RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

FIGHTING STEREOTYPES: EXPRESSIONS OF FEMININITY IN PUBLIC SPACES AND THE CHALLENGE OF TOXIC MASCULINITY

Okto David Kristian Zega[1*], Paulus Koritelu[1], Prapti Murwani[1]
[1]Universitas Pattimura, Jalan Ir. M. Putuhena, Ambon 97233, Indonesia

*Correspondence E-Mail: oktodavidkristianz@gmail.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30598/baileofisipvol2iss1pp18-26

ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of toxic masculinity and its impact on gender expression in public spaces in Negeri Rumahtiga, a community characterized by strong patriarchal structures. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis to uncover how hegemonic masculinity manifests and shapes individual behaviors. Findings indicate that toxic masculinity in public spaces harms not only women but also men who deviate from dominant masculine ideals, leading to psychological strain and social exclusion. Expressions of femininity in public are often met with ridicule or suppression, while men are pressured to conform to rigid expectations of strength, emotional restraint, and heterosexuality. This research highlights that masculinity is a socially constructed and contested identity, not an innate male trait. The study offers new insights by addressing the psychological consequences of toxic masculinity on men—an area often overlooked in previous literature. It recommends that sociocultural interventions and inclusive gender discourse are essential to challenging entrenched stereotypes and promoting gender justice. This contribution enhances the understanding of gender construction in localized contexts and supports broader efforts within social sciences and humanities to address structural inequalities and promote emancipatory social change.
Keywords: *Expressions of Femininity, Gender Construction, Hegemonic Masculinity, Public Space, Toxic Masculinity*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, toxic masculinity is influenced by a long-rooted patriarchal culture, where men are given privilege while women are often neglected in terms of their rights (Irwan, 2023; Jais, 2022). These norms lead to the emergence of aggressive behavior and violence. Toxic masculinity reflects norms and expectations that promote dominance and violence in male culture (Ika, 2021; Luthfiah, 2022). Gender equality seeks to eliminate gender stereotypes that limit both sexes by expanding the concept of gender and supporting equality and freedom of expression.

Toxic masculinity is reflected in various harmful behaviors and views, such as the taboo of using skincare products and the excessive pressure on men to conform to hegemonic masculinity standards (Hermawan & Hidayah, 2023; Wikström, 2019). Many men feel compelled

to display strength and aggression, including through bullying, as a way to meet cultural expectations that emphasize toxic masculinity (Ramdani & Wisesa, 2022). Misconceptions about masculinity can also lead men to feel alienated from their potential and choose to remain silent when experiencing sexual violence. Toxic masculinity can also be seen in the prohibition against men expressing emotions or using skincare products and makeup (Irwan, 2023; Nur, 2022; Waling, 2019). This creates a narrow understanding of how men should behave and what roles they should play, emphasizing that men must always be strong and never show vulnerability.

Studies on the expression of femininity in public spaces also highlight how behaviors considered 'feminine' can influence societal perceptions within the community (Ayuningrum, 2021). In Indonesia, the expression of feminine gender traits by men is still considered taboo and often results in exclusion and bullying (Johnson & Ashworth, 2023; Mhembwe, 2019). The social construction that reinforces strict masculinity norms causes many men to feel alienated from their identities and reluctant to open up, especially in situations of sexual violence (Jensen, 2024).

In addition to toxic masculinity, society must also confront the phenomenon of toxic femininity and the rejection of gender non-conformity. Challenging these gender norms is an important step toward a more inclusive and healthy society (Hakim, 2018; Stromquist, 2018). Although efforts have been made to address toxic masculinity, gender norms remain strong in Indonesian society(Jensen, 2024; Piscopo & Kenny, 2020). However, positive changes have occurred with the growing awareness of freedom of expression and the diversity of gender identities.

In Negeri Rumahtiga, strong patriarchal patterns influence gender roles in society (Selvia & Jatiningsih, 2023). Women are often restricted to domestic spheres, while men dominate the role of head of the household. Research in the Maluku region indicates gender inequality due to patriarchal constructs that confine women to domestic sectors (Afdhal, 2023). Further studies on toxic masculinity in Negeri Rumahtiga are needed to better understand gender dynamics in the area.

This research focuses on the manifestation of toxic masculinity in public spaces in Negeri Rumahtiga. The goal is to understand and analyze how toxic masculinity manifests in behavior and interactions in public spaces in Negeri Rumahtiga. This study offers theoretical benefits by contributing important references to the development of social sciences, particularly in gender sociology. The research delves deeper into how toxic masculinity is expressed within specific cultural and social contexts in Negeri Rumahtiga. Consequently, this study not only reveals gender inequalities caused by patriarchal constructs but also describes how prevailing norms affect how men and women understand and express their gender identities. Through this analysis, the study provides deep insights into how dominant social and cultural structures can force individuals to conform to or reject hegemonic masculinity images, as well as the psychological and social impacts that result. Therefore, the contribution of this research is not only limited to academic understanding but is also significant in the context of efforts to address gender injustices and stimulate broader social change.

Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity highlights that masculinity is not an inherent trait of men but rather a dynamic social construct closely linked to power relations

within society. According to Connell, every society has a hierarchy of masculinity where one form of masculinity is dominant and occupies a hegemonic position. Hegemonic masculinity is seen as the ideal representation of manhood, while other forms of masculinity are measured and evaluated based on their proximity to these hegemonic masculinity norms. Characteristics that describe hegemonic masculinity include physical strength, mental toughness, and bravery, often associated with images of strong and resilient men. Additionally, men who hold hegemonic masculinity positions are encouraged to be competitive, ambitious, and constantly striving for success and dominance. They are expected to express themselves as independent individuals and not show too much emotion, as this is often considered a weakness in masculinity norms. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity is also closely related to heterosexual orientation and often belittles or devalues other sexual orientations, such as homosexuality (Connell, 2005, 2018).

Based on previous research by Ramdani & Wisesa (2022) several gaps in the study of toxic masculinity have been identified. This research has not fully supported the concept of toxic masculinity and its impact on men. Evidence shows that toxic masculinity negatively affects employee performance, but does not detail its effects on men's psychology. Additionally, this research explores how toxic masculinity impacts men psychologically and how society can accept and address it, which has not been extensively discussed before.

RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research used is qualitative research. According to (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) qualitative research involves studying phenomena in their natural settings with the aim of interpreting events and is conducted using various available methods. In qualitative research, methods typically used include interviews, observations, and the use of documents such as journals and books. Qualitative methods are employed in this study because they are descriptive in nature, allowing for the detailed description of research findings on the expression of femininity in public spaces and the challenges of toxic masculinity.

This research adopts a qualitative approach involving various methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, including journals and books, to support a comprehensive research process. The qualitative method allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the social phenomena being studied, with the researcher acting as the primary instrument in data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Sarfo et al., 2021). The research location is selected based on the research object in Negeri Rumahtiga, allowing the researcher to directly observe the local context relevant to the studied topic. The research duration is set for one month, from February 23 to March 23, 2024, ensuring that the researcher has adequate time to collect representative data and perform a thorough analysis of the findings. Thus, this methodological approach not only strengthens the validity of the research results but also provides deep and contextual insights into the dynamics of toxic masculinity expression within the specific cultural and social context of Negeri Rumahtiga.

The community in Negeri Rumahtiga is composed of diverse backgrounds, reflecting strong heterogeneity with residents coming from various places. On the other hand, Negeri Rumahtiga also has strong traditional values, including traditional norms related to gender roles. Men are often seen as heads of households and primary responsible for the security and well-being of the family, while women are usually considered as homemakers, child caregivers, and managers of domestic affairs. However, the diversity within Negeri Rumahtiga should enable challenges to the existing ideal masculinity standards. With such a diverse background, the community should have a more open perspective on the ideal masculinity concept that values diversity. This is important because a heterogeneous society can bring various perspectives and support the adoption of more inclusive and progressive values related to the concept of ideal masculinity.

The selection of Negeri Rumahtiga as the primary research location is based on its complex social dynamics, where traditions and diversity come together to shape views and practices related to masculinity behavior. The research subjects are men who experience toxic masculinity in Negeri Rumahtiga, while the research object is the process of expressing toxic masculinity in public spaces. Thus, this study aims to provide a deep understanding of the phenomenon of toxic masculinity in the context of public spaces in Negeri Rumahtiga

This research selects eight informants from various community elements, including one psychologist, six youths from Negeri Rumahtiga, and one parent of a youth experiencing toxic masculinity. The psychologist provides professional insights into the psychological aspects of the phenomenon, while the parent offers a perspective on the family environment and factors influencing their child's behavior. The youths who experience toxic masculinity provide their firsthand experiences. The understanding of masculinity and femininity in this research encompasses community perceptions of behavior patterns associated with both concepts, extending beyond traditional gender stereotypes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Process of Toxic Masculinity Occurring in Public Spaces in Negeri Rumahtiga

Toxic masculinity in Negeri Rumahtiga is also influenced by economic and educational factors. Inequality in access to education and economic opportunities for women has reinforced the separation of gender roles seen in both domestic and public spheres. This creates additional pressure on men to maintain a dominant and hegemonic masculinity image, even if it conflicts with their personal values. Historically, the process of toxic masculinity in Negeri Rumahtiga reflects the cultural and social complexities that have developed over centuries. To deeply understand this phenomenon, research needs to consider not only structural and individual aspects but also the historical context that has shaped and maintained certain gender norms within this society.

The process of toxic masculinity occurring in public spaces in Negeri Rumahtiga is closely related to the patriarchal social construction that influences men's attitudes and behaviors. Patriarchy positions men as the primary holders of power in society, reinforcing stereotypes and norms that support toxic masculinity. In Indonesia, patriarchal culture is deeply woven into the social structure, affecting gender role distribution, inheritance, and daily life. In the social environment of Negeri Rumahtiga, patriarchal norms influence how individuals express their gender identities. Men who display feminine behaviors or expressions are often marginalized or ridiculed for not meeting the expected masculinity standards. This is reflected in the experiences of several individuals who feel constrained and unrecognized within their social environment.

The interviews with youths from Negeri Rumahtiga illustrate experiences closely related to Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. This theory highlights how social constructions of dominant masculinity influence individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and experiences in society. The respondents revealed that they feel trapped by rigid expectations of what is considered a 'real man.'

Firstly, these youths experience pressure to meet specific standards associated with hegemonic masculinity. These standards often include aggressive behavior, excessive bravery, and an emphasis on dominance in social relationships. Those who do not meet these standards, for example by displaying traits considered 'feminine' such as sensitivity or emotional expression, are often treated discriminatorily and excluded from equal opportunities, including leadership roles.

Secondly, the patriarchal culture encompassing Negeri Rumahtiga positions men as holders of authority and emphasizes dominance in public life. This is reflected in the derogatory treatment of those who do not conform to masculinity stereotypes, such as being called demeaning terms like 'bencong' or 'banci.' The use of these terms not only indicates a rejection of individual differences but also reinforces gender hierarchies that marginalize those who do not fit existing norms.

Thirdly, social pressure to adhere to hegemonic masculinity norms is evident in individuals' experiences across various contexts, including public spaces and daily social interactions. For example, their experiences in various organizations or committees reveal how they feel pressured to behave in accordance with expectations of being a 'real man,' such as being assertive, strong, and dominant.

In the context of Connell's theory, the toxic behaviors that emerge in Negeri Rumahtiga within this patriarchal social construction not only harm women but also men who do not meet the established standards. They experience significant psychological and social pressure to maintain the hegemonic masculinity image, even if it conflicts with their personal identities and values.

The Reality of Feminine Expression in Public Spaces Related to Toxic Masculinity in Negeri Rumahtiga

The state of femininity in Negeri Rumahtiga shows that men who express feminine traits live in a manner that is not grouped or organized within any specific structure. Nevertheless, their beliefs and ways of adapting to each other demonstrate high quality. They continue to support each individual's decisions well, showing tolerance and cooperation in their daily lives. Initially, they express themselves freely in public spaces, although not organized within any formal structure. They feel comfortable and safe walking or spending time with others like themselves outdoors. However, at first, they tend to express themselves quietly in public spaces, avoiding drawing too much attention as men who behave like women. This is done to avoid excessive scrutiny or attention from others towards their identities.

When in public spaces, they adapt to their surroundings in ways that respect individual diversity and value each other's privacy. Although not organized in a formal structure, they still demonstrate tolerance and support for each individual's decisions, creating a supportive environment for them to express themselves according to their identities without fear or excessive pressure. When the concept of ideal masculinity arises in society, emphasizing men to display physical strength and reject softness and close involvement with female friends, feminine men or those showing feminine behaviors often face significant psychological and social pressure in public spaces. They feel poorly accepted due to their differences from the traditional image of strong and dominant men. The physical strength and masculinity highly valued in society often place them in a vulnerable and isolated position, seen as representatives of norms that are violated or ignored.

This situation often causes them to feel trapped by the negative perceptions and stereotypes attached to them, both in daily interactions and in digital spaces such as social media. The feeling of being a 'bird in a cage' illustrates how difficult it is for them to feel free to express themselves without fear of being ridiculed or criticized by society. Minimal acceptance of gender diversity often leads them to struggle to feel valued and fully accepted in social life. The impact of these rigid masculinity norms can limit their opportunities to authentically develop their own identities. They may face pressure to hide or suppress their expressions to avoid greater stigma or social punishment. This creates real emotional challenges and hampers their experiences in finding space to build a strong sense of self and accept themselves with all their differences. Amid these conditions, an inclusive approach and respect for gender diversity become increasingly important to create a supportive environment for all individuals, without restricting or judging based on narrow gender stereotypes.

In the context of Negeri Rumahtiga, men involved in toxic masculinity often feel bound by harsh, dominant, and unemotional masculine stereotypes. They may feel the need to display physical strength, decisiveness in decision-making, and bravery in facing challenges. This creates significant pressure for them to conform to the expected male image within their family and community environments.

Connell explains that hegemonic masculinity not only creates expectations for individual male behavior but also reinforces gender inequality and supports power structures that favor men in society. Men who are unable or unwilling to meet these standards are often embarrassed, judged, or considered to be out of sync with existing social norms. In practice, men in Negeri Rumahtiga may feel constrained in how they express their emotions, show vulnerability, or explore feminine aspects of themselves. They might suppress or hide their emotions for fear of being perceived as weak or unworthy as a man according to existing norms.

The interviews with several youths illustrate the complexity and pressure associated with hegemonic masculinity constructs. This concept, as proposed by R.W. Connell, refers to the cultural and social dominance that defines certain characteristics as the essence of 'true' or 'ideal' masculinity. These youths reveal how patriarchal social constructions, both within the family environment and in public spaces, compel individuals to conform to narrow and often unrealistic masculinity norms.

They face immense pressure to display courage, physical strength, and assertiveness in their social interactions. Expressions considered 'feminine' or inconsistent with dominant masculinity stereotypes are often ridiculed or deemed inappropriate. For example, some youths feel comfortable expressing their softer and more sensitive sides in more liberated environments but feel compelled to hide these aspects when in the presence of family or in contexts that demand a rigid and limited display of 'masculinity.'

Consequently, they experience internal conflict between the expectation to embody a strong, dominant, and unemotional male image and the desire to express their true identity. This illustrates that hegemonic masculinity not only affects an individual's self-perception but also limits their ability to express the uniqueness and diversity of their gender identity.

Furthermore, the pressure to adhere to strict masculinity norms often results in psychological stress and anxiety in the effort to meet social expectations. For instance, some youths feel compelled to adjust their behavior to align with family expectations that reject feminine or non-conventional expressions. This not only impacts their mental health but also restricts their ability to form authentic and deep relationships with others. In a broader social context, hegemonic masculinity can reinforce gender inequality and exacerbate discrimination against individuals who do not conform to existing norms. Efforts to address toxic masculinity and advocate for more inclusive and diverse norms are crucial. This will not only open space for youths in Negeri Rumahtiga to express themselves freely but also promote greater gender well-being and justice in society as a whole.

The reality of toxic masculinity expression in Negeri Rumahtiga illustrates how the dominant cultural and social norms in the region exploit and establish certain standards related to what is considered 'true masculinity.' This concept not only affects how men are expected to behave in society but also restricts their ability to freely express their identity and emotions.

CONCLUSION

Overall, toxic masculinity in the public space of Negeri Rumahtiga is closely related to the patriarchal social construction that confines men within hegemonic masculinity norms. This culture not only affects how individuals express their gender identity but also imposes significant psychological and social pressure on those who do not meet these stereotypical expectations. The struggle to conform to the dominant masculinity image often leads to the suppression of emotions and identity, potentially harming mental well-being and exacerbating gender injustice. Steps to transform these norms into more inclusive and diverse ones will support individuals' freedom to express themselves more authentically and promote a more gender-just society.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

REFERENCES

Afdhal, A. (2023). Peran Perempuan dalam Perekonomian Lokal Melalui Ekowisata di Maluku: Tinjauan Sosio-Ekologi dan Sosio-Ekonomi. *RESIPROKAL: Jurnal Riset Sosiologi Progresif Aktual*, *5*(2), 208–224. https://doi.org/10.29303/resiprokal.v5i2.427

Ayuningrum, N. G. (2021). Analisis Wacana Kritis Komentar Seksual dalam Media Sosial Twitter Laki-Laki Berekspresi Gender Feminin. *Jurnal Wanita Dan Keluarga*, *2*(2), 117–126. https://doi.org/10.22146/jwk.3620

Connell, R. W. (2005). Masculinities University of California Press. *Berkeley, Los Angeles*.

Connell, R. W. (2018). Masculinities and Globalization. *Men and Masculinities*, *1*(1), 3–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X98001001001

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5 (ed.)). Sage Publications.

Hakim, M. A. (2018). Meruntuhkan Budaya Kuasa dan Kekerasan pada Anak: Belajar dari Ki Hadjar Dewantara. *BUANA GENDER : Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Anak*, *1*(1), 79–90. https://doi.org/10.22515/bg.v1i1.64

Hermawan, I., & Hidayah, N. (2023). Toxic masculinity dan tantangan kaum lelaki dalam

masyarakat Indonesia modern. *Dimensia: Jurnal Kajian Sosiologi*, *12*(2), 171–182. https://doi.org/10.21831/dimensia.v12i2.60991

Ika, E. C. (2021). *Konstruksi Makna Toxic Masculinity Pada Kalangan Mahasiswa Kota Bandung*. Universitas Komputer Indonesia.

Irwan, Y. (2023). *Gambaran Toxic Masculinity Pada Pria Dewasa Awal Dikota Makassar*. UNIVERSITAS BOSOWA.

Jais, A. (2022). *Toxic masculinity represented in Sol Yurick's The Warriors*. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim.

Jensen, A. L. (2024). *Toxic Masculinity and the Public Square*. University of Colorado at Boulder.

Johnson, R., & Ashworth, L. (2023). Gender Differences in Consumer Decision Making: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *60*(2), 234–251.

Luthfiah, N. U. (2022). *Representasi Maskulinitas Dalam Keluarga (Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Representasi Maskulinitas dalam Keluarga pada Film Pertaruhan)*. UPN'Veteran'Jawa Timur.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.

Mhembwe, S. (2019). Gender equality and women empowerment on sustainable community development in Zimbabwe. *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research*, *3*(1), 66–75.

Nur, F. (2022). *Konstruksi Sosial Maskulinitas Positif dan Kesehatan Mental (Studi Fenomenologi Toxic Masculinity pada Generasi Z)*. UIN Prof. KH Saifuddin Zuhri.

Piscopo, J. M., & Kenny, M. (2020). Rethinking the ambition gap: gender and candidate emergence in comparative perspective. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, *3*(1), 3–10. https://doi.org/10.1332/251510819X15755447629661

Ramdani, M. F. F., & Wisesa, P. A. D. (2022). Realitas Toxic Masculinity di Masyarakat. *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Ilmu Ilmu Sosial (SNIIS)*, *1*, 230–235.

Sarfo, J. O., Debrah, T., Gbordzoe, N. I., Afful, W. T., & Obeng, P. (2021). Qualitative Research Designs, Sample Size and Saturation: Is Enough Always Enough? *Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education*, *8*(3), 60–65. https://doi.org/10.13187/jare.2021.3.60

Selvia, C. C., & Jatiningsih, O. (2023). Ketidakhadiran Pemimpin Perempuan di Forum Komunikasi Mahasiswa Bojonegoro Universitas Negeri Surabaya dalam Persepsi Pengurus dan Anggota. *Kajian Moral Dan Kewarganegaraan*, *11*(2), 601–617.

Stromquist, N. P. (2018). Women's <scp>E</scp> mpowerment and <scp>E</scp> ducation: linking knowledge to transformative action. *European Journal of Education*, *50*(3), 307–324. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12137

Waling, A. (2019). Problematising 'Toxic' and 'Healthy' Masculinity for Addressing Gender Inequalities. *Australian Feminist Studies*, *34*(101), 362–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2019.1679021

Wikström, M. C. (2019). Gendered bodies and power dynamics: The relation between toxic masculinity and sexual harassment. *Granite Journal*, *3*(2), 28–33.