



Post-feminist Discourses in Taylor Jenkins Reid's *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*

Liyana Khairunnisa, Supiastutik & Ghanesya Hari Murti

supiastutik.sastra@unej.ac.id

English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Jember, INDONESIA

Abstract

*This research analyzes feminist success in post-feminist discourse related to neoliberalism in the Hollywood film industry through *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. This research aims to reveal how Evelyn's actions within the neoliberalism framework criticize the discourse of post-feminism. Postfeminism emerged as a response to feminism, suggesting that women can embrace traditional feminine roles while still feeling empowered and in control, as post-feminism believes that feminism has largely achieved its goals. Angela McRobbie's post-feminism theory is used to analyze the novel because it identifies the form of neoliberal practice in post-feminism. The results show that the success of neoliberal feminists portrayed by Evelyn is false because the dominance of neoliberalism practices still idealizes a heterosexual matrix with seven marriages possible in the Hollywood industry. Women are capitalized as sexual objects for heterosexual audiences for neoliberal interests. Women must comply with these two things through the sexual contract by participating in the fashion beauty complex to survive in the work environment. The resulting impact is that women then repress their gender identity and discipline it to fit the industry's logic. This discourse is disseminated in the novel as a social discourse even though the author's critical position seeks to reject the application of heteronormativity in the novel and also the social practices of the Hollywood industry.*

Keywords: *heterosexual matrix; neoliberalism; post-feminist discourse*

Article information

Received:
31 May
2023

Revised:
26 September
2023

Accepted:
14 October
2023

Introduction

Post-feminism is a concept that can effectively display the gaps inherent in feminism's cultural, social, economic, and political relations and connect those gaps to contemporary problems of gender subjectivity (Kanai, 2019, p. 158). Gill (2007) adds that

post-feminism in popular culture campaigns women as figures of subjectivity where women have the freedom to make choices and want much. This has led to the women's movement for their rights being individualized (McRobbie, 2015).

One of the phenomena in post-feminism is that women think their bodies are not only the object of the male gaze but can also emphasize their subjectivity and strengths (Darwin & Miller, 2021; Wigley & Dornelles, 2022). Dobson's (2014) study on the laddishness performativity of young women's social networking sites (SNS) shows profile photos between the ages of 18 and 21 to maintain self-definition in the face of intense social and cultural scrutiny of sexual objectification and gaze. Hence, there is the phenomenon of the biopolitics of women's bodies in magazines and fashion activities that feature women's body parts, as well as the phenomenon where women display their bodies on their social media accounts. According to Foucault (2008), biopolitics is how the body becomes a tool of power to control society in the social and economic fields attractively, promising sexual pleasure and offering control illusions for anyone who follows the trend and has become a culture of competition in neoliberal society. This phenomenon happens in celebrities such as in Minaj's and Perry's music videos showing capitalism that remains in Perry and Minaj as part of the capitalist product in the media formed by the men who run the capitalist and consumerist world (Walser, 2015).

This research analyzes post-feminist discourse that relates to neoliberalism in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. This novel is a historical fiction written by an American woman writer, Taylor Jenkins Reid, in 2017. This novel describes Evelyn Hugo, who wants to be a talented actress in Hollywood by winning an Oscar. To achieve her goals, she got married seven times to famous men and became a sex icon in Hollywood. Evelyn is described as an individualized woman, in line with the characteristics of women in post-feminism. However, she feels frustrated and unhappy after achieving her goals. At the end of the story, Evelyn is told to pass away due to a drug overdose.

This is problematic because in this novel Evelyn has represented the criteria for successful feminist that are promoted by the mass media in post-feminism. Still, she does not enjoy her 'feminist success' at the end of the story. Whereas today, the media always represents their feminist branding on celebrity

figures. Based on Jackson (2021), celebrity feminism is a discursive tool to benchmark women toward the boundaries that shape themselves and others to become feminist subjects or not. Therefore, this research questions the accuracy of the criteria for feminist success in post-feminist discourse.

There are two previous studies that analyze *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. The first is Damayanti (2023) who stated the novel exemplifies liberal feminism. This is evident in how Evelyn and Monique struggled with the oppression they faced in order to reform laws that favored men and individuals of white racial backgrounds in all aspects of life. The second is Suharni's doctoral dissertation (2021) that revealed Evelyn is an example of gender as performativity and subversive by using Butler's theory. Besides, Lewis, Rumens, & Simpson (2022) used post-feminism as an analytical tool to identify the position of mumpreneur that links feminine and masculine behaviors related to home and work. Harrison (2019) reveals three manipulations of women's double standards in electronic sports media by using Gill's (2007a) and McRobbie's (2004a) post-feminist discourses, those are 1) the increasingly exposed outfits of female sports broadcasters, 2) few recruitment and retention sports broadcasters for women, and 3) unequal media consumer evaluations of on-screen appearance.

From the above studies, there are still few who analyze this novel from a post-feminist scope and concerns explored in earlier postfeminist studies primarily revolve around matters related to identity, individual empowerment, and negotiating power dynamics between genders. Therefore, the novelty of this research is exploring McRobbie's post-feminism theory in literary analysis and revealing the involvement of neoliberalism in producing feminist success in postfeminist discourse in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*.

The objectives of this research are divided into two categories: first, describing post-feminist discourses that are influenced by neoliberal practices in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, and second, questioning the true

meaning behind the 'feminist success' that is experienced by female characters in the novel. In finding the answer, the purpose of this analysis is to discover and examine how the post-feminist discourse is constructed and the critical position of the author in the novel. This research can help further research about the study of post-feminism research and develop an understanding of post-feminism.

Methodology

This research uses qualitative research. The qualitative research approach effectively finds and observes certain information by exploring social behavior phenomena (Mack & Woodson, 2005). The data source in this research is divided into two. The primary data is from *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Reid. The secondary data is collected from scholarly journals, books, and internet resources that are related to post-feminist discourse in America, especially in Hollywood.

The data collection in this research uses a close reading technique. Based on Fisher & Frey (2014), close reading is a learning practice to understand the meaning of a complex text and improve critical thinking habits by repeating reading, cognitive scaffolding, and discussion. The purpose of doing close reading in this research is to find and understand the information, statement, and arguments from the sentences, paragraphs, and dialogues in the novel that are related to post-feminist discourse by paying attention to the plot, characters, background places and events in the story.

The data analysis uses a post-feminist discourse approach to describe some impacts that are caused by neoliberalism in post-feminist discourse. The next step is connecting texts in the novel and data identified in reality with McRobbie's post-feminism theory. This research uses two concepts from McRobbie's approach (2009), which are a new sexual contract and the luminosity effect, to discuss the undone of post-feminism. Therefore, the connection between the text in the novel, the relationship between neoliberalism and post-feminism, and the social phenomena in reality (that are connected to post-feminism) would be seen. Then, to answer the critical position of

the author is to connect the relationship between information about Reid from her background. These interviews connect with post-feminist discourse in the Hollywood film industry with the novel's content. The result of this analysis research is presented as a descriptive description.

Results and Discussion

This research analyzes data from the novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, which tells about Evelyn Hugo's life journey as a Hollywood star known as a glamorous iconic actress of Hollywood. This research will reveal the post-feminist discourses that exist in this novel. The novel is observed using Angela McRobbie's theory of post-feminism, where in her theory, she criticizes neoliberalism that intervenes in post-feminist discourse. To explore the meaning of feminism success, the discussion is divided into two, focusing on the novel and author who is part of social discourse in reality.

The Post-feminism Discourses in The Novel

In *The Aftermath of Feminism*, Angela McRobbie (2009) criticizes the cultural transformations and economic changes in popular culture (beauty, fashion, magazines, etc.) in post-feminism, which creates a new arrangement in feminism, especially in the formation of a renewed understanding of young womanhood. McRobbie warns that the idea of womanhood is being reshaped in some Western countries, which is linear with neoliberalism.

Young women are chosen as the subject of social change in this post-feminism because they are considered a good investment, with little risk, and are quickly recruited with the promise of freedom (McRobbie, 2008, 2009, p. 15). They are forced indirectly to compete with other women to pursue the success and freedom promised by neoliberalism. Therefore, the feminist movement today is more individual and competitive rather than a collective movement like feminism used to be (McRobbie, 2015, p. 4). She also states that in popular culture in this era of 'post'-feminism, young women are manipulated to gain choice

and freedom, such as social and sexual recognition in public values, which no longer necessitates feminism. Feminism is considered old-fashioned, redundant, and ambivalent for young women (McRobbie, 2009, p. 11).

This post-feminist masquerade is shaped by media such as television programs targeting women as female citizenship. The criteria are under 50 years old and can be working-class or lower middle-class women, as long as they are able to play an active role as the potential value in the labor market and consumer culture agents (McRobbie, 2009, p. 124). According to McRobbie (2009), female citizenship is defined as women who focus on shopping activities and carry out routine activities, that is, working to earn money, spending money to do shopping, and additionally following female trends provided by television programs.

The Neoliberal Practices in Hollywood Film Industry

The media has good marketing to promote their post-feminist discourse to society. Public figures such as celebrities become the face and mediator of how the media's feminism is presented to the public (Genz, 2015). The celebrity figure in post-feminism branding fits perfectly with the description of female characters in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, which is centered on celebrity life. History.com (2018) states that Hollywood is symbolized as a place full of glamorous stars, power, and money in the entertainment industry. In about a century, the Hollywood film industry has raised the stars by receiving significant recognition and fame in America and the world's popularity. Hollywood has dominated the world of cinema and become the center of the world's film industry. It is implied in the novel from the main character's point of view, Evelyn Hugo, how her perspective on life in Hollywood, with the following quotation:

Here's the thing about Hollywood. It's both a place and a feeling. If you run there, you can run toward Southern California, where the sun always shines and the grimy buildings and dirty sidewalks are replaced by palm trees and orange groves. But you

also run toward the way life is portrayed in the movies.

You run toward a world that is moral and just, where the good guys win and the bad guys lose, where the pain you face is only in an effort to make you stronger, so that you can win that much bigger in the end. (Reid, 2021, p. 44)

The narration above describes how Evelyn judges Hollywood, and it shows that Evelyn admires Hollywood. Evelyn believes that living in Hollywood will be the same as that shown in Hollywood films. The narration brings a statement about Hollywood image to people that living in Hollywood has a happy life, or if it is likened to a movie, living in Hollywood has a happily-ever-after life. Hollywood is shown as a place where there is no crime, and justice and safety always exist, as shown in words "moral" and "good guys win" that describe Hollywood. This proves how the influence of mass media, such as films and television programs, can affect people's interpretation of something. Bi (quoted in Ibbi, 2014) says that Hollywood films build equality, freedom, prosperity, and other positive aspects of Hollywood as their global image characteristics. It makes Hollywood a dream place for people who want to have a better life, especially in financial aspect. Therefore, the narration above shows that Evelyn wants to be in Hollywood to make it easier for her to achieve her desire as a Hollywood star.

Hollywood reflects on the sector of the economy and industrial conditions in producing films, that is, by spending as little production costs as possible but with results that still fulfill or even beyond the standard of movies that audiences (buyers) are interested in. That statement makes the Hollywood film industry a brilliant example of capitalism in business (Benshoff & Griffin, 2011; Erigha, 2015; Ibbi, 2014). Including the feminist movement, Hollywood also shows feminist actions that are still in line with neoliberal and patriarchal benefits. According to Press & Liebes (2016), female character identity in more typical films almost constantly highlights women's sexuality in most scenes in the film. It is illustrated in the following data:

Even in her much-talked-about sex scene in Three A.M. from 1977, in which she writhes, reverse-cowboy style, on top of Don Adler, you see her full breasts for less than three seconds. It was rumored for years that the incredible box-office numbers for the film were because couples were going to see it multiple times. (Reid, 2021, p. 16)

This quotation is taken from Monique's point of view about Evelyn's film. It explains that having explicit sex scenes in a film can make people, which in this quotation is preferred to couples, feel addicted to watching it, especially heterosexuals. This action will affect the film's income shown, as displayed in the phrase "the incredible box-office numbers for the film." Filmmakers use this interest to increase profits from scenes representing female objectification to satisfy society's desire to put women in sexual entertainment. It illustrates Mulvey's opinion of Hollywood films that are produced in a patriarchal society where the visual content of films always contains male bias. Therefore, Hollywood films are often intended for heterosexual male audiences, so people outside of this group must adapt to the male gaze in films that objectify women (Mulvey quoted in Benschhoff & Griffin, 2011, p. 506). Although the West is known to be more open about freedom, Western countries' ideology of patriarchal capitalism is still very dominant, like Hollywood is dominated by men (Benschhoff & Griffin, 2011; Erigha, 2015). Thus, until now, women are still traded as objects of desire in the mass media to fulfill heterosexual male customers' wishes, such as what Evelyn does in the above quotation.

Feminism in neoliberal economics implicates women from the conceptual turn of sexual objectification into sexual subjectivity to articulate women's girlhood in terms of predetermined scripts of beauty, femininity, and sexiness (Genz, 2015). As Foucault (1997) claims, the human body can be shaped, trained, and impressed with the imprint of dominant historical forms of desire, femininity, masculinity, and self-hood through the rules and organization to obey, become skillful, and upgrade its forces. This perspective embodies mass media discipline Evelyn's body -news- an ideology of sexual objectification. Also,

Evelyn's body is considered a mechanism of power to control people watching the film because the film producer and the news writer know that people are interested in a woman's body. The construction of a woman's body in this quotation is preferred to Evelyn's chest, and the sexy poses that Evelyn has made in the film fit with the postfeminist notion that the body is women's main sign of success. Therefore, it can be considered that a woman's body can gain empowerment (Gill, 2007b) and self-esteem (McRobbie, 2015). It is implied in the following data:

I wasn't blessed with an hourglass figure. My ass might as well have been a flat wall. You could hang a picture on it. It was my chest that kept men's interest. And women admired my face. (Reid, 2021, p. 51)

Evelyn is consciously aware that the parts of her body are the center of people's attention. The male gaze implies lust, while the female gaze implies admiration and envy. Even so, these two Evelyn's body parts become symbols of objectification towards a woman's body, which both indicate desire. Being the object of desire can also be interpreted as Evelyn's power to get recognition from society as a form of success. Even though on the other side, it proves that a woman's body is controlled and imprisoned by neoliberal practice from Hollywood. Also, Evelyn's self-confidence toward her body is an illustration of the research results by Evans & Riley (2013), who conducted interviews with white heterosexual women aged between 23 to 58 years who exposed that the sexiness of female celebrities is understood as a form of women's rights, pleasures, and 'choice.' It is considered a postfeminist legacy that becomes the benchmark against 'ordinary' women.

The self-confidence of women toward their bodies becomes one of the post-feminist discourses expressed by Gill (2007) and McRobbie (2004, 2009, 2015) that women are controlled by neoliberalism and consumer culture through post-feminist discourse, which seems to be accepted by society through Western media, such as television programs, films, advertaintments, magazines that often choose women who are beautiful and not fat (Benschhoff & Griffin, 2011; Cohen, 2017; Lazar,

2011). Through Evelyn's character from the point of view of herself, other characters, and the media in the novel, it can be concluded that women have to face the stereotypes of society towards women's bodies which lead to sexualization and utilize it for their (women) own benefit. Therefore, because their bodies are used as objects of desire through stereotypes of society, especially men, women capitalize on their bodies as their 'selling value.' This exchange of women and success becomes a normal thing that happens in a consumer culture which is explained in McRobbie's concept in her postfeminism theory, which is a new sexual contract.

A New Sexual Contract

The form of sexual contract is reiterated by Carole Pateman (2015) and first used in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries in Anglo-American societies, such as marriage contracts and labor contracts from a feminist perspective to obtain the principle of women's freedom and equality (Pateman, 2015). In contrast to Pateman, McRobbie uses the phrase 'sexual contract,' which incorporates Foucault's theories about biopolitics, power, and discipline, and Stuart Hall's, wherein this new sexual contract refers to a new form of power that requires negotiation at the social and cultural level to adjust the field of sexuality (McRobbie, 2009). In the context of post-feminism, McRobbie's new sexual contract refers to the analysis of the combination of power that shapes feminist discourse in the West. The rise of new sexual contract can be considered as a new patriarchal tool in the era of neoliberalism to anticipate the danger of feminism, strengthen control over women, and maintain male domination in a disguised way (McRobbie, 2009). This new sexual contract is proposed to young women to become 'perfect' as a form of women's equality and success. The success and equality that the new sexual contract in post-feminism offers young women are the freedom of their own choices, education, opportunities for employment, fertility control such as sexual freedom, gaining qualifications, and financial ability to participate in customer culture.

This postfeminist sexual contract requires women to ignore and not criticize patriarchal

issues (McRobbie, 2009). These demands are conveyed and propagated by mass media with economic interests. Through this postfeminist sexual contract, neoliberal media culture directs young women to self-work, self-formation, and self-improvement in cultivating the desire to be 'perfect' (Kanai, 2019, p. 11). Women who are considered to have achieved feminist success are women who show their contribution to consumerist cultures, such as shopping, especially in the beauty and fashion cosmetics sector (Kanai, 2019; Lazar, 2011; McRobbie, 2015). It is shown in the following data:

She's just as thin as she ever was, and the only way I know she's had work done on her face is because no one her age can look like that without a doctor.

Her skin is glowing and just the littlest bit red, as if it's been rubbed clean. She's wearing false eyelashes, or perhaps she gets eyelash extensions. [...]

Her hair is past her shoulders—a beautiful array of white, gray, and blond—with the lightest colors framing her face. I'm sure her hair is triple-processed, but the effect is that of a gracefully aging woman who sat out in the sun. (Reid, 2021, p. 19)

This quotation is Monique's monologue when she first meets Evelyn for the interview. In this narration's timeline, Evelyn is 79 years old. This proves how Evelyn can still participate in consumer culture through her physical features that look younger than women of her age. McRobbie claims that the women who enter the 'make-over' television program while trying to be glamorous are the victims of 'symbolic violence' because, in this process, a standard of femininity is formed by verbally attacking the condition of their bodies, clothes, and make-up (McRobbie, 2009). In addition to taking care of her body, Evelyn changes her appearance according to Hollywood's top woman criteria, which are white woman and blonde (Nwonka, 2021). Although unable to change her skin color, Evelyn changed her hair to blonde and changed her name from Evelyn Diaz to Evelyn Hugo to look more French. The existence of post-feminist discourse which is from popular culture and Western media establishes the discourse of lookism upon women, which

considers being beautiful becomes self-esteem, pleasurable, and women's skill in feminine pursuits (Gill, 2007b; Lazar, 2011; McRobbie, 2008). Postfeminist sexual contract makes women that are represented through Evelyn in this novel are expected to become feminine citizenship that promotes the post-feminist discourse of being beautiful that has been previously campaigned through mass media.

The negative impact of this postfeminist sexual contract is the bargaining of feminism in favor of neoliberal capacity that makes feminism fade away and requires women to be at the 'perfect' stage. Women get the luminosity effect at this perfect stage, making women visible. Unfortunately, this luminosity limits women's space (Kanai, 2019, p. 158; McRobbie, 2009). It is illustrated in the following data:

"... Look, I'd be the first person to say back when I was young that all I was was a nice pair of tits. The only currency I had was my sexuality, and I used it like money. I wasn't well educated when I got to Hollywood, I wasn't book-smart, I wasn't powerful, I wasn't a trained actress. What did I have to be good at other than being beautiful? And taking pride in your beauty is a damning act. Because you allow yourself to believe that the only thing notable about yourself is something with a very short shelf life." (Reid, 2021, p. 239)

Evelyn's anxiety shown in the quotation is an example of her ambivalence in encoding her femininity that must fit a certain femininity that is shaped by the Hollywood film industry, which is being beautiful and sexy. Evelyn experiences the space limitation in that she only has a sexy and attractive body as her attraction as an actress, which over time will age. This action is the exchange of a postfeminist sexual contract to get a place and luminosity effect that the Hollywood film industry promises by changing her looks as a form of her participation in becoming feminine citizenship in the beauty fashion complex.

Luminosity Effect: Space of Attention

The term 'luminosity' is borrowed by McRobbie from Deleuze's theory of luminosity which focuses on the effect of visibility. In Deleuze's theory of luminosity, Deleuze reveals that the existence of 'visibility' can describe the structure of power Foucault in modern society (Kearney, 2015). For McRobbie, post-feminism functions like a luminosity as 'this moving spotlight softens, dramatizes and disguises the regulative dynamics.' Therefore, this luminosity reflects how young women have become visible today (McRobbie, 2009, p. 54). This luminosity effect displays postfeminist equality while limiting the conditions of that status. This luminous postfeminist is the 'clouds of light' that give young women a shimmering presence. Also, this luminosity marks the perfectly believable new rebranding of femininity. McRobbie also explains that the luminosity effect given to women under the name of the 'young women's movement' actually aims to describe shadow feminism, the abandonment (of dominant patriarchy) forced on young women upon new feminist political imaginaries (McRobbie, 2009, p. 90). It can be emphasized that the luminosity effect is a concept that McRobbie creates to reveal the shadow feminist success which is promoted by neoliberalism through a new sexual contract with the promise of freedom to young women.

However, in this novel, there is a 'perfect' standard to get the luminosity effect, which is depicted by Celia. The sign is to win an Oscar, and Celia has won an Oscar 3 times. This fact displays the difference between Evelyn and Celia, where Evelyn cannot match Celia in acting achievements. Therefore, in maintaining this luminosity effect and becoming 'perfect' close to Celia's criteria, Evelyn creates the image of Evelyn Hugo as a sex symbol in Hollywood. This is successful because Evelyn gained recognition of her body and beauty, which is indicated by the data below:

A style icon of the '50s, turned sexpot in the '60s and '70s and Oscar winner in the '80s, Hugo made a name for herself with her voluptuous figure, daring film roles, and tumultuous love life. She was married

seven times and outlived all of her husbands. (Reid, 2021, p. 328)

This quotation describes Evelyn as a glamorous and scandalous Hollywood star from her 'sex symbol' image and her seven-time marriage. Evelyn's sex symbol image is illustrated in the phrase 'turned sexpot in the '60s and '70s' where this culture of being a sex symbol is famous and often appeared from Hollywood stars through Marilyn Monroe who was known as a famous sex symbol during the '50s to '60s. Monroe gave rise to the term 'blonde bombshell' on her from several characters she played, which described 'the blonde (and sexy) but stupid,' such as in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1957) (Evans & Riley, 2013; Scheibel, 2013). Being a sex symbol is Evelyn's branding of feminine celebrity in Hollywood like Letort (2016) exploits Coppola's film *The Bling Ring* celebrity culture through the feminine stars as the brands to be consumed. Besides being a sex symbol, Evelyn made a name for herself with her seven-marriage scandal.

Another reason is to hide Evelyn's sexuality as bisexual, where in the 1960s, LGBT people were not well accepted. It is proven in the following data:

"I slept with Mick because I wanted to protect our careers, mine and hers. And that was more important to me than the sanctity of our relationship. And I slept with Harry because I wanted a baby, and I thought people would get suspicious if we adopted. Because I was afraid to draw attention to the sexlessness of our marriage. And I chose that over the sanctity of our relationship. ..." (Reid, 2021, p. 272)

This quotation highlights that Evelyn is submissive to patriarchy by having sex with man. Since the quotation is from Evelyn's perspective and thoughts, it explains how Evelyn thinks that having sex is the solution to solve her problems, especially those problems that relate to her image as a Hollywood actress. The problem Evelyn expresses in the quotation refers to her relationship with Celia as a lesbian. Since the homosexual relationship is forbidden, Evelyn chooses to have sex with a

man to show herself as heterosexual and display her femininity by having a child with her husband as her own initiative 'choice.' This narration also describes how Evelyn only cares about her career reputation because Evelyn's choice in this narration shows her individuality. It also shows how Hollywood still embraces heteronormativity. Evelyn must fit into this heterosexual matrix to protect her position in the Hollywood industry as an actress.

The LGBT rejection ever happened during Hollywood's Golden Age, when actors and actresses had to protect the image that Hollywood studios demanded to achieve fame, so LGBT stars often married the opposite sex as a solution to hide their sexual orientation and be considered heterosexual (Morgan, 2019). Tab Hunter also explores this situation in his biography, *Tab Hunter Confidential*. He spoke frankly about how hard it was to be gay in Hollywood in the 1950s and 1960s (Zane, 2017). This rejection shows that Hollywood adheres to the heterosexual matrix because most Hollywood audiences are heterosexual couples (Benshoff & Griffin, 2011; Ibbi, 2014; Scheibel, 2013).

According to the statement that the Oscar is considered a symbol of luminosity, winning an Oscar is the climax of Evelyn's achievement to become 'perfect' and symbolizes the freedom that is promised by the Hollywood film industry. Evelyn has complied with the requirements of Hollywood's heteronormativity to achieve her luminosity effect. Although Evelyn gets fame in Hollywood, they are not guaranteed freedom and success by the Hollywood film industry. It is shown in Evelyn and Celia's limitations in expressing themselves. They have to behave under Hollywood's target, that is being women whom heterosexual men desire. The climax of Evelyn's limited freedom in Hollywood is at the end of the story. Evelyn shows her anger towards the Hollywood industry, which is shown in the data below:

Say that Evelyn Hugo doesn't care if everyone forgets her name. Evelyn Hugo doesn't care if everyone forgets she was ever alive.

Better yet, remind them that Evelyn Hugo never existed. She was a person I made up for them. So that they would love me. (Reid, 2021, p. 358)

The narrative above shows Evelyn's regrets during her life. Evelyn's regret in the narrative illustrates the problems that postfeminists experienced today, where women are too focused on recognizing others to show themselves differently. They forget the 'real' happiness of the feminist success they should be pursuing. Women have been controlled by neoliberalism for too long for economic interests. They are too complacent in their pursuit of success and recognition. In the narrative, Evelyn emphasizes that Evelyn Hugo is a product formed by herself and Hollywood (film industry) that fulfills the requirements of post-feminism to get public attention and recognition and live rich.

McRobbie (2009, p. 110) says that women's self-mobilization with self-esteem is part of the post-feminist disorder. McRobbie argues that this problem has been normalized and glamorized in real life. This problem is exemplified by how Evelyn's life narrative during her career is identified with her struggle against patriarchy and maintaining her pathetic self-esteem wrapped in glamorization as a form of 'the struggle of postfeminist woman.' In addition, after confessing all her secret life that Monique will book, at the end of the story, Evelyn commits suicide by overdosing on drugs. From the point of view of post-feminism and considering the neoliberalism activities carried out by Hollywood against Evelyn, it can be concluded that Evelyn is still afraid to face the reality of the possibility that the image that she has formed will be destroyed.

The Critical Position of The Author

Taylor Jenkins Reid is an American writer. She studied at Emerson College in Boston, where she majored in media studies. After graduation, she moved to Los Angeles and began working in the film industry until now. Now she lives in Los Angeles with her daughter and husband, Alex Jenkins Reid, a screenwriter.

As part of the American discourse that still has a robust patriarchal system, especially in the workplace, such as in the Hollywood film industry, Reid criticizes the heterosexual matrix in the work environment that is experienced by female characters in the novel who are identified as non-heterosexual. Reid tries to negotiate to survive this heterosexual matrix by making Evelyn marries a man seven times to adapt herself to the heterosexual system. Unfortunately, Reid reveals that during this negotiation process, Evelyn experiences ambivalence and distress toward her femininity. This is because, in the end, after she gets the freedom promised by the Hollywood film industry, Evelyn realizes that she is still powerless in the patriarchal and heterosexual matrix in Hollywood. According to McRobbie, this feminine ambivalence often happens in women who try to hold questions about masculinity, patriarchy, and other rules in the heterosexual matrix (Kanai, 2019; McRobbie, 2009). In Reid's interview with HuffPost.com (Granett, 2017), she uses Elizabeth Taylor as the model of Evelyn Hugo to show and describe how the scandalous Hollywood actress.

Reid's rejection of the heterosexual matrix is also shown in how she is not part of the LGBT community. Still, she dares to position herself as neutral about the community's existence. This is evidenced in her interview with Zane (2017), which is shown in the data below:

And the other reason why Evelyn uses that word is because it was important to me that this book be unequivocal in its support and sight of the LGBTI community, specifically people that are bisexual. I was mindful of every word of this story. And I will readily admit that my dedication to positive representation came at the expense of subtlety. (Zane, 2017)

From the quote above, Reid reveals that she uses clear and straightforward language to show that Evelyn is explicit and proud of her sexuality as bisexual (to the people closest to her) so that bisexuals who question their uncertain feelings about being part of the LGBT community will feel supported by reading *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. Evelyn's 'coming out' as bisexual to her best

friends Celia, Harry, and John is a 21st-century agenda Reid puts into the novel. The decision to come out as part of the LGBT community in the 21st century has been made by many people who dare to voice their sexual orientation to those closest to them or even to society, where this 'coming out' agenda is taboo in the 20th century.

After all the discussion, being perfect demands women to continual self-evaluation and labor (Kanai, 2019, p. 30). Evelyn's success is only a shadow feminist success that Hollywood gives. This is McRobbie's criticism conveyed in her theory about post-feminist masquerade that women are still controlled by neoliberalism with the promise of freedom as feminist success to maintain patriarchal masculinity and another form of heterosexual matrix.

Conclusion

The current research interrogates the meaning of female success in the novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, where Evelyn Hugo commits suicide by drug overdose at the end of the story after becoming a famous Hollywood star. Even though she has done everything possible to achieve her fame by marrying several famous men and becoming a sex symbol in Hollywood to solidify herself as a talented actress by winning an Oscar as her goal. The cause is a post-feminist masquerade that frustrates the female character instead of being happy and enjoying her success.

From the lens of McRobbie's theory about post-feminist masquerade, neoliberalism is symbolized as the Hollywood film industry in this novel that promises freedom to a woman by making her the object of desire to most heterosexual consumers of Hollywood's products. Through the new sexual contract, the Hollywood film industry controls women to suit the industry's preference, such as changing their looks to match a white woman and being beautiful and sexy. Since the Hollywood film industry is a market for most heterosexuals, a woman who is not heterosexual must pretend to be heterosexual by marrying a man and hiding her real sexual identity. By fulfilling the requirements of neoliberalism (as an object of desire) and the

new sexual contract, a woman is promised a luminosity effect, her space of attention and power in the workplace. But actually, this luminosity effect is a shadow success for women. Women are only being used in their workplace for neoliberalism purposes, which makes them feel distressed about coding their femininity to fit the patriarchal system and heterosexual matrix in the Hollywood film industry. Therefore, the freedom the female characters in this novel gain after all the struggles is only false freedom and success.

This study is limited in discussing how neoliberalism influences post-feminist discourse in branding the meaning of feminist success to young women and women. Obviously, there is still much work to be done to illuminate people's perspectives on post-feminist discourses in literary works, such as contemporary popular feminism, consumerism, commercialization, and misinterpretation of post-feminism.

References

- Benshoff, H. M., & Griffin, S. (2011). *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*. Chichester: Blackwell .
- Cohen, A. (2017). How Much Progress Has Hollywood Actually Made In Showing Body Diversity? Retrieved February 11, 2023, from Refinery29 website: <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2017/10/173864/plus-size-actresses-tv-movies-body-types-women>
- Damayanti, A. P. (2023). *The Portrayal Of Women Oppression In Reid's The Seven Husbands Of Evelyn Hugo* (Thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang). Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Malang. Retrieved from <http://etheses.uin-malang.ac.id/54765/1/19320131.pdf>
- Darwin, H., & Miller, A. (2021). Factions, frames, and postfeminism(s) in the Body Positive Movement. *Feminist Media Studies, 21*(6), 873–890.

- <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1736118>
- Dobson, A. S. (2014). Laddishness Online: The possible significations and significance of “performative shamelessness” for young women in the post-feminist context. *Cultural Studies*, 28(1), 142–164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2013.778893>
- Erigha, M. (2015). Race, Gender, Hollywood: Representation in Cultural Production and Digital Media’s Potential for Change. *Sociology Compass*, 9(1), 78–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12237>
- Evans, A., & Riley, S. (2013). Immaculate consumption: Negotiating the sex symbol in postfeminist celebrity culture. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 22(3), 268–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2012.658145>
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2014). *Close Reading and Writing from Sources*. Delaware: International Reading Association.
- Foucault, M. (1997). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Second Edition). New York: Vintage Book.
- Foucault, M. (2008). *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at The Collège de France, 1978–79*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Genz, S. (2015). My job is me: Postfeminist celebrity culture and the gendering of authenticity. *Feminist Media Studies*, 15(4), 545–561. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2014.952758>
- Gill, R. (2007a). *Gender and The Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gill, R. (2007b). Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 147–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549407075898>
- Granett, B. M. (2017). The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo: A Q & A with Taylor Jenkins Reid. Retrieved February 26, 2023, from HuffPost website: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-seven-husbands-of-evelyn-hugo-a-q-a-with-taylor_b_59232576e4b07617ae4cbe61
- Harrison, G. (2019). “We want to see you sex it up and be slutty:” post-feminism and sports media’s appearance double standard. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 36(2), 140–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2019.1566628>
- History.com Editors. (2018). Hollywood. Retrieved February 18, 2023, from History.com website: <https://www.history.com/topics/roaring-twenties/hollywood>
- Ibbi, A. A. (2014). Hollywood, The American Image And The Global Film Industry. *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, 3(1), 93–106. <https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2013.81>
- Jackson, S. (2021). “A Very Basic View of Feminism”: Feminist Girls and Meanings of (Celebrity) Feminism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21(7), 1072–1090. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1762236>
- Kanai, A. (2019). Gender and Relatability in Digital Culture. In *Gender and Relatability in Digital Culture*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91515-9>
- Kearney, M. C. (2015). Sparkle: Luminosity and post-girl power media. *Continuum*, 29(2), 263–273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2015.1022945>
- Lazar, M. M. (2011). The Right to Be Beautiful: Postfeminist Identity and Consumer Beauty Advertising. In R. Gill & M. M. Lazar (Eds.), *New Femininities* (pp. 37–51). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Letort, D. (2016). The Cultural Capital of Sofia Coppola’s *The Bling Ring* (2013): Branding Feminine Celebrity in Los Angeles. *Celebrity Studies*, 7(3), 309–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2015.1119657>
- Lewis, P., Rumens, N., & Simpson, R. (2022). Postfeminism, hybrid mumpreneur identities and the reproduction of masculine entrepreneurship. *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship*, 40(1), 68–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02662426211013791>
- Mack, Natasha., & Woodson, Cynthia. (2005). *Qualitative research methods : a data collector’s field guide*. North Carolina: FLI.

- McRobbie, A. (2004a). Post-Feminism and Popular Culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4(3), 255–264.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1468077042000309937>
- McRobbie, A. (2004b). Post-feminism and popular culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4(3), 255–264.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1468077042000309937>
- McRobbie, A. (2008). Young Women and Consumer Culture. *Cultural Studies*, 22(5), 531–550.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380802245803>
- McRobbie, A. (2009). *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. London: SAGE Publications.
- McRobbie, A. (2015). Notes on the Perfect: Competitive Femininity in Neoliberal Times. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 30(83), 3–20.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2015.1011485>
- Morgan, T. (2019). When Hollywood Studios Married Off Gay Stars to Keep Their Sexuality a Secret. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from History website:
<https://www.history.com/news/hollywood-lmarriages-gay-stars-lgbt>
- Nwonka, C. J. (2021). White Women, White Men, and Intra-Racial Diversity: A Data-Led Analysis of Gender Representation in the UK Film Industry. *Cultural Sociology*, 15(3), 430–454.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975520974565>
- Pateman, C. (2015). Sexual Contract. In *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies* (pp. 1–3). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663219.wbegss468>
- Press, A., & Liebes, T. (2016). Feminism and Hollywood: Why the backlash? *Communication Review*, 19(4), 267–279.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2016.1237717>
- Reid, T. J. (2021). *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. London: Simon & Schuster UK.
- Scheibel, W. (2013). Marilyn Monroe, “sex symbol”: Film performance, gender politics and 1950s Hollywood celebrity. *Celebrity Studies*, 4(1), 4–13.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2012.750095>
- Suharni, S. (2021). *Performativitas Gender Dan Tubuh Yang Subversif Dalam Novel The Seven Husbands Of Evelyn Hugo Karya Taylor Jenkins Reid*. Retrieved from <https://etd.repository.ugm.ac.id/penelitian/detail/201974>
- Walser, A. M. (2015). The Color of Postfeminism: Representations of Black and White Women in Popular Music Videos. *Spring*, 4(1), 17–28. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/dissentingvoices/vol4/iss1/5>
- Wigley, E., & Dornelles, V. R. C. (2022). Blue is for boys: postfeminist continuations of gender, body and hue in UK magazines, 2009–2018. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 29(3), 345–371.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2021.1891864>
- Zane, Z. (2017). Writing Nuanced Queer Protagonists: A Q&A with Taylor Jenkins Reid, Writer of ‘The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo.’ Retrieved April 2, 2023, from Bi.org website:
<https://bi.org/en/articles/writing-nuanced-queer-protagonists-a-qa-with-taylor-jenkins-reid-writer-of-the-seven-husbands-of-evelyn-hugo>