

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A.1 Background of the Research

For decades, feminists have advocated for gender equality, particularly in economic opportunities, enabling women to work in various roles within the workplace. Gender inequalities in the workplace remain a significant issue in today's society. Despite the considerable progress made by the feminist movement over the years, women still face challenges, especially in male-dominated industries. This issue is not confined to any country; it occurs globally, including in nations with a long history of feminist activism, such as the United States (McCammon, 2017; Hewit, 2010).

In the United States, the feminist movement has driven social change, progressing through four waves since the 19th century. It has addressed various issues, such as voting rights, equal opportunities, reproductive rights, and online activism (Mohajan, 2022). The advancements made by feminists are reflected in educational attainment, with women surpassing men in graduation rates. In 2018, the participation of women in higher education reached 73%. However, this educational progress has not fully translated into economic opportunities, and the rate of advancement has slowed in recent decades (England et al., 2022). Arendt and Buzzanell (2017) noted that the slowdown in progress on gender issues is due to a shift in societal perception. Rather than being viewed as matters of rights,

gender issues are often framed as personal choices. This perspective has hindered further advancements toward achieving gender equality. Additionally, various problems related to gender inequality arise, especially in male-dominated work environments. These include gender stereotypes and the prevalence of toxic masculinity, both of which are deeply ingrained in society. Such issues significantly impact the roles individuals play and how their characters are perceived (Yunita, 2024)

Gender stereotypes limit women's potential and opportunities across various industries, especially when seeking leadership positions or roles on par with men. Leadership roles are often associated with traditional notions of masculinity, emphasizing assertiveness and decisiveness. In contrast, women are frequently expected to labor emotionally (Vial & Cowgill, 2022). For instance, nurturing professions such as nursing and teaching are often perceived as traditionally female, whereas leadership and STEM fields are frequently regarded as male-dominated (Ikkatai et al., 2020). Recent research indicates that women in leadership roles face a double bind. They are expected to demonstrate both stereotypically feminine traits, such as warmth and empathy, and stereotypically masculine traits, like assertiveness, decisiveness, and ambition, to be viewed as effective leaders (Chikwe et al., 2024). Nevertheless, workplace culture often prioritizes masculine traits as the standard for success. This bias ultimately restricts women's roles in the workplace and their ability to influence the organizational hierarchy.

Moreover, masculine traits in leadership are often prioritized due to individual biases and the organizational structures in place (Dean & Perret, 2020). This is mainly because men hold higher-level leadership positions than women across almost all industries, while women are more frequently found in managerial roles (World Economic Forum, 2023). As a result, this dynamic creates barriers to women attaining leadership positions (Dean & Perret, 2020).

Furthermore, the concept of toxic masculinity refers to harmful male behaviors associated with traditional masculinity norms, including domination, aggression, and violence (Rahayu. et al., 2022; Sinha, 2021). Toxic masculinity as a result of pressure to conform to societal expectations of being a "real man" can be harmful to men themselves, potentially resulting in destructive behaviors. (Rahayu et al., 2022). The claim that toxic masculinity is harmful and arises from societal pressures on men supports the researcher's viewpoint. This perspective is valid because traditional masculine norms and societal expectations significantly contribute to the emergence of harmful behaviors associated with masculinity.

One area where toxic masculinity appears is in male-dominated workplaces. These workplaces are often linked to a culture of competitive masculinity, as stereotypically masculine traits are prioritized (Xie & Zheng, 2022). In masculine contest culture (MCC), there are four interconnected dimensions. First, one should show no weakness, such as making a considerable effort to appear competent. Second, emphasize strength and stamina, highlighting physical strength and status. Third, prioritize work above all other aspects of life. Fourth,

adopt a "dog-eat-dog" mentality, which involves fiercely competing with coworkers and creates a highly competitive work environment (Berdahl et al., 2018; Koc et al., 2021). These four interconnected dimensions lead to a toxic work environment and cause high competitiveness between men and women in workplaces that make women disadvantaged and negatively affected by a masculine contest culture.

Examining how these issues are reflected in real life is essential. The following example is a real-life case that demonstrates these problems are not merely theoretical concepts but also daily challenges women face, particularly in male-dominated workplaces. In the case of sexual harassment and gender discrimination at Uber, former Uber engineer Susan Fowler revealed systematic sexual harassment and a discriminatory culture in her workplace in a blog post that went viral. Her confession highlights how women often have to deal with an unsupportive and discriminatory work environment. Fowler reported several incidents of sexual harassment committed by her manager and explained how her complaints to human resources were ignored or denied. She described how human resources and senior management repeatedly protected high-achieving male employees even when they misbehaved. After reporting the harassment, Fowler faced retaliation from her superiors. Her performance reviews were unfairly downgraded, and she was threatened with dismissal (Berdahl et al., 2018).

Previous studies have addressed the issue of gender inequality through the portrayal of female characters struggling in male-dominated work environments. Azis and Sunra (2022), in their analysis of *Enola Holmes (2020)*, identified two types of gender stereotypes: femininity, characterized by traits such as submissiveness, and masculinity, characterized by traits like bravery and resilience. Meanwhile, Vianingrum et al. (2024) use Sylvia Walby's patriarchy theory to examine *Enola Holmes 2 (2022)* and identify inequalities such as the wage gap, patriarchal cultural norms, and the beliefs that women's lives are dependent on men as they have no right to act as they please, the assumption that women are often seen as weak and easily influenced, and various forms of violence. Further research by Amanda et al. (2024), based on their study of *Hidden Figures (2016)*, highlights the gender and racial discrimination faced by three African American women in scientific work environments of the 1960s. All three movies depict gender inequality in a historical context. This research aims to fill this gap by analyzing the movie *Fair Play (2023)*, which represents gender inequality in a masculine work environment in the modern era. Inspired by these discussions, this research explores how traditional gender stereotypes continue to limit women's recognition and advancement in modern workplaces, reinforcing systemic inequality despite the illusion of progress.

Furthermore, the research applied Betty Friedan's concept of the *Feminine Mystique* as the grand theory and cinematography as the supporting one. The feminine mystique is selected because this theory analyzes how women in modern workplaces continue to face barriers to recognition. Friedan's critique of societal expectations remains highly relevant, as women are often seen as less capable in professional settings. This perspective aligns with how Emily Meyers is often underestimated in the movie, despite her evident competence. Although Friedan primarily discussed domestic roles, her ideas extend to workplace dynamics, where women often face barriers to recognition and advancement. Additionally, cinematography explores how visual elements reinforce themes by highlighting power imbalances and gender dynamics through effective framing, lighting, and camera techniques. By combining these theories, we gain a deeper understanding of the narrative and the visual representation of workplace inequality.

A.2 Problems of the Research

Based on the background research, the identified research problems are as follows:

- a. What challenges does Emily Meyers face as a woman working in a male-dominated environment?
- b. How does Emily Meyers navigate the dominant masculine traits in her highly competitive work environment?

A.3 Objectives of the Research

Based on the problem research mentioned earlier, the study's objectives are as follows:

- a. To examine the challenges Emily Meyers faces as a woman in a male-dominated work environment
- b. To analyze how Emily Meyers navigates masculine dominant traits in her highly competitive work environment

A.4 Significance of the Research

This research is both theoretically and practically significant. It broadens the understanding of gender roles and power dynamics in the media by analyzing the movie *Fair Play*, incorporating theories such as *The Feminine Mystique*, and examining cinematography. Meanwhile, in practical terms, this research provides insights to support gender equality advocacy efforts, including encouraging critical media literacy to help viewers understand and assess gender representation in the media.

A.5 Limitations of the Research

This research has limitations in its scope and focus analysis. The research focuses exclusively on the movie *Fair Play* (2023), with an emphasis on Emily Meyers' character and various interactions involving her. Additionally, the issues analyzed are limited to gender inequality in the context of a male-dominated work environment, so other aspects beyond these issues are not discussed in depth.

A.6 Definition of Key Terms

This research study frequently uses special key terms: Gender Stereotypes, Gender Inequality, Toxic Masculinity, and Masculine Contest Culture (MCC). To ensure a clear understanding of the key terms used throughout this research study, the following definitions are provided:

1. Gender Stereotypes

According to the American Psychological Association, gender stereotypes refer to widely held beliefs and expectations about the attitudes, behaviors, and roles considered appropriate for individuals based on gender. These stereotypes play a significant role in shaping societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles.

2. Gender Inequality

Gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment and opportunities experienced by individuals based on their gender. It is a widespread form of inequality, similar to class, race, and sexual orientation. Gender inequality is rooted in power dynamics and social relations, where men have historically held a dominant position over women in various aspects of life (Hernando, 2024).

3. Masculine Contest Culture (MCC)

Masculinity contest culture (MCC) is an environment that encourages and reinforces norms, practices, and values centered on competition and dominance based on traditional notions of masculinity (Berdahl et al., 2018).

A.7 Organization of the Research

The organization of the research titled “Gender Inequality and Workplace Dynamics: A Case Study of Chloe Domont's Movie *Fair Play* (2023)” is outlined as follows: The first chapter is an introduction, the chapter presents the background of the research, problems of the research, objectives of the research, significance of the research, limitation of the research, definition of key terms, and organization of the research. The second chapter presents a comprehensive literature review that encompasses related issues, a theoretical framework, and an overview of relevant research. The third chapter discusses research methods, including the design of the research, data, and source of the data, and method of collecting data. The fourth chapter is dedicated to data analysis, including data description and analysis. The fifth chapter presents the conclusion and suggestions, including a conclusion that addresses a problem with the research and several recommendations based on the findings.