

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Relationship between people is basic human needs, whether it's with family, friends, society, or even the deeper and personal like romantic relationship. The desire of need connection with other people is linked with survival and emotional belongings within human beings. This makes human naturally is a social beings. "A social instinct is implated in all men by nature" (Aristotle, 1908, p. 29). Otherwise, the social beings in human first formed through family where emotional support and belongings are exist furthermore into friends, society, and romantic relationship. "The need to belong is a fundamental human motivation. Human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships," (Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R., 1995, p. 497). In consequence, the romantic relationship is one of necessary for human social beings because it connected to the family where individual seeking for emotional belongings, intimacy, and also it formed individual identity within social expectation.

In this modern era, romance is something crucial for individual matter. Romance often acknowledged as an intimate relationship that seen in reality through emotional attachment between individuals. It has been concerned by society since it is part of a social construction that shaped from cultural expectations especially to women. "Ideals of romantic love have long affected the aspirations of women more than those of men, although of course men have not been uninfluenced

by them,” (Giddens, 1992, p. 2). Therefore, romance becomes social concerned rather than a personal perception.

This social construction shaped romance into social expectations that connected to capitalist society where the ideal of romance influenced through material stability and economic rationality. In consequence, the seeking for the ideal of romance within capitalist society is something decisive for individuals in looking for partner of their life. Rather than separated from economic system romance is deeply connected to capitalist values through its system.

Moreover, while romance connected to economic system it can be said that romance connected to capitalism. “When spouses and lovers succeed in sustaining each other’s lives, they don’t do it with love alone, but with concrete contributions to their joint material welfare,” (Zelizer, 2005, p. 34). Where in capitalist modernity, it brings up the pressure within individuals in the long run affects to their romance sphere by shaping the desires, expectations, and emotional tendencies. Capitalism influenced how society think about romance as an investment or a tool for self-development although capitalism is rooted from religion sphere especially in Western (European and America) and it continuously develops into modern capitalism. “The moral energy of the Puritans, brought about the rise of Modern Western capitalism,” (Giddens, as cited in Weber, 2005, p. xvii).

This is where the cultural conflict appears in Celine Song's *Materialists* (2025). The movie is played by Dakota Johnson as Lucy which is a woman who got more affected ideals of romantic love in this capitalism society. Otherwise, the movie focusses on Lucy who is a high-end matchmaker in New York area and she

is stucked in confusion relationship between two men. Those are John who is a poor cater waiter who symbolises economic instability and Harry who is a successful rich man who works for private equity under his family company. The capitalist expectation that American women will associate romantic desire with financial security is challenged by Lucy's final decision on her life partner choice. Therefore, rather than shifting romance as an example of capitalist rationality, the film delivers an opposition manner that breaks the cultural logic of American capitalism.

Purpose of this study is to examine romance under capitalism system that lead us to see how intimate life is constructed by broader social structure along with personal emotional choice through *Materialists* (2025). “Capitalism went hand in hand with the making of intensely specialized emotional culture,” (Illouz, 2007, p. 11). Therefore, *Materialists* (2025) is both entertainment and a literary work that merges into the redefining of life choices and romance in a capitalist society. Using a sociological approach, this thesis explores how romance goes against society's beliefs by exploring how romance becomes a form of resistance with sociological approach; Max Weber theoretical framework that focused on capitalism. The study also explores on the way *Materialists* (2025) redefine romantic life beyond capitalist ideology.

1.2 Research Questions

This study analyzed the questions below:

1. How do the intrinsic elements in *Materialists* (2025) depict capitalism?
2. How does *Materialists* (2025) portray romance as a form of resistance against capitalist logic and offer a redefinition of romance beyond its ideology?

1.3 Objectives of The Study

This study will follow the following objectives:

1. To explain how *Materialists* (2025) depicts capitalism through intrinsic elements.
2. To analyze how *Materialists* (2025) redefines romance as a form of resistance in capitalist society.

1.4 Scope of The Study

The study limits itself to a qualitative sociological approach analysis of the movie *Materialists* (2025) as a cultural text. The primary focus is on romance and how it symbolize resistance against capitalist culture in America. Furthermore, the analysis does not attempt to explain general of the American romance film's history, nor attempt a broad overview of American capitalism. It is instead focused on intrinsic and extrinsic elements those are representation of individual's choices, romance, and form of resistance in *Materialists* (2025) that influenced by capitalist ideology.

1.5 Previous Studies

Materialists (2025) is a new object of study, the studies before that discussed about the movie as its object is not available, alternatively the previous studies focused on the same topic as this thesis. The studies that have analyzed the merging of resistance, Max Weber concept, and cultural identity that serves as platform for exploring the movie.

First, Max Weber's Concept on Social Class as Reflected in *Crazy Rich Asian* Movie by Yuni Cinthya (2020). This thesis applies Max Weber's class theory,

status and power to analyse the representation of social stratification in the 2018 film *Crazy Rich Asians*. The film represents three of Weber's four social classes; upper class, middle class and working class, while the lowest class is absent. This is the result of the study with the library research method and a prudent text analysis of movie scenes. This analysis shows a large influence of position and income on relationships. The main character Rachel Chu is bothered by the discrimination and inferiority complexes caused by the class differences in the family of her boyfriend who is a person of high status.

Second, the study by Jonathan Dave P. Ayala and Louie B Villanueva on A Marxist analysis of the movie *Third World Romance* (2025) that used Marxist theory to analyze issues of class struggle, labor exploitation, and socio-economic inequality within Philippine society. From the study, it was discovered that the movie reveals the reality of life faced by the working class, which includes exploitation through unjust labor practices, low pay, unsafe working environment, and lack of workers' autonomy under capitalism. Through the use of characters Alvin and Britney in the movie, the researchers pointed out that the movie romanticizes resilience as a way of survival in spite of the continued existence of inequalities. Using qualitative thematic analysis method, the researchers revealed how the movie reflects Marxist ideas such as alienation, false consciousness, and exploitation of workers who have to suffer oppression because of their economic weakness.

Third, Sara Mills' Critical Discourse in *Mother* Movie: Deconstruction of Meaning by Sara Mills on Femininity and Women's Resistance by Pratiwi et al.

(2021). This study using Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis theory to analyse how femininity and women's resistance are depicted in Bong Joon-ho's *Mother* (2009). Following a descriptive qualitative methodology, the study finds that Hye-ja, the female lead, is depicted as both an object through domestication, sexism, and subordination and a person who challenges patriarchal norms. According to the research, the movie deconstructs femininity by showing female strength, emotional depth, and acts of resistance where Hye-ja's attempt to protect her child when the media often objectifies women. The results also demonstrate how cinema is a medium that simultaneously produces and reflects societal perspectives.

Fourth, the next study lends to the discussion on women and resistance through Indonesian Women as Eastern Representation in *Darah Garuda* Movie by Evi Irawanti Br Saragih (2022). Drawing on Edward Said's Orientalism concept, the paper investigates how Indonesian women were viewed by Dutch colonial authorities as both victims and entities of resistance. The study found that Dutch views of Indonesians are mostly ones of inferiority and lust, which is in line with Orientalist stereotypes that depict the East as helpless, unreasonable, and obedient to the West. The movie also depicts women physically challenging these stereotypes by disguising themselves as males in order to pass for men and even using guns to defend off colonial soldiers. The study concludes that women, despite being represented as subaltern in colonial discourse, create their agency by resisting headon Western domination and Orientalist misrepresentation.

Fifth, De la Pava Vélez's (2017) doctoral thesis. *Celluloid Love: Audiences and Representations of Romantic Love in Late Capitalism* explored how

contemporary North American romantic films and diverse audiences in London construct cultural ideologies of love. Embedded in a feminist-informed, critical media with sociological framework that treats romantic love as a culturally constructed ideological phenomenon, the research makes three main arguments: neoliberal individualism has produced called "crisis of romantic love," mainstream film narratives capture this crisis, even exploit it, and audiences internalize and respond to these crisis narratives. Based on textual analysis of five films and 36 audience focus group interviews, de la Pava Vélez discovers that even though both films and viewers are responding to precarious and technology-mediated intimacy conditions, general claims over a love "crisis" are "greatly exaggerated" and tend to incorporate anxieties in companionship relationships into the mere commodification of relationships. Put simply, his thesis discussed how romance films reflect capitalist anxieties and yet reveal the perpetually personal–social dimension of love. The implication could be that film romance might be an avenue to interrogate or even subvert dominant capitalist narratives of intimacy (de la Pava Vélez, 2017).

Sixth, *Love Them, but Get Them to Leave You – Neoliberal Ideals of Love, Romance and Family Life Imprinted on Contemporary US Cinema*, a thesis by Mentis (2019) looks at Hollywood romantic comedies through the lens of neoliberal ideology where he argues that the attachment of US culture to free-market values reshapes the love stories of these films. Using genre theory and ideological critique, Mentis contends that contemporary rom-coms increasingly encode themes of individualism, competition, and self-optimization into narratives of love. He finds

that the protagonists achieve their fulfillment not by challenging social norms but rather by adapting themselves to the logic of the market for example, by improving their position in the market through self help. Hence, the film endings find characters in marginally better socioeconomic or emotional positions, without the realization of a grand romantic ideal. In effect, Mentis concludes, such love plots are "powerful ideological tool[s]" that engage audiences with the neoliberal status quo. At any rate, Mentis's thesis focuses exclusively on how romance reinforces an already existing ideology and does not take into consideration romance as subversion.

Seventh, merely John G. Cawelti's views on convention and invention have been examined in The formula of romance in *The Redeeming Love* (2022) movie. In their analysis of the film *Redeeming Love* (2022), Jusrianti, Rasiah, and Arman (2024) find that while the film maintains its traditional elements such as the hero and heroine's first encounter, the development of conflict, the boy-wins-girl theme, and a happily-ever-after conclusion, it also innovates through the use of a mixed narration, an ordinary male hero, and a stubborn but well-liked heroine. They employed a descriptive qualitative study approach and Cawelti's formula theory to analyse how romantic formulas have changed in contemporary films. Additionally, they pointed out that the film uses narration and characters from.

Eight, the study by Yuri Yusnia Kartika, Andang Saehu, and Agry Pramita's (2022) titled Fantasy formula in romance movies: *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) and *Aladdin* (2019). This study used Joyce Saricks' fantasy genre theory and Wellek and Warren's comparative literature theory to analyse the fantasy formula in the

romance-fantasy films *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*. Characterisation, plot, framing, and pacing are the four primary areas where *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin* have commonalities in the fantasy genre formula, according to a comparative descriptive qualitative study approach. It was observed that both films have strong heroines, Belle and Jasmine, who exhibit courageous and daring traits.

Ninth, Javaria Farooqui on Women, representation, and romance: The magic space of *What's Love Got to Do With It?* (2024) was studied on the movie *What's Love Got to Do with It?* analysed with the feminist perspective, representation of women, romance and cultural identity in romantic comedy film. The study notes that the film attempts to espouse the values of diversity and female emancipation but is rather patriarchal and conservative in its approach. "It's a story about the clash of Kaz's orthodox views on arranged marriage and family responsibilities with Zoe's western liberal ideals of freedom and romanticism," says Farooqui. Thus, it was proved that in spite of the female characters appearing to be powerful initially, they are eventually forced to accept the traditional conception of happiness in marriage and dependence on males. Moreover, the film is said to depict the patriarchal system in a positive light and to imply that arranged marriage and cultural conservatism are preferable to western dating practices as more ethical and stable.

Last, Bjarne M. Holmes in *In search of my "one-and-only": Romance-oriented media and beliefs in romantic relationship destiny* examined the relationship between 294 undergraduates' beliefs in romantic destiny and their intake of romance-focused media. There is a strong correlation between mind-

reading behaviours and romance-based media because this study showed that people who enjoyed watching romance-focused films, TV shows, and magazines believed in predestined soul mates and that their partners could understand them even if they didn't communicate with them. The idea of cultivation theory and social cognitive theory were used to explain how media consumption affects people's irrational beliefs about romantic relationships and love. Furthermore, according to Bjarne M. Holmes, romance-focused media featured themes like fate and love at first sight.

1.6 Research Methods

1.6.1 Data and The Source of Data

The research approach for this thesis is based on both primary and secondary data sources in order to examine the chosen topic collectively. The study's main source of data is the film *Materialists* (2025) which was directed by Celine Song and produced by A24. As a cultural narrative, the film offers a deep audio-visual look into the intersection of romanticism and society in the American social landscape. This study uses secondary data sources such as e-books, research articles, journals, thesis papers, and earlier studies on sociological theory, capitalism, romance, and American society. These resources provide basic knowledge and academic viewpoints that placed the movie within larger theoretical contexts.

1.6.2 Method of Data Collection

This study data consists of selected scenes and dialogue from *Materialists* (2025). The main source of evidence for the analysis is written and visual elements

that the writer executed from watching the movie, *Materialists* (2025), then assorted its scene and dialogue that relevant to support the thesis analysis. The information was collected through library research, which includes searching for, compiling, and combining relevant academic papers that offer understanding on the key topics of the study. George (2008) explains that library research is simplifying the process of finding materials that offer either factual information or critical analysis to support analysis. In this particular situation, secondary sources play important role to strengthen the author arguments that focused on several main sources, Max Weber ‘The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’.

1.6.3 Method of Approach

This study applies a sociology approach to analyzing the extrinsic aspect that is connected to the current socio-economic condition in United States. It uses Max Weber’s theory to examine more specifically the social and cultural of romance and capitalism. Furthermore, the study also applies the objectives approach through the intrinsic elements that it is focussing on narrative structure including; theme, character and characterization, setting of place and setting of time, conflict, plot and cinematic elements.

1.7 Organization of The Writing

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides overviews of background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, previous studies, research methods and organization of the writing. This chapter explains the need for *Materialists* (2025)

to be examine through sociological approach, with a focus on romanticism as cultural resistance.

CHAPTER II: INTRINSIC ELEMENTS

This chapter examines the intrinsic elements of the film, such as narrative form, characterization, time and place context, and conflicts. With the objective approach, the chapter contrasts and examines how these formal aspects help in the meaning-construction of the film.

CHAPTER III: EXTRINSIC ELEMENTS

This chapter explains the extrinsic elements of the film those are social and cultural contexts. Using Max Weber's theory, the analysis considers how Materialism captures and resists capitalist ideology in American culture. This chapter also uses relevant sociological and cultural theories to explain the film's representation of romance and resistance.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter outlines the findings of the analysis and how the film reimagines romance as resistance to capitalist ideology. It weaves together the intrinsic and extrinsic analysis, with an emphasis on individual decision.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This final chapter summarizes the key findings, restates the significance of the research. It also provides implications for understanding romance beyond capitalist rationality as well as suggestions for additional research.