CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Kindergarten Cop (1990), *The Pacifier* (2005), and *Playing with Fire* (2019) use masculinity as a source of comedy by putting masculine characters in situations that they are unfamiliar with. These three films explore what happens when hyper-masculine characters are given domestic tasks that are often associated with feminine traits. Since Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Kindergarten Cop* in 1990, films with this theme have become a popular genre or trope. In the 1970s and 1990s, Arnold Schwarzenegger was a popular masculine icon (Alegre, 1998, p. 87). He is used to acting in films involving violence, firearms, war, and among other things. Toward the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, "the idea of men as invulnerable, nonemotional, working and fighting machines" became a subject of mockery (Messner, 2007, p. 465). Many films have attempted to replicate the success and popularity of *Kindergarten Cop* since its release. Two films that use a cinematic premise similar to *Kindergarten Cop* are *The Pacifier* (2005), starring Vin Diesel, and *Playing with Fire* (2019), starring John Cena. Vin Diesel and John Cena were also generational masculine icons.

These three films attempt to alter the masculine image, which is often associated with toughness, muscle cars, and motorbikes, by revealing their other side. They are put in situations where they must deal with domestic issues, such as caring for children and teenagers. According to Messner, "although 'softer' and more 'sensitive' types of masculinity are evolving among some privileged groups of males, this does not inevitably help to the emancipation of women; in fact, precisely the opposite may be true" (Messner, 1993, p. 725). The film's main characters' employment background always involves excellent discipline, hard labor, and government agencies. Furthermore, the protagonists in these films are often the leaders of a special unit or the best agents in their agency that nobody would suspect would raise and take care of children. When the characters are given the responsibility to take care of the children, they become overwhelmed and seek "creative" solutions to their domestic problems. Gender reversal can be

defined as any change in social behavior, work, clothing, mannerisms, speech, self-designation, or ideology, which brings a person closer to the other (or, in polygender systems, another) gender, whether "total" or partial.

Gender reversal in these three movies becomes a comedy formula to entertain the viewer. Gender reversal comedy can be defined by comedic scenarios in which traditional gender roles or stereotypes are reversed or parodied for humor. While gender reversal comedy may appear to be harmless or even progressive on the surface, there are several reasons why it can be harmful. One of the major issues is that gender reversal comedy frequently relies on stereotypes associated with a specific gender, which can reinforce existing biases and prejudices. By exaggerating or mocking these stereotypes, comedy can potentially dismiss the experiences and struggles of people who identify with that gender. This is especially dangerous for marginalized groups already subjected to discrimination or social challenges because of their gender. Suppose a gender reversal comedy depicts men as incapable and clueless when they play traditionally female roles. In that case, it may reinforce the stereotype that women are naturally better suited for those roles and men are incapable. This not only perpetuates gender stereotypes but also dismisses women's experiences and contributions in those fields.

This notion attempts to humanize these hyper-masculine personalities associated with being unable to express or suppress their emotions. The involvement of children in these films is strictly limited to being just literary devices for the development of the main character. The relationship between the main character and the children shows the main character's "human side." In the film, the main character will do things he has never done before, such as changing the baby's diaper, carrying the baby, making breakfast, and reading bedtime stories. In the process, the main character's troubles with home tasks create comedy. When a detective or SEAL agent has to wear ballet clothing or change diapers, there is a discrepancy between reality and the movies.

The purpose of this research is to analyze how masculine identity is portrayed in the films *Kindergarten Cop* (1990), *The Pacifier* (2005), and *Playing With Fire* (2019). The research tries to understand how male identity is presented

and exploited as a source of humor in popular culture by examining these films. Furthermore, this research intends to investigate the potentially problematic features of masculine figures playing feminine roles in comedy. The research aims to identify and discuss the underlying gender dynamics, power structures, and societal expectations at work through a critical examination of these films while also addressing issues related to gender stereotypes, gender performance, and the reinforcement or subversion of gender norms.

1.2 Research Question

1. How is masculine identity presented in the films *Kindergarten Cop* (1990), *The Pacifier* (2005), and *Playing With Fire* (2019)?
2. How is masculine identity used as humor in *Kindergarten Cop* (1990), *The Pacifier* (2005), and *Playing With Fire* (2019)?
3. How does the presentation of masculine figures who perform feminine roles in comedy be problematic?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To show how masculine identity is presented in the films *Kindergarten Cop* (1990), *The Pacifier* (2005), and *Playing With Fire* (2019).
2. To show how the films *Kindergarten Cop* (1990), *The Pacifier* (2005), and *Playing With Fire* (2019) use masculine identity as humor.
3. To show how the presentation of masculine figures who perform feminine roles in comedy is problematic.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

To show how masculinity is presented in the movies, I will use Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity, a term he uses to refer to a specific idealized picture of masculinity in relation to which images of femininity and other masculinity are suppressed and subordinated. The hegemonic ideal of masculinity in current Western culture is a man who is independent, risk-taking, aggressive, heterosexual, and rational. I will also refer to Butler's concept of Gender

Performativity, which stresses gender as a repetitive and structured performance done in acceptance of societal norms.