

GENDERED RESISTANCE AND EMOTIONAL SURVIVAL IN *FAIR PLAY* (2023) AND *MARIE CURIE* (2019)

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Abstract

This study examines how gendered power struggles are represented through the female protagonists of Fair Play (2023) and Radioactive (2019). Both narratives center on Emily and Marie Curie who navigate male-dominated professional environments shaped by patriarchal norms and institutional hierarchies. The purpose of this comparative study is to deepen feminist readings of contemporary and historical female figures while fostering critically empathetic engagement with visual narratives. The research utilizes a comparative critical analysis framework, drawing on the theories of Judith Butler, Michelle M. Lazar, and bell hooks to explore how institutionalized misogyny, emotional labor, and resistance are constructed on screen. The findings reveal that both protagonists experience layered forms of marginalization, including workplace bias, emotional burden, and social surveillance. Yet, each asserts agency, Emily through reclaiming her dignity in the corporate world, and Marie Curie through intellectual defiance in academia. This study contributes to feminist film criticism by highlighting the emotional cost of women's survival within gendered structures and underscoring the need for more intersectional and humanized portrayals of female agency in media.

Keywords: Gendered Power, Emotional Labor, Feminist Film Analysis, Comparative Study

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of secondwave feminism, cinema has served as both a mirror and mechanism for social critique, particularly regarding the construction and contestation of gender roles. As cinema continues to evolve, feminist scholarship remains attuned to how gender ideologies are encoded in filmic representations and narrative structures. Bainbridge (2008) emphasizes that film is not merely a medium of storytelling but a cultural text that inscribes femininity and subjectivity through symbolic codes and aesthetic forms. Earlier feminist film expose how mainstream cinematic structures reinforce the male gaze and objectify women. Today's scholarship increasingly feminist centers on how women in film navigate neoliberal conditions, perform affective labor, and embody hybrid identities that trouble the binary logics of victimhood and empowerment (Gill & Orgad, 2017; Tasker & Negra, 2019).

Cinema, as a cultural artifact, holds immense potential for critiquing and



dominant reproducing ideologies, particularly those surrounding gender and power. In feminist film discourse, the female protagonist often becomes the locus through which systemic inequalities. emotional labor. and performative gender roles are dramatized (Thornham, 2019: Bainbridge, 2008). This article conducts a comparative analysis of Fair Play (2023) and Radioactive (2019), two films that feature women resisting and enduring institutionalized misogyny high-performance, within maledominated spaces: the corporate world and scientific academia.

Both narratives trace the journeys of women Emily and Marie Curie. Emily is a rising analyst in a New York hedge fund, while Marie Curie is a pioneering physicist challenging entrenched masculine norms. These films portray not only the systemic barriers women face but also the emotional and psychological toll of negotiating power and agency in such contexts. As Rupp and Taylor (2018) argue, feminist inquiry must interrogate both the overt and subtle mechanisms through which women are marginalized and resist that marginalization. This study builds on that premise by drawing from several foundational feminist thinkers.

Judith Butler's concept of gender performance (1990,2004) examine how gender is not an innate identity but a set of repeated social acts, often policed by cultural norms. bell hooks (2000) bring attention to the emotional toll that patriarchy expects on particularly through women, expectation that they serve as emotional caregivers in both public and private spheres. Meanwhile, Michelle Lazar's feminist critical discourse analysis (2017) highlights how institutional language, often disguised as neutral or progressive, can in fact reproduce exclusionary gender hierarchies.

Together, these theoretical frameworks provide a layered approach to understanding how Emily and Marie Curie engage with the roles expected of them. At times, they disrupt or challenge the norms; and at other times, they navigate or internalize them. Through this lens, the films are not only stories of individual struggle but also reflections of broader gendered power relations at work across affective, institutional, and discursive dimensions.

While prior studies have richly explored gender dynamics in cinema, from portrayals of gender oppression in South Asian film (Gershon, 2021) to the representation of women in scientific biopics (Pérez, 2022) and the affective politics of women in tech (Sammartino, 2022), most have focused on single narratives, regional contexts, or genrespecific discourses. Analyses such as Tendenan (2024) and Shalini Alamelu (2022) interrogate feminist themes through cultural or theological lenses, yet they remain localized in Similarly, scope. Wajiran (2024)explores women's resistance in No Fourth River through a liberal feminist lens, underscoring how narratives of function endurance as liberation. Pramesti and Supsiadji (2022) reveal how misogynistic structures persist even postfeminist narratives. Simamora and Satria (2022) highlight women's struggle for equality in Brecht's Mother Courage and Her Children. These studies collectively affirm that feminist critique in literature remains vital in exposing systemic gender hierarchies and modes of resistance. Sinha (2021) and Sutherland & Feltey (2017) foreground toxic masculinity and intersectionality but stop short of offering comparative



studies that traverse both workplace and scientific domains.

However. what remains underexplored is a cross-contextual, comparative feminist analysis examines how institutionalized emotional labor. misogyny, and autonomy are negotiated by women in both corporate and scientific milieus. This study addresses that gap by comparing Fair Play and Radioactive, offering a thematic and theoretical synthesis through the lenses of gendered power struggles and feminist resistance. By situating these two films within shared structures of patriarchy yet distinct temporal and professional contexts, this article contributes to feminist film criticism by expanding the discourse beyond single-narrative analyses toward integrated an understanding of how women's agency is negotiated, constrained, and redefined within modern and historical frameworks.

Accordingly, this research asks: How do feminist theoretical lenses, particularly those of Butler, hooks, and Lazar, illuminate the protagonists' experiences of power, gender, and identity in Fair Play and Radioactive? Through thematic and theoretical synthesis, the study foregrounds the emotional, intellectual, and symbolic labor women perform in navigating patriarchal structures, thereby offering a nuanced contribution to feminist film scholarship.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity challenges essentialist notions of identity by asserting that gender is constructed through repeated social and discursive acts (Butler, 1990). This framework is particularly relevant in analyzing *Fair Play* and *Radioactive*. where women's

professional and emotional experiences expose the fragile boundaries of gender conformity. As Foster (2015) contends, feminist film readings must deal with the embodied disruption of heteronormative scripts in both personal and institutional spaces.

While Butler highlights the punitive consequences of transgressing gender norms, bell hooks turn attention to the affective dimensions of this struggle. Emily's promotion in a hypermasculine workplace, for instance, becomes a moment of rupture rather than triumph. rise is interpreted not Her meritocratic but as opportunistic tokenism, echoing Butler's (2004) observation that gender transgressions invite social sanction. Similarly, Marie Curie's exclusion from the French Academy illustrates Butler's idea of the "punitive consequences" of defying prescriptive gender norms. However, these disciplinary mechanisms are not only institutional, but they are also emotional, operating through guilt, doubt, and isolation.

hooks (2000) provide a powerful lens for understanding these affective dimensions, framing emotional labor as both a tool of patriarchal control and a potential site of resistance. Women, hook argues, are socialized to become emotional caregivers even at expense of their own well-being. This dynamic is evident in Fair Play, where continually manages **Emily** partner's insecurity, and in *Radioactive*, where Marie channels grief rejection into intellectual perseverance. Vial and Cowgill (2022) note that women in leadership often shoulder an invisible burden of emotional regulation to maintain social harmony. Emily's struggle between empathy and selfpreservation and Marie's decision to return to her lab after Pierre's death visualize this tension cinematically.



Both films use tight framing, reflective surfaces, and subdued lighting to convey the internalization of emotional labor. These moments are not unambiguous acts of defiance but gestures of endurance that, as hooks suggest, transform vulnerability into political strength.

Extending this analysis to discourse and institutional structures. Lazar's discourse (2005)feminist critical analysis examines how power and ideology are sustained through everyday language. Though her work centers on Singaporean media and politics, its analytical principles that is how reproduce institutions gender hierarchies through egalitarian discourse, remain highly relevant to Western contexts. Lazar's framework illuminates how neoliberal institutions cloak exclusionary practices in the rhetoric of empowerment. In Fair Play, Emily's promotion is framed as proof of diversity rather than professional competence, reflecting what Lazar terms the rhetoric of surface-level equality. Similarly, in Radioactive, Marie Curie's intellectual identity is frequently eclipsed by narratives emphasizing her private life and emotional relationships. Pérez (2022) observes that biopics often feminize achievements women's through affective storytelling, diluting subversive power of their intellect.

Taken together, Butler, hooks, and Lazar offer a complementary theoretical triad that situates gender not only as performance but also as emotion and discourse. Butler exposes the regulatory power of norms; hooks reveal how emotions mediate submission and survival; Lazar uncovers the linguistic mechanisms that naturalize inequality. perspectives collectively These illuminate how Fair Play Radioactive dramatize the negotiation of female agency across bodily, emotional, and institutional domains. By attending to both cinematic representation and discursive framing, this review underscores that resistance in feminist film is seldom absolute, it is often ambivalent, negotiated, and deeply human.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative comparative approach within framework of feminist criticism. It analyzed two films, Fair Play and Radioactive, which were purposively selected for their portrayal of women's struggle for agency within patriarchal institutions. One in a neoliberal corporate environment, the other in twentieth-century scientific academia. Following Avci and Cetin (2022), the research proceeded through three analytical stages. First, selection was conducted by transcribing and closely examining key dialogues from both films that explicitly or implicitly reveal gendered hierarchies, emotional labor, and acts of resistance. Second, the selected dialogues were coded thematically, allowing patterns related to power dynamics, emotional expression, and self-definition emerge inductively from the data. Third, these thematic findings were interpreted through feminist theoretical frameworks to identify how linguistic expressions in the dialogues construct, challenge, or negotiate patriarchal power.

To enhance the credibility of interpretation, the study applied triangulation through three analytical dimensions:

1. Textual triangulation, by comparing dialogues across scenes and between the two films to identify recurring linguistic patterns of domination and resistance.



- 2. Contextual triangulation, by situating the dialogues within each film's broader socio-cultural and institutional setting (corporate vs. scientific).
- 3. Theoretical triangulation, by interpreting the findings through feminist theories proposed by Judith Butler (1990, 2004), bell hooks (2000), and Michelle M. Lazar (2005).

This triangulated approach ensured that meaning was derived not merely from isolated dialogue excerpts but from their interplay with narrative context and theoretical perspective.

In keeping with feminist research principles, the researchers acknowledge their positionality as interpreters who approach the texts through a feminist lens. Rather than seeking objectivity, study the embraces interpretive subjectivity as a means of engaging ethically with the power relations embedded in the texts. methodological design thus facilitates a layered and contextually grounded understanding of how Fair Play and articulate women's Radioactive negotiation of power, emotion, and resistance through dialogue.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section offers a thematic reflection on how Fair Play and Radioactive illuminate the experiences of women navigating systems deeply rooted in misogyny. Rather than simply presenting isolated stories, both films capture the everyday tensions and resilience of women whose professional and personal lives are shaped by gendered power dynamics. Emily is a modern finance professional, and Marie Curie is a pioneering scientist in early 20th-century Europe. They may be separated by time and discipline, but both face structures that resist their presence and success.

Through these characters, the films do not only represent individual struggles but also expose broader societal tensions around women's ambition, autonomy, and resistance. Returning to the research question, how Butler, hook, and Lazar help understand these characters' negotiations of power, the following discussion examines how institutional misogyny, emotional labor, and the politics of feminist survival shape the experiences of these two protagonists. These four interlinked discussions reveal not only the costs of nonconformity but also the possibilities of reimagining agency in deeply gendered spaces.

4.1 Institutionalized misogyny

In Fair Play, Emily's rise within the firm catalyzes a crisis not only in her personal relationship but the gender dynamics of her workplace. Although her promotion appears to be based on merit, it is quickly reframed through sexist assumptions. Luke's bitter retort:

"You only got the job because you're a girl. They wanted to look progressive."

This illustrates what Lazar (2005) terms institutionalized discursive misogyny, in which the language of progress masks the reproduction of patriarchal hierarchies. Emily's professional competence is overshadowed by the gendered narrative imposed upon her success.

Her male colleagues, too, reinforce this narrative in covert ways. One co-worker made a remark during a team meeting:



"Let's hope she doesn't cry under pressure."

Such comments reflect Butler's (1990) notion that gender is performative and policed. When women deviate from expected roles especially by occupying positions of authority, they become sites of suspicion and hostility.

In *Radioactive*, Marie Curie's scientific brilliance is persistently questioned, especially when she is publicly accused of "destroying a man's family" during the Langevin scandal. A member of the press shouts:

"You are a foreign adulteress corrupting our moral fabric!"

Here, Marie's identity as a woman, widow, immigrant, and scientist are collapsed into a single narrative of deviance. Despite winning two Nobel Prizes, she is denied entry into the French Academy of Sciences. This exemplifies Butler's (2004) argument that institutions regulate subjectivity through norms, denying recognition to those who defy gendered expectations. Marie herself articulates the cost of existing outside these norms:

"They love Pierre's science. They fear me."

In both films. institutional discourse and gender performance intersect to produce exclusion. It does not operate through overt prohibition but through subtle mechanisms of containment and devaluation. Emily's competence is recorded as a threat, while Marie's intellectual authority is undermined by the very scientific institutions that benefit from her discoveries. Their visibility, which is achieved through merit and becomes perseverance, a site

vulnerability. It exposes them not to celebration, but to suspicion, scandal, or strategic erasure. These responses are not incidental. They are systemic, reflecting a form of institutionalized misogyny that punishes women who transgress established gender roles. As such, both narratives underscore how institutions police not just who belongs, but on what terms, revealing the prohibitive cost of being a woman who refuses to shrink.

4.2 Emotional labor and the burden of care

Emily's emotional labor in *Fair Play* is relentless. This occurs especially as her partner's jealousy morphs into emotional manipulation and physical aggression. She becomes the caretaker of his ego even as he unravels. After violent altercation, as Emily is bleeding and exhausted, still she whispers:

"I'm here. I want to help you."

This scene aligns with bell hook's (2000) critique of emotional labor as a gendered obligation. This means that it is a social expectation that women must offer unconditional care even in abusive situations. Emily's emotional breakdown in the elevator, after being assaulted and gaslit, is not weakness but inevitable product of systemic emotional exploitation. Furthermore, the film's visual language reinforces this burden. Emily is often framed alone reflected surfaces including elevators, mirrors, glass doors which visually encode her emotional isolation.

In *Radioactive*, Marie's emotional burden is no less profound. Following Pierre's tragic death, she is urged by colleagues to take a break or "step away from the lab." Her refusal is firm:



"I will mourn in motion. Grief is not an enemy of reason."

Marie's words defy the stereotype that women must fragment emotionally before they can recover. Her grief becomes integrated into her labor. This aligns with what Lazar (2005) might read as affective resistance that can be translated as the refusal to collapse under emotional expectations placed on women in public life.

Even in her confrontation with media, Marie resists emotional transparency. When asked whether the scandal has affected her scientific work, she replies:

"Science is not a man's pursuit. It is human. My work stands."

The psychological endurance of both protagonists challenges the false dichotomy between emotionality and professionalism. This dichotomy historically used to exclude women from positions of influence (Vial & Cowgill, 2022). In both films, emotional labor is neither visible nor passive. It is central to the struggle for legitimacy.

In both narratives, emotional labor emerges not as a passive consequence of patriarchy but as a charged and contested space where Emily and Marie Curie navigate the psychological toll of gendered power. systemic experiences underscore how the burden of care, self-regulation, and resilience is disproportionately placed on women, especially in male dominated spheres. However, rather than capitulating, both women assert emotional sovereignty. In the case of Emily, she sets limits in a toxic relationship that punishes her ambition. In the case of Marie Curie. refuses internalize she to dismissiveness of her male colleagues. Through their refusal of emotionally

accommodate patriarchal expectations, they transform emotional labor into a form of feminist resistance that is quiet, persistent, and deeply political.

4.3 Refusal as feminist resistance

Emily's most powerful moment comes not through confrontation, but through exit. After enduring physical violence, public humiliation, and professional sabotage, she confronts Luke:

"I won't bleed just so you can feel like a man."

Emily's ultimate rejection of Luke is not framed as a climatic outburst but as a political withdrawal. This is a refusal to be emotionally exploited any longer. Far from mere self-defense, Emily's walkout enacts a Butlerian subversion (1990) of gendered scripts. Emily's walkout is political. This is a form of agency that serves her from the oppressive structures of romantic and institutional power. She does not shout. She leaves.

Earlier when trying to reason with Luke, she says:

"Why do you hate me for being good at what I do?"

His silence, then his rage, confirms the patriarchal logic at play. That is male identity feels endangered by female success. Emily's refusal to internalize this logic becomes a radical act of survival.

In *Radioactive*, Marie's resistance operates in more institutional registers. When the Academy offers her husband's professorship on the condition that she remains anonymous, she responds:



"I will teach. But not in his name. In mine."

This insistence echoes hook's (2000) call for self-definition that is refusing to be cast as merely a wife or assistant in male legacies. Marie's activism is scientific, rhetorical, and embodied. She insists on her presence in spaces that actively try to erase her.

Even on her deathbed, reflecting on her life's work, Marie's declare:

"We are made of energy. I chose not to disappear."

This final line metaphorically encapsulates the feminist spirit that runs through both narratives. Neither woman is permitted ease or safety in her journey. Both refuse invisibility. Their act of resistance, be it leaving a relationship or claiming authorship, disrupts normative gender roles and assert subjectivity on their own terms.

Both Emily and Marie Curie embody a feminist stance that asserts women's right to exist independently of male approval or relational identity. Their journeys reflect a deliberate effort to claim space not just physically, but intellectually and emotionally. While the spaces they carve are often challenged or undermined, their sense of worth is rooted in self-possession rather than external validation.

Emily resists the pressure to make herself smaller in response to Luke's fragile ego. Marie Curie confronts the scientific institutional barriers that tried to erase her presence. In doing so, both women reimagine survival not as mere endurance, but as an act of vision. It is a bold refusal to be defined by systems that diminish them. Their resistance is not performative or grandiose, but quietly radical. It symbolizes a

commitment to living on their own terms.

They move through the world not as supporting characters in someone else's story, but as authors of their own. In centering their experiences, the films invite viewers to reflect on what it means for women to live with clarity, purpose, and self-authored dignity despite the forces that try to limit them.

4.4 The Policing of Female Success

In Fair Play, Emily's ascent within her firm initiates a subtle relentless institutional pushback, among her male colleagues and romantic partner. Her promotion is immediately reframed by Luke as illegitimate. This suggests that it was motivated by superficial consideration rather than merit.

"They needed a woman to look good."

This statement is emblematic of what Michelle Lazar (2005) describes as the rhetorical veneer of inclusivity in neoliberal spaces where diversity is celebrated publicly but undermined privately. Emily's competence becomes a target, and her gender becomes a liability within a system that demands conformity to masculine norms while rejecting the legitimacy of feminine authority.

Luke's response is not isolated. He mirrors the institutional anxieties. One of their colleagues' remarks at a party:

"Let's see if she can handle the heat."

Such language exemplifies Butler's (1990) assertion that gender is publicly regulated performance. Emily's deviation from expected submissive role is punished both socially and emotionally. Even in silence, the film

shows Emily absorbing these judgements, her body tense in boardrooms, her voice forced into controlled tones in meetings dominated by men.

In *Radioactive*, Marie Curie's navigation of academia exposes a more historical but equally potent mode of exclusion. Her professional breakthroughs are met with suspicion and scandal. This is particularly true during the Langevin affair when her scientific identity is eclipsed by mediafueled moral panic:

"You are not a woman of science. You're a disgrace"

Furthermore, despite her scientific credential, the institutional rejection of her application to the French Academy reflects what Butler (2004) describes as institutional violence. That is, the systematic denial of recognition to subjects who defy gendered norms. Marie is seen intellectually as dangerous not only for her discoveries but also for her refusal to conform to the submissive femineity expected women in the public eye.

Marie's own word distills the conflict:

"They think my science threatens their order because I do it as a woman, not despite of it."

This assertion reclaims her identity as integral to her work. It also rejects the idea that femininity and brilliance are mutually exclusive.

Both Emily and Marie Curie, through their actions and presence, challenge the norms of the institutions they inhabit. As a result, they face real consequences for doing so. Emily, as capable professional, disrupts the unspoken rules of gender hierarchy by

succeeding on her own terms. Rather being recognized than for achievements. she is met with resentment and, eventually, abuse. Her experience exposes the discomfort institutions feel toward women who step outside submissive roles. Similarly, Marie Curie's intellectual brilliance defies long-standing stereotypes of women as emotional and intellectually secondary. Her scientific accomplishments bring not recognition but also exclusion, isolation, and criticism. Those become evidence the structural barriers of continuously faced.

These portrayals highlight how institutions often respond with resistance to women who challenge seated gender expectations. Resistance is not limited to a lack of recognition. It often involves active punishment socially, emotionally, or symbolically for those who refuse to conform. Despite being set in different historical and social contexts, both stories reveal how patriarchy enforces conformity through layered forms of violence.

4.5. Synthesis and Implications

Fair Play and Radioactive offer more than narratives of oppression. They provide counter-narratives of endurance, agency, and transformation. Produces in different contexts, Fair Play within the #MeToo era and Radioactive within biopic conventions, they are shaped by and contribute to feminist cultural discourse.

Aligned with previous analyses of women's struggle for equality in literary texts (Wajiran, 2024; Pramesti & Supsiadji, 2024; Simamora & Satria, 2024), this study extends feminist criticism to the terrain of contemporary film, demonstrating how gendered

resistance and emotional survival are enacted through visual storytelling. These films honor women's complexity and confront enduring structures that limit them. Through their courage, endurance, and redefinition of success, Emily and Marie illuminate the feminist pursuit of autonomy and recognition across time and context.

5. CONCLUSION

This comparative study of Fair Play and Radioactive demonstrates how modern cinema represents women's negotiation of power within patriarchal systems across different time and professional settings. While Fair Play situates Emily in the high-stakes recent world of corporate finance, Radioactive positions Marie Curie in the patriarchal structures of early twentieth-century science. Both characters confront gendered hierarchies. However, their responses reveal distinct modes of resistance: Emily's struggle centers on reclaiming emotional autonomy and psychological dignity amid manipulation, whereas Marie's defiance unfolds through intellectual perseverance and the pursuit scientific recognition.

The findings show that both films resilience reframe not as endurance but as a form of agency enacted through everyday persistence, emotional strength, and moral integrity. These narratives complicate the notion of resistance by illustrating how women self-definition even systems that are not overtly violent yet deeply restrictive. In doing so, Fair Play and Radioactive expose how patriarchal power operates institutionally and intimately through language, expectation, and emotional labor.

This study contributes to feminist criticism by bridging the perspectives of

Butler, hooks, and Lazar to interpret cinematic dialogues as sites discursive struggle. It underscores how feminist theory can illuminate the subtle workings of gender ideology embedded in dialogue and affect, extending the analytical focus from visual imagery to linguistic expression. This contribution helps expand the scope of feminist film analysis beyond gaze-centered or purely visual critique toward an integrated discourse-based understanding representation.

Future studies could extend this comparative inquiry through intersectional approaches, exploring how class. race. and cultural background intersect with gendered experience in film. Similarly, studies on audience reception and cross-genre comparisons deepen may understanding of how contemporary cinema continues to negotiate women's emotional and intellectual agency.

At its core, Fair Play and Radioactive illustrate that feminist resistance in film transcends overt confrontation, emphasizing instead the endurance of selfhood. Through their courage, endurance, and redefinition of success, Emily and Marie illuminate the ongoing feminist pursuit of autonomy and recognition across time and context.

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