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## REPRESENTATION OF TOXIC MASCULINITY IN STEVE ROGERS' CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE FIRST AVENGER

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### Abstract

*Toxic masculinity is a harmful masculinity caused by gender stereotypes which emphasizes three core points; toughness, anti-femininity, and power. The method in this study is qualitative and it used intrinsic approach to observe representation of toxic masculinity in Steve Rogers through the narrative elements of Captain America: The First Avenger film. The result showed Steve Rogers represented several characteristics of toxic masculinity including; 1) man must be tough, strong, and dare to take risk, 2) man must avoid expressing emotions, 3) man must pursue their ambitions by any means. Further, the existence of this research is expected can increase society awareness regarding toxic masculinity issue as the product of gender stereotypes, which can motivate man to hurt himself and others.*

**Keywords:** toxic masculinity, steve rogers, film

### INTRODUCTION

Toxic masculinity is closely related to patriarchy, which is a system in society that places men superior to women (Allanana, 2013) Commonly, people think that patriarchy only hurts women as men are perceived as superior and thus can gain privilege from it, however in fact patriarchy is also harmful to men (Niyogi, 2022). As patriarchal culture promotes certain standards regarding how man and woman are supposed to be, including feminine beauty and masculine toughness, images of feminine vulnerability and masculine protectiveness, also the naturalness of men's aggression, competition, and dominance, and female caring, cooperation, and subordination (Johnson, 2004), causes men to be reluctant to show acts that are interpreted as weaknesses and are only appropriate for women who are inferior, such as feeling sad, crying, feeling pain, and many more. Those masculinity characteristics that emphasize men to be tough, strong, and avoid showing emotions then create men with no compassion, men who justified all ways including violence to be dominant, and men who think that man should do dangerous and harmful things to prove his toughness. This kind of man is what is called a man with toxic masculinity behaviors.

There are many definitions of “toxic masculinity” that appear in research as well as in pop culture. Thompson et al. (1986, as cited in Ingram et al., 2019) define toxic masculinity with three core components: 1) Toughness: This is the notion that men should be physically strong, emotionally callous, and behaviorally aggressive, 2) Anti-Femininity: This involves the idea that men should reject anything that is considered to

be feminine, such as showing emotion or accepting help, 3) Power: This is the assumption that men must work toward obtaining power and status (social and financial) so they can gain the respect of others.

Talking about toxic masculinity means that talk about gender too. Thus, to identify toxic masculinity, it is important to recognize the stereotype of gender in society to recognize how society sees or expects men should be and how the stereotypes affect the behavior of men for practicing toxic masculinity. Based on the theory about gender stereotypes men are characterized as more agentic than women, taking charge and being in control. Masculine characteristics are: acts as a leader, aggressive, ambitious, analytical, assertive, athletic, competitive, defending own beliefs, dominant, forceful, abilities, independent, individualistic, makes decisions easily, masculine, self-reliant, self-sufficient, strong-personality, willing to take a stand, and willing to take risks. These characteristics provide a good representation of prescriptive gender stereotypes, at least as they existed in the early 1970s (Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

The previous studies about the film have analyzed masculinity of Steve Rogers (Aikionemi, 2021) and hypermasculinity in the form of body that is related to militarism and politic (Lout, 2017). The previous researchers do not specifically discuss toxic masculinity which is different from masculinity or hypermasculinity. Masculinity is a set of social expectations of its men, which in American modern culture, men are expected to support patriarchy (Craig, 1992). While hypermasculinity is a gender-based ideology for the exaggeration of male stereotypical behavior, such as toughness as emotional self-control, violence as manly, danger as exciting and calloused attitudes toward women and sex (De Dauw & Connell, 2020). Toxic masculinity, on the other hand, focuses on the way that the rejection of femininity through the performance of hypermasculinity creates unhealthy behavioral patterns and ideological beliefs that become toxic to men and on a structural level, to their environments (De Dauw & Connell, 2020).

Captain America: The First Avenger film which is set in World War II told about Steve Rogers, a small and frail man who wanted to be a soldier, but he was always rejected because of his weak physical appearance. However, despite failing many times in the army entrance exams, Steve did not want to stop to continue enlisting, he did not want to do any other work than being in the army like most men did at that time. Steve's rejection of other work implies a rejection of something that is considered feminine in terms of work, which is one of the characteristics of toxic masculinity. It was because Steve as a man wanted to be considered strong and tough like the male stereotype created by the patriarchal culture, thus it prompted him to force himself to become a soldier, for it was considered men's primary job in World War II era. As also stated in (Hilaldo et al., 2019) that the gender condition sets up in the midst of military, place men as the only gender practical for the military interest.

The small Steve who was so keen to be a soldier even he knew he was not eligible represented one of toxic masculinity behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to observe and reveal how is toxic masculinity represented in Steve Rogers character by using qualitative method and intrinsic approach. Further, the toxic masculinity characteristics of Steve Rogers will be discussed separately according to the core components of toxic masculinity; toughness, anti-femininity, and power. The existence of this research is expected can present new idea about the film which is different from previous research that only highlighted masculinity in the military and body aspect. This research discussed another aspect of masculinity that focused on the characterization of Steve Rogers character, which represented toxic masculinity. Thus, society can be more

aware about gender inequality issue that also damages men caused by patriarchy called toxic masculinity and for this reason, the stereotypes about how men should look, perform, and behave can gradually decrease.

## THEORY

### *Theory of Film*

Film is an audiovisual medium that begins with the written word because the initial step in film production is the completion of a script (Prince, 2003). Just like the other literary work, the film also has a structure. The difference is if a novel or short story consists of chapter, paragraph, and sentence, the structure of film is divided into three main elements, namely shot, scene, and sequence (Pratista, 2008). Film is composed of two main elements, narrative and cinematic elements. Both are connected and dependent on each other. It can be said that the narrative element is a material that will be processed, while the cinematic element is the technique, style, and method used to process the material.

The narrative element is related to the story of a film, including theme, character and characterization, plot, setting, and point of view. Those elements are interacted with one another to build a unified story that has a purpose. On the other hand, the cinematic element consists of four primary elements, such as mise-en-scene, cinematography, lighting, and voice (Pratista, 2008). In analyzing the representation of toxic masculinity in Steve Rogers' *Captain America: The First Avenger* film, the researcher focused on the narrative element, but of course without ignoring the film itself, to get a detail and clear description of the story.

### *Toxic Masculinity*

Kupers defines toxic masculinity as “the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence” (2005). The term 'toxic masculinity' addresses explicitly a set of subtle men's issues that have been constructed a long time ago by patriarchal systems, but that still feature society and provide negative repercussions on male individuals themselves and, at the same time, on the whole humankind (Rotundi, 2020).

Toxic masculinity taught men to be the strongest, therefore it is strictly related to the promotion of violence and aggression because it leads men to picture themselves as aggressive and powerful. For this reason, men with toxic masculinity traits will ignore every trait that is categorized as feminine, for example showing their emotional side. They tend to prioritize ambition to reach the highest social status, self-sufficiency, physical strength, sexual prowess, and aggressiveness (Rotundi, 2020). Siagian (2022) argued that toxic masculinity caused men to be perceived as powerful and greedy in society, thus it prompts men to believe that to be a man means admitting rivalry, never signifying soft or weak and never having to seek permission. Thus, men who consider themselves more masculine are less likely to engage in helping behavior, which means that if we witness bullying or see someone being attacked, we are unlikely to intervene.

There are many definitions of “toxic masculinity” that appear in research as well as in pop culture. Thompson and Pleck (1986, as cited in Ingram et al., 2019) define toxic masculinity with three core components.

1. Toughness: This is the notion that men should be physically strong, emotionally callous, and behaviorally aggressive.

2. Anti-Femininity: This involves the idea that men should reject anything that is considered to be feminine, such as showing emotion or accepting help.
3. Power: This is the assumption that men must work toward obtaining power and status (social and financial) so they can gain the respect of others.

### **Gender Stereotypes**

Gender stereotype theory is required to recognize how society sees or expects men should be a<sup>11</sup> how the stereotypes affect the behavior of men for practicing toxic masculinity. Gender stereotypes are generalizations about what men and women are like, and they are typically is a great deal of co<sup>10</sup>nsensus about them (Hentschel et al., 2019). Based on theory about gender stereotypes<sup>11</sup> men are characterized as more agentic than women, taking charge and being in control, Masculine characteristics are: acts as a leader, aggressive, ambitious, analytical, assertive, athletic, competitive, defending own beliefs, dominant, forceful, abilities, independent, individualistic, makes decisions easily, masculine, self-reliant, self-sufficient, strong-personality, willing to take a stand, and willing to take risk.<sup>12</sup> These characteristics provide a good representation of prescriptive gender stereotypes, at least as they existed in the early 1970s (Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

Ellemers (2018) also argues that gender stereotypes are reinforced by the portrayal of women and men in various media, such as advertisements, tv series, news programs, and so on. (Murnen & Don (2012) explain that it is simple to identify the ideal physical appearance of men, just as female models in magazines and TV commercials show slim women, the media displays portraits of athletic men with enormous muscles. This creates a perspective that the most ideal and attractive man is the muscular one. As a result, most men tend to possess a muscular body as a form of dissatisfaction with their body, moreover, they do believe that muscular men are more attractive to women than those who are not (Murnen & Don, 2012). This muscular body carries a message about masculinity, in which enormous muscles signify power, control, and strength, like the stereotypes and expectations formed in men.

However, although gender stereotypes seem to benefit or elevate the position of men, in fact men are also harmed because of the existing stereotypes that give higher emphasis and expectations on men as a group that is considered superior.<sup>13</sup> Based on the research conducted by Wong et al. (2017, as cited in Ellemers 2018) reveals that men who are driven by masculine st<sup>14</sup>erotypes to be independent and exercise power over women suffer social disadvantage and impaired mental health, including depression, loneliness, and substance abuse. This is the main point that toxic masculinity wants to emphasize that patriarchal culture which forms stereotypes about men and women, is detrimental to both of them.

### **Popu<sup>17</sup> Culture**

Popular culture is the culture in everyday lives that is present in all human groups in the form o<sup>17</sup> performance, expression, and symbolism, which is more than just entertainment. Popular culture plays a vital role in expression of cultural identity and the social well-being of human groups. Cultural groups share many elements of popular culture in common, but each has its own unique set of customs influenced by several factor<sup>9</sup> such as gender, class, and ethnicity (Fedorak, 2009).

Popular culture possesses its form of power, it can generate political commentary and activism, mirror changing social values and societal practices, resist mainstream hegemonic, and even influence the way people understand the world (Fedorak, 2009).

Thus, popular culture is very influential in developing some perspectives in society, including gender equality issues. Therefore, this theory is needed in this analysis because the term toxic masculinity is also discussed in popular culture, moreover, the object of this research is a popular film that holds an important role as a medium to spread popular culture.

Additionally, the portrayal of masculinity that teenagers see from the popular culture, television, even literature, are generally critically simplified, emphasizing the characteristics of toxic masculinity, including physicality, superiority, and dominance Siagian (2022). Beynon (2002, as cited on Siagian 2022) this kind of portrayal is influenced by cultural assimilated which further forms cultural standards regarding how men are expected to be, for men are not born with masculinity. Thus, the discussion regarding popular culture is required to emphasize its dangerous of portraying men which prompts toxic masculinity thought.

## METHOD

This research conducted using the qualitative method. There are several notions that presented by Taylor (2015) regarding qualitative research, for instance qualitative research are concerned with the meaning people attach to things in their lives also how people think and act in their everyday lives. Therefore, because this research is about toxic masculinity which is a part of popular culture, thus qualitative method is the appropriate method to observe this social phenomenon.

The source of data in this research divided into two categories; primary source and supporting source. The primary source of this research collected by the researcher from the film and the original script of *Captain America: The First Avenger* film. Because the analysis of this study is used intrinsic approach or also called as objective approach (Ratna, 2006), so it focused on the narrative elements of the film, including character and characterization, plot and setting. Additionally, because the object is a film, therefore just like drama, the analysis not complete without concerning the film or the performance. It is because the script was composed to be performed or shown, so the description in the script is not clear enough like novel. Further, to obtain more information the researcher collected several supporting sources, such as previous studies, some reviews on the internet about the film, books, journals, articles, magazines, and many more.

In composing the analysis, the first step is by collecting the primary data from the film and the original script of *Captain America: The First Avenger* film. Primary data was obtained from identifying several intrinsic elements of film such as theme, characters and characterization, setting, and plot. The researcher drew a table of research data to map those elements and then wrote down each discovery in the form of dialogue or narrative in the film script. The main element in this analysis is the character and characterization, for it analyzed the representation of toxic masculinity in a Steve Rogers character. Thus, to obtain the data the researcher observed the whole dialogue and narration in the script, especially Steve's dialogues. Not only that, the researcher also noticed the expression and depiction of Steve Rogers on the film. Besides character and characterization, theme, setting, and plot were included in data collected to obtain a comprehensive depiction of the story. Therefore, the researcher watched the film and read the original script back and forth in several times.

After that, the researcher highlights the data related to the problem statement while searching for some supporting data in books, journals, etc. The marked data is data that described the characteristics of toxic masculinity behavior in accordance with toxic

masculinity theory which was identified through dialogue and narrative. Further, the collected data was analyzed first by identifying Steve Rogers' behaviors that represented toxic masculinity based on the three main components of toxic masculinity. The researcher wrote an analysis by concerning the correlation between the intrinsic elements of the story, then connected it to the theory of toxic masculinity and gender stereotypes based on literature review. The final step is to draw analytical conclusions as answers to the research questions explained in the findings and discussion section.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section described the main findings and also the explanation and interpretation regarding toxic masculinity characteristics found in Steve Rogers character, which discussed separately according to the core components of toxic masculinity; toughness, anti-femininity, and power. In addition, it synchronized the toxic masculinity characterizations found with the theories used in making the overall conclusion.

### *Anti-Femininity*

In the beginning of the film, Steve was shown as a short, thin, and frail man. Besides, he also had asthma. Even though he had a small and frail body, however, he had a big ambition to become a soldier. Unfortunately, because of his physical appearance and condition, he was always rejected in the army entrance exam. There are several factors caused Steve very obsessed with becoming a soldier, the main factor was setting time which was in the era of World War II. During World War II between America and Germany, America was mobilizing most of the men to fight against Germany (Barrow, 2013). Thus, healthy young American men with strong and muscular bodies flocked to join the American army.

Figure 1.  
The Small and Frail Steve Rogers



Source: (Johnston, 2011).

Further, because most of the men were going to the army, this sparked the mindset that the only obligation of men in those days was to fight, and this happened to Steve. The situation at that time caused Steve to think that there was no other job worthy for a man rather than being a soldier. Even when he failed many times in the army entrance

exams, he still had a strong desire to become a soldier and had no intention of giving up his ambition.

This kind of thought illustrates the idea of toxic masculinity, which as a man Steve wanted to do something like most men did. He looked down on other jobs, which in fact had no less important role than military work. Moreover, he even ignored the reason he was rejected, that was because he had asthma. Thus, if he became a soldier, he would take part in various strenuous physical activities which could endanger his health condition. This is what is called toxic masculinity behavior when men always put their health aside because masculinity idea required men to be tough and take a risk (Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

However, this fact did not diminish his ambition in the slightest, then he falsified his identity on the recruitment form in order to continue enlisting in the army as if he was a different person. His action in falsifying his identity was completely contrary to what he said that he wanted to serve his country because in fact he lied and did an illegal thing that was clearly against the rules that had been set. This portrays that Steve was ambitious, make a decision easily, and was willing to take a risk as masculine value shapes men's behavior (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). However, these masculine characteristics drove Steve to commit an illegal act to achieve his ambition. Even though his friend, Bucky had forbidden and warned him that if he was found out by the authorities he could have been arrested and imprisoned, it did not change anything. His great ambition made him justified in any way even though he knew it was wrong. This is what indicates the toxic behavior of Steve which is caused by his ambition and desire to become a soldier like other men, thus he only focused on his purpose and neglected the worst possible effect that could happen to him.

On the other hand, another reason that drove Steve so keen to become a soldier was that he hated bullies which he likened to the Nazis who attacked America. He wanted to eliminate all the bullies, whoever they were, that was his answer to Dr. Erskine when he was asked about his reason for becoming a soldier. From the film, it shows that Steve was often bullied by anybody unreasonably, and most of the bullies were men, thus it can be inferred that he hated bullies because he was often bullied. This indicates that the social environment where Steve lived contained toxic masculinity values, as portrayed when Steve was bullied unreasonably the first time he entered the military base. The other recruits who were big and muscular men only ignored him when a soldier named Hodge sabotaged his military training, Hodge intentionally kicked Steve in the face and made him trouble during training. Thus, it can be inferred that the reason why he was bullied was because he was considered weak due to he did not represent masculine characteristics in the forms of physical appearance. It also can be seen as Steve was the only man that was bullied by Hodge, for the other recruits were big men same as Hodge.

This kind of situation that Steves experienced is appropriate to the theory of toxic masculinity on Rotundi (2020) which states that **the idea of toxic masculinity taught men to be the strongest, and it caused men to commit violence and aggression. It leads men to picture themselves as aggressive and powerful.** This idea of toxic masculinity portrays in Hodge's characterization as a masculine man as he had a big and muscular body, he did violence in the form of bullying Steve whom he considered as weak for Steve was small and frail. Thus, it was reasonable why Steve was so eager to achieve the standard of masculinity by being a soldier and having an athletic body just like Hodge and other men because otherwise, he would continue to be bullied all his entire life. Therefore, he was



willing to take a risk by becoming an experiment that he did not even know about it at all, and also withstand all the pain he felt during the experiment process

In short, the toxic masculinity behaviors that occurred in Steve Rogers was influenced by the society and environment. It can be seen through what Steve Rogers had experienced and felt when he was small, thin, and frail, and after he already had an athletic body which was muscular, big, and tall. The small Steve was often bullied, oppressed, unappreciated, and also unattractive among women, because of his non-athletic body, thus he was seen as weak and inferior which was in contrast with the value of masculinity that encourages men to be superior.

This indicates how bad the treatment of society towards Steve, a man who did not fit the standards of masculinity as stated in the theory of gender stereotypes. As a result, he was internalized by those perspectives and driven to do toxic things that were harmful to himself, to prove that he could also be as strong and tough as other men. That was why Steve was very ambitious to become a soldier because he wanted to prove to society that a man who was often underestimated could be better or at least equal to big men. This is also what caused him avoiding to save himself or asking for help when he was beaten and bullied, because he did not want to be seen as weak, thus he defended and tried to fight back, even though it was painful and he knew he could not beat the bullies who were bigger than him.

### **Toughness**

Not only committed an illegal act, but in the film, Steve also committed some behaviors and actions which portrays that he often took big risks without considering the worst consequences that might occur. Just as Steve without no doubt agreed to become the subject of Dr. Erskine's serum experiment in creating super soldiers for war purposes. Being an experiment is certainly a very dangerous thing because if the experiment fails Steve can lose his life. However in the film, there was not any portrayal that shows Steve's doubts, he never questioned anything about the serum that would be tested on his small and thin body, he only asked the reason why he was chosen as the super soldier experiment.

From this, it can be seen that Steve was a man who was not afraid to do dangerous things that were very possible to threaten his life. Steve's behavior was in line with the gender stereotype theory which mentioned masculine characteristics in form of taking a risk and being ambitious (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). This stereotype caused Steve to think that it was proper for him as a man to do a risky thing as long as it was for his ambition, and it was better to risk his life than to give up his ambition. This can be categorized as toxic masculinity behavior in form of toughness where a man to show that he was tough enough, he was willing to do a dangerous thing, as the gender stereotype of masculine taught men to be brave and avoid all the things related to the feeling which were considered as weak like fear.

Furthermore, when the experiment was taking place, and Steve was in the experiment tube after the serum was injected into him, Steve felt so much pain when the dial was at 90 percent running that he screamed so loud. Steve's scream signaled extreme pain he felt, but when Dr. Erskine was about to stop the experiment, Steve stopped him. He said that he was still able to withstand it and asked Dr. Erskine to continue it.

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90...A SCREAM ECHOES FROM THE SPEAKER. Erskine rushes to the window, but can't see in. He barks into the microphone.

DR. ERSKINE (CONT'D)

Steven? STEVEN?

Peggy rushes out of the booth and down the stairs.

PEGGY CARTER

Shut it down!

The lights get brighter. The viewers shield their eyes.

DR. ERSKINE

MR. STARK, KILL THE REACTORS

Suddenly, everyone in the lab hears:

STEVE (ON SPEAKER)

No...

In the booth, Brandt and Phillips exchange an amazed look.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Don't...

Stark's hand hovers over the dial.

STEVE (CONT'D)

I can do this.

Erskine swallows. With great hesitation, he nods to Stark.

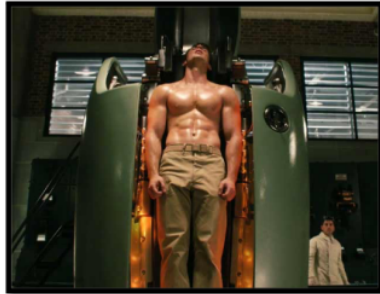
STARK GIVES THE DIAL A FINAL TURN. 100.

(Markus & McFeely, 2011, Scene 45, p.38-39).

Then, when the experiment was over, Steve's body was successfully and drastically changed, his body turned big, tall, and muscular. Steve's decision that wanted to continue the experiment even though he was in pain indicates that he wanted the kind of body posture he had after the experiment which was tall, big, and muscular. He was willing to endure the pain because he had already felt the changes in his body as the dial was at 90 percent, thus it can be concluded that the experiment was almost done and the changes were close to perfect. Additionally, it can be inferred that the reason why Steve wanted to possess a muscular body before was that it was the ideal body for men which he knew could make him achieve his ambition to become a soldier, as he no longer had the weak physique as before which was the only reason he could not pass the army entrance exam.

It is based on the gender stereotype theory which mentioned one of the masculine characteristics is an athletic body (Prentice & Carranza, 2002) and one of the athletic body characteristics is muscle. This masculine value drove Steve to ignore all the pain he felt to possess an athletic body like other men, thus he could be a soldier as he dreamed for the whole time. On the other hand, Steve's action when he ignored the pain he felt to possess an athletic body portrays a characteristic of toxic masculinity in the form of toughness, for toxic masculinity promotes the idea that men have to be strong and tough (Sculos, 2017), for this reason, Steve avoided showing his vulnerability.

Figure 2.  
Steve Rogers' Body Transformation



Source: (Johnston, 2011).

The representation of toxic masculinity behaviors of Steve in terms of toughness also can be seen through his reaction in facing the bullies. As it was known that Steve was a small man, thus he was in contrast with the bullies who were big, tall, and muscular men. However, even though he already knew he could not beat the bullies, running from them was not an option for him, Steve preferred to hold on until the bullies stopped beating him. For example, it was portrayed in the scene when Steve was beaten by a big guy in the movie theater alley. Steve kept trying to fight back and parry the big guy's punches, but they did not hurt him at all. He even told the big guy "I can do this all day" which indicates that he was still strong and tough enough to continue fighting even though he was painful. This kind of speech also his action which trying to withstand painful conditions, indicates a characteristic of toxic masculinity in the form of toughness. As a man, Steve wanted to be seen as a tough man, thus he did not want to run away because it would be considered a loser, as toxic masculinity required men to be able to fight and should have physical strength (Rotundi, 2020). Not only that, but Steve's behavior also represents that he wanted to show his manliness to the big guy, that even though he was already overwhelmed, he would not give up.

However, this could harm Steve's health because if the bullies hit his vital organs he could lose his life. Nevertheless, because of his toxic masculinity, he always thought that he should fight and be tough in adverse conditions as he did not want to look for another safety solution. Further, Steve, who was saved by his friend, Bucky when he was beaten by the big guy, told his friend that he almost defeated the big guy. In fact, this was contrary to the fact that happened, which Bucky already knew, that it was Steve who was battered. Steve's attitude shows that he did not want to be seen as weak or considered weak by others, including his own best friend. This is in line with the theory of toxic masculinity by McIntosh (2016), which explains that toxic masculinity was a fear of being perceived by others as "feminine" and therefore "unmanly." For this reason, Steve pretended as he could defeat the big guy, for he wanted Bucky to see him as a strong and tough man, also he did not want to complain about the pain which he felt, to cover his vulnerability, thus he would consider as weak or unmanly.

Unfortunately, even though Steve's body had turned into a muscular, tall and big body, also with extraordinary strength for the experiment was successful, Steve still did not involve in the war. Colonel Phillips doubted him because the way he obtained that muscular body was different from the other soldiers. Other soldiers gained strength and muscular body from military training while Steve only from an experimental serum or in other words unnatural. On the other hand, Senator Brandt assigned Steve to perform on

stage at fundraising event for war needs as an American hero named Captain America. As a consequence, Steve again did a dangerous thing. He carried out a rescue mission alone to the enemy base to prove that he was strong and capable to be a soldier. This kind of behavior clearly shows the portrayal of toxic masculinity value in terms of toughness. Steve again endangered himself, as he wanted others to see him that he was brave and tough enough to carry out this dangerous mission alone, yet he ignored all the worst consequences that could happen to him.

In this film, the representation of toxic masculinity is mainly emphasized in the men's bodies. It can be seen from the depiction of the difference in Steve's body before and after using the serum, which implies that a muscular body like Steve was an exact picture of a strong and mighty soldier. This is also illustrated by the reaction of Colonel Phillips, who always looked down on Steve because of his small and skinny body even though Steve had proved his guts, and he greatly praised Hodge, the recruit who was strong and big. This is what is called the toxic masculinity idea, where a man's strength is only measured and seen through his body, as toxic masculinity taught men to have physical strength, therefore men who are not will be considered weak and demeaned.

On the other hand, this film also shows that to be a soldier is not merely about having extraordinary physical strength, but courage and the guts to fight. This is what is depicted when Steve managed to save hundreds of soldiers in the enemy base alone after he was not allowed to be involved at all in the war because Colonel Phillips only considered him as an experiment whose strength was unnatural, thus he was still considered weak. Steve who succeeded in proving his toughness and ability to fight even though he was always doubted was finally recognized and appreciated, even immediately got a mandate to lead the next missions. From here, it can be seen that although this film focuses on the man's body, the story also illustrates that a muscular body was not the main thing in becoming a soldier, but courage.

### **Power**

Luckily, Steve was successful in carrying out the rescue mission. Based on the data, since that time Colonel Phillips also the soldiers who mocked him started to appreciate and believe in him. Not only that, but Steve also became more adored and loved by women and he was entrusted to be the leader on the battlefield he wanted to be. From this, it can be inferred that the essence of being a soldier was not a muscular, big, and tall body, but courage and guts. However, because of the toxic masculinity idea, people measured men's strength, courage, and guts based on their body and muscles, as men were characterized by their athletic bodies. On the other hand, this also shows that a man would only be acknowledged and appreciated if he could prove his masculinity through his toughness, guts, and courage, also supported by his muscular body. Therefore, it caused men often commit harmful actions or dangerous things, whether those that can harm others such as violence and oppression, as well as those that harm themselves. This was suitable with the toxic masculinity idea in the form of power, which taught men that they should obtain power and status (Ingram et al., 2019), as Steve wanted to become a soldier to get respect from others because it could raise his social status in society.

On the other hand, this kind of situation shows significant different between how society treated the small, thin, and frail Steve, with the big, tall, and muscular Steve. Despite of the small Steve was often bullied by men, because of his weak physical appearance it also made Steve unattractive to women. This was seen when Steve was invited by Bucky to do a double date with two women, but the reaction of the woman

who was paired with him showed she disliked and felt disgusted for Steve, which indicates that she did not appreciate Steve at all, even though he did not do anything wrong to her. The way Steve was treated by women illustrates the existence of a social environment that contained a toxic masculinity mindset in assessing and treating men. Meanwhile, the women were so excited and cheerful around his friend, Bucky who was a soldier with an athletic body, thus it can be inferred that a man would look charming to women if his body was athletic as the masculine characteristic defines a man to possess that kind of body (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Additionally, Steve had realized that he was disliked because he was short and thin, thus he was reluctant to approach women.

In short, the reason why an athletic body can be the most important characteristic of masculinity is that most people judge the strength and power of a man through his body. Thus, a man with a muscular body will be considered as strong, brave, and tough, therefore he will be liked and respected. On the contrary, men who do not have an athletic body just like the small Steve became unappreciated. As a consequence, Steve felt unappreciated and unvalued by people, especially women then drove him to the idea that he had to be the same as the other athletic men. Therefore, it made him so keen to be a soldier and also caused him to take all the dangerous risks and ignored his safety which are the characteristics of toxic masculinity behavior. From this, it can be inferred that toxic masculinity can begin with the unappreciated feeling of a man who is not in line with masculinity standards. This causes a lack of self-love, consequently, the man then tries to do toxic things to achieve existing masculinity standards, so he can get respect from society.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, it can be concluded that the representation of toxic masculinity in Steve Rogers' Captain America: The First Avenger emphasizes several things, including 1) the depiction of muscular men as ideal man, 2) men must be tough, strong, and dare to take risks, 3) men must pursue their ambitions by any means, 4) men must be able to do everything, especially those related to physical strength like fighting on the battlefield, 5) men must not look weak, so they must avoid expressing emotions as it considered as feminine.

These five points are characteristics of toxic masculinity based on the stereotypes and expectations of society about how men should look and behave, which can prompt men to commit violence, suppress and force men to do dangerous things that could harm themselves. Previous studies related to toxic masculinity mostly discussed male antagonist characters, because it is a bad character, thus it is attached to villain or criminals. The average villain in a story certainly has a strong body and strength to support his role. However, in this research it can be seen that it is not only male antagonist characters who have toxic masculinity thoughts, but so do male protagonist character.

Furthermore, the researcher has several suggestions and recommendations for further research regarding to this research. Other researchers can conduct research on toxic masculinity in the film using a different approach, for instance using psychological approach. Since toxic masculinity can cause serious impact on a man's psychological condition as depicted in this study, so other researchers can reveal symptoms or disorders suffered by the male characters in the film as effect of toxic masculinity. Not only having two sequels, this film has also been adapted into a novel by Alex Irvine, which is already available on various online trading platforms. Therefore, this novel can also be the object of further research by using comparative research between the depiction of toxic

masculinity in the film and in the novel. Obviously, there will be a significant difference as the description in the novel is more detailed, thus can reveal deeper interpretations.

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