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Language expressions in constructing physical masculinity in Indonesian teen lit

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**LANGUAGE EXPRESSIONS IN CONSTRUCTING PHYSICAL
MASCULINITY IN INDONESIAN TEEN LIT**
**EKSPRESI BAHASA DALAM PEMBANGUNAN MASKULINITAS FISIK
PADA SASTRA REMAJA INDONESIA**

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Abstract: Teen lit serves a central position in the conception of masculinity in teenagers due to its closeness to them as readers. For teenagers, physical masculinity is relatively highlighted compared to masculinity in other dimensions. Physical masculinity is expressed through classic names, which is related to strength, and is signified by ‘provincial’ names. Physical masculinity is also conveyed through the expressions of the eyes and figures. Besides, a specific cultural icon typically related to handsomeness is also used to construct physical masculinity in teen lit.

Keywords: Language expression, Physical masculinity, Teen lit, Construction, Gender identity

Abstrak: Sastra remaja memiliki posisi sentral dalam konsepsi maskulinitas pada remaja karena kedekatan dengan mereka sebagai pembaca. Pada masa remaja, maskulinitas fisik relatif lebih menonjol dibandingkan dengan maskulinitas pada dimensi lain. Maskulinitas fisik diekspresikan melalui nama klasik, yang dihubungkan dengan kekuatan, dan secara negatif dikonotasikan dengan nama yang “udik”. Maskulinitas fisik juga ditunjukkan melalui ekspresi mata dan figur. Selain itu, ikon budaya tertentu yang biasanya terkait dengan ketampanan juga digunakan untuk membangun maskulinitas fisik dalam seni remaja.

Kata kunci: Ekspresi bahasa, Maskulinitas fisik, Sastra remaja, Konstruksi, Identitas gender

INTRODUCTION

Masculinity is an important issue in discussions about gender identity. The difference between masculinity and femininity has been acknowledged as social differences and cultural perspective among both genders. Women and men’s perspective on masculinity may differ. As time changes and develops, the value of masculinity may be regarded differently. For this reason, it is important to investigate masculinity in Indonesian teen lit, as their authors are mostly female teenagers.

As a narration, teen lit also includes perspectives related to inner contemplation, which is associated with life problems. As mentioned in Fina (2003), a narration is the main actualization of the understanding about the world, experience, and self. Teen lit is not a mere aesthetic product which functions as an entertainment. Teen lit is a social reality. From the teen lit, abundant lessons can be learned about everyday practices. Therefore, teen lit can be used as an instrument to get to know about age-based community, particularly teenagers. Teen lit can also be considered as a source to foster tolerance, absorb values, as well as increase awareness and critical thinking.

One of our everyday experiences which is encoded in teen lit is masculinity. As a part of a social construct, masculinity is highly contextual and dynamic (Davis, 2019). Teen lit, which emerged after the 2000s becomes one of the trackers of masculinity values among Indonesian female teenagers. This type of literary product can be stated as a projection of teenage life and can be their reference in doing makeup, socializing, as well as creating economic and social activities. Teen lit can also be an inspiration for young men to be accepted by the opposite sex where they learn how men are defined particularly by women.

Previous research on teen lit mentioned that most of its authors are 14-20-year-old females, with these authors belonging to the categories of smart, rich, being fond of reading and writing, and actively involved in school/campus activities (Noor, 2014). In general, teen lit shows a tendency to feminine characteristics. Based on the physical aspect, the cover page of teen lit emphasizes the pictures of teenage girls with various styles and teenage boys with masculine images as might have generally been expected by teenage girls. The main characters within teen lit stories are primarily senior high school teenagers. Often, the story perspective was constructed upon teenage girls' point of views. This differentiates between novel, teen lit and teenage novel in general.

Reflecting on the research by Noorman (2011), teen lit has a significant potential in influencing teenagers. For example, research on *Lupus the series* which was popular in the 1990s until the 2000s showed the popularity of *Lupus* with his identity features relating to Indonesian teenagers; thus it has made *Lupus* a must-read teen lit for teenagers in 1990s. The *Lupus* figure with his silly behavior (*ngocol*) becomes the representation of urban teenagers.

Teen lit cannot be stated as a must-read for 2000s teenagers, unlike *Lupus* in 1990s. However, the presence of teen lit with a relatively high in publication and titles reaching up to hundreds has made this type of literary product one of the strategic and impactful sources in the shaping of gender identity in teenagers. Pedagogically, the central position of teen lit among them is based on the questionnaires and brainstorming performed by a group of senior high school teenagers in Malang City, East Java. Generally, teenagers know teen lit well. On average, they can mention more than five titles of teen lit and have read at least three teen lit titles.

One of the important issues in teen lit is masculinity. In fact, teen lit is extensively written by female authors who have unique perspectives on masculinity. Here, masculinity is the construction of male traits that are normally found in men. In Indonesia, it is identical with the depiction of a male figure who is agile, nimble, and manly, so that physically men are constructed to have a tall and upright figure as the culture places men as strong figures. As such, culture has a strong influence on the way female writers construct masculinity in teen lit. The male characters in teen lit are young teenagers who are handsome with tall and upright postures. Furthermore, Demartoto (2010) confirms that masculinity is not an innate trait. Masculine traits are imposed on men by the society in which they were born. In fact, masculinity and femininity are not binary characteristics. Zahro et al. (2017) argue that femininity and masculinity can be opposite, similar, or even exactly the same in certain

aspects. In this study, the expressions used to construct masculinity, especially physical traits were studied.

METHODS

This qualitative study employed a discourse analysis method. Via various linguistic expressions, teen lit articulates authors' ideas on various social problems; here, language is treated as a social practice. Furthermore, the authors' ideas in teen lit are not only expressed through language but also dispersed in the story lines. The intrinsic elements of the story – especially the characters and theme – must be explored first to find the value of masculinity. Then, an analysis of the language use was performed. Thus, the data of this study take in the form of vocabularies, phrases and sentences used to express masculinity. Data collection was done by selecting narrative events that revealed the characters' masculinity and by marking the vocabulary, phrases and sentences used to construct physical masculinity. The data were analyzed by carrying out an in-depth and interactive-dialectical understanding toward the selected vocabularies, phrases and sentences. The next stages of data analysis consisted of classification and verification of the findings to draw conclusions.

The data sources were five teen lit novels that were popular in the year of 2015 from various publishers. They were: (1) *Me versus High Heels* by Maria Ardelia, (2) *Kana di Negeri Kiwi* by Rosemary Kesaully, (3) *Fairish* by Esti Kinasih, (4) *Raksasa dari Jogja* by Dwitastari, and (5) *Dear Baba* by Sabrina Putri Lofissa. These teen lit novels are written by young female authors and depict senior high school teenage lives with a teenage girl as the main character.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The masculine image presented physically is commonly handsomeness. Handsomeness equals to beauty (*indah*) or exquisite (*elok*), which represents the beauty of men. As an adjective, beautiful (*indah*) is related to physical characteristics or visible by eyes. Exquisite is related to appearance, shape, and location. Exquisite (*elok*) can also mean gallant (*gagah*) (Badan Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, 2017). Handsome is related to the look (*paras*) or face (*wajah*), which is a face holistically and in parts.

Physical masculinity can be related to other than spiritual things. In this case, name is also categorized in physical masculinity since name is a label to address someone. Name is usually given by parents to their children when they are born. Name is not merely a personal identity, but more importantly it carries a certain meaning. In teen lit, the masculinity image is attributed to male protagonist figures who are constructed as a charming figure. They have attractive names and eyes that emit assertiveness, handsome face, and stout built.

The findings on language expression used to construct physical masculinity in teen lit includes (1) classic names related to strength but negatively connoted with 'clownish' names; (2) expressions on the intensity of view; (3) expressions on tallness and stout build; and (4) analogue of the main protagonist faces with a handsomeness icon.

Classic Names and its Relation to Strength

Name is not merely a sign or tool to recognize someone. Every name makes its own impression to other people. Long or short names – either derived from local or foreign languages and either followed by family names or not – mark different impressions. Names can also imply various things. Country or region of origin, religion, even family background can sometimes be seen through a name. Therefore, a given name can be perceived better or more sophisticated than the others. Similarly, names in teen lit has become one of the ways

to establish a masculine image. The protagonist names in teen lit are classic names related to strength.

Classic names here mean giving names using the archaic terms of either Indonesian or foreign languages. Generally, classic words are terms referring to archeology and theology which are not used in today's communication. For example, the names *Rolando Anggara* (in the novel *Me versus High Heels*) and *Davidio Daniel Dharmawan* (in the novel *Fairish*). The words *Anggara* and *Dharmawan* are originated from archeology field and borrowed by the Indonesian. In addition, *Gabriel* (in the novel *Raksasa dari Jogja*), *Rolando*, *Daniel*, and *Davidio* are names associated with religious figures, believes, and cultural values existed in the society since ages. Those names are derived from English, but are also found in other languages, mainly Hebrew with its extensive use in the Bible.

To emphasize the strength and power of male protagonists in teen lit, names related to strength and authority are used, for example *Anggara* which means beast or wild (Badan Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, 2017).

The name *Daniel* and *Gabriel* are also related to power. While *Daniel* is the name of a king and prophet is a number of religions, *Gabriel* in *Raksasa dari Jogja* is correlated with a kind-hearted and strong figure, which is an angel (Dwitasari, 2012). Here, the names *Davidio*, *Daniel*, *Gabriel*, *Roland*, *Anggara* are categorized as classic names since they are acknowledged to be valuable in many places and numerous social groups since ages. It is different from the local names such as *Dondon*, *Basri*, *Ucup* and *Udin* that seem to represent unattractive figures and less literate persons. *Ucup* and *Udin* are particularly kind-hearted figures, but they are considered as a miser and often do silly things and clownish.

The naming practices have become a strategic part of teen lit authors to establish the masculinity image of the main protagonists. Names become a part of the attractiveness of the figures or characters. Teen lit authors present the full names of the figures and reaction or comments about their names in stories. For example, one considers the name *Davidio Daniel Dharmawan* as excellent, the name *Gabriel* corresponds to his figure as an angel, and the name *Rolando Anggara* which is not less attractive than *Arnoldus Rennov*, who is described as a student who attracts many girls.

Use of Expression for Eyes

The teenage boys in teen lit are handsome teenagers. The handsomeness of the main characters here are explicitly described as boys whose face is attractive to girls. The handsomeness of the characters depicted in the five novels under observation is expressed through the description of their eyes. Here, the masculine image established through the eyes is the focused, assertive, and conquering eyes. Therefore, to describe the performance, the words 'gazing' (*menatap*), 'scanning' (*menyapu*), and 'scrutinizing' (*melibas*). The word 'gazing' (*menatap*) carries a stronger sense of 'seeing' than the word 'looking at' (*memandang*). 'Gazing' (*Menatap*) means looking at a clear direction. Meanwhile, the word 'scanning' (*menyapu*) and 'scrutinizing' (*melibas*) are related to the generated effect that nothing is missed from the sight of the man.

The word 'sharp' (*tajam*) can be used to express the eye gaze of the figures in several teen lit novels. The attributes of 'sharp' (*tajam*) equals to 'straight' (*lurus*) that is also used to describe the focused eye gaze. These sharp-eye gaze and a clear focus generally complete their characters which are cold and taciturn. Through the sharp eyes, men are positioned as powerful and dominant figures. Men can gaze their interlocutor (women) one by one. It is different from women who are considered of not having such dominance.

The expression of eyes as the representation of masculinity is revealed in Mark Simpson's notes (Mulyana, 2014) in which a new class of young men with an eccentric look at fashion advertisements are described. The handsomeness of the models are explained in

details, such as the ideal construction of the face, gaze, and impression through their smiles. Eyes are often called the window of the soul and reflection of the heart. Eyes can reveal many things. However, this does not apply to men in Indonesian teen lit who are often portrayed as cold and taciturn. Even so, they want another party (women) to understand about them and their mystery emphasized in the expression of cold eyes and cool face, rarely smiling, and talk less to girls.

Masculine eyes are eyes with a sharp and focused gaze. The eyes are not necessarily slanted or wide eyes. Not a single teen lit author mentions the eye anatomy of the figures specifically. However, in a number of teen lit novels it is mentioned that the handsomeness standard can be anybody, including from Indonesia or other countries in Asia (China, Japan, India), Europe (including Turkey), and America.

Teen lit becomes a reflection of acceptance toward all races and cultures in the world. As mentioned by Haryanto (2015), western society (Europe and America) no longer becomes the standard of popular culture consumption in Indonesia and other regions in Asia. There is no longer a country holding an exclusive dominant strength, as previous centuries ago.

Teenagers in teen lit are those who are imaged as modern teenagers, but they also do not want to lose their local identity. Slant or wide eyes are not necessarily mentioned since at a glance look at the face like Yao Ming and Michel Owen does not clearly describe whether their eyes are slant or wide. The expressions about eyes are related to its function. Eyes with their sharpness are not related to a specific cultural setting. However, eyes of this kind are acceptable in all cultural settings, primarily in a modern cultural setting.

Expressions on Tall and Stout Body

In teen lit, having tall body is an essential requirement in the physical masculinity. Teenage boys in teen lit are teenagers with tall and well-built body postures. Lanky (*jangkung*) body is always used to describe the main characters' body. For example, one of the teen lit presents the tallness of men in the title *Raksasa dari Jogja* or the Giant from Jogja. Giant here is used to represent *Gabriel* who is physically very tall. In the author's narration, *Gabriel* is attributed as a distinguishable monster. In Fairish, the word 'lanky' *jangkung*, 'towering' (*menjulang*), and 'tall' (*tinggi*) are used by the authors to describe *Davi*.

In *Me versus High Heels*, the main protagonist is not described to have lanky body, but a well-built one indicating that *Roland* is not a youngster with a short posture. *Roland* is equal to *Arnoldus Rennov* in attracting *Sasha*. *Arnold* is the school basketball athlete whose face is a combination between Yao Ming and Michael Owen. In *Kana di Negeri Kiwi*, it is not mentioned explicitly about the posture of *Tsunehisa Matsuyama*. However, the physical representation of *Tsunehisa Matsuyama* and *Takeshi Kaneshiro* shows that *Tsunehisa* is not shorter than the Japanese and Taiwanese action actors. The word 'bump into the chest' was used to describe the clumsiness of *Kana* when meeting *Tsunehisa* showing that *Tsunehisa* has a lanky and strong body.

The tall and well-built body become a part of masculinity revealed in teen lit similar to the champions and officers in a legend who have tall and well-built bodies. In *Raksasa dari Jogja*, the author emphasized masculinity through *Bianca*. *Bianca* sees her cousin, *Kevin*. as a charming young person but unfortunately his body is relatively short as a man. This means that masculinity is closely related to tall and stout body.

In Indonesia, the constructions of masculinity in the society can be classified based on time periods. In the 2000s, during the early emergence of teen lit, physical masculinity is constrained by tall and well-built body. However, Demartoto (2010) states that the construction of masculinity is shifting slowly towards dandy or metrosexual men as a result

of popular culture and the hedonistic lifestyle in modern urban society which develops along with the development of science and technology.

An Analogy with Handsomeness Icon

To construct the main protagonist's handsomeness in teen lit, analogy with the currently popular figures is also used. Teenagers in teen lit are presented as handsome youngsters with their handsomeness being not limited to having sharp eyes and cool faces but also being equal to those of popular figures. Not only celebrities but also athletes of the East and West are used for comparison.

Metrosexual men have marked the construction of masculinity in the 2000s, with men coming from different occupational backgrounds (Harum, 2018, Hasyim, 2017). This is in line with the evolution of fashion that has been penetrated to various layers of society, although actors and singers are still the prominent figures who set the trends. The celebrities of teenagers' idols used as a standard of handsomeness; among them are Justin Timberlake, members of boybands such as Westlife and Backstreet Boys. Besides singers and boybands from America and Europe, Asia's celebrity such as Takeshi Kaneshiro has also been well considered in teen lit. Takeshi Kaneshiro is a Japanese celebrity and Taiwanese born. He is a 1990s pop singer and also movie actor who is still popular in the 2000s. In addition to Takeshi Kaneshiro, Yao Ming – a Chinese NBA athlete – was also a teen lit idol. There was also Michael Owen, a football player from England, and Michael Schumacher, a formula-one racer.

Celebrities being taken as a role model of handsomeness can be anybody and from anywhere. Along with the development of technology, it is highly possible for individuals with their field of expertise to show off their self-existence. They are not only actors (film stars and singers), but also athletes, politicians, and religious figures. Ordinary people are rarely found in teen lit as idols, because at the time these novels were written, social media are not as popular as they are now; therefore, not everybody gets the chance to show off their talent. On the contrary, our current world provides spaces for individuals from various backgrounds to be appreciated and to go global. Therefore, in the 2000s, the word "celebrity" has been widely used to describe celebration that it does not belong to those who work in the entertainment industry anymore, but wider communities. Celebrities can also come from anywhere in the world, either from the West or the East. The word belongs to all nations. After the 2000s, pop songs from Asian region such as China, Korea, and Japan also started to globalize. In Indonesia, television is filled with Chinese (Taiwanese) and Korean dramas.

CONCLUSION

Masculinity is a social definition. The perspective of physical masculinity is influenced by a developing and growing culture. Therefore, every society, era, and even human being can have a typical definition of masculinity. Masculinity related to physical traits is also subject to changes along with the development of the world. The acceptance is represented by the appearance of characters in teen lit that are described as coming from various ethnicities and cultures.

Analysis of masculinity in literary texts involve multiple processes. Literary works contain not only beautiful language but also ideological one. Therefore, critical discourse analysis (CDA) needs to be used in literary work readings. Teachers can start to introduce students to CDA, especially in reading a literary work. Similarly, future researchers can also use this approach so that literary works can be seen as both figurative language product and ideological construct.

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