

COUNTER DISCOURSE OF MACULINITY IN *AVENGER: END GAME* MOVIE

Agustin Diana Wardaningsih¹, E. Ngestirosa Endang Woro Kasih²
agustin.wardaningsih@uph.edu¹, ngestirosa@teknokrat.ac.id²

Universitas Pelita Harapan¹, Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia²

Abstract

Masculinity in mass communication always attracts attention and is a hot topic of discussion. The masculinity of men who are always juxtaposed with women is a power struggle on two sides: men as men themselves and men compared to women. The study aims to counter the dominant masculinity issue in *Avenger: The End Game* (2018) movie. This study sheds light on the position of men in superhero films who are always dominant in masculinity. However, this film also shows declining male masculinity where men show their powerless side. This study was conducted with a descriptive qualitative method. Stuart Hall's representation theory and Chafetz's masculinity are the main theories to dissect male masculinity. Secondary data from other journals and books also supported the analysis. Finding and analysis finally show that men's powerless and men's emotions become male declining masculinity in this film.

Keywords: *communication, declining, domination, male, masculinity*

Introduction

Masculinity has been widely discussed, and its terminology is practiced and applied to differentiate particular gender in all media. Masculinity, as Connell (2005) stated, “*can be considered as the way people think of themselves, conceptualize themselves, and self-identify as men.*” This statement refers to ‘being a man’ (Mackenzie, 2017). Someone could briefly define masculinity as simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage in that place in gender, and the effects of these practices on bodily experience, culture, and personality (Connell, 2005). The culture has then a role in constructing and stereotyping masculinities. Therefore, masculinity is not just a personal, private, or intimate identity. People consider masculinity a political, cultural, and social marker that inherently regulates other social identities, power dynamics, and dominance dynamics (Lennes, 2020). Masculinity clashes with the distinct characteristics of man, which means it imposes on men what they should and should not do. They are tied with certain societal features. Madsen (2006) also stated that masculinity could be related to oppression, which can be reworded in traits such as competitiveness, exploitation, greed, and violence.

Paten (2018) stated that men and women are formulated differently. The circular social structures that continuously serve society cause differences. Men are expected to be masculine, assertive, aggressive, knowledgeable, reasonable, and dynamic. Meanwhile, women should be feminine, obedient, powerless, intuitive, emotional, and conversational (talk about something). Other men stereotypes are the interest in transportation mode and technology, beverages, and casual sex with many partners. Meanwhile, women like shopping for make-up, social drinking with friends, and have committed relationships. Those patterns mostly appear in mass communications.

The traits of men and women are not only found in real-life human interactions but widely disseminated mass communication products. One of which is through films. As part of mass communication, films can be regarded as a tool to convey messages that will shape public opinion and behavior. The film is a medium for delivering messages and a means of mass communication, which plays a role in educating the public through the messages in the film's story. Therefore, films have a significant influence in shaping social constructions that will influence people's behavior. Irawanto in Sobur (2004, 127) said that film can record the reality that grows and develops in society, which is projected on the screen. A film can display a message implicitly or explicitly, which can later influence the audience and even change and shape the audience's character through the film they watch.

Regarding this issue, social construction of men can be represented difference in mass media. Media can sometimes counter the position of men as the story is needed. Counter means opposition. This study aims to have counter discourse of masculinity in Avenger: End Game (2018) movie. Thus, the study will delineate the opposition issue of masculinity in the film media, Avenger: End Game (2018) movie.

Literary Review

Films can be made to convey the story of a culture and society in it (Ibrahim, 2007, 173). Siregar in Nugroho (2005, xviii-xix) explains that the films produced up to now can be identified as cultural texts of the local community that offer social values as an alternative that develops in the community. Social values are general instructions that last a long time to direct behavior to something right or wrong, good or bad, in everyday life (Rohman et al., 2003, 122). The values that will be conveyed in a film story produced have undergone construction since the screenplay was made by the writer (Burton in Bourdeu, 2010, 39). A director will direct the extent to which the film will be produced and shown to the public (Nugroho, 2005, 9). One of the messages is the theme of a man's masculinity depicted in the film. In cinematic images of men, the concept of masculinity is explicit in describing men's representation (Ardia, 2017). The structure of cinema contains the idea of masculinity, namely the view of the camera, the view of the audience, and the view of the male character in the narrative. In the film industry, there is male domination, so when the production process occurs, the concept of shooting in the direction of the camera's view still constructs that men have strong and tough figures. The view of the audience that in general, prefers that even men, in their powerlessness and weakness, must be shown as solid and rigid figures. Mulvey in Brooks, 2011, 252. Films that contain male toughness, one of which appears in the superhero genre.

A film genre is defined as a type or classification of a group of films that have the same (typical) character or patterns, such as setting, content, story subject, theme, story structure, action or event, period, style, situation, icon, mood, and character. (Pratista, 2018, 40). The classification results in various popular genres such as action, adventure, drama, comedy, horror, thriller, noir, romance, etc. The classification of the superhero genre has a plot that is the process of a hero getting his power so that he becomes a figure of truth enforcer and crime slayer.

Superhero characters have always been inseparable from two popular comics, DC Comics, and Marvel. Since 1979, DC has had success with Superman, while Marvel competed with the X-Men and the iconic superhero Spiderman in the 2000s (Pratista, 2018, 55). Marvel's big breakthrough adopted various comic stories into one cinematic story. In the Avenger film story, Marvel features superheroes such as Iron Man, Hulk, Thor, Captain America, Ant-Man, Spider-Man, and Doctor Strange. The audience is directed to see several

big superheroes at once in a film produced by Marvel. Men in superhero figures are usually shown to have super powers that exceed the abilities of men in general or exceed human capabilities. However, the power is not purely in a man. There are additional powers because of the failure of scientific experiments, technology, gifts, and practice. In the Marvel superhero, the figure of Iron Man relies on energy because of technology. Tony Stark's human figure will become strong if he wears armor to compete against enemies controlled by super-advanced technology. Then the figure of Thor is a human figure who was born as a descendant of a god with long life and physical strength, but he has the power of his lightning club. Then the results of scientific experiments can be seen in the Hulk figure. An explosion from a gamma bomb hits Dr. Bruce Banner, so he can turn into an enormous figure and have strong emotions. He has very strong emotions, such as anger in his human figure. This anger will turn him into the Hulk figure.

The masculine representation is clearly illustrated in superhero movie. However, movie viewers do not sometimes realize what they actually see. The masculine values of each cultural atmosphere and the development of the times also influence the stereotyped concept of masculinity values in society. According Chafetz (2006), there are seven categories of masculinity, including 1) physical appearance, which has strength in it, for example, male, athletic, strong, and brave, 2) functional, where the man's position is the backbone for his relatives and himself, 3) sexual appearance, which includes his experience in having relationships with women, 4) emotions which can control or hide the emotions they feel, 5) intellectual, intelligent, logical, rational, and objective thinking, 6) interpersonal including a responsible and independent man, a spirit and dominated leader, 7) ambitious, self-centered, moral, trustworthy, competitive, and adventurous.

The development of masculinity values is also different from time to time. In this current era, masculinity form is more diverse in types. The level of masculinity and femininity values has shifted in their meaning. Zheng (2015) argues that the masculinity crisis is considered jeopardy because it sometimes reflects powerlessness, inferiority, feminized passivity, and social deterioration, reminiscent of the colonial past.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method, and it aims to delineate the counter-discourse of masculinity in *Avenger: End Games* (2018) movie. Qualitative research should deal with a natural, descriptive setting, emphasizing the process rather than the result, inductive, and interpretative (Ritchie, 2003). The qualitative method can also analyze social phenomena through interpretation and criticism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Meanwhile, the data research used *Avenger: End Game* as the primary source and some articles, other films, and books as the secondary source. This research data were dialogue, narration, and pictures from film scenes. Creswell (2007) stated that data were collected first by reading the data source. Next, the catalog table grouped data based on the research topic.

Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation

The representative theory closely relates to culture because Hall believed that culture shares meaning, while language is the privileged medium that can make sense of things (Hall, 1997). It can be said that language makes it possible for a culture to be shared. Hall believed that language could do that because language operates as a symbolic system, and that belief becomes the beginning of the occurrence of representation theory. Representation through language deals with producing meaning (Hall, 2003). More specifically, the writer

applied the discursive approach by Hall (2003, p. 6) as one approach to representation theory. The discursive approach is the knowledge that considers a context's use and relevancy (Hall, 1997). The discursive approach allows the writer to analyze and discuss the meaning and relevance of a social issue. Michael Foucault develops the discourse approach as the primary source of the idea.

Findings and Discussion

The study of masculinities traits in Avenger: End Game movie found that that some characters appear diiference from those stated by Chafetz (2006). It can be said that there are men and heroes in the film who do not appear strong, brave, sexual, attractive, et.al. The analysis found out that some characters in Avenger: End game movie show a man who appears powerless, emotional, whiny, spoiled, and coward.



Men's Powerless

Superhero films in general, show one category of masculinity - physical appearance that looks manly, athletic, strong, and brave. In this film, several superhero characters seem different from the masculinity category of physical appearance.

Tony Stark – Iron Man

Superhero Iron Man is a superhero using advanced technology. His power is a robot suit that makes him strong, can fly, and dare to eradicate the enemy. In one scene in this film, he is visited by other superhero characters such as Captain America, Hulk, and Black Hawk. Iron Man sits in a wheelchair and is still receiving a medical infusion. Because of a heated argument, he stands up and suddenly is fainted. He is rushed to the hospital, and then has to be bedridden and receives the attention of many people. This shows that a superhero should emphasize physical strength but looks weak and must need the help of others.

Table 1: Data 1

Picture	Narration
	<p>TONY, weak, sits in a hi-tech wheelchair, dripping into his arm. He stares, taking in the loss.</p>
	<p>TONY <i>I've got nothing for ya, Cap. No coordinates, no clues, no strategies, no options. Zero, zip, nada. No trust. (rips out RT) Here. You take this. You find him, you put this on, and hide. (drops to his knees) I'm fine!</i></p> <p>Tony COLLAPSES. Rhodey catches him.</p>

Tony Stark's character in the film clearly doesn't support Chafetz's theory that physical appearance of masculinity is like virile, strong, athletic, and brave man. A Tony Stark as Iron Man, who is usually strong, actually looks whiny, skinny and lacks enthusiasm. A statement to Captain America that *"I've got nothing for ya, Cap. No coordinates, no clues, no strategies, no options. Zero, zip, nada. No trust. Here. You take this. You find him, you put this on, and hide. (drops to his knees) I'm fine!"*. This statement mean 'no hope' and Tony's masculinity is not fulfilled. He turns into a coward and has no ambition. Tony does not have the physical masculinity from Chafetz's theoris. They are physical appearance and ambitious attitude. Bracher (2015, p. 116) said that *"the depressive position .. runs directly counter to the basic script of dominating, heroic, chivalric masculinity"*. The decline of masculinity occurs for several reasons. Masculinity will always be associated with the existence of women. If men are said not to be masculine in certain cases, it is associated with women's weakness.

Male powerless appear in men's lives because of female power or subordination. Rowlands (2021) quoted that the decline of male masculinity is also because of violence perpetrated by women. In real cases, it can be seen with Jonny Deep, who experienced violence and the subordination of women. In this film, the subordination of women and the power of women that lead to violence in men are not found in the characters. The power of women such as Black Widow and Superwoman arises from the inability of men to overcome existing problems. For this reason, women are present as a help for the helplessness of men. The powerlessness of men is also compared to the stereotype of women, who often appear weak, fragile, griper, and powerless. This condition is seen in the characters Tony Stark and Thor.

Thor

The counter position of masculinity can also be related to physical appearance. Men must have an athletic body with an ideal body weight that supports their appearance. The superhero Thor with the power of a hammer, is usually depicted as having muscular physical strength. In *Avenger: End Game* movie, he is depicted as meager one with excessive body weight, depicted by a large stomach and agile movements.

Table 2: Data 2



Picture	Narration
	<p>Thor enters, confused, a little drunk, shirtless...and tremendously fat. Rocket and hulk stare.</p>

Thor is a descendant of the king who initially has a strong and mighty body. In this film, he looks whiny, fat, and cowardly. He is afraid to fight Thanos and feels he has no power anymore. He loses his hammer and thinks he has no power at all. His overthinking creates Thor as a powerless superhero. In Thor, Marvel, as a film company, presents different superheroes. Superheroes in previous films have never been represented like Thor, who is changed and utterly different in physical terms. Thor appears as the opposite of a superhero

with complete masculinity in this film. Thor does not fulfill the aspect of a superhero with a robust physical appearance and an ambitious attitude.

The following picture is also about Thor, who is not only fat and cowardly but also has a spoiled nature. He became afraid in front of his mother and tried to avoid her. Thor becomes fearful of his physical form and the power he no longer possesses. His leadership qualities are lost, and he becomes a coward to meeting his mother. The superhero who 'fails' in fulfilling the masculine figure makes this film closely related to the post-humanist issue. This issue raises the opinion that human nature will change and highly depends on technology. Thor is defenseless when he does not have the hammer he usually uses. He has declined the human side that has no belief in his strength.

Table 3: Data 3

	<p>Frigga walks down a corridor, alone. Thor sneaks from column to column, following her. She pauses, sensing something. Thor hides. When he peers again, Frigga is gone. Then he turns around to find Frigga standing beside him. Thor jumps.</p>
	<p>FRIGGA What are you doing?</p> <p>THOR Mother! What? Nothing. Hello.</p> <p>FRIGGA You're better off leaving the sneaking to your brother. (re. his bathrobe) What are you wearing?</p>

The picture shows how Thor tries to avoid his mother because he feels fat. The feeling of looking fat and powerless makes him a coward and inferior in front of his mother. Men will always be afraid when he becomes weak in front of women. He immediately becomes a coward and tries to stay away from the crowd. Coward men will always appear when compared to women. Connel (2005) points out that the masculinity of men who are always juxtaposed with women is a benchmark for developing a man's personality. Men become 'men of reason' (Connel, 2005) because they are weak in front of women. This is like the case of Thor, who feels 'powerless' in front of women, even women who are his mother. Thor, who always looks macho, strong, and invincible, can fall in shame in front of his mother. Marvel also looks at men's weaknesses instead of male domination of power.



Men's Emotion

In the early scenes of *Avenger: End Game* movie, Tony Stark's figure as the superhero Iron Man is portrayed as being so beaten, sad, and feeling powerless and defenseless because he has lost strength and has felt defeated against the enemy. His self-confidence is at its lowest point. He requires mental strength given by the figure of Captain America. An emotional condition that cannot be concealed. Thor looks sad, stressed, and depressed, and he finally looks for a way out by drinking and overeating, which affects his physical

condition, which has drastically changed. They depict this emotional superhero man. The emotion which appears in several superheroes in *Avenger: End Game* also comes up in other superhero characters. In Tony Stark and Thor, those male superhero weaknesses are described beyond the female character's strength. In addition, Hawkeye, in this film, cannot hide his emotions well because of the loss of Black Widow or Natasha Romanov. However, Black Widow and Tony Stark's wife show strong women if compared to Tony Stark, Thor, and Hawkeye.

Clint Barton – Hawkeye

Table 4: Data 4

Picture	Narration
	<p>NATASHA <i>Let me go.</i> CLINT BARTON No. Please no...</p> <p>The two friends stare at each other, a lifetime between them.</p> <p>NATASHA It's okay...</p>
	<p>CLINT BARTON Natasha, no</p> <p>Then Natasha Romanoff kicks off the cliff wall, yanking out of Clint's grasp. She falls... Clint dangles from the grappling hook, staring down, helpless, stifling his scream</p>

Clint Barton or Hawkeye in the picture ultimately loses the power of women to sacrifice. Barton is not fully prepared to sacrifice for humanity's sake and resist Thanos' power. Barton's unpreparedness to sacrifice is marked by his defeat with Natasha Romanov, or Black Widow. Barton's unpreparedness to sacrifice is that he has a wife and children, while Natasha has no family at all. He is the adopted son of an obscure family. The defeat with Natasha to sacrifice makes Barton shocked and emotional. He can not face the Hulk's question about the whereabouts of Natasha, who can not return to their realm.

The male emotion of Hawkeye in this film is also clearly seen in other male characters. If Hawkeye cries because he lost Natasha, all the male characters in this film show shameless tears. All the show's male characters fall into crying and being sad when they experience defeat and lose someone. On the other hand, this male character also shows excessive emotions when he has to cry because of loss. This shows a man's unpreparedness to lose and lose. Marvel indeed shows the human side of men.

The idea that emotions are related to moral notions of virtue can be explained in rational terms. The powerlessness of men in male characters cannot be said to be a weakness or a decrease in male masculinity. Every man also has a feminine side. Emig in Horlacher (2015) says that "*emotions are interpreted as 'feminine' and so as a threat to male identities, and partly because masculinities are identified with self-control as a mode of dominance in which reason supposedly silences inner emotions, feelings and desires*" (p. 127-128). However, superhero films are made to show the dominance of men who are so strong. Marvel, in this case, finally admits that the feminine side becomes important in mass communication. The film is also made to meet the audience's challenges, which women also dominate as male superhero fans.

Conclusion

Masculinity is the real face of men and the study in *Avenger: End Game* shows male masculinity in a different way. Masculinity falls in powerlessness and emotions shown in male characters. Male domination in superhero films becomes more humanist when men become 'feminine'. The 'feminine' men in superhero films will be interesting for further studies.

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