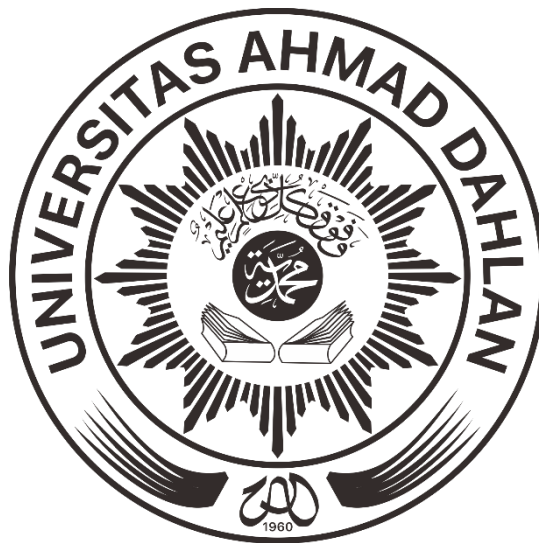# HYPERSEXUALIZATION OF BLACK WIDOW IN
THE *IRON MAN 2* MOVIE

NASKAH PUBLIKASI

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ABSTRACT

HYPERSEXULIZATION OF BLACK WIDOW IN THE *IRON MAN 2* MOVIE

By

Hananan Taqiyya (2000026019)

This undergraduate thesis explores the hyper-sexualization of the character Black Widow (Natasha Romanoff) in the movie "Iron Man 2" (2010) within the context of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). The MCU, initiated by Marvel Studios, traditionally spotlighted male superheroes like Iron Man, Captain America, and Thor, epitomizing classical heroism. However, with the introduction of female characters, the narrative began shifting towards more multidimensional and empowered heroines. This research focuses on Black Widow's debut in "Iron Man 2," examining how her portrayal as a femme fatale intersects with themes of hypersexuality, mainly through the lens of Barthes's semiotic theory and the male gaze theory proposed by Laura Mulvey.

This qualitative study examines Black Widow's character through a comprehensive analysis of "Iron Man 2" (2010), supplemented by the "Black Widow" (2021) film, scholarly articles, journals, and critical analyses. The research involves detailed viewing and documentation of the films, focusing on character identities, contextual details, dialogues, and interactions. Semiotic theory is used to explore the mythology of the "femme fatale," while the male gaze theory helps in understanding the hypersexualization depicted through specific film techniques.

The study finds that Black Widow's hypersexualization is evident in her physical portrayal and the emphasis on her sexual allure. Her persona as a femme fatale is intertwined with the male gaze, which objectifies her as a seductive figure. Black Widow's intelligence and skills, which she uses to outmaneuver adversaries, further reinforce her femme fatale archetype. Using Roland Barthes" semiotic theory, the research identifies key characteristics of the femme fatale in Black Widow, including her intelligence and beauty, which she leverages to manipulate Iron Man. The male gaze theory highlights how specific camera angles and the depiction of women as images and spectacles contribute to the hypersexualization of her character. This thesis demonstrates that the hypersexualization of Black Widow in "Iron Man 2" is a manifestation of the male gaze, reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes and objectification of women in media. However, it also underscores her complexity and multifaceted nature as a character who uses her intelligence and skills to achieve her objectives.

Keywords: Black Widow, Hypersexualization, Femme Fatale, MCU, Semiotic Theory, Male Gaze, Iron Man 2

ABSTRAK

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Skripsi ini mengeksplorasi hiperseksualisasi karakter Black Widow (Natasha Romanoff) dalam film "Iron Man 2" (2010) dalam konteks Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). MCU, yang diprakarsai oleh Marvel Studios, secara tradisional menyoroti superhero laki-laki seperti Iron Man, Captain America, dan Thor, yang melambangkan kepahlawanan klasik. Namun, dengan diperkenalkannya karakter perempuan, narasi mulai beralih ke pahlawan yang lebih multidimensional dan berdaya. Penelitian ini berfokus pada debut Black Widow di "Iron Man 2," dengan menelaah bagaimana penggambaran dirinya sebagai femme fatale bersinggungan dengan tema hiperseksualitas, terutama melalui lensa teori semiotik Barthes dan teori male gaze yang diusulkan oleh Laura Mulvey.

Studi kualitatif ini menelaah karakter Black Widow melalui analisis komprehensif terhadap film "Iron Man 2" (2010), yang dilengkapi dengan film "Black Widow" (2021), artikel ilmiah, jurnal, dan analisis kritis. Penelitian ini melibatkan penayangan dan dokumentasi mendetail dari film-film tersebut, dengan fokus pada identitas karakter, detail kontekstual, dialog, dan interaksi. Teori semiotik digunakan untuk mengeksplorasi mitologi "femme fatale," sementara teori male gaze membantu memahami hiperseksualitas yang digambarkan melalui teknik-teknik film tertentu.

Studi ini menemukan bahwa hiperseksualisasi Black Widow terlihat jelas dalam penggambaran fisiknya dan penekanan pada daya tarik seksualnya. Personanya sebagai femme fatale terjalin dengan male gaze, yang mengobjektifikasinya sebagai sosok yang menggoda. Kecerdasan dan keterampilan Black Widow, yang ia gunakan untuk mengalahkan musuh-musuhnya, semakin memperkuat arketipe femme fatale-nya. Dengan menggunakan teori semiotik Roland Barthes, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi karakteristik utama femme fatale dalam diri Black Widow, termasuk kecerdasan dan kecantikannya, yang ia manfaatkan untuk memanipulasi Iron Man. Teori male gaze menyoroti bagaimana sudut kamera tertentu, dan penggambaran perempuan sebagai gambar dan tontonan, berkontribusi pada hiperseksualisasi karakternya. Tesis ini menunjukkan bahwa hiperseksualisasi Black Widow dalam "Iron Man 2" merupakan manifestasi dari male gaze, yang memperkuat stereotip gender yang merugikan dan objektifikasi perempuan dalam media. Namun, hal ini juga menekankan kompleksitas dan sifat multifaset karakternya yang menggunakan kecerdasan dan keterampilannya untuk mencapai tujuannya.

Kata Kunci: Black Widow, Hiperseksualisasi, Femme Fatale, MCU, Teori Semiotik, Male Gaze, Iron Man 2

BAB I

INTRODUCTION

A.   Background of the Study

Media representation plays a vital role in shaping how people perceive racial and gender relations in the world. The film engages with audiences by forming an ideological framework around the social environment they live in (Zhang, 2023). A film is a form of art that uses moving images to tell stories or convey ideas to an audience. The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) is a series of interconnected superhero films produced by Marvel Studios. The films are based on characters that appear in Marvel Comics and feature a shared universe in which many of the characters and plot elements are interwoven. The MCU has been successful in creating a cohesive and interconnected world that spans multiple films and TV shows. The films in the MCU have been praised for their storytelling, character development, and visual effects.

The femme fatale archetype has been criticized for its role in hypersexualization, particularly in the portrayal of female characters in popular culture. The archetype embodies harmful tropes about women, such as

seductiveness, manipulation, and danger, which can contribute to the objectification and sexualization of female characters.

The "Iron Man 2" (2010) movie success and the portrayal of Tony Stark, played by Robert Downey Jr., are critical to understanding the MCU's evolution and impact on popular culture. The film's themes, characters, and narratives get into the cultural review, influencing beyond films, television shows, and even music. "Iron Man 2" (2010) explores into issues of identity, power, and responsibility, which become crucial to the MCU's storylines. These themes are expanded after that film, resulting in a rich and complicated universe. On the other hand, "Iron Man 2" (2010) highlights how the introduction of a new character, Black Widow, as one of the superheroines, turns her into an object of male sexual desire, notably Tony Stark.

The connection between Black Widow's hypersexualization in "Iron Man 2" (2010) movie and her depiction as a femme fatale is significant. The film presents her as a mysterious and captivating character, emphasizing her physical appearance and sexual allure. This portrayal is evident in how she is framed and lit, with a particular focus on her body and facial features. The hypersexualization of Black Widow in "Iron Man 2" (2010) movie is important because it mirrors societal attitudes toward women and their bodies (Barranco, 2021). The film's depiction of Black Widow as a sexualized and objectified character reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and perpetuates the objectification of women in media.

B. **Problems Formulation**

1.   How does Black Widow's character portray the "femme fatale" myth through her actions and decisions, as analyzed by Barthes's theory?

2.   How is hypersexuality defined and portrayed in the character of Black Widow in the "Iron Man 2" (2010) movie?

C. **Objectives of Study**

        The objective of this research, as presented in your thesis titled "Hypersexualization of Black Widow in the *"Iron Man 2"* Movie,"

1. To explore how Barthes' theory deciphers the signs used to portray Black Widow as a "femme fatale" in the "Iron Man 2" (2010) Movie.

2. To analyze the hypersexualization of black widows within the male gaze theory.

D. Review of the Related Studies

This research is related to the topic of gender representation in the Marvel Cinematic Universe:

"An Analysis of Black Widow (2021): Marvel's Most Feminist Film Features Powerful Sisters and an Attenuated Male Gaze". The author of the article is Kyle D. Killian. The article was published in the Journal of Feminist Family Therapy. The author is affiliated with Capella University. The problem of research addressed in the article is the representation of superheroines in comic books and comic book movies, which often subscribe to the patriarchal logic of the male gaze. This results in the objectification and sexualization of female characters. (Killian, 2023)

"Avenging Women: An Analysis of Postfeminist Female Representations in the Cinematic Marvel Avengers Series" by Mary Louise DeMarchi, published in June 2014, is affiliated with DePaul University. The thesis appears to be a significant contribution to the academic exploration of gender representation in popular culture and media, particularly within the context of the Marvel Avengers film series. (DeMarchi, 2014)

"Superheroines and Sexism: Female Representation in the Marvel Cinematic Universe" by Folukemi Olufidie and Ms. Yunex Echezabal, this paper discusses the representation of female superheroes in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and the impact of feminist movements on their roles. It highlights the sexualization, lack of inclusivity, and marginalization of female characters in the MCU. The article argues for the need to address these issues in the film industry as a whole. The limitation of this paper is that it primarily focuses on the portrayal of female characters in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and does not extensively analyze other film franchises or genres. (Echezabal, 2021)

"Gender Portrayal in Marvel Cinematic Universe Films: Gender Representation, Moral Alignment, and Rewards for Violence" by Kristen Ray likely examines the depiction of gender in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) films, focusing on three key aspects: gender representation, moral alignment, and the potential rewards for violence. The article is expected to provide a critical analysis of how gender roles and behaviors are presented in MCU films. (Ray, 2020)

"Distorted Asian Female Representation in the Marvel Cinematic Universe: Old and New Pattern" by Jingjing Zhang, the thesis is expected to delve into how these portrayals have evolved, highlighting both persistent stereotypes and any positive changes in representation. The author analyzes early MCU films to identify stereotypes and biases associated with Asian female characters. This could involve examining portrayals of Asian women as exotic, submissive, or one-dimensional characters. (Zhang, 2023)

E.   Research Methodology

1. Data and Source of Data

1.1. Primary Data

The primary focus of this thesis is on the characters Black Widow (Natasha Romanoff) within the MCU. This character has played pivotal roles in the MCU, and her portrayal of the femme fatale affected the hypersexualization of her character. In addition to this character, the following film that has been selected for the primary data is "Iron Man 2" (2010), directed by Jon Favreau. This film portrays Black Widow in her initial introduction to the MCU.

1.2 Secondary Data

The secondary data for this thesis include the "Black Widow" (2021) movie, directed by Cate Shortland. This film serves as an in-depth exploration of the character of Black Widow and delves into themes of agency and identity. The movie used can be accessed in the official Disney Hotstar+ application.

2. Method and Technique of Collecting Data

In conducting research, the writer needs the research method to answer the research question. Before getting the data analysis and conclusion, the researcher needs much preparation to obtain the data. After that, the important thing is to understand what the research method is. The research method is primarily an academic method for collecting data for particular purposes and implementations. (Sugiyono, 2014) explains that there are several techniques for collecting data, including observation, interview, questionnaire, documentation, and triangulation.

3. Method and Technique of Analyzing Data

The primary analytical approach in this thesis is qualitative, with a central focus on conducting an in-depth examination of the "femme fatale" myth and the hypersexualization of Black Widow within the "Iron Man 2" (2010) movie. Qualitative research methods, including content analysis, textual analysis, and visual analysis, will be employed to delve into how the character Black Widow is portrayed across the "Iron Man 2" (2010) movie.

F. Presentation

This study is presented in four chapters. The first chapter is the introduction, which consists of the background of the chosen object, problem formulations, objectives of the study, review of related studies, and method of research. The second chapter onsists of a theoretical approach and framework. The third chapter is a discussion that focuses on the discussion and analysis of the study. The last chapter is the conclusion, which describes the results of the study.

BAB II

THEORETICAL APPROACH

A. Theoretical Approach

1.   Semiotic Approach

The semiotic approach extends beyond language to include visual signs, gestures, symbols, and other forms of communication. On the other hand, it typically focuses on the structure and use of language.

2. Sociological Approach

The male gaze theory originates from feminist film theory that is connected to a sociological approach, particularly in the examination of gender roles, power dynamics, and societal norms.

The sociological approach analyzes and explains social reality from a sociological perspective. It connects individual concepts to organize and support sociological knowledge. As a result, such information is built around complex theoretical frameworks and methodologies.

B. Theoretical Framework

1. Semiotic Theory

Semiotics theory has its roots in philosophy, linguistics, and the study of signs and symbols. The study of signs and symbols can be traced back to ancient civilizations, where philosophers and scholars explored the nature of language, communication, and symbolism.

2. Male Gaze Theory

According to the male gaze hypothesis, films are often constructed from the perspective of a heterosexual male. As a result, women in films are frequently objectified, presented as objects of desire, and exposed to the scopophilic pleasure (joy obtained from staring) of the male viewer.

C. Femme Fatale

Femme fatale literally means "fatal woman" in French. This term is used to describe a female fictional character that is seductive, mysterious, and dangerous. Femme fatale literally means "fatal woman" in French.

D. Femme Fatale in American Cinema

American cinema refers to the film industry and its productions in the United States. It encompasses the history of filmmaking in the country, from the early days of silent films to the present day. American cinema has been a significant part of the global film industry, with Hollywood being the center of the industry.

The femme fatale is a prominent figure in American cinema, particularly within the film noir and neo-noir genres. Originating in the late 19th century, the term "femme fatale" describes an alluring and dangerous woman. In American films, the femme fatale is typically depicted as a seductive and manipulative character who employs her beauty and charm to manipulate men and achieve her objectives.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS

This chapter deals with the outcomes and discussions of the study of "Hypersexualization of Black Widow in the "Iron Man 2" Movie ."The results of this study are obtained through the process of analyzing the sequence of the characters of the Black Widow in the film "Iron Man 2" (2010), then expressing it in a form of systematic analysis. This chapter refers to two formulas of problems generating the myth of "femme fatale" and hypersexualization in the Black Widow character using semiotic analysis and the male gaze.

A. Black Widow's portrayal of the "femme fatale" myth

Femme fatale literally means "fatal woman" in French. This term is used to describe a female fictional character that is seductive, mysterious, and dangerous. Usually, they use their charm and intelligence to manipulate men, often bringing them to destruction. One of the characteristics of a femme fatale is that it is beautiful and attractive; a femme fatale is usually described as a woman who is very beautiful and physically attractive (Raalte, 2019). They use their appearance to their advantage to attract and manipulate men. The next feature is strong ambition. Usually, a woman with a femme fatale character is always ambitious in getting something she wants. They use their charm and intelligence to get what they want. They can easily manipulate men to do things that benefit them.

B. Black Widow potrayed hypersexuality in the "Iron Man 2" Movie

Hypersexuality refers to an act or process that emphasizes or highlights a person's sexual attributes, behavior, or characteristics. It often involves portraying individuals, especially women and girls, as sexual beings, reducing them to their sexual appeal or function at the expense of their other qualities and attributes. Hypersexuality can occur in various forms of media and popular culture, including film, television, advertising, and fashion (Burch, 2018). It involves treating individuals as objects of sexual pleasure for others, not as complete and complex human beings with their desires, needs, and agencies. Sexual objectivity is often manifested in the way people are described in the media, where their values are mainly related to their sexual appeal.

BAB IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In the final chapter of this thesis, the researchers will present some conclusions and suggestions based on the previously discussed research findings involving the myth of "femme fatale" and hypersexuality in the Black Widow's character in the "Iron Man 2" (2010) movie.

A. Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the character Black Widow, portrayed by Scarlett Johansson, who experienced hypersexualization and embodied the femme fatale archetype in the "Iron Man 2" (2010) movie. This hypersexualization is evident in how Black Widow is depicted and framed in these films, especially in her physical appearance and sexual allure. Additionally, her femme fatale persona is closely tied to the male gaze, which objectifies and expresses her character as a seductive figure.

B. Suggestion

Based on the research findings and discussion, the researcher has several suggestions for readers and future researchers conducting similar studies. Here are some points to consider:

1. The researcher hopes that this study on the hypersexualization of the character Black Widow can pave the way for further research from pragmatic aspects and other issues related to feminism.

2. The researcher acknowledges that this study is far from perfect and that there are still many aspects that can be explored further, such as a more in-depth study of Black Widow's character and how it influences hypersexualization.

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