



Toxic Masculinity Represented in Colleen Hoover's *It Ends With Us* (2016)

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Abstract

This study is an analysis of Colleen Hoover's novel, "It Ends with Us". Toxic masculinity refers to harmful social norms and expectations that promote traditional gender roles that associated with how man should behave to be called as being a real man. This research aims to find out the forms of toxic masculinity that represented by the male characters named Ryle Kincaid and Andrew Bloom in this novel. The result of this research shows that there are three forms of toxic masculinity that can be found in this novel such as misogyny, domination and physical violence.

Key words: Toxic Masculinity, Misogyny, Domination, Physical Violence

A. INTRODUCTION

Masculinity refers to the characteristics, behaviors, and qualities traditionally associated with being a man or considered culturally and socially masculine. According to Connell (1995), masculinity refers to the role that men and women play in gender dynamics and the effects that such practices have on one another's physical characteristics, personalities, and cultural customs. Male and female individuals can both exhibit masculine behaviors, hence still Connell (1995) masculinity is a social construct; its definition changing according to place and time. Connell's examination of masculinity as hegemonic or even called as hegemonic masculinity offers a conceptual framework that takes into account societal structures and hierarchical mechanisms responsible for empowering men in Western society. This framework acknowledges the significant role played by historical processes in the development of hegemonic masculinity, which has evolved over the years through shifting stereotypes, definitions, and perceptions of what it means to be masculine. Males must be strong, powerful, and competent according to the western cultural definition of masculinity and traditional gender roles (Ricciardelli 2012). Males appear to have acted more aggressively than females throughout history, and their violent acts have been documented more frequently because they were motivated by a desire to maintain their reputation

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(Eibach 2016). In this instance, it is clear that men are using violence as a means of maintaining their manliness. So, it can lead men to be included on the term of toxic masculinity. In addition, Blair (2007) stated that masculinity refers to a set of culture expectations about how males should behave, think, and seem. Thus, Toxic masculinity refers to the negative and harmful aspects of this dominant form of masculinity.

Toxic masculinity is one of a theme which discussed in literary works. Toxic masculinity refers to harmful social norms and expectations that promote traditional gender roles that associated with how man should behave to be called as being a real man. It is usually used to describe practices related to gender inequality, male dominance, and control (Johnson, 2005). Terry A. Kupers (2005: 714), he defines the phrase of "toxic masculinity" as the set of socially regressive male characteristics that support homophobia, misoyny, violence, subjection of women, and dominance. This kind of phenomenon is most likely to happen in a society that adopts a patriarchal system. Toxic masculinity is often associated with rigid gender roles and the suppression of vulnerable emotions, which can have detrimental effects on both men themselves and those around them. The concept of toxic masculinity has been increasingly recognized in recent years. It describes a prevalent expression of masculinity in which men employ dominance, aggression, and authority to establish their strength and supremacy, as a result, men who live in culture of violence are demanded to perform that they have the capability to become violent (Patterson in Maghfiroh: 2017).

The reality of such as toxic masculinity that appears in society also can be reflected in the literature work such as novel, and for doing this study the researcher chose the novel entitled *It Ends With Us* (2016) by Colleen Hoover to be the instrument of the research to dissect the term of toxic masculinity. The novel *It Ends with Us* by Colleen Hoover is a powerful and emotionally charged novel that delves the term of toxic masculinity. This novel is set in contemporary America where societal expectations around gender roles can still perpetuate harmful beliefs and practices related to masculinity. This novel shows how social expectations affect the male characters to be toxic. The toxic masculinity that can be found in this novel is represented in the domestic area. Toxic masculinity refers to harmful social norms and expectations that promote traditional gender roles that associated with how man should behave to be called as being a real man. It is usually used to describe practices related to gender inequality, male domination, and male control (Johnson, 2005).

Based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in discussing about the theme of toxic masculinity. The researcher uses the feminist literary approach to analyse the the forms of toxic masculinity that represented by the male character in this novel.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is conducted by using a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative descriptive method is a research method that provides a better understanding of the related phenomena. According to Creswell (2012, p. 274), he

explained the purpose of qualitative descriptive method is to find a detailed explanation and description about the object of the research systematically. Based on the explanation, the researcher will use qualitative descriptive research in conducting this research. The object of this research is taken from the novel “*It Ends with Us*” by Colleen Hoover. *It Ends with Us* is a novel written by Colleen Hoover, an American author known for her contemporary romance and young adult fiction. She's well known as a prominent figure in contemporary romance literature. The novel *It Ends with Us* by Colleen Hoover is a powerful and emotionally charged novel that delves the term of toxic masculinity. This novel is set in contemporary America where societal expectations around gender roles can still perpetuate harmful beliefs and practices related to masculinity. This novel shows how traditional gender roles as could affect the male characters in this novel could turn out to be toxic. *It Ends with Us* published by Atria Books on August 2, 2016. The collected data were analyzed using the qualitative method based on the theoretical framework. The data will be collected by citing quotes from the novel *It Ends with Us* (2016) in a form of paragraphs, sentences, and phrases by these following procedures: Reading the novel *It Ends with Us* (2016) by Colleen Hoover repeatedly using close-reading technique. Identifying the data related to the research questions by marking and taking notes of parts of the novel related to the study. The result of the analyzing process is also presented in the form of words, clauses and sentences. Classifying the data related to the issue of what are the forms of toxic masculinity that can be seen through the male characters in *It Ends with Us*. Analyzing data based on feminist literary theory. Data analysis in *It Ends with Us* uses toxic masculinity theory by Terry A Kupers with research questions that discuss what are the forms of toxic masculinity that can be seen through the male characters.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Forms of Toxic Masculinity That Represented by The Male Character in *It Ends with Us*

1.1 Misogyny

Misogyny is the dislike, contempt, or prejudice against women. It can manifest in various forms, including discrimination, objectification, stereotyping, and even hostility or violence directed towards women based on their gender. This form of toxic masculinity could be found from the male character in this novel, one of the evidence of it can be seen from the quotation below.

People spend so much time wondering why the women don't leave. Where are all the people who wonder why the men are even abusive? Isn't that where the only blame should be placed? (217)

From the quotation above, it can be revealed the misogyny in a form of prejudice or hatred of women. Violence against women, often rooted in misogyny, can occur when individuals wrongly perceive women as weaker or inferior, in this context based on the quotation above put man as the perpetrator who tend to be abusive

towards women. This perspective underscores how toxic masculinity can perpetuate misogyny by perpetuating harmful stereotypes and attitudes towards women, and even blaming women at all situation even when the fact is women actually the victim.

“Mother,” Ryle says. “Meet Lily. My blasphemous whore.” (p.174)

The dialogue of Ryle above contains derogatory language and offensive terms that can be considered misogynistic and disrespectful towards women. Referring to someone as a "blasphemous whore" is not only offensive but also objectifies and degrades the person being talked about, in this context Lily Bloom. Another form of Ryle's objectification towards woman is also can be seen in the quotation below.

*You asked for my recent thought, so I gave to it to you. You're beautiful. I'm a guy. If you were into one-night stands, I would take you downstairs to my bedroom and I would f*ck you. (p.20-21)*

The excerpt above shows the position of women is very unfavorable, as men attempt to objectify women for their own sexual desires by making them as their sexual object. Ryle aimed to fulfill his longing for Lily's physical appearance, by saying word "beautiful". Ryle judge Lily based on her physical appearance symbolizes how men objectify women to attain their desires. Furthermore, the character Andrew Bloom also exhibits Misogyny as the form of toxic masculininity as this quotation below.

I heard him call her a whore and then I heard the first blow. (p121)

The sentence above provides contains the context of misogyny. The term "whore" is a derogatory and sexist that is often used to demean and objectify women. Its usage in the sentence reflects a misogynistic attitude, as it demeans the woman. Additionally, the sentence implies an act of violence ("the first blow"), which is a further manifestation of misogyny, as violence against women is a serious issue related to gender discrimination and power imbalances. Misogyny involves not only the use of derogatory language but also actions that perpetuate the oppression and harm of women.

1.2. Domination

According to Kupers (2005), male dominance is a trait of masculinity for it turns into toxic masculinity because the dominance is shown to force the will of other, it involves the need to aggressively compete and dominate others and encompasses the most problematic proclivities in men. The men in this novel exhibit this form of toxic masculinity. It can be seen from the quotation below.

I am in love with a man who physically hurts me. Of all people, I have no idea how I let myself get to this point. (p.221)

From the quotation above it can be revealed consequence of societal norms that promote male dominance and female submission. The statement of Lily above expresses her emotional turmoil and confusion about allowing herself to be in a relationship with Ryle for letting herself to be submissive under Ryle's toxic behavior, which is in this context, the term "dominance" is relevant because it signifies the power and control exerted by the man in the relationship, which aligns with toxic masculinity traits.

Furthermore, according to Kupers, domination is a form of masculinity, for it turns into Toxic Masculinity because the dominance is shown to force the will of others. This also can be proven from the excerpt below:

He spins me, but my eyes are still closed. I'm too scared to look at him. His hands are digging into my shoulders as he pushes me toward the bed. I start trying to fight him off of me, but it's useless. He's too strong for me. (p.265)

The quotation above reveals a situation where Lily as woman is feeling dominated or overpowered by Ryle, this situation related to Johnson (2005, p.5) that stated the male dominance is reflected the idea that men are always superior to women. From the excerpt above it can be seen the fear and reluctance from the woman character are shown as she mentions her closed eyes and her fear of looking at him. The mention of Ryle's hands digging into her shoulders and the way she attempt to fight him off implies a sense of physical dominance by Ryle.

Another male character who exhibits this behavior is Andrew Bloom, as can be seen in the quotation below.

They were on the couch and he had his hand around her throat(...) She was trying to fight him off and I just stood there, frozen. She kept begging him to get off her and then he hit her right across the face and told her to shut up. (p.121)

The sentence above portrays a situation where control and power could turn into physical aggression to show man dominance. It describes a disturbing and abusive scenario where Andrew is using force and violence to show his dominance over Jenny. The situation that can be seen from the excerpt above is Andrew is physically dominating his wife, Jenny, by having his hand around her throat. Also Jenny's attempt to resist this domination is clear from the sentence. Another Andrew's dominance over other also can be seen from the quotation below.

I remember one time we were walking into a grocery store and an old man was ringing a bell for the Salvation Army. I asked my dad if we could give him some money and he told me no, that he works hard for his money and he wasn't about to let me give it away(...) people like my father are the problem. Instead of helping others, people use the worst-case scenarios to excuse their own selfishness and greed. (p.93)

From the quotation above it can be found the power imbalance. According to Johnson(2005, p.5), he argues that if men occupy superior positions, it's a short leap to the idea that men must be dominance over other. The quotation above shows there is a power imbalance, where the person doing the underestimating assumes a position of superiority or authority over others, in this case Andrew shows his domination over the old man. In this context, Andrew's actions, which involve using worst-case scenarios to justify his selfishness and greed, demonstrate a disregard for empathy and a willingness to exploit situations to his advantage, perpetuating a dynamic where some individuals underestimate or mistreat others to maintain their own interests.

1.3. Violence

As described by Kupers (2005), violence encompasses actions that result in harm, destruction, or attacks directed towards oneself or others. The males character in this novel exhibit this form of toxic masculinity, it can be seen from the quotation below.

In a matter of one second, Ryle's arm came out of nowhere and slammed against me, knocking me backward. There was enough force behind it to knock me off balance. When I lost my footing, I hit my face on one of the cabinet door handles as I came down. Pain shoots through the corner of my eye, right near my temple. (P.185)

From the excerpt above it shows Lily's experience with gender-based violence takes the shape of physical attack by Ryle, and this distressing situation stemmed from a conflict that arose between Ryle and Lily. The result of this troubling incident is that Ryle made Lily sustained a physical injury or wound on her body. Another act of violence that exhibits by Ryle is occurred when Ryle found out another guy's telephone number and began to be jealous. He can't control his emotions, and Lily returned to being the victim of his violence.

*"Ryle!" I yell.
Why did I never throw that number away?!*

[...] I shove myself in front of him and grab his shirt in my fists. "Ryle, please. Let me explain." He grabs my wrists and pushes me away from him. (p.230).

The situation that occurred between Ryle and Lily above depicts an instance of physical violence where one person, Ryle, grabs Lily's wrists and pushes them away. The dialogue, "Ryle, please. Let me explain," suggests that Lily was attempting to communicate or resolve a conflict peacefully before the physical aggression occurred. Ryle's act of violence makes Lily get a wound by that incident on her lips and corners of her eyes.

You have a small cut on your lip. I just bandaged up the cut on your eye. You don't need stitches. (p.231).

The peak of Ryle's act of violence moment for Lily was when he discovered and read Lily's old diary, which had stories from her love story in the past and talks about her ex.

An empty moving box with the words, "Lily's stuff," written on the side of it. And then all the contents that were inside that box. Letters . . . journals . . . empty shoeboxes. I close my eyes and breathe in slowly. He read the journal. No. He. Read. The. Journal. (P. 264)

By reading Lily's old journal, Ryle finally found out the meaning of Lily's tattoo in her neck, and he got really mad. Instead of listening to Lily's explanation, he chose to commit violence in an act of sexual assault.

Another male character that shows the act of violence in this novel is Andrew Bloom. He reflects the toxic masculinity in the form of violence as can be seen from the quotation below:

My father was abusive. Not to me—to my mother. He would get so angry when they fought that sometimes he would hit her. (p.16)

This quotation above provides the evidence of the tendency of how Andrew using violence without hesitating towards his wife. Johnson (2005, P.48) stated that violence against women is a pattern of behavior that reflects the oppressive patriarchal that exist between men and women as dominant and subordinate in society as a whole. This statement can be found from Andrew that tends to use violence as a sign of oppression towards his wife, it can be seen from the word "abusive" that strongly suggests a repeated pattern of harmful actions. When

Andrew gets into arguments, he tends to get extremely mad, which is a big warning sign. This increasing anger can even lead to physical violence, like when it says "sometimes he would hit her".

This is going to be a big one for my mother to hide. My father is usually pretty cognizant of hitting her where it won't leave a visible bruise (...) I've seen him kick her a few times, choke her, hit her on the back and the stomach, pull her hair. The few times he's hit her on the face, it's always just been a slap, so the marks wouldn't stay for long. (P.120)

The excerpt above is revealed Andrew exhibit toxic masculinity in the form of violence, he does violence directed towards his wife. The physical attacks that Andrew does to his wife such as kicking, choking, hitting her on the back and stomach, pulling her hair, and the mention of hitting her on the face suggests a pattern of physical abuse.

She kept begging him to get off her and then he hit her right across the face and told her to shut up. I heard her crying, and then she said, "Please be quiet. Lily is here." "Please be quiet while you rape me, dear." (P. 121)

From the quotation above, it can be shown a distressing situation involving toxic masculinity in the form of violence that represented by Andrew over his wife, he does violence in act of sexual assault. It can be seen from the way his wife considers his action as a rape towards her. Rape occurs if a person is forced to obtain sexual services without the willingness of the person concerned. By this case, Andrew reflects the sexual violence over Jenny. Andrew's action that reflects violence appears not only towards woman but also man.

I'll never forget that moment for as long as I live. Being completely helpless as my father came down on him with a baseball bat. The sound of bones snapping was the only thing piercing through my screams(...)By the time the police got to my bedroom and pulled my father off of him, I didn't even recognize Atlas, he was covered in so much blood(...) (p.170)

The quotation above reveals the situation that is depicted the toxic masculinity in the form of violence. Andrew's violence characterized by the use of physical force of symbolized by the baseball bat, and the resulting injury to Atlas, another man character in this novel. The use of terms like "helpless," "bones snapping," and "covered in so much blood" underscores the severity of the violence. Toxic

masculinity can be implicated in situations where aggression is seen as essential qualities, leading to harmful actions.

Discussion

Based on the results, it can be seen the forms of toxic masculinity that represented by the male character named Ryle Kincaid and Andrew Bloom. Toxic masculinity in this novel is reflected in the domestic area. First, the spousal relationship between Ryle Kincaid and Lily Bloom that puts Ryle as an perpetrator for being an abusive husband and Lily as the victim. Second, the same thing also happens to the relationship between Andrew Bloom and Jenny that represents the relationship as husband and wife. In this case, Andrew Bloom shows the term of toxic masculinity that is also reflected in the domestic area, he is portrayed to be the perpetrator for being an abusive husband. The researcher uses the toxic masculinity theory by Terry A Kupers to dissect the form of toxic masculinity such as misogyny, domination and physical violence that can be found in this novel.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter concludes the analysis of this research. This research reveals the forms of toxic masculinity that represented by the male character in this novel that harmful not only towards woman but also man. Based on the results of this research, it can be concluded that the forms of toxic masculinity that can be found in this novel are included misogyny, domination and physical violence.

The researcher realizes that this paper is actually still not perfect, there are lots of mistakes in it. Thus, the researcher only hopes that this paper can serve as a guide for several literary studies, especially to those who are interested in conducting similiar research or who will conduct research from another novel. For further researchers, they can analyze the toxic masculinity by using the same theory or others in more depth discussion.

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