

Toxic masculinity in Michael Rohrbaugh's American Male

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ABSTRACT

Masculinity is recognized as a social value that regulates how a man should or should not behave. Those who do not meet the ideal characteristics such as strong, powerful, dominant, aggressive, and others, in some circumstances, will be considered as toxic masculinity. This article aims to explore how masculinity traits and toxic masculinity are presented in a short film directed by Michael Rohrbaugh entitled *American Male* (2016). This film looks at the gender norms which are emerged in a society by showing a muscle-up man who portrays masculine standard traits. The main character in the film is portrayed as a man who is strong, competitive, and violent. The method used is a qualitative content analysis based on the concept of masculinity by Janet Saltzman Chafetz. The results show that *American Male* is a medium used to convey how masculine norms has ruined the society. As it is socially and culturally constructed, men must be engaged with it. Men must be masculine. Even more, men who do not fulfill the traits are considered either losers or gays. Toxic masculinity subsequently forces men to fulfill masculinity. The traits are socially regressive and lead to violence, patriarchy, domination, and homophobia. In conclusion, the main character becomes depressed, violent, and stereotyped as a result of toxic masculinity.

Keywords: male domination, masculine traits, men suppression, toxic masculinity

Maskulinitas Toksik dalam American Male Karya Michael Rohrbaugh

Abstrak

Maskulinitas diakui sebagai nilai sosial yang digunakan untuk mengatur bagaimana seorang laki-laki harus berperilaku. Bagi mereka yang tidak memenuhi ciri ideal dari seorang lelaki seperti kuat, mendominasi, agresif, dan lain sebagainya, akan dianggap sebagai laki-laki sejati yang mana standar tersebut akan dianggap menjadi maskulinitas toksik. Artikel ini membahas bagaimana karakteristik maskulinitas dan maskulinitas toksik ditampilkan dalam film pendek *American Male* (2016) yang disutradarai oleh Michael Rohrbaugh. Film ini mengkaji bagaimana norma gender yang muncul di masyarakat dengan memperlihatkan seorang laki-laki berotot yang mengikuti berbagai karakteristik maskulinitas. Karakter utama dalam film tersebut digambarkan sebagai pria kuat, kompetitif, dan kasar. Metode yang digunakan adalah analisis konten kualitatif dan konsep maskulinitas dari teori Janet Saltzman Chafetz. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *American Male* (2016) merupakan media yang digunakan untuk menyampaikan bagaimana norma maskulin telah merusak masyarakat. Karena norma tersebut dibangun secara sosial dan budaya, laki-laki harus terlibat di dalamnya. Laki-laki harus maskulin. Lebih dari itu, laki-laki yang tidak memenuhi sifat-sifat tersebut dianggap pecundang atau homo. Maskulinitas toksik selanjutnya memaksa laki-laki untuk memenuhi maskulinitas. Ciri-ciri tersebut regresif secara sosial dan mengarah pada kekerasan, patriarki, dominasi, dan homofobia. Kesimpulannya, karakter utama menjadi tertekan, kasar, dan distereotipkan sebagai akibat dari maskulinitas toksik.

Kata kunci: maskulinitas toksik, karakteristik maskulinitas, dominasi laki-laki, penindasan pria

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INTRODUCTION

Masculinity, according to Peberdy (2011), is an image of performing or acting out male angst. Heilman and Barker (2018) then claims that the social status of being considered as a real man is not automatically applied to all adults that are identified as men. Instead, the social status must be achieved first by meeting many difficult and contradictory standards, such as being physically strong, a provider of financial, and not impervious emotional rock. Many men are trying extremely hard to appear tough in the eyes of society. They exercise regularly, consume many protein shakes, and inject steroids into their bodies to gain muscular bodies. It is embedded in their heads that only those who have muscular bodies are the ones who can be considered to be masculine. They do not realize that the idea of being tough by having muscular and athletic bodies then becomes the standard in becoming a man. When men do not fulfill the ideal body image of real men, they are rather considered to be feminine. Moreover, these masculine ideas become a culture where being emotionally vulnerable is prohibited, mistakes are irreparable, strength, and stamina display are required to be successful (Matos, O'Neill, and Lei, 2018).

In discussing masculine traits, men are often being told about the expression *Man Up* which means that men are told to step up their responsibilities, be strong, and show less emotion. It then implies that doing all those things above is gender-specific (Jackson, 2018). The expression is originally used in the football and military context. When men fail to man up, they will be referred to as a girl or lady since being soft is more likely to be considered to be feminine traits. The association of softness with manliness is rarely to happen in society. Most people assumed that softness is commonly associated with being weak and feminine. Softness is not added to the masculinity contexts (Masters, 2015). It proves that not only the physical appearance that matters, however, participating in sport and military activities also become masculine standards. Moreover, with the availability of masculine norms, it becomes a social rule to avoid femininity and expressing emotion, and also to create an influence of homophobia (Levant and Kopecky, as cited in Merdeka and Kumoro, 2018).

In order to look tough, men are also taught to suppress their feelings. It was stated that the masculine norms created the term "gendering the heart", in which it encourages men to only show a limited range of emotion and refrain them to express emotional vulnerability (Heilman and Barker, 2018, p.9). Mabrouk (2020) stated that from a young age, young boys are always compared to girls in a negative context when they are crying. It created the statement *Boys Don't Cry* which has a negative connotation. When they grow up, men cannot express their feelings as free as women can. Consequently, men express their feelings by directing anger towards their surroundings, such as women and children. Boys are also no longer be able to express their feeling freely since they are afraid to not be considered to be masculine. Their feelings are suppressed, and they will feel lost, unhappy, indignant, and disenchanted toward people around them. When they are no longer able to control their feelings, they will deliver it to less positive act, or worse, it will lead to violence.

It is assumed that true masculine power happens when men can function their courage, vulnerability, integrity, and awareness all together to take strong action (Masters, 2015). Since being a soft person is considered to be feminine traits, men are taking their strong action too far until they do not realize that they are becoming violent. Connell (2005) stated that a non-masculine person is seen as peaceable rather than violent and conciliatory rather than dominating others. Men who are hardly able to kick a football and uninterested in sexual conquest would also fall into the category of being a non-masculine person. Haider (2016) also stated that when being a peaceable person rather than a violent one is deemed as a non-masculine, it shows clearly that violence is constitutive of masculinity. Violence then becomes a tool by which one asserts one's masculinity. It is also stated by Heilman and Barker (2018) that masculine norms are always linked with violence as if those two things cannot be separated. The stereotypes and social instruction in the masculine norms are the crucial factors that drive men into performing violence. According to Namy et al. (2017), as cited in Heilman and Barker (2018), the acts of men violence to women and children are also supported from the act of the patriarchal systemic hierarchy, in which it tells about the subordination of women and children. It can be seen that men often look down on women and children because they think that they are weaker than them.

The ideas of masculinity have created many negative effects on men. To be precise, Veissière (2018) defined toxic masculinity as a culture which overwhelming connects masculinity with risk, an inner essence, and violence is affected by sexual aggression. It is also stated that the most extreme version of hyper-masculine is toxic masculinity. The characterizations of it are male domination, weaker men and women subjugation, and homophobia (Creighton & Oliffe, 2010, as cited in Jenney & Exner-Cortens, 2018). When it comes to inequality of gender, the difference of roles between men and women then becomes a problem. Men have more profit and are placed in a better position than women (Rosida & Soraya, 2017). However, not only it becomes a problem in the difference of gender roles, but toxic masculinity also becomes a problem for inequality among men themselves, especially for homosexual men. Couti and Grant (2019) explained that homosexuality is a symbol of deprived power and a failed masculinity. This ideology promotes homophobia and hyper-masculinity among men in the discourse of masculine hegemonic.

Connell (2005) defines hegemonic masculinity as a form of sex roles created by society. It embodies the current problems that occur in our society which is the legitimacy of patriarchy. It is seen by society as an assurance or a guarantee of male position in sex roles. Men are dominant, meanwhile, women are the subordinate. Moreover, it is stated that the term 'hegemonic masculinity' name is not a fixed character type, but it is a society configuration in changing the structural relationship of gender practice.

Toxic masculinity still becomes one of the important discussions about gender among researchers. The current research on toxic masculinity was conducted by Dalia M. M. Mabrouk (2020) entitled *The Dilemma of Toxic Masculinity in Eastern and Western Societies; With Reference to the Novel "Men in Prison"*. This article discusses the notion of toxic masculinity that has a lot to do with deforming the male identity, which is revealed that masculinity has been misinterpreted over the years to encompass weird attitudes and behavior as suppressing emotion, masking distress, or showing violence as an indicator of power. It also discusses how great it is a sector of women unintentionally feed this ego of toxic masculinity to their son since childhood days. This is caused by social expectations and social norms suppression which compares men and women. Next, the research of Torres Mondaca (2016) entitled "*A Man After God's Heart*": *Biblical, Hegemonic and Toxic Masculinities in As Meat Loves Salt*. In the research Mondaca analyzes the masculinities in the novel *As Meat Loves Salt*, analyzes the similarities between the novel and Bible by using R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt's framework for the hierarchy of masculinities, and uses the framework to redefine the term toxic masculinity. The result of this research reveals that the characters in *As Meat Loves Salt* is representing hegemonic and conflicting masculinities as well as emphasizing femininity. Moreover, Mondaca redefined toxic masculinity as harmful and violent behavior. He also found that there are similarities of masculinities between *As Meat Loves Salt* and the Biblical story of David. The main characters both in *As Meat Loves Salt* and the Biblical story of David were led to shape the idea of what it means to be man and are punished for attempting to make distance between themselves and the masculinity norms.

Then, the research by Flourish Itulua-Abumere (2013) entitled *Understanding Men and Masculinity in Modern Society* explained that the masculinity of the field of sociological study is drawn from many theories, including structural-functionalism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, critical structuralism, and more recently, post-structuralism and post-modern theory by Frank J. Barrett and Stephen M. Whitehead. This research aims to understand men and masculinity in the modern world which considers the sociology of masculinity, the social construction of masculinity, the crisis in masculinity, and the fair contrast with masculinity and feminism. Likewise, this research has shown that socialization has led to the creation of masculinity and the relationship between masculinity and self-identity.

Nowadays, lots of people are criticizing this toxic masculinity including celebrities, influencers, and communities. In 2015, MTV made a competition entitled "Look Different Creator Competition" to recognize more and challenge hidden gender, racial, and anti-LGBT bias. The campaign goes into several topics connected to bias including microaggression, privilege, and stereotypes. One of the three winners of the competition is a short film titled *American Male* (2016) directed by Michael Rohrbaugh. This short film shows us the current situation, particularly in the United States of America, about stereotypes on how a man should act and look in certain rules.

The main character is described as a man who tries extremely hard to be as masculine as the society wants. It is depicted in the short film that he used steroids in order for him to gain a muscular body. He goes through his day showing his masculine identity to the society. As Peberdy (2011) stated that in order to be a man, it is something to do with performance, "something to be proved and acted out" (p. 4). He, as the host of the party, walks around his house to greet his friends, drinks beer, eats beef, goes to the backyard and play beer pong, dances with girls at night, bullies younger boys, and then calls them with a term "faggot" at the end of the short film.

The voice-over in the short film even more compartmentalizes the stereotype of men and women. Men are told to drink beer and not wine; eat beef and not a chicken; Men should not eat tofu because it looks like a gay; a man should avoid arts such as theater, dancing, painting, poetry, or prose; a man should not read much since they will be considered soft and bookish; women gesture more and men do not; women are the ones who are supposed to wear bright colors, meanwhile men with dark shades; women listen to pop and men only listen to rock; women sing and men play sports; women are supposed to understand fashion and men should understand math; and so forth. In the last scene, the voice-over implicitly said that in order to survive, a man should act as what society tells them to.

This research aims to analyze toxic masculinity portrayed by the main character in the short film *American Male* (2016). It is used to reveal homophobia, male domination, and women subordination portrayed in the short film. Based on the background and the focus of the study, the writer tries to identify the problem by formulating the research question as follows: How is the portrayal of masculinity and toxic masculinity by the main character in *American Male* (2016) short film?

METHOD

This research uses qualitative content analysis as the method and uses Janet Saltzman Chafetz's masculinity concept as the theory. Qualitative content analysis is defined as a method approach which contains qualitative content analysis, and it advocates common research criteria for qualitative research (Mayring, 2014). The instrument used in this research is the writers which are the subject of the study to collect the findings from analyzing the script and images of the corpus. The unit of analysis which will be used in this research is the short film *American Male* (2016) by Michael Rohrbaugh, and it is also supported by the script of the short film. This short film is the winner of MTV's *Look Different Creator Competition*. The theory used in this research is the masculinity concept which tells seven masculine stereotype traits of men. The seven traits are physical, functional, sexual, emotion, intelligence, interpersonal, and other personal characteristics of men (Chafetz, 1978). The technique of data analysis was conducted by watching the short film analytically and perceptively. The data taken from the short film is then analyzed using Chafetz's theory on masculinity traits. In the end, some characteristics investigate the consequences that lead to toxic masculinity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis shows three main results. **First**, based on the short film *American Male* (2016), men are forced to follow certain rules to meet their masculinity standards. The standards are being not emotional, being interested in certain things, and being physically healthy, strong, and muscular. This short film tries to show how toxic masculinity has corrupted the society. **Second**, based on *American Male* (2016), the society is forcing all men to follow all the masculinity traits. Men who are not enough to meet the standards are often being called the word *faggot* or *gay* which then it can lead people to be homophobic. When men are incapable of meeting the standards are being called *gay* or *faggot*, it then proved that the society experiencing toxic masculinity. **Third**, not only it leads to homophobia, but the wrong idea of masculinity traits forces men to dominate in every aspect of life.

Discussion

In this discussion, the short film *American Male* (2016) will be analyzed from the script and the images by using Janet Saltzman Chafetz's theory of masculinity to find out what kinds of masculinity and toxic masculinity are portrayed in the short film.

The characteristic of masculinity

Physical

According to Chafetz (1978), the first characteristic is physical. In order for men to be considered as masculine, they have to look in certain physical appearance, such as having a brawny body to look strong and powerful. Chafetz (1978) wrote that the traits in the physical part are virile, athletic, strong, sloppy, worry less about appearance and aging, and brave. Having an athletic body is not a negative thing, however, the stereotype of men having a muscular body to be considered as masculine can become toxic when people justify any means just to get in shape (Al Falaq & Puspita, 2021), such as using steroids. In the short film *American Male* (2016), the main character is portrayed as someone who works really hard to get in shape.



Picture 1. The main character injecting steroids into his body

From the image above, we can see that the main character is trying really hard just to get in shape by injecting steroids into his body, which something illegal in the USA. The function of steroids, according to NIDA or National Institute on Drug Abuse (2018), is to “promote the growth of skeletal muscle (anabolic effect) and the development of male sexual characteristic (androgenic effect) in both male and female” (p.3). Steroids are illegal as also stated in National Institute on Drug Abuse that the purchase of the supplements (containing steroids) became illegal after the passage of the Anabolic Steroid Control Act of 2004, which amended the Controlled Substances Act.

The stereotype of men having a muscular body is considered as strong and masculine while having a skinny or fat body is considered as non-masculine, more specifically for the skinny guys who are considered weak and not cool (Al Falaq & Puspita, 2021). The short film *American Male* (2016) showed us that this stereotype is toxic. They showed us the scene when the muscular guys yelling at the skinny guys as stated in the picture below:



Picture 2. The main character yelling and pouring drinks at skinny guys

From the picture, we can see that the muscular guys are yelling and bullying the skinny guys. They become dominating and use their powers towards the skinny guys who are considered to be weak. From the picture, we can see that male domination is not only happen towards women, but also to other men. *American Male* (2016) not only showed us the toxic masculinity with the moving

image but also in the voice-over of the film who speaks as the main character. In the physical characteristics, the voice-over said several sentences such as:

Women gesture more when they speak, they call this "limp wrist".

When I was younger, I used to gesture a lot, so I learned to keep my hands in my pocket (MTV, 2016).

From those sentences, we can see that the voice-over tells us the stereotype of how men and women should gesture. Men who gesture a lot are considered to be gay and called with 'limp wrist'. The limp wrist is a term that is used to describe a man who does not act physically strong as they are expected to (dictionary.cambridge.org). In other words, it is a term to describe a man who acts like a gay person.

Women cross their legs when they sit, men keep their legs open.

Women hold books across their chest, men hold them at their sides (MTV, 2016).

The next sentences are still on how men and women should gesture. Women should cross their legs when they sit to be considered to be feminine and men open their legs to be masculine. Women should hold books across their chest and men hold them at their sides. These stereotypes somehow can be toxic when men, who do not do these gestures, are considered as non-masculine. Men who cross their legs when they sit are considered as feminine and men who hold their books across their chest as non-masculine.

Women wear bright colors like pink, yellow, and purple.

Men wear dark shades like blue, brown, green, gray, and black (MTV, 2016).

The next sentences are on what color men and women should wear. The voice-over said there is a stereotype in our society that tells women should wear bright colors like pink, yellow, and purple to be considered to be feminine. While men wear dark shades like blue, brown, green, gray, and black to be considered to be masculine. These perceptions on feminine and masculine colors occur since it represents something. Kross (2018) stated that bright colors such as peach, pink, and rose have feminines influence since it described as sweet, lovely, beautiful, and romantic. While dark shades such as navy and crimson are described as strength and unity which are considered to be masculine (Kross, 2018). These stereotypes on what color that men and women should wear are somehow toxic because they will limit the expression on what color they want to wear. Men and women should be able to express themselves freely in the fashion world.

Functional

The second characteristic is functional. Chafetz (1978) stated that the functions of men are as a breadwinner and provider. This characteristic refers to "the contribution of a man to his family and environment" (Merdeka and Kumoro, 2018). Men have to be the ones who look for the money, the ones who supply their family with something they need or want, and the ones who become the leader of the family. While women are the ones who do domestic things such as cleaning the house, cooking, preparing foods, and involving with children. We can feel this stereotype is very strong in our society that men supposed to be the one who supports their family with the money they earn. Moreover, when men fail to do that, they will not be considered to be real men.

The short film *American Male (2016)* did not show us the functional characteristic of the main character to his family. The short film only showed us the life of the main character as a young man. He is portrayed as a young man who is full of spirits, has lots of friends, and loves to party. However, in the short film, we can see that he is the host of the party. So, we can conclude that he is a provider to his environment as he provided his house for the party.

The breadwinner and provider's stereotype of men can be toxic when men do not fulfill the functional characteristic. This will lead to depression and mental health as stated in Gough and Novikova (2020) that "the sole breadwinner model (part of the hegemonic masculine identity) creates in men expectation that, when not fulfilled, provoke frustration and compensatory behaviors that may entail health risk" (p.4). Gough and Novikova (2020) also stated that men's mental health suffers in places where the single breadwinner model prevails as a key component of masculinity, while men

find it easier, in places where gender equality is prioritized, to move from the single breadwinner to a dual earner.

Sexuality

According to Chafetz (1978), the other masculine trait for men is sexually aggressive. Men are expected to be experienced when it comes to sexual interest. However, they are still acceptable whether when they have a partner or when they are single. It is shown that men are free to choose whoever their partner and how many they are because they need the idea of being experienced with their love interest. In the short film *American Male* (2016), the main character also showed these masculine traits.

In *American Male* (2016), not only the main character who shows his sexual aggression, but the other male characters also show it by interacting with the girls around them at the party. They try to be fun to attract the girls they talk to. When they talk with the girls, they lean forward to the girls. When they dance with the girls, they will put their hands in the girls' buttocks. It is shown from the short film that most men do not want to be seen alone in the party, they need women partners in order to be seen as masculine since sexual aggression is one of the traits of being masculine men. Furthermore, In the short film *American Male* (2016), when men are being sexually aggressive, they do it with the girls' consent. When men are being sexually aggressive without consent towards their partner, it can be considered to be sexual harassment. Sexual aggression is seen to be an ongoing problem which is the act of perpetration by men against women (Bevens & Loughnan, 2019). Even though there is not an act of sexual violence in the short film, we still have to concern that sexual aggression can lead to sexual harassment.



Picture 3. The main character interacts with his two girlfriends

However, the main character seems not only to be taking an interest in girls. He frequently glances or looks at the other male character. It seems that the main character also takes interest in this other male character, but he is afraid to admit it. He is afraid that everyone will know that he likes men, he is afraid of being gay. Martos, Wilson, and Meyer (2017) defined the term gay or homosexual is used to referring to someone who attracts with the same sex as theirs and also often extended to those who are identified as bisexual or transgender. Furthermore, it is stated that in the patriarchal culture, gay men are afraid to “come out” since they are afraid of being labelled as unmanly (Jaspal & Siraj and Rogers in Idriss, 2021).



Picture 4. The main character is quietly looking at his male friend

It is also shown that there are a lot of names calling such as the word *faggot* or *gay* in a connotative meaning. Those whom they do not consider as masculine will be called with the word "faggot". Several studies have also documented that after the masculinity threat, men often throw negative attitudes toward gay people (Rivera & Dasgupta, 2018; Willer et al., 2013, as cited in Konopka et al., 2019). It might be the reason why nowadays there is much hate toward gay people and why the main character is hiding the fact that he is taking interest in this other male character.

Order beer, not wine.

A beef, not chicken.

Never light beer, though.

and no tofu.

Can't get any more gay than tofu (MTV, 2016).

From the first paragraph, it can be seen that, nowadays, the sexuality and masculinity of men are measured by the kind of food they are eating. Starting from the first line of the paragraph, it is shown that in order for men to either feel or be considered as men is by drinking beer, but it cannot be light beer nor wine. It implicitly tells us that light beer and wine are not manly drinks. Men who drink light beer or wine will be seen as lame. Those unwritten rules seem to be not making any sense. Men should have been free to choose what beverages they want to drink without thinking that they will be considered lame or tough. In the second line, the speaker tries to show another rule that in order to be seen as masculine, men should not eat a chicken, but eat beef instead. It might have a relation with why the word *chicken* becomes a symbol which is used to refer to someone who is a coward or not manly enough.

Those rules then are spread widely. People starting to believe that chicken, light beer, and wine are not manly enough to be consumed by men. It can be found easily around us, many people insult men because they eat certain kind of food and when it does not match the masculine standards they will get called, such as *gay* or *faggot*. In addition, those rules can be considered as toxic masculinity. It is quite frustrating to think that food can measure someone's masculinity, and even it is used to tell someone if they are gay or straight. In fact, whether someone is gay or not is not based on what food they prefer to eat. People tend to blame men as gay when they do not fulfill the masculinity standard which makes men be more afraid to be opened up about themselves and their sexuality. In the short film, the main character hates to admit that he is gay since society tells him how people will react badly to gay people. They will not hesitate to do violence, so he hides his sexuality to protect himself. Then, it can be concluded that the main character is portraying toxic masculinity by hiding his own sexuality since being gay is not a characteristic of a masculine.

Emotion

In order to be considered to be masculine, according to Chafetz (1978), men are expected to be unemotional. They are also expected to be someone who is stoical or someone who can endure pain or their feelings without expressing it freely, such as crying. In the short film *American Male* (2016), it can be seen that the characters are also applying Chafetz's theory about emotion in men's masculine traits. In the short film *American Male* (2016), the main character shows his personality to his friends as someone who is charming and cheerful. He walks around the party greeting his friends with a smile. He seems to be getting along with a lot of people at the party. It can be seen that he is an easy-going guy, and never seen to be sad. However, when he is alone, he shows his true color. He is not someone who is cheerful, he is rather someone who looks unhappy and depressed. He hides his feeling away to protect people from seeing him as his true self. Mabrouk (2020) stated that when men feel an emotional heartbreak, people often tell men to just *man up*, instead of being asked if something happened to them. Moreover, according to Levant (in Mabrouk, 2020), it is stated that when men's feelings are dismissed, men avoid expressing their feelings and started to bottle up sadness.



Picture 5. The main character screams when he is alone

The main character is seen to be hiding so many things about himself from people. He is different when he is alone. He does not try to look happy, he can be whoever he is when he is alone. He hides his feelings away from people, he tries to keep the fact that he is interested in his male friend because he is afraid if everybody knows it, he will be seen as less masculine. In the scene where he is alone, it can be seen that he is already fed up with all the masculine norms that society tells men how to behave. It can be seen how indignant he is that he often releases it by screaming when he is alone. However, even though he is tired and depressed with all the masculine traits he is supposed to follow, he still wants to be considered masculine. He still follows those toxic masculinity traits. According to Wright (1987) as cited in Reilly, Rochlen, and Awad (2014), when men expressing their vulnerability in times of distress, it might be considered to be antithetical and a shame if it is seen from self-conceptualizations of masculinity. Furthermore, a shame phobia male experience is promoted by the male gender role socialization.

Heilman and Barker (2018) wrote that social norms about men's emotional suppression also contribute in a harmful way for men, and it will eventually lead to the experience of violence. Furthermore, masculinities are often being the root of bullying. Men often desire to demonstrate their power and control over the weaker men and they use bullying to enforce their gender conformity. Mabrouk (2020) also explained that when the feelings of men are suppressed, they are likely to let it out by directing anger or violence around them. Men often are trying really hard to become what society wants. In *American Male* (2016) short film, we can see that there are a lot of unwritten rules that tell men on how what to do, and what they should not do. They become afraid of being weak that they ended up bullying those men whom they think as weak man. Not only thinking that being weak can't be considered as true man, most men think of men who have feminine traits means that they are not true men. It shows that it is indirectly a judgment that states women as the weak ones. From this short film, we can see that everything that is portrayed through the main character of the short film really matches the situation that happens in our society now.

When it comes to masculine norms, men only have two options which are to stick to the rules to be looked strong or ignore it and get called out. The urge to become tough often makes men feel desperate and hurt. Masters (2015) stated that when men are told to be masculine often imply that they are not enough as a man or a person and that they are not measuring up. They also feel like they failed to meet a certain standard. The truth is, men should not have to follow those rules in order to be considered to be masculine. No matter how they feel, they should be able to express their feelings freely without afraid of being called weak.

Intelligence

According to Chafetz (1978), the other characteristic of masculinity is intelligence. When they are thinking of a problem, men are expected to be intelligent, rational, and logical. They should have public awareness, and also contribute to society. There is not any scene in the short film *American Male* (2016) that depicts this characteristic of masculinity. However, the main character says few things relating to it.

Steer clear of the arts unless you live on the coasts.

That means no theater, dancing, painting, poetry, or prose.

Too much reading is also risky because it makes you soft and bookish (MTV, 2016).

From the paragraph above, it can be seen that men are expected to be smart. However, men should be smart without being geeky, soft, and bookish. According to Masters (2015), most people assumed that softness is commonly associated with being weak and feminine. Softness is not added to the masculinity contexts. Interested in art also is not considered to be a masculine trait. Contributing to theater, dancing, painting, writing poetry, or prose are considered to be activities for women. Without realizing it, those rules about how men should be intelligent and not doing women's activities become patriarchal and discriminate against women. According to Fasih (in Rosida and Rejeki, 2017), women are commonly being discriminated against, and the discrimination is commonly led by gender differences where women are seen to be irrational, weak, and emotional, and positioned in domestic area. Meanwhile, men are seen to be rational, strong and brave, and positioned in the public area.

Men are better at math, mechanics, and home repair (MTV, 2016).

From the sentence above, men are supposed to be better at math, mechanics, and home repair. Mechanics and home repair are things that are considered to be hard jobs, and men are expected to be able to do that. When they are unable to do those things, they will be considered as less masculine or not masculine at all. We can see how horrible toxic masculinity is, and not only it affects men badly, but it also causes women subordination.

Interpersonal characteristics

According to Chafetz, there are seven aspects that belong to interpersonal characteristics of being masculine: leader, dominating, disciplinarian, independent, free, individualistic, and demanding (1978). Interpersonal relates to how a person's character interacts with the people around them (Chafetz, 1978). In the short film *American Male* (2016), there are some scenes that show the main character's masculine interpersonal characteristics.

It can be seen in the short film *American Male* (2016) that the male characters in this short film are being leaders and also being dominant. When the sky started to get darker and everybody at the party is dancing, one of the guys at the party shouted something. They have gathered a lot of teenage boys, maybe younger than them, and told them to line up. It looks like that the older boys are bullying the younger ones. Each one of the younger boys is lined up waiting to be hit by the older ones. It can be seen that when the older guys hit the younger boys, they are laughing like it is a normal thing to do. It is proven that the older boys desire to demonstrate their power and control over boys whom they think are weaker than them. The male characters in the short film are trying hard to follow the masculine traits that they feel the need to punish someone whom they think does not fulfill the traits. Therefore, if a man cannot be a leader, he will be considered to be weak because a leader must be an example for his followers.

The requirement of a man to be a leader who dominates can also lead not only to toxic masculinity but also it can lead to patriarchy or women subordination where women are not supposed to be dominating men and free since only men are the ones who are required to do so. According to Muniarti (2004) as cited in Rosida and Rejeki (2017), women subordination is a view where women are seen to be unimportant in the decision-making, they are also positioned as the second priority after men. Women are also considered not to be a leader because they are considered to be emotional and irrational.

Moreover, according to Hoyt & Burnette (2013), men have typically held positions of authority and influence in society, whereas women have usually held lesser status roles. The problem may stem in part from sexist assumptions. Society considers men to have good leadership qualities, but with women, people tend to be more skeptical which of course then boosts the public's idea of who is more appropriate and capable of handling certain management jobs. Furthermore, it is said that men are expected to be tough, mentally and physically strong, not showing any weakness nor emotion, such as crying in public. They are expected to be bigger than women physically, both in relation to height and muscle mass. Between masculinity and femininity, if one of them is changed, the other one will be intimidated. The fear of social and physical feminization becomes more predominant.

Other personal characteristics

The last character of masculine identity expressed by Chafetz (1978) is other personal character that exists in a main character or character involved. Other masculine personal character includes aggressive, success oriented, ambitious, proud, egotistical, confident moral, trustworthy, decisive, competitive, uninhibited, and adventurous. In the short film, the main character shows four characteristics above. Those are aggressive, success oriented, ambitious, and confident.



Picture 6. A tattoo belongs to the main character

From the picture, it can be seen that the main character has a tattoo that says *I dare do all that may become a man*, which can be concluded that he is an ambitious and success-oriented man. To be considered to be a real man, the main character does all the things that society tells about masculine standards. He does work out and steroids to gain muscular bodies, he acts all violence to release his anger and to be looked manly, he dresses in certain ways to not be looked as non-masculine, and so on. In doing all those things does not only make him ambitious and success oriented, it also makes him a discipline person because he obeys all rules on how to become a masculine man. However, despite all the ambitiousness and discipline person he becomes, he does not realize that he is obeying the wrong rules and is hurting himself.



Picture 7. The main character is hitting the younger boy from behind

The picture above shows a scene in the short film where one of the younger boys accidentally bumps into the main character and makes his drink falls. He immediately looks at the younger boy. He feels furious thinking that the younger boy does it by purpose. Since he wants to prove himself as a masculine man, he does not like the idea of the younger boy being tougher than him. To cover up his feelings, he starts to punch the younger boy, hit him in the buttocks, and calls him by the word "faggot". The main character sees this younger boy that accidentally hit him as someone who is weak which makes him think that this boy is gay. He hits the younger boy really hard until his friends started to stop him. It can be seen that the main character is showing one of the masculinity traits which is aggressive. Salter (2019) stated that male violence and sexism are considered to be the root of toxic masculinity. The term "toxic" masculinity is an aggression trait and self-entitlement which is distinguished from "healthy" masculinity.



Picture 8. The main character acts confidently

Furthermore, it can be seen here that the main character is a confident figure because from the way he talks to his person is with a friendly and cheerful attitude defines him as a very confident person. However, behind his self-confidence, he feels depressed because of the demands that require him to be a manly figure. Men have the freedom to express their opinions and do whatever activities they want to do, but if a man does not do the masculine standards in society, they will be considered weak. I then prove the masculinity traits which can force someone into following the traits to be toxic. It has been discussed that there are seven Chafetz's masculine standards portrayed in the short film *American Male* (2016) through the main character. However, it does not only end there. Toxic masculinity is not only applied to teenagers or men. There is a script in the short film where it says about how the main character is taught about masculine standards since his childhood days.

*At young age, I began to closely observe
the people around me, the way they tattled,
the way they walked, what they said, where it got them.
Now I am no longer a person, but a set of social cues.
Not a person, but a path of least resistance (MTV, 2016).*

From the paragraph, it can be concluded that toxic masculinity on men is forced since childhood days. From this short film, it portrays that the main character mirrors everything that people around him do. Since people around him are following the masculinity traits, he thinks that the idea of fulfilling the standards is an obligation. According to Mabrouk (2020), toxic masculinity behaviors are set up since their early childhood days. Many parents unintentionally feed the concept of toxic masculinity to their sons. Their parents also take part in building toxic masculinity in their sons. Many children often feel pressed and receive a lot of negativities from their parents. However, since they were children, they were always put ahead of their sisters that then lead them to believe that being put first is a common thing. Then, they are expecting their wives to treat them the way their parents treated them. It can be said that masculine standards then lead men to think that to be men means that they should be dominant in everything.

In the third line of the paragraph above, the main character shows that he feels like he is not a person anymore. He feels like he is being a set of social cues. The phrase "a set of social cues" refers to everything that men do because they are forced to do so by the society. Men often feeling pressured because when they show weakness, they will be seen as less masculine. Furthermore, the main character shows his own feeling about himself. He feels like he is not a person, but more like a path of least resistance. The phrase "a path of least resistance" is a metaphor. As a result, it portrays its own image of masculinity as the societal ideal, based on how men should behave and how ostensibly "real men" behave (Morrell et al, 2012). They choose to follow the rule that tells them how to be masculine men so that the society does not punish them. In order for them to survive in this toxic masculinity situation, they are willing to stick to the rules they are forced to follow.

Toxic masculinity as consequences of unfulfilling masculinity traits

As stated in the discussion above, men are forced to follow specific characteristics of masculinity which rules on how men should behave. According to Sculos, toxic masculinity refers to norms, behaviours, and beliefs about masculinity which results in harming men, women, children, and society. In addition, the term "toxic" in toxic masculinity refers to the practices and the characteristics of masculinity that are harmful (2017). From the discussion about characteristics of

masculinity above, it can be seen that the main character, who is forced to follow the rules, encounters many kinds of harmful experiences. So, it is important to note that the characteristics of masculinity above are all toxic since they affect the main character in the short film.

Violence

Most of the characteristics of masculinity is about how men are always in shape, strong, and hypercompetitive. Those kinds of traits then result in men acting violence to each other, and to women and children. In the short film, the main character often feels defensive whenever there is another man who seems to “bother”. This defensive act is caused by his insecurity of being afraid to be called weak by his friends. So, when there is another man that seems to “challenge” his masculinity, he will act defensive and violent. By following the traits, harmfulness to men, women, children, and society are more likely to happen. Furthermore, according to De Boise, it is important to note that if the characteristics of this masculinity are still being followed, certain groups of men will likely encounter certain types of risk such as leading men to be more “perpetrators of interpersonal and structural violences” (2019, p. 150).

Domination

Dominant trait is a character that is able to cover other characters. The characteristics related with toxic masculinity align with emotional manipulation; for example, masculinity is related with a choice to rule and a loss of concern for others. Given the choice to dominate and rule over others, it is far more affordable to expect people with better tiers of masculinity to interact in greater emotional manipulation of others. Dominant characteristics that are identified with men with the assumption that a man must be dominant over women, must be strong, not feminine, not whiny or weak, not cry and so on. Meanwhile, women must be feminine, patient, loving and willing to sacrifice. According to Elliot (2018), toxic masculinity is a concept in which males utilize all means required to dominate the social system, such as physical abuse and trying to appear strong. Until now, men's ability to explore themselves has been stifled by the myth of being strong and emotionless, so that most policy changes are only aimed at empowering women (cited in Al Falaq & Puspita, 2021).

Homophobia

Toxic masculinity is always related to homophobia. As Harrington stated that toxic masculinity is a term coined by feminists to describe men's homophobic and misogynist behavior and violence (Harrington, 2020). In a patriarchal culture, men who do not meet the standard of masculinity tend to be considered as weak and even gay. So that men bullying and avoiding to be those weak and gay men. Furthermore, men who is sexually into men – gay – even hiding their true self to the society. In the short film, the main character implicitly portrayed as a homosexual. He has feeling to his guy friend but when his friend realizing it, he acted like nothing happen. His friend is portrayed as homophobic, so he acts like he is one of them. Here, we can see that the main character not only hiding his sexuality but also forced to pretend as a homophobic. In addition, in the end of the film, his friend gave him the chopping board to hit the skinny guys. When the skinny guy nudged him, his masculinity was threatened which led him to become violent and hit the skinny guy even more and called him with the term faggot.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that *American Male* (2016) is used as a medium to show us that toxic masculinity exists within the society. The short film tries to convey how gender norms are not only giving harmful effects to men, but also to women. In order to blend in with their surroundings, men ought to have masculine traits which are built by society. Men who do not fulfill the traits are considered either to be a loser or gay. They have to be smarter, stronger, and more competitive than women. To sum up, toxic masculinity forces men to fulfill the masculine traits. The traits are socially regressive, and it leads to violence, patriarchy, domination, and homophobia.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the short film *American Male* (2016) tries to portray how gender norms, especially of men, are affecting badly to men. Furthermore, to survive in society, the main

character in the short film *American Male* (2016) feels obligated to have masculine standard which are physically strong, confident, emotionally stable, and ambitious. However, he follows the traits of masculinity without realizing that it forces him to do something that he does not want. It affects him and his surrounding into receiving harmful effects. He becomes violent, domination, and homophobic which then portrayed him as someone who is experiencing toxic masculinity. Furthermore, the society should not absorb this kind of masculinity anymore due to its harmful effect to the society. Men should not be forced to follow the masculinity rules since forcing them in doing so only resulting in bad effect to them. Toxic masculinity can be prevented so it does not last and has a bad impact. For example, by trying to express oneself to others. Have a casual discussion about masculinity, which is a safe and comfortable space without being afraid to talk about themselves. Then, reflect on the negative consequences of toxic masculinity for men, women, and other groups.

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