

Representation of Men in Relationship Dynamics in Women's Media

A Semiotic Analysis of Fimela.com

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ABSTRACT

Digital media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of gender, especially in relationship-oriented content targeted at women. Articles in this category often evaluate male behavior, both positively and negatively affecting how women perceive relationship dynamics. This study explores the representation of men in Fimela.com's relationship articles, one of the most visited sections on the platform. Using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach, the research analyzes articles published between 2024-2025 to identify recurring patterns of male depiction. The results reveal five dominant representations: men as consistently present, unwilling to commit, in need of space, sources of conflict, and emotionally inexpressive. These portrayals tend to evoke concern in female readers and suggest predictive assumptions about male behavior in relationships. Such narratives reflect a postfeminist ideology in which female empowerment is prioritized, while male characters are often depicted in a critical or negative light. The study concludes that while these representations may support female autonomy, they risk reinforcing one-sided narratives and highlight the need for more balanced gender portrayals in digital relationship media.

Keywords: *representation; women's media; semiotics; postfeminism; Fimela.com*

INTRODUCTION

The media plays a significant role in shaping social constructions of gender. Gender, unlike biological sex, is a set of cultural norms and expectations that determine how men and women are positioned within society (Dalimoenthe, 2020). Within media representations, men are often depicted as strong, rational, and dominant figures, while women are portrayed as emotional, dependent, or even in need of protection (Connell & Pearse, 2015). These portrayals do not merely reflect social reality, but also reinforce stereotypes and influence public perceptions of gender relations (Gill, 2007).

Such representations are especially evident in women's media, which is specifically designed for female audiences and offers content on beauty, health, career, and relationships. Among these, romantic relationships are often portrayed as central to women's lives (Santana K., 2017). In these portrayals, men frequently serve as the key figures who determine the success or failure of a relationship. This shapes how women view their roles within relationships and establishes expectations regarding male partners.



Figure 1 The Interface of Fimela.com's Relationship Channel

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

Fimela.com is one of Indonesia's leading women-oriented digital platforms. Managed by KapanLagi Youniverse, the media outlet targets young women aged 20 to 35 with content related to lifestyle, beauty, and relationships. Its relationship channel, in particular, plays a significant role by regularly presenting narratives around romantic dynamics. In this space, men are frequently evaluated. Sometimes as ideal partners, but often as emotionally unavailable or problematic figures. These narratives are conveyed from a female perspective and use both textual and visual elements to frame men as key sources of emotional imbalance or relational conflict.

Understanding how men are portrayed in such narratives is crucial because these constructions are never neutral. The symbolic meanings conveyed in media influence how audiences internalize concepts of gender and shape their interpersonal expectations. To explore this, a semiotic approach is employed, as it allows for in-depth analysis of signs used within text and imagery.

Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, in particular, offers a useful framework through its triadic model of representamen (the sign), object (the referent), and interpretant (the perceived meaning). This model enables the researcher to examine how media constructs male identities not only through what is explicitly stated but also through the symbols and patterns embedded within media narratives (Sobur, 2006). In women's digital media like Fimela.com, such symbolic analysis is vital for unpacking how masculinity is framed within romantic contexts.

Several previous studies underscore the relevance of this topic. Fadhilah and Razin (2024), in their research on Cosmopolitan.co.id, found that male characters were often depicted as dishonest, unfaithful, and sexually driven. These portrayals incited anxiety among female readers and reinforced negative stereotypes. Meanwhile, Nova Risky (2013) analyzed representations of masculinity in Men's Health and found that the magazine promoted dominant, muscular, and socially assertive male images. While informative, these studies focused either on male or international platforms, leaving a gap in the examination of male portrayals within Indonesian women's media.

To address this gap, the current research investigates the representation of men in Fimela.com's relationship articles using Peirce's semiotic theory. By analyzing eight articles published between 2024 and 2025, the study aims to uncover recurring patterns in how men are symbolized in romantic narratives. This research contributes to the field of communication studies by revealing how symbolic gender constructions are embedded in digital media and how they influence readers' expectations in interpersonal relationships. It further illustrates how female empowerment narratives in media may inadvertently contribute to the oversimplification or stereotyping of male figures, underscoring the need for more balanced gender representation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Representation of Men in Media

The representation of men in media refers to how media constructs, presents, and shapes the image of masculinity across various aspects of life. Media does not merely reflect reality but also influences public perception of masculinity through the language, images, and narratives it employs (Burton, 2008). Traditionally, men are portrayed as strong, rational, and dominant figures, while traits such as emotional sensitivity, gentleness, or domestic involvement are less frequently highlighted. However, as cultural norms evolve, media has begun to depict more diverse representations of men, such as caring, expressive, and emotionally involved figures within interpersonal contexts. These representations play a significant role in shaping societal expectations and perceptions of men's roles in everyday life.

Relationship Dynamics

Relationship dynamics refer to the ongoing process of interaction between individuals that evolves and changes over time. These changes are influenced by various factors including emotional states, personal perceptions, and communication patterns between partners. Relationships grow through shared experiences, habitual interactions, and the influence of surrounding social norms. According to DeVito (2013), interpersonal

relationships progress through several stages, ranging from contact, involvement, intimacy, deterioration, to eventual dissolution. Therefore, understanding relationship dynamics is essential in analyzing how individuals build, maintain, and adjust their interactions across different phases and social situations.

Women's Digital Media

Women's digital media refers to internet-based platforms that specifically cater to female audiences by providing content relevant to their needs and interests. These platforms have developed rapidly alongside digital transformation, offering faster, more interactive, and diverse access to information. The main focus typically includes lifestyle, career, health, and relationships packaged in ways that resonate with women's daily experiences (Rivers, Peterson, & Jensen, 2004). With the rise of digital technologies, women's media is no longer confined to print formats but has expanded its reach through websites, social media, and various online platforms, enabling greater engagement and broader audience accessibility.

Social Construction

Social Construction Theory offers a conceptual framework for understanding how social reality is formed through human interaction rather than existing as an objective truth (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). It involves three key processes: externalization, where individuals project ideas and meanings into the social world; objectivation, where these meanings are institutionalized and perceived as natural or objective; and internalization, where individuals absorb these constructed norms into their consciousness, shaping identity and behavior. Language plays a central role in this process, not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for creating symbolic worlds and reinforcing social institutions, such as gender roles in media narratives (Sulaiman, 2016). Despite its analytical power, the theory faces criticism for neglecting objective realities and underestimating the role of power in shaping dominant discourses, as emphasized by thinkers like Foucault. Additionally, it tends to overlook resistance and contestation within social structures. In media contexts, Social Construction Theory is essential for analyzing how reality is produced and maintained through selective narratives, framing, and repetition, making media a key agent in shaping collective perceptions and sustaining social norms.

Postfeminism

Postfeminism is an ideological movement that emerged as a response to the limitations of second-wave feminism, particularly its tendency to pressure women into becoming idealized "superwomen." Rather than emphasizing universal female oppression, postfeminism embraces context-specific experiences shaped by social and cultural environments (Said, 2019). It shifts the feminist focus from collective struggles for equality

to the celebration of individual difference and plurality in women's identities, positioning women as autonomous subjects capable of defining themselves without relying on male standards. Thinkers like Luce Irigaray advocate for the development of distinct female language and culture that values biological and cultural uniqueness rather than imitation of masculine norms (Pratiwi, Nugroho, & Mahadewi, 2020). In practice, postfeminism promotes authentic female expression, whether in strength or softness, and emphasizes empowerment through self-definition, not male recognition (Gill, 2007). It ultimately seeks to liberate women from societal expectations that measure their value through male comparison, advocating instead for meaning and agency on their own terms.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs the semiotic method developed by Charles Sanders Peirce, as it offers a comprehensive framework for interpreting the hidden meanings embedded within media signs. Semiotics is broadly defined as the study of signs and their functions, relationships with other signs, and the processes of encoding and decoding by users (Ersyad, 2022). In media analysis, semiotics plays a crucial role in uncovering how meaning is socially constructed through both textual and visual elements. As Chandler (2007) notes, semiotic analysis of texts allows researchers to explore how linguistic signs shape social understanding and cultural perception. In fact, Sobur (2006) emphasizes that even social phenomena can be interpreted as "signs," as they contain embedded systems of meaning that are accessible through semiotic interpretation.

Peirce's semiotic theory is particularly appropriate for this study, as it serves as a grand theory capable of dissecting the fundamental components of signs while linking them within a unified structure. The theory is grounded in a triadic relationship between the representamen (the visible sign), the object (the concept being referred to), and the interpretant (the inferred meaning). This structure enables researchers to conduct in-depth analysis of how media, specifically Fimela.com constructs representations of men through narrative language and imagery. Peirce's framework allows for detailed identification of symbolic elements, their referents, and the meanings they generate in the minds of readers (Sobur, 2011).

Data collection was carried out through documentation techniques by capturing screenshots of selected articles from the "relationship" section of Fimela.com that fit the research scope. The elements captured include headlines, thumbnails, illustrations, and narrative text. These components functioned as the representamen and were analyzed to identify the object being represented and the interpretant potentially formed in readers' perceptions. This method aligns with the research's primary goal: to examine how men are represented in romantic dynamics within women's digital media.

Each article was analyzed according to Peirce's triadic elements. The representamen consists of observable elements such as headlines, descriptive language, and supportive

illustrations. The object refers to the concept of masculinity being portrayed, whether as the ideal partner, a red flag figure, or a dominant presence. The interpretant reflects the potential meaning drawn by readers, such as viewing caring men as desirable or emotionally distant men as unsuitable. Through this approach, the research aims to uncover symbolic patterns in the representation of men and decode the deeper meanings communicated in Fimela.com's relationship narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Relationship channel is one of the key sections on Fimela.com, specifically dedicated to content about romantic relationships and primarily targeting female readers. Based on the researcher's observations of Fimela.com during the period of 2024 to 2025, eight articles from the Relationship channel were identified as relevant to the research focus on male representation in romantic dynamics. These articles were selected purposively based on their thematic alignment with the research problem, scope, and research purpose:

Table 1.1 List of Articles Selected for Analysis

Article Title	Author	Publication Date
7 Ciri Pasanganmu Selingkuh secara Emosional, Kenali Tandanya agar Tidak Patah Hati	Ayu Puji Lestari	21 July 2024
7 Tanda Sinyal Halus bahwa Dia Tidak Memiliki Perasaan Cinta Padamu	Endah Wijayanti	29 January 2025
7 Tanda Kamu Dicintai oleh Pria Alfa yang Setia dan Dewasa	Endah Wijayanti	30 January 2025
5 Tanda Pasangan Melakukan Pocketing: Tak Siap Mengakui Hubungan ke Publik	Endah Wijayanti	4 February 2025
5 Tanda Pria Jatuh Cinta Padamu dari Sikapnya yang Lebih Perhatian	Endah Wijayanti	14 February 2025
7 Perbedaan Cara Pria dan Perempuan Menghadapi Patah Hati	Endah Wijayanti	19 February 2025

Article Title	Author	Publication Date
Teori Rubber Band: Kunci Memahami Pria yang Butuh Ruang dalam Hubungan	Endah Wijayanti	25 February 2025
Sahabat Fimela, Waspada! 8 Tanda Cowok Red Flag yang Harus Kamu Ketahui	Nabila Mecadinisa	20 March 2025

Source: Researcher's Compilation. (2025).

The representations of men that emerge in these articles are examined through the concepts of representamen, object, and interpretant, which indicate their roles as partners, their emotional responses, and their attitudes toward commitment and conflict within the dynamics of romantic relationships. The following are five representations of men found in the Relationship channel of Fimela.com. These findings and analyses are organized based on the stages of relationship development.

Romantic relationships often begin with an idealized phase marked by affection, emotional support, and physical closeness. During this initial period, typically within the first six months, men are often represented as emotionally and physically available partners (Ripoll et al., 2025). According to Chapman (2015), presence (both physical and emotional) is one of the most basic and powerful ways to express love. This notion is reinforced in Fimela.com articles that portray men as consistently present during the early stages of relationships.

The headlines of two articles “7 Tanda Kamu Dicintai oleh Pria Alfa yang Setia dan Dewasa” (article one) and “5 Tanda Pria Jatuh Cinta Padamu dari Sikapnya yang Lebih Perhatian” (article two) serve as key representations. The word “tanda” indicates observable indicators of romantic intent, guiding readers to interpret male behavior during new romantic stages.



Figure 2 Article Headline Images Depicting Male Presence

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

Both images are set in restaurants, symbolizing companionship and shared experience. A restaurant is metaphorically a space where the “menu” of life is served, including sweet and bitter moments, signaling the emotional spectrum of a relationship (Azy, 2020).

In the first image, the man hands a pink rose to the woman, symbolizing affection and emotional investment (Setiawan, 2023). His upright posture connotes protectiveness (Tannen, 2017), while in the second image, the man gently clasps the woman’s hands, an intimate gesture of emotional presence (Lahitani, 2022). The gift box in front of them further implies commitment and emotional investment (Sitoresmi, 2025). In both cases, the man gazes at the woman, while the woman focuses on his actions, emphasizing the man’s active emotional engagement (Chapman, 2015). The soft yellow lighting reinforces a mood of warmth and safety (Gabb & Fink, 2015).

Though these representations convey romantic attentiveness, they also uphold traditional expectations of masculinity. As Himawan (2022) argues, such portrayals risk reinforcing the notion that men must be perpetual initiators and caretakers in relationships, pressures that can contribute to emotional exhaustion and internalized toxic masculinity (McCornack, 2010).

7. Dia Senantiasa Memprioritaskanmu



Figure 3 Male Presence in Article One

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

In Figure 3, a man and woman are engaged in joyful conversation. Both mirror each other’s gestures by supporting their heads with one hand. This is a sign of deep rapport and mutual understanding (Ramdani, 2021). This image is accompanied by the text that says loving someone is a decision made repeatedly, not just a fleeting feeling. It further emphasizes that if you have a man who continues to choose you in all circumstances, you can be sure that his love is sincere, loyal, and mature.

This statement frames love as a repeated decision rooted in emotional resilience (Fromm, 2020). While it conveys admirable stability, the expectation that men must always “choose” their partner, regardless of emotional state, reinforces uneven gender roles.

Prioritas yang Berubah: Kamu Menjadi Pusat Perhatian



Selalu hadir/Copyright Fimela - Adrian Utama Putra

Figure 4 Male Presence in Article Two

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

The second article furthers this dynamic with imagery of a woman resting on a man's shoulder, while he holds a paper, perhaps symbolizing work. Despite his potential busyness, the man welcomes her presence, suggesting he prioritizes her over personal tasks. This idea is reflected in the text, which says that when a man falls in love, his priorities shift. He will make time for you, even if it means sacrificing things he enjoys, always striving to be there for you, through both good and bad times.

While expressing romantic devotion, such representation centralizes men as emotional providers and decision-makers, sidelining mutual responsibility (DeVito, 2013). The unequal gender portrayal persists despite Fimela's empowering women agenda, arguably to align with reader expectations and maximize engagement (Safitri, Yuliati & Muzni, 2024).

After the initial romantic phase marked by attention and presence, a deeper relationship demands commitment. Commitment involves not only emotional investment and long-term planning but also mutual readiness to face challenges together (Rusbult et al., 2011). It reflects a willingness to remain attached to one's partner through shared responsibility and emotional bonding (Yudistriana, Basuki, & Harsanti, 2010). However, not all men are emotionally prepared for this stage. In some cases, men respond by withdrawing, avoiding future-oriented conversations, or decreasing emotional involvement. Psychological factors such as fear of losing freedom, unresolved past trauma, or emotional instability often underlie this reluctance (Miller, 2015).

This dynamic is subtly portrayed in two articles from Fimela.com: "5 Tanda Pasangan Melakukan Pocketing: Tak Siap Mengakui Hubungan ke Publik" (article one) and "7 Tanda Sinyal Halus bahwa Dia Tidak Memiliki Perasaan Cinta Padamu" (article two). These articles depict men who avoid commitment through ambiguity, detachment, and emotional retreat.

5 Tanda Pasangan Melakukan Pocketing: Tak Siap Mengakui Hubungan ke Publik



7 Tanda Sinyal Halus bahwa Dia Tidak Memiliki Perasaan Cinta Padamu



Figure 5 Headline Images Reflecting Male Reluctance Toward Commitment

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

In the first image, the man is engrossed in his phone, disregarding the woman in front of him. Her expression, with furrowed brows and sharp gaze, signals frustration. This behavior aligns with pocketing, in which a partner hides the relationship from others, possibly due to uncertainty or lack of readiness for commitment. Public avoidance and emotional distance, even in shared moments, indicate fear of vulnerability and rejection. Similarly, in the second image, the man turns his back on the woman. His black-striped clothing suggests internal conflict or confusion (Aslam, 2006), while the woman's white tropical dress symbolizes sincerity and emotional openness (Barnard, 2002). The contrasting visual codes reinforce gendered expectations—men retreat while women hold on to hope.

These portrayals suggest that relationship outcomes depend heavily on the man's willingness to commit. Yet, this oversimplifies the issue. Male fear of commitment is often tied to insecure attachment styles or prior relational discomfort (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Emotional withdrawal may arise not from disinterest, but from a complex interplay of vulnerability and psychological defense.

1. Tidak Pernah Mengenalkan pada Orang Terdekatnya



Figure 6 Supporting Image from the First Article

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

Figure 6 shows the man standing behind the woman, a spatial metaphor for avoidance. The setting (a private neighborhood) suggests the potential for openness, yet his body language implies reluctance. This aligns with the article's warning: if a man often deflects serious topics or keeps the relationship hidden, it could indicate he doesn't view it as serious or may have other undisclosed reasons, such as still being involved with someone else or treating the relationship as temporary.

This suggests that hesitance and vague reassurances signal non-commitment or even hidden motives. However, such assumptions risk portraying men as uniformly disloyal or emotionally detached. As Alamsyah (2023) notes, these representations often reflect and reinforce audience expectations rooted in persistent gender stereotypes (Connell, 2002).

1. Kehadirannya Hanya Fisik, Bukan Emosional



Masalah dalam hubungan./Copyright Fimela - Adhib Mujaddid

Figure 7 Supporting Image from the Second Article

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

In Figure 7, the couple sits back-to-back on a bed, a space symbolizing intimacy. The man's crossed arms and withdrawn posture suggest emotional closure (Knapp & Hall, 2010). The article's text explains that while a man might physically sit beside you, his mind may wander, making conversations feel shallow or formal. When you talk about something important, he responds with a simple nod, not truly listening.

This highlights a perceived emotional absence despite physical closeness. The woman's disappointed expression and body language reflect the breakdown of emotional reciprocity. Still, this depiction risks overlooking external factors such as stress, fatigue, or male social conditioning against emotional expression (Connel, 2002).

While Fimela.com aims to inform readers, the narrative often overstates male fault in failed commitment, reflecting societal expectations rather than psychological nuance. These portrayals deserve critical reading, especially when they risk turning emotional complexity into one-dimensional blame.

In the course of romantic relationships, there are moments when men appear to "pull away." This behavior is often misinterpreted as disinterest or emotional withdrawal. In reality, it can be a natural process where men seek space to process emotions and regain emotional balance (Gray, 2004). Rather than rejecting their partners, men may simply require

solitude to restore inner equilibrium. This concept, known as the Rubber Band Theory, is explained in the Fimela.com article titled “Teori Rubber Band: Kunci Memahami Pria yang Butuh Ruang dalam Hubungan.”

Teori Rubber Band: Kunci Memahami Pria yang Butuh Ruang dalam Hubungan



Figure 8 Headline Image Depicting a Couple Engaging in Open Communication

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

The headline image shows a couple in conversation. The man looks upward with open palms, suggesting honesty and an effort to communicate his need for emotional space (Floyd, 2011). The woman responds with a soft smile and open hands, indicating emotional openness and a willingness to listen without judgment. The natural setting reinforces the notion that space in relationships is not a threat but a healthy, organic need.

This visual aligns with the Rubber Band Theory, which posits that giving men space can strengthen emotional bonds rather than weaken them. When men are allowed to temporarily withdraw, they often return with greater emotional presence. The image presents space-taking as part of healthy, trust-based communication.

Fimela.com frames this behavior positively, contrasting previous representations where male withdrawal was linked to emotional avoidance. In this article, the platform supports healthy masculinity by validating men’s emotional needs and encouraging partners to respect them (Wendt et al., 2024). The phrase “Kunci Memahami Pria” reflects the editorial theme “Unlocking The Limitless,” which aims to challenge traditional gender roles and promote emotional literacy (Lestari, personal communication, 2025).

Jarak Bukan Berarti Kehilangan, Melainkan Penyelesaian



Momen bersama / Copyright Fimela - Rising Abel

Figure 9 Post-Space Reconnection

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

The second image shows the man animatedly explaining something, with raised eyebrows, laughter, and open palms as indicators of confidence and emotional engagement (Allan & Pease, 2004). The woman listens with a supportive smile, mirroring his energy and leaning in with interest (Ramdani, 2021). A large teddy bear behind him symbolizes comfort and emotional care. Its placement behind the man suggests a role reversal: the man is now emotionally re-engaged and ready to resume his nurturing role.

The article text explains that one common misunderstanding of the Rubber Band Theory is interpreting distance as emotional withdrawal. For some men, it's a natural process to balance themselves. In relationships, there's a cycle where a man may feel very close to his partner, then suddenly need space to reconnect with his own world. This doesn't mean he's lost interest or love; rather, it's his way of maintaining emotional balance. Furthermore, this distance can be a moment of realignment, where the more space given, the stronger the attraction can become, like a rubber band being stretched.

This clarifies that space-seeking is a form of emotional regulation, not detachment. Like a rubber band, the more room men are given to stretch emotionally, the stronger their return to intimacy. Still, the article acknowledges that this dynamic is often misunderstood. Many women may interpret a man's distance as a lack of seriousness or fading affection. The closing advice warns that if a man feels he doesn't have the opportunity to pull away, he may feel pressured or lose interest in the relationship. However, if given enough space, he will return with deeper feelings.

Rather than seeing distance as abandonment, the article encourages women to view it as part of an emotional rhythm. Misunderstanding this need can lead to unnecessary conflict or anxiety, while acknowledgment can foster deeper connection. Fimela.com thus encourages a shift in perception, where emotional space becomes a shared understanding, not a threat. In doing so, the article promotes a more equitable and emotionally intelligent model of romantic relationships.

While conflict is a natural part of romantic relationships, data shows that nearly 40% of relationships in Indonesia end due to infidelity (Kertamuda, 2023). Increasingly, this infidelity manifests not as physical betrayal but as emotional cheating, an intense emotional connection with someone outside the primary relationship, often concealed and unnoticed because it does not involve sex (Arwa, Ronda & Hanafi, 2023). With digital communication enabling discreet emotional entanglements, media platforms like Fimela.com have begun addressing this issue.

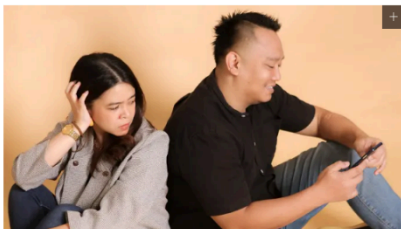
In the article “7 Ciri Pasanganmu Selingkuh secara Emosional, Kenali Tandanya agar Tidak Patah Hati” (article one), Fimela.com presents men as emotional cheaters. Meanwhile, another article titled “Sahabat Fimela, Waspada! 8 Tanda Cowok Red Flag yang Harus Kamu Ketahui” (article two) discusses male behaviors such as manipulation, dishonesty, verbal abuse, and control, depicting them as direct causes of relational breakdown (Mecadinisa, 2025).

7 Ciri Pasanganmu Selingkuh secara Emosional, Kenali Tandanya agar Tidak Patah Hati

Ayu Puji Lestari
 Dipublikasikan 21 Jul 2024, 12:35 WIB



Share 52



Ilustrasi pasangan yang selingkuh./copyright fimela/adrian putra

Sahabat Fimela, Waspada! 8 Tanda Cowok Red Flag yang Harus Kamu Ketahui

Nabila Mecadinisa
 Dipublikasikan 20 Mar 2025, 02:37 WIB



Share 57



Hubungan yang makin dekat./Copyright Fimela - Adrian Utama Putra

Figure 10 Headline Images Portraying Manipulative Male Behavior

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

In the first image, a man smiles at his phone, ignoring his visibly uncomfortable partner. His dark clothing reinforces the notion of secrecy or emotional distance (Suryati, 2024). This lack of attention is linked to emotional infidelity, especially when digital distractions replace real interaction (Roberts & David, 2016). Emotional affairs often begin through private digital communication that disrupts relationship intimacy.

The second image is more visually ambiguous. The couple appears affectionate, with the man leaning in and touching the woman's hand. However, this gesture, paired with the article's focus on “red flags,” suggests potential manipulation. The man's forward-leaning posture and exaggerated smile may reflect love bombing, overwhelming attention designed to control a partner emotionally (Durvasula, 2020). The woman's downcast smile implies discomfort or submission, a common sign of social pressure (Allan & Pease, 2004).

Together, these images portray men as emotionally distant or manipulative, responsible for initiating conflict. Yet such portrayals warrant deeper critique. For instance, interpreting phone use as a sign of infidelity may oversimplify modern communication norms. In digital contexts, frequent phone use may be habitual, not necessarily indicative of secrecy (Przybylski et al., 2013). Similarly, using an affectionate image to signal toxic behavior risks normalizing manipulation under the guise of romance, making it harder for readers to identify genuine red flags.

1. Komunikasi Intens dengan Orang Lain



Pasangan yang sedang selingkuh/copyright fimela/adrian putra

Figure 11 A Man Appearing to Calm His Partner

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

A supporting image shows a man holding his partner's arms while leaning in, a pose that could seem caring but may reflect a need for control. His gesture aims to dominate the situation and maintain his image (Allan & Pease, 2009). Meanwhile, the woman touches her chin, a signal of doubt or contemplation (Shadaydeh et al., 2020). This aligns with the article's quote, which states that if your partner communicates more frequently with others than with you, it could be a sign they are emotionally involved with someone else.

Here, the man's effort to manage the situation stems from emotional involvement with someone else. He masks his guilt through control and reassurance while avoiding confrontation or openness. Fimela.com strengthens this perspective in the second article, emphasizing that frequent lying, even about small things, signals a lack of integrity and trust. Lies create the foundation of an unhealthy relationship. Manipulation and gaslighting are also red flags. If he twists the facts or makes you doubt yourself, it's a form of emotional abuse.

Labeling behaviors as "red flags" without nuance risks overgeneralization. Although such guidance is meant to protect women, it can also fuel fear or misinterpretation. Cultural factors, emotional suppression, or communication struggles in men are often ignored (Connell, 2002).

Tanda-Tanda Lain yang Perlu Diwaspadai

- Ketidakstabilan emosi
- Ketergantungan emosional
- Isolasi sosial
- Perilaku buruk terhadap orang lain
- Terlalu baik pada semua perempuan
- Menghindari komitmen
- Riwayat hubungan yang buruk
- Kecanduan
- Tidak bertanggung jawab
- Sering mengeluh
- Sulit memaafkan dan meminta maaf

Figure 12 Additional “Red Flag” Traits in the Article Text

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

Interestingly, the article lists more than eight warning signs despite its title. This mismatch reflects clickbait strategies in digital journalism, where listicle formats with small numbers drive higher traffic (Noland & Wen, 2022). Yet overloading the list may reinforce negative male stereotypes and heighten anxiety among female readers.

Although the articles raise valid concerns, Fimela.com’s overemphasis on male fault risks distorting public perception. A more balanced view should acknowledge broader relational dynamics, including psychological and social contexts, rather than presenting men solely as instigators of harm.

In the aftermath of romantic breakups, men are often portrayed as emotionally unaffected. However, this perception is misleading. Many men experience difficulty expressing sadness or emotional pain due to dominant masculinity norms, which encourage emotional suppression, strength, and independence (Gray, 2004). This social expectation leads men to internalize their distress, reinforcing the false image that they are “fine” after a breakup.

In Fimela.com’s article “7 Perbedaan Cara Pria dan Perempuan Menghadapi Patah Hati,” gendered differences in emotional coping are highlighted. The article explains that women tend to cry, seek support from friends, and verbally express heartbreak, while men often withdraw, distract themselves with activities, or act unaffected.

7 Perbedaan Cara Pria dan Perempuan Menghadapi Patah Hati

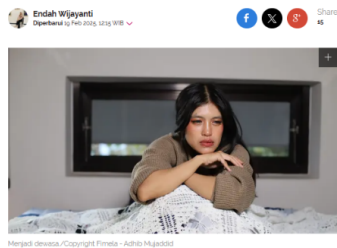


Figure 13 Headline Image Depicting a Woman Crying

Source: Fimela.com. (2025).

Despite the article's focus on both men and women, the headline image exclusively features a woman sitting on a bed, hugging a blanket, and gazing downward with teary eyes and a solemn expression (Hong, 2020). The absence of a male figure reinforces the trope that women are more emotionally affected and expressive, while men remain invisible in this emotional landscape.

The article further explains that men often choose to avoid everything related to their exes. They may stop visiting places with memories, delete contacts, or even block social media to avoid being tempted to check on their ex's life. While this strategy may seem effective initially, it can actually make it harder for them to fully accept the reality of the situation.

This avoidance behavior, such as deleting contacts or blocking social media is categorized as an avoidant coping strategy. It allows men to shield themselves from emotional triggers but often delays emotional processing (Levant & Wong, 2017). The language used in the article, "not tempted," "avoid memory places" implies unresolved emotional attachment, suggesting that emotional suppression is not evidence of detachment, but of struggle.

Additionally, the article notes that avoiding emotions does not mean they are resolved. Men who distract themselves without reflecting often repeat the same mistakes in future relationships, while women who have analyzed their experiences are better equipped to make healthier choices.

This highlights the risk of repetitive relational patterns due to unprocessed emotions. Unlike women, who are often socially encouraged to reflect on their emotional pain, men are

more likely to see introspection as taboo, which may hinder their growth and healing (Himawan, 2022).

Although the article attempts to portray male emotional complexity, it unintentionally frames men as emotionally incompetent or “weak” in handling heartbreak. This reinforces problematic stereotypes without acknowledging the diversity in how men express and process emotions.

The representation also reflects a broader cultural bias in emotional narratives. While female emotional openness is normalized and often valorized, male emotional struggles are either pathologized or rendered invisible. As the article suggests, many men are never taught the value of reflection, and thus choose distraction or silence, not from indifference, but from learned restraint. The text in article, while valid, also risks reinforcing a singular image of men as emotionally immature. A more inclusive understanding would consider the role of social conditioning, psychological barriers, and the variability in emotional expression across individuals.

Fimela.com’s narrative, while aiming to highlight a lesser-discussed issue, should be approached with nuance. Media portrayals that overly emphasize male emotional suppression may inadvertently deepen stigma. Rather than portraying men as emotionally incapable, such narratives should contextualize their emotional silence within broader gendered and societal expectations (Levant & Wong, 2017).

To foster a healthier public discourse on male vulnerability, media must avoid simplifying male emotional response into avoidance or failure. Instead, it should affirm emotional diversity and promote understanding across gender lines.

The analysis of Fimela.com’s relationship articles reveals a complex pattern in how men are represented within the context of heterosexual romantic relationships. Across five primary themes, men are portrayed as emotionally invested in the early stages, yet unreliable, conflict-inducing, and emotionally inexpressive as relationships progress or dissolve. These depictions, though nuanced, often reinforce traditional masculinity norms while simultaneously catering to a female readership rooted in postfeminist sensibilities.

Initially, men are presented as attentive and emotionally available partners, especially during the early, affectionate phases of a relationship. They are seen as listeners, emotional supporters, and committed presences. However, this representation constructs an unrealistic emotional ideal, burdening men with expectations to suppress their own needs and always prioritize their partners’ well-being. Such portrayals risk reinforcing toxic masculinity by requiring constant emotional availability and selflessness (Himawan, 2022).

In later stages, men are portrayed as reluctant to commit, often engaging in behaviors like pocketing or emotional withdrawal. Articles frame such behavior as signs of emotional evasion or lack of seriousness, without fully acknowledging psychological or contextual factors that may explain commitment aversion (Miller, 2015). This flattening of complexity contributes to an oversimplified moral binary.

Similarly, the portrayal of men needing “space” in relationships (illustrated through the Rubber Band Theory) acknowledges emotional nuance but still positions men as emotionally avoidant. The accompanying narrative implies that women’s desire for relational certainty may suppress men’s emotional regulation needs, inadvertently casting men’s emotional boundaries as problematic or insufficiently communicative.

The most concerning representations occur in the depiction of men as sources of relational conflict. Fimela.com’s coverage includes emotional infidelity, manipulative behavior, and red flag traits, often presented without balanced consideration. Articles include clickbait-style listicles (e.g., “8 Tanda...”) that exceed their titled claims, reinforcing an overgeneralized portrayal of men as emotionally dangerous or untrustworthy (Noland & Wen, 2022). While emotional abuse and dishonesty should be rightfully addressed, the lack of contextual nuance may fuel moral panic rather than empathy.

Lastly, in post-breakup scenarios, men are depicted as emotionally suppressed and unable to process grief, relying on avoidant coping strategies like distraction and emotional denial. While this reflects legitimate findings about masculine emotional socialization (Levant & Wong, 2017), the portrayal risks suggesting that men are inherently less emotionally competent, reinforcing gendered emotional hierarchies.

These layered portrayals create an overarching narrative in which men are framed as emotionally burdened initiators in healthy relationships and emotionally unavailable or toxic figures in unhealthy ones. This contributes to reader anxiety, particularly among women, who are frequently advised to “watch for signs” and “be cautious” in their relationships. As highlighted by Watie (2013), this kind of narrative consumption, though sometimes discomfiting is persistently engaged with by female readers seeking validation or understanding of emotional challenges.

This strategy aligns with postfeminist ideology (Gill, 2007), which emphasizes women’s empowerment, agency, and emotional awareness without outright opposing male presence. Fimela.com encourages women to become reflective, emotionally intelligent partners capable of identifying risks and making better relational choices. Statements such as “*perempuan yang sudah lebih dulu menganalisis pengalamannya bisa membuat pilihan yang lebih baik*” reflect a recurring theme: the woman is the wiser, more emotionally evolved actor.

However, in focusing so strongly on women’s growth and agency, the media inadvertently creates a pattern where men are persistently shown as emotionally inadequate, problematic, or even dangerous. This one-sided representation risks reinforcing stereotypes and limiting space for alternative, healthier masculinities to be imagined or modeled in media. A more balanced approach would acknowledge men's emotional complexity, their contextual struggles, and the influence of socio-cultural norms on their behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study explores how men are represented in romantic relationship articles on Fimela.com between 2024 and 2025. Using Peirce's semiotic method, the research analyzes both visuals (such as headline and article images) and written texts. The results show that men are portrayed in five main ways: as consistently present, reluctant to commit, a source of conflict, needing personal space, and emotionally reserved. Although Fimela.com aims to empower women and promote gender equality, the articles still reflect traditional views of masculinity. Men are often shown as strong and dominant figures who carry the main responsibility in a relationship. This can create unrealistic expectations and emotional pressure for men, while shaping how women view their partners.

Ideologically, Fimela.com follows a postfeminist perspective that focuses on giving women more freedom and control in relationships. However, this focus sometimes overlooks how men are represented. By repeating certain stereotypes, the media may unintentionally maintain unequal gender roles. This study is limited to content analysis and does not explore how readers interpret the messages. Future research could involve interviews or group discussions with readers to better understand how these representations affect their views on gender and relationships.

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