROCKOVICH" MOVIE:
A LIBERAL FEMINIST APPROACH**



RESEARCH PAPER

Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for Getting Bachelor Degree of Education
in English Department

by

HENDRIYATI

A320040248

**SCHOOL OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION
MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF SURAKARTA**

2008

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Being a parent is a choice, and so is being a single parent. Though it is performed with much risk, the status of single parent seems to be a popular alternative in parenthood. In America, nowadays there are many families that are being led by single parent. Compared with other countries, most of single parent in America are mothers (80%), while families which are being led with two parents are at significant risk of becoming single parent families. Forty percent of all young women can expect to be a single parent before their youngest child reaches eighteen years old. It is a shocking phenomenon of American's life, since everyday in United States there are 2860 children see their parent divorce (Huff and Thorpe, 2002: 05).

For approximately 50% the reason of single parent is divorce, and it is more acceptable by society today than before. Moreover, women with higher incomes are likely to seek divorce. Beside divorce, other reason to be single parent in America are the growing economic opportunities for women, the changes in cultural values, the neighborhood that is surrounded with unmarried motherhood, and the general forces created by industrialization and urbanization.

Because of the reason above, single parents are now a widespread phenomenon, with a small number of children raised, at least at some point in their childhood, exclusively by their mother. While the existence of single parent families is far from being new, its perception has changed over time, though it remains at the core of numerous debates on the “future of the family”. Where a single motherhood used to be perceived as something imposed on women, nowadays we see it as the possible result of their free choice. As it has become a noticeable feature of America society, the “single parent” has been increasingly presented in the media, notably in Hollywood movies. A real example of Hollywood movie that carries out single parent phenomenon is a film by Steven Soderberg entitled *Erin Brockovich*.

Erin Brockovich, a movie by Steven Soderberg, is a true-story-based film. This movie was inspired by the case of PG & E Company where the establishing of real estate causes some diseases for the local citizen. PG & E uses chromium hexavalent more than the standardized usages for water pure, for instance it becomes water pollution. This overdose has effects on many diseases suffered by the population, such as cancer, cerebral disease, abortion etc. It is the greatest case of changing financial for real estate project. The changing of financial that is claimed by the society is fulfilled by the company by the interference of Erin Brockovich.

Erin is a single parent who has three children. In the movie, it is told how a mother tries hard to get job, to meet her financial need. She always makes an unsuccessful job interview until she meets her lawyer and convinces

him to hire her. She is demanded to be able to her good will in work. She really tries hard to prove to her partner that she can do something for her job. Since her performance convinces others that she's not the kind of a good employee. Finally she can prove she can work well and being a success woman. Through her claim of PG & G case makes her an important woman and deserves to be respected in her field. Her successful claim needed a hard work and arise a time management problem to her family. As a mother she has a less time to her children that causes some conflict among them. The way this movie portrays a single parent shows that there are some handicaps arise in her family and surrounding.

Angel Damien is one of American sociologists who pays attention to the single parent phenomenon. In his paper "A path to Depression: The Stigmatization of Poor Single Mother". Angel Damien explains that American society considers single parent as "crack whores". This negative stereotype considers that single parent has no ability to support their lives. And to support their lives they act like a whore. It is also explain in Daniel's paper, that society, exclusively in America, has been stereotyping to be incapable of seizing opportunities because they are lack of diligence and initiative (Daniels, 2005: 03).

The word of stereotype means a standardized concept or image of a specific group of people or objects, or direct expression of beliefs and values (Nachbar and Lause. 1992:263-237). In popular cultural theory, it is said that stereotypes are an especially useful tool in the study of popular culture. That is

because they are direct and simple expression of popular beliefs and values and because they can be found in all areas of popular expression (Nachbar & Lause, 1992:26). Those stereotypes are what this movie tries to explore. The stereotypes of America single parent that have build by American society are a common phenomenon. Though it is already common, the researcher tries to explain further the stereotyping through the movie, so that readers find it to easier to understand how the stereotyping is exactly attached on single parent.

What makes this stereotyping interesting to the researcher is how a single parent makes her struggle to fight against the existing stereotyping in her surrounding. Since Erin is used to be a queen of beauty, she always tries to attach the sense beauty of herself. The way she dresses up which shows her body shape makes her partner complain. However, she does not give up her principal to keep her performance. As a single parent *Erin* is demanded to have a job to meet her family's need. Here, she meets another problem when she has to be able to cope with her role as a mother and a carrier woman. In this research, the researcher tries to explore the problems mentioned above as the explanation of the question "how is the stereotyping of single parent reflected in the movie *Erin Brockovich*."

Erin Brockovich movie talks about "American Dream" that all Americans want to be educated, employed, married with children, and complete with owning their own houses. This film tries to show that a 'crack' woman can prove others that she can break the prejudices upon a single. This story is a story about woman who fights against the system with her own 'system'.

Considering the above explanatory ideas, the researcher turns to analyze the film *Erin Brockovich* based on the perspective of feminism because of the some consideration, the first is *Erin Brockovich* as a single parent can play both roles as a mother and father who fulfils and supports family life. The second is that the movie has great possibility to know the phenomenon of feminism of the main character. In this study the researcher encourages herself to give a title STEREOTYPING OF SINGLE PARENT REFLECTED IN STEVEN SODERBERGH'S "ERIN BROCKOVICH" MOVIE: A LIBERAL FEMINIST APPROACH.

B. Previous Study

As long as the researcher knows there is no other researcher that has conducted to study the movie "*Erin Brockovich*" in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.

The researcher just found one study about gender reflected in a movie. The title is Gender Equality in "*She's The Man*" Movie Directed by Andy Fickman: Feminist Approach, which is conducted by Chandra Maulana (2007), the student of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. The difference of this research and the research's study lies in the objects of the research. This research uses *She's the Man* movie and the researcher uses *Erin Brockovich* movie And the similarity lies on the perspective used to analyze the phenomenon brought up in the movie, that is liberal feminist.

C. Problem Statement

The problem statement of the research is “How is the stereotyping of single parent reflected in the *Erin Brockovich* movie in feminist approach perspective”?

D. Objective of the Study

The objective of the research for the reader: is to explore how the stereotyping of single parent is reflected in the *Erin Brockovich* movie.

E. Limitation of the Study

The researcher focuses on the analysis of single parent, Erin Brockovich as the major character in Steven Soderberg’s *Erin Brockovich* movie, viewed from the feminist perspective, particularly liberal feminist.

F. Benefit of the Study

The benefits expected from the study are as follows:

1. Theoretical Benefit

The theoretical benefit is for getting deeper understanding about feminist issue in Steven Soderberg’s “*Erin Brockovich*” movie

2. Practical Benefit

- a. It can be a reference in doing researches of other cases.
- b. It can be a new discourse for people about how single parent a single parent in America is stereotyped.

- c. It can be a new discourse for people that single parent can break the stereotype that has been existing in a society.

G. Research Method

In this research, the writer analyzes stereotyping of single parent in Steven Soderbergh's *Erin Brockovich* movie by using descriptive qualitative method.

1. Object of the Study

The object of the study is Steven Soderbergh's *Erin Brockovich* movie because the movie reflects the single parent phenomenon in USA.

2. Type of the Data and the Data Source

In this study, there are two sources of data namely primary and secondary data source.

a. Primary data

The primary data are taken from a movie entitles "*Erin Brockovich*" which was released in 2000 and written by Susannah Grand and directed by Steven Soderbergh. This film was produced by Columbia Pictures and Universal Pictures.

b. Secondary data source

The writer takes the secondary data source, including the scrip of the movie and other information from book and website from internet that were relevant to the subject matter.

3. Method of Collecting Data

The technique of collecting data was purpose sampling. Where the researcher took sample of dialogue and ellipse of picture of the movie then used it as a starting point to analyze the issue. The analysis of the sample and dialogue and ellipse of picture could be used as a representation of a general phenomenon in social life. In order to make the data more complete, the researcher is doing some steps. The necessary steps are as follows:

- a. Watching movie and finding out the important sentence on the dialogues.
- b. Reading the script of the movie
- c. Reading the books that are connected to the research.
- d. Browsing to the internet to get some information articles that related to the research.
- e. Finding out the important data
- f. Arranging the important data based on its
- g. Developing the data that are provided.

4. Technique for Analyzing Data

The data are analyzed by using descriptive analysis. It concerns with structural element of the movie and feminist analysis. The steps are follows:

- a. Classifying the data
- b. Verifying the data
- c. Interpreting the data based on underlying theories.

H. Research Paper Organization

Research paper organization is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is the introduction which consist of background of the study, literary review, problem statement, research limitation, research objectives, benefit of study, research method and paper organization. The second chapter is underlying theory, which consists of notion of feminist, liberal feminist, as also theoretical application. The third chapter consists of social historical background of single parent in 20th century of American society. The fourth chapter consists of discussion, including of analysis based on structural elements. The fifth chapter consists of analysis based on the feminist perspective. And last chapter is conclusion and suggestion. Then, appendix and bibliography is included after the last chapter.