

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Nowadays, traditional masculine and feminine roles are no longer regarded as a set construction of someone since gender is regarded as fluid. Regrettably, there is still a problem occurred in a culture where conventional masculine norms must be fulfilled by all males. Toxic masculinity defined as a social repression from a patriarchal culture that leads to a gender construction of males must possessed traditional masculinity traits such as strong and aggressive that leads men to become violent. Men also must exhibit dominancy against other individuals who have subordinate position in the patriarchal society. The media is one of the promoter in society's gender construction that leads to toxic masculinity. According to Wood (1994) media reinforce unrealistic, stereotyped, and restricting ideas of men and women that reflect and support socially endorsed views of gender (Wood 1994). Since then, masculinity portrayal in mainstream media is always associated with a traditional masculine stereotype. In addition, men identify themselves with this heroic figure, who exudes machismo and heroism and as for them, a gun is not a weapon that poses a threat to their loved ones, but rather a symbolic representation of their bold masculinity which it offering them a sense of dominance and superior power that is celebrated and adored on television and other forms of media (Silva 2019). A macho man became a conventional figure of manhood within the patriarchal system in the Western society and also the cowboy figure in The

Marlboro Man has become a global icon of rugged, independent, and strong which represent American masculinity (Wong 2001). The macho is the masculine figure that has enforced these norms of extreme masculinity and men who represent the image of extreme masculinity appear in popular Hollywood films like *Predator*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Days of Thunder*, *Total Recall*, *Robocop*, and *Die Hard*. The media then reinforces long-held societal masculinity ideals that men are portrayed as rugged, sexually aggressive, independent, fearless, threatening, stoic, and as much as possible to throw away feminine traits (Wood 1994). In a patriarchal system, being a male that is caring and showing a respectful act toward others is always linked to being less masculine or effeminate.

The western cultural notion of masculinity and the masculine gender norms impose for males to be strong, powerful, and competent (Ricciardelli 2012). Throughout history, males appear to have acted more aggressively than women and their violent deeds have been recorded more frequently since violent action was driven to preserve their reputation (Eibach 2016). In this case, it can be seen how men are used violence as their act to retaining their manliness. In western films such as *Fight Club* (1999) and *American Psycho* (2002), the main characters, the narrator in *Fight Club* and Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*, both prefer to use violence to deal with their problems as men (Alorda 2013). Additionally, Boys and men are taught to reject or resist everything stereotypically feminine, to be physically strong, to repress emotions (other than anger), and to seek for competitiveness and power when it comes to the socialization of masculinity (Mankowski and Smith 2016).

An overview of gender in a society is always defined by a belief that the relationship between men and their masculinity and women with their femininity is inevitable. Nevertheless, in contemporary society, that connection is not a specific relation. Connell (1995) defined masculinity as a role in gender relations by which men and women partake in gender relations and those practices on physical experience, personality, and culture. Therefore, masculinity is socially constructed because both males and females can manifest the masculine way of behaving. It can be known that gender is defined by the individual. According to Franklin (2012), the general concept of masculinity has undergone multiple changes over time (Franklin 2012). Hence, it can be said that masculinity has no fixed concept due the definition model always permeate alteration as the civilization improved. It shows that many men do not necessarily have to fit the idealized forms of masculinity. Open expanses may be opened up for contemplation about how men can be disadvantaged or oppressed. Instead of categorizing all men with the same attribute, pointing at the aspects of distinction will provide ways in which men will begin to re-examine some of the challenges they encounter as a man and raise an understanding of circumstances in which roles are reversed (A. 1. Cornwall 1997).

Toxic masculinity, however, constructed by the aspect of hegemonic masculinity that are socially harmful (Kupers 2005). Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity is characterized as a custom that reinforces the dominant role of men in society and justifies the subordination and other marginalized forms of being a man, of the standard male population and women (R. Connell 1995). The concrete form of hegemonic masculinity in daily life can be seen in the role of men who

holds masculine job such as popular actor, famous football player or it could be someone who have a high rank or having a success life, even a person who is respected by the society. In the United States and Europe, hegemonic masculinity refers to a high level of competitiveness, an unwillingness to show emotions other than anger, a refusal to accept vulnerability or weaknesses, devaluation of women and all feminine traits in males, homophobia, and so on (Brittan 1989). Hegemonic masculinity becomes a collection of beliefs, standards, and behaviors that place a man in a position of superiority over other males. However, since achieving hegemonic masculinity status is incredibly difficult, only a few men in society can exhibit this form of masculinity status. In short, hegemonic masculinity determine how it should be to be a man (Drianus 2019). Functionally, the primary term of hegemonic masculinity seeks to illustrate how men preserve their superior and dominant position in a patriarchal society by taking control of women and other gender identities that are viewed in a given culture as “feminine”. Connell claims that using “toxic” behaviors such as physical abuse, which would help enhance men’s superiority over women in Western societies, is an essential aspect of hegemonic Masculinity (R. Connell 2005). In Western societies, the notion of hegemonic masculinity is considered synonymous with macho identities such as being (to some extent) aggressive and violent, courageous, completely impervious to risks and problems, and stoic in the face of hardship (McVittie and J Hepworth 2017). In addition, in the United States, men outnumber women as a gun owner, gun users, and gun supporters since research support that guns are utilized to maintain hegemonic masculinity in which guns symbolize power, violence, and

domination (Michelson 2017, Stroud 2012). Few men may indulge in toxic masculinity behaviors, yet it is socially expected in men in Western culture (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The assumption that men must be strong and should not cry also applies in Indonesia and has been normalized in society. The men who behave like women are called "bencong" and being marginalized. They are also shunned by the society since they do not apply the prevailing masculinity standards, which is the traditional masculinity. In this case, toxic masculinity in Indonesia is identical to toxic masculinity in western culture.

Hereinafter, Kupers defined toxic masculinity as the constellation of socially regressive male characteristics that promote dominance, women's devaluation, homophobia, and sinister violence (Kupers 2005). Toxic masculinity describes where men have to compete and challenge everything actively. The act of controlling other people that often embody in men who possessed hegemonic masculinity to become the most problematic trait from what it means of being toxic. Toxic masculinity refers to a loosely connected set of masculinity-related norms, attitudes, and actions that are damaging to women, men, youth, and culture as a whole (Sculos 2017). Hyper-competitiveness, self-sufficiency, the perpetuation of aggression, patriarchy, homophobia, conventional gender norms, heteronormativity, and, last but not least, a feeling of superiority to sex with women are all examples of toxic masculinity according to Sculos (2017). Toxic masculinity is seen to be the primary cause of men being forced to dominate, pursue dominance, and committed sexual and domestic abuse. It results in men to hiding their emotional feelings, disregarding mental and physical health, participating in

aggressive and violent acts, and often homophobic action. Occasionally, as early as childhood, the socialization of boys according to patriarchal expectations happens to normalize aggressiveness and violence by implying the idea that “boys will be boys”. This idea justifies and validates male children and teenagers’ violent and aggressive behaviors as natural instincts that should not be limited, resulting in latent biases and gender stereotypes (Rotundi 2020). Toxic masculinity allows not only women to being the subject of the subordinated, but also men who cannot consciously engage in the norms of hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, in the sense of toxic masculinity, a man who holds superior masculinity can control someone’s gender identity with the power to dominate others.

Men display their masculine characteristics in all aspects of their lives, including at home, at work, and in public. However, men are shown their extreme masculinity is not only happen in real life but also it is depicted toward fictional works such as novel and film. In most Hollywood films, the lead is often paired with a man who embodies traditional masculinity. Young, Caucasian, attractive, and muscular male heroes are often depicted in the film. The protagonist is also often seen to be in an intimate relationship with a woman, indicating that the lead character is always heterosexual, which is one factor that contributes to traditional masculinity portrayal in Hollywood films. Men have also always been the dominating lead character rather than women in Hollywood films. On the other hand, women are depicted as a submissive character toward the male protagonist and usually only used as a sex objects for the protagonist. Subversions of hegemonic Masculinity were seen, and their re-emergence in popular Hollywood films is

unavoidable. Film continues to be a powerful tool for transmitting hegemonic values and maintaining patriarchal dominance (Usmar 2015). This can be seen in the 007 series, which is a popular Hollywood production. *From Russia with Love* is the second installment of the James Bond film series. The stereotypical masculinity of the lead character, James Bond, was seen in the film. James Bond has been portrayed as a courageous, romantic, and attractive man and a muscular man (Adynugraha 2019).

The cultural and social condition of society at a specific time in which that the toxic masculinity phenomenon occurs is reflected in the film entitled “The Art of Self-Defense” in a way that the audiences get the impression of how toxic masculinity works in modern society. Toxic masculinity in this film also affects the main character's gender identity into a violent-masculine self. *The Art of Self Defense* is directed by Riley Stearns and starring Jesse Eisenberg, Imogen Poots, and Alessandro Nivola. The film was released on July 12, 2019, in the United States and on June 4, 2020, in Indonesia through HBO Channel and HBO GO streaming service, and on June 28, 2021, on Netflix. The film was produced by Andrew Kortschak, Walter Kortschak, Cody Ryder, and Stephane Whonsetler. The film was nominated for Munich Film Festival for Best Film by An Emerging Director for Riley Stearns and nominated for audience award in Americana Film Fest 2020. (IMDb, Internet Movie Database 2019). Casey Davies is the film's main character who experienced the traits of toxic masculinity from the patriarchal society. Casey characterizes as a shy, socially awkward, soft, and weak individual that in a patriarchal society it has to be considered as less masculine or effeminate. The film

itself revolves around the journey of Casey self-discovered to be a “real” man by taking a karate class in order to learn self-defense after a mysterious motorcycle gang is attacking him. In the karate class, he met a charismatic sensei that indoctrinated Casey to become harsh and violent to become more “masculine”. He also learns that the more irrational and violent he can get, the more masculine he is. This thesis will focus on the feature of masculinity portrayed in the film as violent, aggressive, and showing a dominant position through other people who do not hold a superior position in a patriarchal society. This film is released when Donald Trump’s presidency still occurs. Since 2016, a significant number of media reports about U.S. President Trump and the #MeToo movement have utilized the term “toxic masculinity” to characterize the terrible behavior of powerful white elite males, as opposed to its prior uses to marginalized men (Harrington 2020). During his 2016 campaign, Trump demonstrated how he would use hegemonic masculinity as a weapon while in office by repeatedly doubting his opponents' strength or insulting them with stereotypically feminine qualities (Becker 2021). Trump overt hyper-masculinity key element of his candidacy in 2016 in which he discussed about committing sexual assault as “locker room talk” (Kurtzleben 2020). The writer assumes that this film criticize on how toxic masculinity occur in American society during Trump’s presidency. In this case, the president of the United States is considered to exemplify the national identity and its collective ideals as the national representative, and given that the nation-state is designated masculine, he personifies "not only 'America,' but also “American manhood” (Katz 2016).

However, masculinity does not always have to be described through violence and domination but also about knowing themselves and respecting women. As the writer states above, excessive and toxic traits of hegemonic masculinity in a person can lead to toxic masculinity. According to the ideas of masculinity in the film *The Art of Self-Defense*, it shows that masculinity is something associated with bad behavior because it shows that a masculine person is labeled as violent and dominant through another person. It is also showing that man should not be weak or showing an emotional feeling. While In fact, the ideal masculinity characteristics change over time by showing an emotional awareness, caring, and be respectful towards women and each other. Thus, masculinity appears both as positive, in that it provides some means of gender value for males, and on the negative side, they are not considering femininity behavior. Masculinity and male behavior are not the mere results of genetic code or biological predisposition (Clatterbaugh 1990, Whitehead and Barrett 2001). The film also shows how toxic masculinity works in the current society.

In analyzing this movie, the writer also needs previous studies to help in conducting the research. The first study is a journal article entitled *Toxic Masculinity Dalam Sistem Patriarki: Analisis Wacana Kritis Van Dijk*. This journal article explores the toxic masculinity traits in the character. The study contributes by giving sight of how toxic masculinity works in the patriarchal society throughout the film's main character. Danijela Petkovi wrote the second study, titled "Heteronormativity and Toxic Masculinity in Stephen Dunn's *Closet Monster*." In her research, she looked at monstrosity as a metaphor for an offensive homophobic

behavior that was attributed to toxic masculinity traits in the film *Closet Monster*. This research would be beneficial to this thesis because the author gained an understanding that hegemonic masculinity are able to create toxic masculinity.

Finally, in order to achieve the purpose of the study, the theory of hegemonic Masculinity by Raewyn Connell will be used to analyze the objects. The idea of toxic Masculinity by Terry Kupers is also used to support the analysis. This theory is chosen because the writer thinks that this is a unified theory to analyze the issue in this object. In this study, the data will be analyzed with descriptive qualitative methods to examine the issue of toxic masculinity. According to Vanderstoep (2009) qualitative research is a study that generates narrative or textual representations of a phenomenon being studied, thereby providing a deeper level of understanding of the population to the writer of this study. The writer will also analyze the narrative and non-narrative aspects of the film to reveal the issue.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Responding to the background of the study, the main issue addressed, and the object of the study are proposed is:

1. How Toxic Masculinity is represented in "*The Art of Self-Defense*" film?
2. How is toxic masculinity shift Casey's gender identity from feminine to masculine?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Mentioning the question above, the objectives attempt to be received through this study is:

1. To reveal about how toxic masculinity is represented in “*The Art of Self-Defense*” film.
2. To explain about how toxic masculinity can shifting Casey’s gender identity from feminine to masculine.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is hoped to be useful for people in general as the readers particularly in the issue of toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity also became one of the cultural issues that still occurred these days that could even construct someone’s gender identity. Therefore, a study about a phenomenon in toxic masculinity in the film should be conducted. The writer wants to examine the case of toxic masculinity represented in “*The Art of Self-Defense*” film and how toxic masculinity constructs the main character's gender identity. Therefore, this research's findings are expected to contribute to the field of cultural studies and literary criticism, where the issue of toxic masculinity is very significant under gender studies. It will also be useful for the next researcher when they conduct a study related to this issue. This study might be beneficial to be compared to their consideration and reference.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

There are several terms used in this studies that may not be familiar and is commonly used in our daily life so the definition of those terms is also provided here to help the readers to understand the research.

Masculinity: the patterns of behavior by which individuals (including men and women, but primarily males) involved in that stance (R. Connell 2005).

Toxic Masculinity: The tradition of hegemonic masculinity that are culturally harmful because these traits are acknowledge and valued in patriarchal society, including such, misogyny, domination, violence, and homophobia (Kupers 2001).

Violence: the negative aspects of traditional masculine identities that are frequently connected with aggressive male characteristics (Bozkurt and Dawes 2015)

Oppression: a social injustice inflicted by social groups on social groups through social institutions, practices, and norms (Cudd 2005)

Hegemonic Masculinity: the dominant idea of masculinity in a specific historical setting (R. Connell 1987).