A PORTRAYAL OF TOXIC MASCULINITY IN THANOS'S *AVENGERS: ENDGAME*

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ABSTRAK

Toxic masculinity adalah salah satu isu paling populer di masayarakat yang berhubungan dengan pria. Salah satu faktor *toxic masculinity* adalah bahwa pria cenderung egois ketika mereka merasa lebih baik daripada pria atau wanita lain dalam masyarakat. Pada film *Avengers: Endgame*, film ini menyajikan perang manusia melawan penjahat yang memanfaatkan kekuasaan untuk memerintah dunia untuk mencapai kemenangan dan membawa perdamaian ke dunia dengan cara menghancurkan setengah manusia. Studi ini menggunakan teori *toxic masculinity* oleh Terry Kupers sehingga *toxic masculinity* dapat dilihat pada salah satu karakter di *Avengers: Endgame*. Kedua, sang peneliti memasang tiga langkah teori kekuasaan melalui teori kekuasaan Gaventa sebagai medium untuk mendukung hubungan antara *toxic masculinity* dan kekuasaan. Selanjutnya, sang peneliti berfokus pada salah satu tokoh penjahat yang disebut Thanos, yang diidentifikasi sebagai figur *toxic masculinity*. Deskriptif kualitatif adalah metode utama. Kemudian, sang peneliti mengumpulkan data dengan menonton film, menganalisis penelitian sebelumnya, dan memfokuskan dialog yang berkaitan dengan masalah *toxic masculinity* baik secara langsung atau tidak langsung. Penelitian ini menyelidiki ciri-ciri *toxic masculinity* seperti yang digambarkan oleh Thanos dan menjelaskan hubungan kekuasaan dalam *toxic masculinity*. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa *toxic masculinity* membawa pria menuju kehancuran.
Keywords: Toxic Masculinity, Avengers: Endgame, Superheroes

ABSTRACT

Toxic masculinity is one of the most popular issues related to men in society. One of the factors of toxic masculinity is that men tend to be selfish when they feel better than other men or women in their society. In the Avengers: Endgame, the movie presents human's war against the villain whose utilization of power to rule the world to attain victory and bring peace to the world by destroying half of the humans. This study used the theory of toxic masculinity by Terry A Kupers so that the toxic masculinity issue can be seen from one of the characters in Avengers: Endgame. Secondly, the researcher attached three steps of power theory by Gaventa's Theory of Power as the character's medium to support the relationship between toxic masculinity and power. Next, the researcher focused on one of the villain characters called Thanos, who is identified as the toxic masculinity representation. Qualitative descriptive was the primary method. Then the researcher collected the data by watched the movie, analysed the previous studies, and focused on the dialogue containing direct or indirect toxic masculinity issues. This study explores the features of Toxic Masculinity as portrayed by Thanos and explains the relation of power and toxic masculinity. This study reveals that toxic masculinity leads men to destruction.
Keywords: Toxic Masculinity, Avengers: Endgame, Superheroes

INTRODUCTION

This study discusses how toxic masculinity is depicted in superhero movies, especially in Avengers: Endgame. Toxic masculinity is a phenomenon of social issues among the society, and it is according to how the men trait others, especially women. Indeed, according to Terry A. Kupers in the Journal of Clinical Psychology, toxic masculinity is "the system of unhealthy masculinity, the devaluation of socially regressive male characteristics that tend to promote superiority of women, sexism, and indiscriminate violence" (Kupers, 2005,714). According to Collinson and Hearn (Collinson & Hearn 1994), the idea of masculinity is complex, and it tries to dismiss matters of control and supremacy. The definition of masculinity, according to Petersen (Petersen,1998, 2003), Collier (Collier, 1998), and MacInnes (MacInnes, 1998), is faulty because it essentializes men's character or constructs a false identity on a

complex and ambiguous fact. Toxic masculinity becomes composed of harmful and dangerous elements of hegemonic masculinity (Kupers, 2005:717). The environment tells us that to become men means admitting rivalry. Becoming a man means never signifying soft or weak. Being men mean never having to seek permission. Being a man means never having to say, "No, I probably couldn't afford that." Thus, these theories explained that toxic masculinity is an action that could affect society by making men look powerful and greedy.

Film or movie is a medium that could entertain the spectators, and movies also can become a medium for writers to film the script to become a movie. In 2019, Marvel published their most fantastic superhero movie, Avengers: Endgame. In Avengers: Endgame movie, all of the characters have their self-defense, Iron Man with his high-tech, Captain America with his fighting skill, Thor with his energy of thunder, and others with their unique power. This superhero movie also had villain characters: Loki as Thor's brother, Thanos as the famous main villain character in Avengers: Endgame, Nebula, and Gamora as Thanos' daughters who turn out against him.

Avengers: Endgame is a superhero fantasy film in the U. S. that has been published in 2019. It is one of the Marvel Cinematic Universe's films and the main sequel to Avengers: Infinity War, which Anthony and Joe Russo produced, also widely recognized as the Russo siblings, and distributed by Disney Studios. The Russo Brothers, born a year apart in Cleveland, Ohio. It all started when they borrowed their credit cards student to fund their first movie, Pieces. In the past ten years, the Russo brothers have directed 10 TV series. They successfully catch the Marvel Studios executives and carry them to head Captain America: The Winter Soldier in 2014, and it reaches the highest rated movies of 2014.

Thus, toxic masculinity got a significant impact on men and women in society. From day one, in the bible explanation, a woman was created to accompany men and not obey them. However, the man had a big responsibility to take care of and protect his family at all costs and created a mindset that men are more dominant than women; this makes women unable to be the same as men. The researcher chose the villain character, Thanos,

seeing as a representation of toxic masculinity. It becomes the deconstruct the purpose of men in society; men can also be weak and cannot be superior as other men should have been because of their personality, which will be the beginning of toxic masculinity.

Masculine/masculinity is broad and varied, affected by a person's cultural, economic background, ideological, and ethnic traditions, along with their circumstances. Nonetheless, the representation of masculinity that teenagers see from the television, modern culture, even literature, and perhaps other academic sources are generally critically simplified, emphasizing the characteristics of toxic masculinity, including physicality, superiority, and dominance. Men are not born with masculinity in their natural blood; therefore, masculine/masculinity is culturally assimilated and built of cultural standards of behavior taught to reconstruct socially relevant ways, according to John Beynon (Beynon, 2002) in Masculinities and Culture. The masculine/masculinity not only relates to men but also women. Some women prefer to be independent by themselves, yet it is still not acceptable in society. Therefore, masculinity is a product of society, not something men get from birth.

Toxic masculinity is a variant of hegemonic masculinity. The theory of hegemonic masculinity is being proposed to examine masculinity from a historical perspective or by a class perspective (Beynon, 2002). Hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell, is "the dominating concept of masculinity in a historical context era" (Connel, 1987). In education, the theory of hegemonic masculinity has already been utilized to understand better students' learning, such as behaviors of opposition and intimidation among students. It has been used to analyze curriculum connections and the obstacles in sexual identity pedagogy (Martino, 1995). The idea of toxic masculinity illustrates specific harmful criteria of hegemonic masculinity that are admired and held traditionally, including aggressive dominance, homophobia, and selfishness (Kupers, 2001). These cases could happen among us; men, women, or even kids. Since kids, some of us were taught to be strong and brave, especially boys. Some boys get bullied by other boys because they cannot do sports

or prefer playing with some girls. This phenomenon built the character of the one who got bullied became afraid to express himself, and the one who bullied became rude, or maybe the one who once got bullied became the one who bullied others because he seeks revenge for an unpleasant experience.

In the previous study, toxic masculinity is already found. Miranda Brookshier did it. The study's article refers to a discussion of "Approaching Toxic Masculinity through #MeToo: Representations of Sexual Assault in American History X" (Brookshier, 2019). She utilized the qualitative methodology to analyze how and why the subject or the male survivors of sexual violence. Miranda discusses how the stereotype of prison rape leans on and develops a pre-existing masculine concept throughout this study.

The second was done by Conway in "Poisonous Pantheons: God of War and Toxic Masculinity." (Conway, 2019). Toxic masculinity was portrayed in the research through Freya's mother-son relationship with her son, Baldur, who was given a terrible twist throughout this chapter. Overall, this study discusses how God of War portrays toxic masculinity's features, analyzes its impacts, and providing suggestions for its recovery.

Furthermore, the last discussion was done by Bryant W. Sculos with the title, "We are the Beast: On Toxic Masculinity and Social Responsibility in Disney 's Beauty and the Beast." (Sculos, 2017). As the male character and the Beast, Gaston was both depicted as concerned with gender stereotypes. This study focuses on how toxic masculinity related to the moral conscience, western capitalism, and real social-financial revolution are all topics that have been discussed recently.

Power is the skills to perform anything or operate in such a particular order, specifically as a characteristic or competence. According to John Gaventa, he discovered that the social elite primarily uses its authority to avoid escalating disagreements inside its area or achieve social peace. In those other ways, a limitation of evident problems can be seen both as an indication and a result of frequent usage of power processes (Gaventa, 1980). Gaventa's approach for explaining

subordination and revolt as in the face of fundamental unfairness is founded on Lukes' three dimensions of power (Lukes, 1974), previously discussed inside the section. It will be a chance to get a more substantial insight into such aspects and how it connects to the duality of dominance and weakness

1. The One-Dimensional Approach to Power

As an instance, in the ideal place of gender roles, A's power over B is demonstrated to a level that can influence to force someone to do something that he would never have done if it was not for the influencer. Analysis of behaviors can be used to study the explicit aspect of power: who participates, who wins, who loses, and who shows oneself as in judgment processes. One method is founded on ideas that some who supported it have slammed. For instance, folks often realize disagreements and confront the others whose contributions in power structures mostly happen conspicuously in choice battlegrounds. Such governmental areas are available to any established movement. Nevertheless, the heads of state are not an elite from their preferences but instead portray the needs of the public.

2. The Two-Dimensional Approach to Power

An analysis of hidden power requires examining someone chooses what, when, and how, who keeps beyond, how this occurs, and how these two mechanisms interact, aside from winning a battle, among essential components of power in determining the battle's agenda ahead of time.

3. 3rd. The Three-dimensional Approach to Power

Next, according to Lukes, he describes how A affects, decides, and defines B's decision. A further unique feature of this dimension is whether the phenomena can arise without extreme disagreement (Lukes, 1974). An imbalance of power exists between the individuals who activate a power and the actual desire to exempt this.

Hence, Gaventa's power theory reveals the explicit and implicit ways people's weakness is produced and sustained from those explanations above. It emphasizes the significant role of indirect processes with information of weakness, a

condition over which humans shall have much more to say in the future.

As a result of the earlier research and the topics mentioned above, the writer aims to bring up toxic masculinity in superhero films. A situation seems likely to occur within us; some action to get "power" to lead the world is the matter of toxic masculinity, and it is the beginning of greed and violence. The writer thinks how this study provides us with information concerning toxic masculinity.

METHOD

The fundamental data used for this study originates from the film Avengers: Endgame. The movie is approximately 03:02:00 in duration, and this study simply includes a few lines relating to the topics especially in Thanos's character. To sustain the data, the researcher uses the cultural approach by Terry A Kupers and supported by the theory of power by John Gaventa. The qualitative technique was used in this study. According to (Creswell, 2010), qualitative methodology is a descriptive type for understanding the literature of an existing image founded on an object (as a side study). With both the examiner as the essential partners, discussion of the findings and qualitative approach outcomes highlighting the significance of generalization (Semiawan, 2010). The technique's defining aspect analyzes processes that rely on a person's personality traits and the manifestations that appear in the film and text. The data is not associated and not explained with percentages or numbers. Nevertheless, the writer chose to discuss the characters through the dialogues. By watching the movie, studying, collecting data from the previous studies, this research finally achieves data supporting the theory of toxic masculinity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this session, the researcher described Thanos's character from his experience, appearance, characteristics, and desires related to the toxic masculinity issue.

Who is Thanos?

Thanos is one of the main villain characters in the Avengers movie, and he got a big purple body which is different from humans. He is one of the cruel warriors from Titan who got a

ruthless ambition to restore peace to the world by destroying 50 percent of all humanity across all planets. However, the aspiration and steps to create peace by killing half of the humans were wrong. He got two daughters named Gamora and Nebula. His daughters were stepsisters, and he treats Nebula differently from Gamora. Everybody saw Thanos as the most significant manifestation of meanness, brutality, egotism, murder, dominance, and insanity. However, Thanos seems to be more complicated and became a traumatized person in reality. Bearing his tragic history and passion for achieving everything he believed to be his future, that also forced him to do barbaric acts in the pursuit of trying to save the world, even sacrifice himself to achieve his purpose.

Hunting the Infinity Stones is his goal. He got it in the movie, Avengers: Infinity Wars. He finally collects all the six Infinity Stones; each of the gems has a different function and power. Nevertheless, if the stones are united as one, the ultimate energy will be more substantial than any power in the world, and again this power is what is Thanos was looking for his whole life. He successfully removes almost 50% of humans in the world by snapped his fingers that clothe with a six-infinity-stone-encrusted iron glove. The superheroes such as Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, and others cannot stop Thanos, and some of them also suddenly disappear. The Avengers: Endgame is the downfall situation of civilization caused by the Infinity Stones. He also got the impact of the Infinity Stones, half of his body burnt, and it also makes him weak. He decided to move to another planet which no one knows where it is, even his daughters, Gamora and Nebula. In Avengers: Endgame, the rest of the superheroes that still exist was trying to survive and move on, until one of them, called Ant-Man, appears and claimed that the time machine is a thing that can change the situation and could bring back the one whose gone. Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, and other superheroes were looking for Thanos in the galaxy, and finally, they find Thanos. Thanos was living in peace without any alliance, and he is alone on his pleasant farm. He gets caught by the superheroes in Avengers: Endgame and gets killed by Thor. Long short story, after Thanos get killed nothing change, and it makes the situation more complicated. Ant-Man convince that everything

can go back to how it was by traveling with a time machine, and the Avengers willing to try the Ant-Man suggestion. Finally, the time machine is ready to take the Avengers to the time before Thanos destroyed half of the humans and finds Thanos alive, and he still sticks to his plan about destroying half-humans to bring back the peace that he dreamt of in his life.

Moreover, the war started between the Avengers and Thanos. Thanos is ready with his ally and was about to win, but the lost heroes in Avengers: Endgame surprisingly appear and help the desperate heroes in Avengers to win the battle. Furthermore, in the end, the Avengers won, and they successfully bring the situation back to normal, and Thanos ended up losing the battle, dead and become ashes. Thus, the situation back as it used to be, and everyone lives happily ever after and because of Thanos's characteristics that tend to do harmful things, women's supremacy, and indiscriminate violence. In the end, He lost everything, especially his daughters, his dream, and ascendancy that he made for a long time.

Secondly, the researcher revealed greedy and aggressive power data that support the theory of toxic masculinity. According to Terry A Kupers, "toxic masculinity involves socially damaging characteristics of "hegemonic masculinity," including sexism, homophobia, greed, and aggressive power." Furthermore, the three steps of Gaventa's power theory to mark the dominance and weakness issue that will be the medium to depict the toxic masculinity issue.

The researcher reveals data of greedy and aggressive power, which supports the theory of toxic masculinity according to Terry A Kupers.

Thanos as the representation of Toxic Masculinity.

1) Greedy

This greedy characteristic is shown through dialogues between Thanos and Tony (Iron Man).

> THANOS: "**I thought by eliminating half of life,** the other half would thrive. But you have shown that is impossible. Life clings to the past with bloody fingernails as long as there are. Those who remember what

was, there will be those unable to accept what can be. They will resist.

> TONY (Iron Man): "Yep. We're all kinds of stubborn."

> THANOS: "I'm thankful. Because now I know what I must do."

> *Thanos reaches for his helmet*

> THANOS: "**I will shred this universe down to its last atom. And then, with the stones you've collected for me, create a new one, teeming with life that knows not what it has lost, but only what it has been given. A grateful universe.**"

First data shows that Thanos was selfish. Removing half of life is not the ideal way to be a leader. The thought of having a peaceful world is wise, but not by destroying half-humans. A man's thought is broad; some men choose the easiest way to achieve their desire and do not even actually care about the rest of the world. Furthermore, this makes the greedy characteristic grown.

2) Aggressive Power

The aggressive power is proven in Thanos's lines.

> THANOS: "**In all my years of conquest of violence and slaughter -- it was never personal. But I'll tell you now, the things I'm about to do to your stubborn, annoying, little planet. I'm going to enjoy it. Very, very much.**"

Second, data exposes what Thanos has done to the world. He did the violence regardless of the innocent people, kids, and women. "**I'm going to enjoy it**" shows how the violence will make him thrilled. This statement relates to the toxic masculinity issue, and man tends to do harmful actions as the man thought he is better than the other.

Furthermore last, the researcher displayed the connection between power and toxic masculinity. As a representation of toxic masculinity, Thanos also indicates the social elite who also desires to take over the world to construct a peaceful environment.

Power as a medium to portray the toxic masculinity

1) The One-Dimensional Approach to Power

The data was taken from the dialogues when Bad Nebula gets caught by her father, Thanos.

> *EBONY MAW: "Sire. Your daughter is a traitor."*
>
> *EBONY MAW GESTURES: CABLES WRAP AROUND NEBULA'S NECK. SHE AWAKENS, PANICKED. She looks up at Thanos.*
>
> *BAD NEBULA (choking):* **"No. Please, father. That's not me. I would never betray you. Please –"**
>
> *Thanos UNWRAPS the cord. He touches his daughter's face.*
>
> *THANOS:* **"Ssh, child. I know. And you'll have the chance to prove it –"**

First data suit the 1st step of Gaventa's power theory. Thanos forced Bad Nebula to do something she would never have done if it was not for her father. As the representation of the dominance, Thanos dominated his daughter, and Bad Nebula, as the representation of the weakness, cannot do anything except obeying his father's commands.

2) The Two-Dimensional Approach to Power

This data is shown from the dialogues between Thanos and Bad Nebula to snatch the infinity stones back.

> *Thanos takes off his helmet, staring up at the crater's edge*
>
> *IV.   THANOS:* **"Go. Find the stones. Bring them to me."**
>
> *BAD NEBULA: "What will you do?"*
>
> *THANOS:* **"Wait."**

The second data also represented the 2nd step of Gaventa's power theory. Thanos chose to wait and let Bad Nebula get the infinity stones for him. This statement displays that besides starting a battle, one of the essential elements of power is choosing the conflict's schedule. In other words, Thanos was monitoring the situation and waiting for the right time to start the battle.

3) The Three-dimensional Approach to Power

The last data was taken from the dialogues between Thanos and Tony before Thanos becomes atoms and disappears.

> *THANOS: "I am -- inevitable."*
>
> *TONY (Iron Man): "And I -- am Iron Man."* ***SNAP***
>
> ***Thanos stops and looking around, viewing his armies lose. Thanos is alone during the darkness. He sits on a rock and embraces his destiny during the last minutes. His molecules break down in front of him. Thanos ends at the last moment***

The third data is the last step of Gaventa's power theory. It described how Thanos affects, decides, and defines Tony's decision. Thanos, the one who successfully snatches the infinity stones back, decided to snap his finger to destroy the world; however, Tony succeeded in manipulating Thanos and getting back the infinity stones. Thanos and Tony's purpose is contrast, and by snapping his fingers, Tony successfully brings the world back to normal.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Avengers: Endgame movie, especially the main villain, Thanos, represents the toxic masculinity issue and the power to control another as the medium to support the toxic masculinity. Using the theory of toxic masculinity by Terry A Kuppers and supported by Gaventa's theory of power. The researcher finally acquired 5 data of each point. 2 data to revealed the toxic masculinity characteristic and 3 data to demonstrated the three steps of Gaventa's power theory to distinguished the dominance and the weakness.

First, the greedy characteristic that Thanos shows portrayed the toxic masculinity issue. Man becomes greedy when it comes to achieving his desire. Thanos destroyed half of the humans just to

release his desire which is to build a better future. Next, the aggressive power as the toxic masculinity issue shows Thanos as a man indiscriminately killing innocent people, kids, and women. As a man, Thanos should be wise before doing violence action towards other.

Secondly, in Gaventa's power theory, the researcher highlighted three steps that encourage the toxic masculinity issue. Each of the three steps represents the social elite as a father, Thanos, who controls the daughter, representing the civilization. Thus, this study depicts that toxic masculinity is a bad influence that could lead men to their destruction.

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