

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Contemporary cinema has become an important site for examining gender identities and the transformation of traditional gender roles. Masculinity has received scholarly attention as conventional ideals of manhood are continuously questioned by changing social, cultural, and emotional expectations (Connell, 1995; Anderson, 2009). Instead of being understood as a fixed biological characteristic, masculinity is now widely recognized as a social and cultural construct that is shaped by power relations, historical contexts, and everyday social practices (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). As a cultural text, film not reflects these changing understandings of masculinity but also participates in shaping and negotiating masculine identities through narrative and cinematic representation (Stam, 2000; Bordwell & Thompson, 2020).

Within Masculinity Studies, R. W. Connell's theory of multiple masculinities provides a significant framework for understanding how masculinities are organized through hierarchical gender relations. Connell (1995) argues that masculinity consists of multiple relational positions, including hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, and marginalized masculinities. Instead of describing individual personality types, these categories explain how different masculine practices are placed within systems of social power. This perspective enables researchers to examine how films construct masculine identities in relation to dominant cultural expectations and gender norms.

While Connell's framework explains the social organization of masculinities, more recent scholarship has highlighted the increasing flexibility of masculine performances in contemporary society. Bridges and Pascoe (2014) introduce the concept of hybrid masculinities, refers to the selective incorporation of performances and identity elements associated with marginalized masculinities or femininities into masculine practices. This perspective suggests that contemporary masculine identities combine characteristics such as emotional openness, care, and vulnerability with more conventional masculine expectations. In this study, the concept of hybrid masculinities supports the interpretation of Calum's masculine performance.

Film communicates meaning not only through dialogue but also through visual language, cinematic techniques, and symbolic representation. Kozloff (2000) explains that dialogue is an important element of cinematic storytelling because it reveals character, develops narrative, and conveys emotional meaning. At the same time, visual elements such as framing, lighting, body language, silence, and spatial composition also contribute to the construction of meaning (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020). To interpret these visual representations, this study adopts Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Through the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, Barthes (1972) explains how signs serve within cultural systems to produce meanings beyond their literal representation. Consequently, masculinity in film can be understood not as a characteristic of a character but as a cultural meaning constructed through the interaction of verbal and visual signs.

Aftersun (2022), directed by Charlotte Wells, provides a compelling case for examining contemporary masculinity. The film follows Calum, a young father whose interactions with his daughter, Sophie, show a complex negotiation between responsibility, affection, emotional vulnerability, and inner psychological struggle. Instead of portraying masculinity through dominance, Aftersun presents a father whose identity is revealed through fragmented memories, home-video aesthetics, subtle dialogue, silence, and symbolic visual imagery (Bradshaw, 2022; Keathley, 2023). These strategies invite audiences to interpret Calum's character and demonstrate how masculine identity is constructed through both verbal and visual representation.

Several previous studies have examined masculinity, identity, and semiotics in film. Anderson and McCormack (2018) discuss the increasing flexibility of contemporary masculinity, while Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) revisit the relational nature of multiple masculinities. Sari et al. (2025) analyze identity crisis and alienation in Aftersun (2022), and Putri (2022) applies Barthes' semiotic concepts to examine cultural meanings in film. Although these studies contribute to Masculinity Studies and film analysis, relatively few integrate Connell's theory of multiple masculinities, Bridges and Pascoe's concept of hybrid masculinities, and Barthes' semiotic framework to examine how masculinity is represented through both dialogue and cinematic representation.

Therefore, this study investigates how masculinity is represented through Calum in Aftersun (2022) by integrating textual and visual analyses. Drawing upon Connell's theory of multiple masculinities, Bridges and Pascoe's concept of hybrid masculinities, and Barthes' semiotic framework, this study argues that

Calum's masculinity is represented as fluid, combining traditionally masculine responsibilities with emotional openness and vulnerability. Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing discussion of masculinity in contemporary cinema by demonstrating how masculine identity is negotiated and constructed through verbal, visual, and symbolic representation.

1.2 Research questions

1. How is masculinity represented through verbal elements in the character of Calum in *Aftersun* (2022)?
2. How do visual and symbolic elements contribute to the interpretation of Calum's masculinity as fluid in *Aftersun* (2022)?

1.3 Purpose of the study

1. This study aims to analyze how masculinity is represented through the verbal elements of Calum's character in *Aftersun* (2022). Drawing on Sarah Kozloff's film dialogue and R. W. Connell's theory of multiple masculinities, this research examines how Calum's dialogue, emotional expressions, and interactions shapes his masculine identity. Bridges and Pascoe's concept of hybrid masculinities is used as a supporting perspective to interpret how Calum's masculine performance combines traditionally masculine responsibilities with emotional openness and vulnerability. Through this analysis, the study seeks to interpret Calum's masculinity as fluid based on the findings.

2. This study also aims to examine how visual and symbolic elements contribute to the interpretation of Calum's masculinity as fluid in *Aftersun* (2022). Using Roland Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, this research analyzes how cinematic elements, including lighting, body language, gestures, silence, and symbolic imagery, produce meaning and construct audience interpretation. Through this analysis, the study seeks to explain how visual representation reinforces the understanding of Calum's masculinity and contributes to the overall interpretation of his masculine identity.

1.4 Scope of the study

This study is limited to the analysis of *Aftersun* (2022), directed by Charlotte Wells. The research focuses on the representation of masculinity through the character of Calum by examining selected dialogues and scene captures that are considered significant to the study. The verbal analysis concentrates on Calum's dialogue, emotional expressions, and interactions, while the visual analysis focuses on cinematic elements such as lighting, body language, gestures, silence, composition, and symbolic imagery that contribute to the construction of meaning within the film.

This study employs a qualitative film analysis using R. W. Connell's theory of multiple masculinities, Bridges and Pascoe's concept of hybrid masculinities, Sarah Kozloff's concept of film dialogue, and Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Connell's theory is used to examine how Calum's masculine identity is represented through his verbal expressions and interactions, while

Bridges and Pascoe's concept of hybrid masculinities provides a supporting perspective for interpreting the coexistence of masculine responsibilities and emotionally expressive practices. Kozloff's film dialogue supports the analysis of dialogue as a meaningful cinematic element, whereas Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth are applied to interpret the visual and symbolic meanings embedded in the selected scenes. By integrating textual and visual analyses, this study argues that Calum's masculinity is represented as fluid, with this interpretation emerging from the findings.

1.5 Significance of the study

Theoretically, this study contributes by integrating R. W. Connell's theory of multiple masculinities, Bridges and Pascoe's concept of hybrid masculinities, Sarah Kozloff's concept of film dialogue, and Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to examine the representation of masculinity in *Aftersun* (2022). It also states that Calum's masculinity is represented as fluid based on the findings.

Practically, this study is expected to serve as a reference for students and future researchers interested in masculinity, film analysis, and semiotics, while demonstrating the value of combining textual and visual analyses in interpreting cinematic representation.