

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In social life, being a man is no longer merely a matter of biology, but rather how men prove their abilities and dominate others. In society, men are often placed in a high position and burdened with expectations to master fields that are perceived to be impossible for women (Courtenay, 2000). According to R.W. Connell in *Masculinities* (2005), these social constructions are described as masculinity. Connell (2005) further argues that masculinity is not a universal concept, but varies across different social contexts such as race, class, and geography. Different societies and environments produce different standards of what is considered masculine. The most ideal and highest form of masculinity is called hegemonic masculinity, which relies heavily on strength, financial success, and excellent emotional control. Although this form seems difficult for men to achieve, society continues to pressure them to reach it. They chase this standard to gain social respect and maintain power over women and other weaker forms of masculinity.

However, because the demands of hegemonic standards are so high, maintaining a dominant position is often difficult. When men fail to achieve these expectations, it often triggers an identity crisis. This pressure can lead to a 'masculinity protest,' a concept by Alfred Adler where men use aggressive behaviors to mask deep feelings of inferiority (Connell, 2005). This defensive aggression is what defines fragile masculinity (Stanaland et al., 2023).

Fragile masculinity does not only appear in personal or social interactions but also appear in institutions, especially in workplaces where masculine traits have become something commonly displayed (Connell, 2005). This dynamic is also built through the office work culture, where the norms and standards behaviors of employee is shaped in daily interaction (Schein, 2010). One country where this dynamic can be seen is the United States, as workplaces are shaped by a mindset of individualism and meritocracy (Storti, 2004). This aligns with the United States cultural dimensions, where the country scores 62 in masculinity and 91 in individualism, which emphasize achievement, competition, and independence (Hofstede et al., 2010). These dimensions further intensify pressure on individuals to pursue high status and turn the workplace into an arena where men must continuously prove their value through competitive performance (Berdahl et al., 2018).

The competitive tendency of American workplaces is illustrated on Wall Street. According to Fisher (2012) on *Wall Street Women*, financial institutions function as gendered spaces, men consistently demonstrate hyper-competitive masculinity, whereas women are often invisible and powerless. In this setting, a man's worth is often judged by his career progress, financial success, and professional recognition. This is because masculinity in Wall Street is not something men simply have, but something they must keep showing through their achievements at work (Kimmel, 2016). One way to show it is through American work culture. So, when a man fails at work in this harsh system and environment, his identity becomes fragile and can easily fall apart.

Such media as TV series or films have potential to become effective ways of representing and influencing social values. The film *Fair Play* (2023) by Chloe Domont attracts attention for its depiction of gender relations through the characters of Emily and Luke. It all began after Emily was promoted at work and the gender relations started to change. Initially, the dominant position seemed to be attributed to Luke. However, Luke has experienced a crisis of identity as a woman took his position. In the end, he couldn't accept the fact that his partner was just as competent, or even more competent, in her career than he was.

Studies on masculinity in films have mainly focused on hegemonic masculinity and gender roles at home (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2016). Researchers have also examined fragile masculinity as a response when a man loses his dominant position. However, not much attention has been paid to how corporate environments and American work culture contribute to fragile masculinity. The relation between fragile masculinity and competitive workplace culture in recent American films is underexplored. By analyzing *Fair Play* (2023), this study aims to expand discussions of gender representation in films and offer new insights into how high-pressure American work culture shapes and challenges male identity.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How is Luke's fragile masculinity portrayed through the intrinsic elements in *Fair Play* (2023)?
2. How does the American work culture shape and intensify Luke's fragile masculinity in *Fair Play* (2023)?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the question above, objectives of this research are:

1. To analyze how Luke's fragile masculinity is portrayed through the intrinsic elements in *Fair Play* (2023).
2. To examine how American work culture shapes and intensifies Luke's fragile masculinity in *Fair Play* (2023).

1.4 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on analyzing the issue of fragile masculinity depicted in the character Luke Edmunds in the film *Fair Play* (2023). Narrative and cinematography aspects are taken into account to help the writer analyze the scenes where Luke displays jealousy, aggression, and insecurity. These behaviors are analyzed within the context of hegemonic masculinity and American work culture.

1.5 Previous Studies

To ensure that this research has not been previously done and to address the existing gap of research on this topic, the writer will provide previous research that is relevant to similar topics discussed in this study. Those are as follows:

Previously, the film *Fair Play* (2023) has been examined in a thesis titled "Quantitative Content Analysis of Misogynistic Behavior: Forms of Misogyny in the Film *Fair Play*" by Selly Fitri Yanti (2023). This study identified four types of misogyny, including insults, mistreatment, repeated derogatory remarks, and gender-based personal attacks which is showing how *Fair Play* (2023) reflects

challenges faced by women in patriarchal workplaces and relationships. However, this research focused only on explicit misogynistic behavior and did not analyze fragile masculinity or the influence of American work culture, which is the gap addressed in this study.

The second study, written by Terra Istinara and Hariati Sinaga (2024) in journal article titled “Alienation of Female Characters in the Movie *Fair Play* (2023) as Main Breadwinners in the View of Jaggar” published in *Journal of Language and Literature* Vol. 24 No. 2. Using Alison Jaggar’s theory of alienation, this study explores how Emily experiences alienation in both sexuality and intellectuality due to gendered double standards in a capitalist patriarchal system. While the study highlights systemic challenges faced by women in male-dominated workplaces, it does not examine fragile masculinity or the role of American work culture which is leaving a gap that this study aims to address.

The third related study, written by Reymond Muksim (2025) from Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya in a thesis titled “Representation of Sexism Against Women in the Film *Fair Play* (2023)”. This study identifies benevolent, hostile, and internalized sexism shown through cinematic symbols and narratives, with the central conflict rooted in the male character’s fear of his partner’s success, leading to controlling behavior and aggression. The study concludes that *Fair Play* reflects patriarchal ideologies that marginalize career women. However, while focusing on Emily as the victim of sexism, it does not examine Luke’s fragile masculinity or the role of American work culture which the gap that intended to be addressed by the present study.

The fourth related study written by Bezaleel Matthew Christopher (2025) from Universitas Mercu Buana Yogyakarta in a thesis titled “Framing Analysis of Toxic Masculinity in the Film *Fair Play* (2023) and the Miniseries *Adolescence* (2025)”. Using Robert N. Entman’s framing model to examine toxic masculinity. This study finds that *Fair Play* (2023) depicts masculinity as a crisis shaped by social construction and reinforced by misogynistic ideologies in digital media, showing men who fail to adapt to shifting gender hierarchies. The study concludes that toxic masculinity is reproduced through media and institutions, requiring change through gender education. However, it does not analyze fragile masculinity or the systemic role of American work culture which is leaving a gap that this study aims to address.

The fifth related study, written by Kate Maclean (2015) in journal article titled “Gender, Risk and the Wall Street Alpha Male” published in *Journal of Gender Studies* (Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 427-444). This study analyzes the concepts of masculinity and risk-taking in films during the global financial crisis of 2008. For example, *The Other Guys* and *Margin Call* were analyzed. Risky behaviors can be considered characteristics of men and are always associated with women in comparison. Although this research provides some significant information regarding the issue of gendered risks in finance, it lacks the topic of fragile masculinity and American work culture, which was the focus of this study.

The sixth related study, written by Ulfried Reichardt (2017) in a book chapter titled “Wall Street and Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Film and Fiction” published in *Contemporary Masculinities in the UK*

and the US. It analyzes how masculinity is portrayed in films and novels such as *Wall Street* (1987), *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), *American Psycho* (1991), *Cosmopolis* (2003), and *Dear Money* (2010). This study shows that economic rules, individualism, and risk-taking shape hypermasculine behaviors in the financial market and connect the masculinity to American ideals of dominance and success. While this study provides great insights into masculinity within financial settings, it does not discuss fragile masculinity or its relation to American work culture in *Fair Play* (2023), which is a gap that this research aims to fill.

The seventh related study written by James Brassett and Frederic Heine (2021) in journal article titled “Men Behaving Badly? Representations of Masculinity in Post-Global Financial Crisis Cinema,” published in the *International Feminist Journal of Politics* (Vol. 23, No. 5, pp. 763–784). This study analyzes films such as *Inside Job*, *Margin Call*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, and *The Big Short*. The study shows how different forms of masculinity, including non-mainstream, geeky, and working-class. The study shows that these films often use humor and irony to criticize toxic ‘alpha male’ behavior. While this study provides insights into masculinity in financial crisis cinema, it does not examine fragile masculinity or the influence of American work culture in *Fair Play* (2023), which is a gap this study aims to address.

The eighth related study is a thesis by Dhea Fylla Ifadha (2021) titled “The Dominance of Masculinity in the Workplace (Discourse Analysis in the Films *Purl* and *In A World...*)”. This study focuses on how hegemonic masculinity operates within professional environments. By using Sara Mills’ discourse analysis, the

study shows that male-dominated workplaces maintain gender inequality through stereotypes. As a result, these companies often marginalize women unless they adopt masculine traits. The study concludes that cultural and structural rules maintain male dominance, while women often doubt themselves when facing new opportunities. However, this study focuses on general workplace dominance in animated and indie films and does not address the fragile masculinity that occur when male dominance is challenged by a female partner, as seen in *Fair Play* (2023) which is a gap intended to be addressed by the present study.

The ninth related study, written by Tirna Sadhu (2024) in journal article titled “I want to fit in, but I don’t want to be a clone”: Exploring the Fragility of Masculinity through Bret Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho*, published in the *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies* (Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 319–322). It examines fragile masculinity in Patrick Bateman’s character. It shows how Bateman’s identity crisis, anxiety, and violent tendencies reflect the instability of masculinity shaped by materialism, conformity, and social expectations in 1980s Wall Street. While this study highlights fragile masculinity in *American Psycho*, it does not analyze how fragile masculinity is constructed within American work culture in *Fair Play* (2023), leaving a gap this study aims to address.

The last related study written by Deva Putri David, Yunitari Mustikawati, and Auliyanti Sahril Nurfadhilah (2025) in a journal article titled “The Man's Fragility of the Male Main Character in the Barbie Movie (2023)”, published in *ELITERATE: Journal of English Linguistics and Literature Studies*. This identifies six indicators of fragility: emotional expressiveness, physical inadequacy,

intellectual inferiority, subordination to women, failure to meet masculine ideals at work, and sexual inadequacy. The study concludes that Barbie critiques patriarchy and shows the psychological impact of rigid masculine norms. However, this research focuses on fragility in a satirical, fantasy-based narrative and does not examine how fragile masculinity is triggered by a female partner's professional success in the realistic, high-pressure Wall Street setting of *Fair Play* (2023), which is the gap this study aims to fill.

From earlier researches, several studies have examined *Fair Play* (2023) and related films, mostly focusing on women's experiences of misogyny, alienation, or sexism. However, none of these works have analyzed fragile masculinity or the role of American work culture, which is the specific gap this study aims to address through an analysis of *Fair Play* (2023).

1.6 Research Method

1.6.1 Data and the Source of Data

The primary source is the film *Fair Play* (2023) directed by Chloe Domont. The secondary data consist of scholarly books, journal articles, and academic writings that discuss theories of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, fragile masculinity, and American work culture. These secondary data help to connect the portrayal of fragile masculinity in *Fair Play* (2023) with the topic of American work culture.

First, the film *Fair Play* (2023) is watched by the writer multiple times to understand its plot, characters, and corporate setting. Second, the dialogue, behavior, and interactions of the main characters, particularly Luke and Emily are observed by the writer to identify elements of fragile masculinity as well as scenes

that depict American work culture. Third, the relevant data is transcribed and categorized by the writer. The data includes dialogue, narrative sequences, and character actions, with the use of the theoretical frameworks of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) and fragile masculinity. Finally, the writer analyzed the collected data by using secondary sources, such as books, journal articles, and academic writings on hegemonic masculinity, fragile masculinity, and American work culture to provide context and deepen the analysis of how fragile masculinity is shaped and reinforced by American work culture in *Fair Play* (2023).

1.6.2 Method of Data Collection

The method of research used in this study is the library research method, which is one of the research methods for collecting data. Library research involves gathering data and information, as well as expert opinions related to the study's topic (George, 2008). The data sources of this study consist of primary and secondary data.

1.6.3 Method of Approach

In this study, the writer utilizes Abrams's objective approach to analyze the intrinsic elements of the film *Fair Play* (2023). According to Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1971), the objective approach focuses on analyzing a literary or cinematic work through its intrinsic elements, without considering external factors (Abrams, 1971). This approach allows the writer to examine how the film constructs meaning through its plot, characters, setting, and dialogue.

To interpret the findings, this study draws on gender studies theories, particularly R.W. Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, which

explains how this dominant form of masculinity creates cultural pressures that make men's identities easily fragile when they do not meet expectations such as dominance and financial success, thus giving rise to fragile masculinity as a response to such failures. This fragile masculinity is a result of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is form of masculinity that functions as most ideal form for men within the social structure. To examine the workplace as a specific system that shapes identity, this study uses the framework of American work culture by Craig Storti (2004).

1.7 Organization of the Writing

The thesis is organized into five chapters:

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research framework. It outlines the research background and links hegemonic masculinity to American work culture. Additionally, this chapter presents the research questions and objectives, focusing on the fragile masculinity of the character Luke in the film *Fair Play* (2023). Furthermore, this chapter outlines the scope of the study, reviews ten previous studies to identify research gaps, and explains the methods used, including library research and gender studies theory.

CHAPTER II : INTRINSIC THEORITICAL FRAMEWORKS

Chapter II presents the intrinsic theories used in analyzing *Fair Play* (2023). The narrative elements include characters, themes, plot, setting, dialogue, and conflict. The cinematography elements include extreme long shot, long shot, medium long shot, medium shot, close-up shot, medium close-up shot, and extreme close-up shot. Additionally, the analysis of sound is also included to show how it builds emotion and tension throughout the film.

CHAPTER III : EXTRINSIC THEORITICAL FRAMEWORKS

Chapter III presents the theoretical framework used in analyzing *Fair Play* (2023). The analysis utilizes the theory of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, cultural framework of American work culture, and Wall Street as the contextual framework. These theories are used to analyze how fragile masculinity is constructed and triggered in the film *Fair Play* (2023)

CHAPTER IV : RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Chapter IV presents as the core of the thesis. This chapter discusses how fragile masculinity is constructed and triggered in the film *Fair Play* (2023). Intrinsic elements such as narrative,

cinematography, and sound are used to show Luke's fragile masculinity. This chapter also analyzes the extrinsic elements such as American work culture and the Wall Street environment that shape and intensify fragile masculinity.

CHAPTER V : CONCLUSION

This final chapter presents the conclusion of the thesis. Suggestions for future research on gender dynamics in work culture are also included in this chapter.

