

Hegemonic Masculinity in “The Way of the Househusband”

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Abstract: For ages, men’s roles in society have been constructed as the breadwinner and the head of the household. These roles were believed to be the standard of what men should be doing to meet the expectation of being the real men. This research attempted to determine whether living a distinct role as constructed in society impacts a man’s masculinity. This research analyzes the male main character of *The Way of the Househusband*, Tatsu, in terms of hegemonic masculinity. As a man who lives as a family caretaker, we believed that Tatsu shows appealing proof of the househusband’s masculine identity. Applying Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity, Roberson’s *Men and Masculinity in Contemporary Japan*, and using qualitative research as the method, this research discovered that although Tatsu plays the role of a househusband, he still has man’s masculinity. Hence, this research concludes that the shifting value of hegemonic masculinity of men occurs in Japan, at least in this anime.

Keywords: anime; hegemonic masculinity; househusband; *The Way of the Househusband*

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Masculinities are arrangements of traditions built, unraveled, and evolved. In the same way, hegemonic masculinity has the potential to change, and anyone is capable of disapproving, modernizing, or reconstructing it. The concept of hegemonic masculinity also has a different definition in each culture, region, and class (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

In Japan, during the Tokugawa Period (1503-1868), the family system in Japan complying the *Ie* system, which originated from the Confucian hierarchy. The *Ie* system adheres that the oldest family member goes before the younger member and the men go before the women. Furthermore, when the Meiji Restoration started in 1868, Japan began to adopt European and American norms. The regulation which governs gender roles is constructed as an ideology to establish firm national integrity (Pliassova, 2011).

This regulation distinctly governs the difference between men’s and women’s roles in society. It considers women’s roles as an essential part of the family because they benefit the country's prosperity and improvement. The *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) ideology is created by the government (Pliassova, 2011). Though this ideology saw women as independent individuals, women were still treated as incompetent individuals in legal and political matters. During the time Japan got into the Taisho Period (1912-1926), as the military widened and the

empire broadened, women's role became more distinguished in the establishment of Japan's economic development, but still treated unnoticed or marginalized. Nonetheless, men's ideology believed in *Tairuki no Nin* (continental adventurer) image and masculinity construed by military triumph.

Following World War II and the occupation of the United States, the ideology of military masculinity was crippled along with the disperse of Japan's old military in 1947. Instead of bearing the hardship of military triumph, now men are expected to bear the responsibility of recovering the national economy by becoming *salarymen*. This became the prevalent concept of how to achieve to be real men, and this concept requires men to get a job, get married, and be the breadwinner of the family. However, women's roles remain the same; they are still expected to do the house chores and take care of children even if the number of working women slowly increases (Pliassova, 2011). Yet, this concept of masculine men begins to weaken due to the bubble economy in 1981 (Roberson, 2003).

Later, men begin to hesitate, and many indications show the changes in masculine values. Such as middle-aged men desire to spend life separately from their work, the youth switch suits to a more unisexual image and the young father spends more time with their kids and does the house chores. Together with this, Japan's ministry of health, labor, and welfare designed a controversial slogan, "A man who doesn't raise his children can't be called a father." This can be evidence of the effort to reconstruct the ideal hegemonic masculinity. Next to this slogan, there are considerable reasons for this shifting of hegemonic masculinity (Roberson, 2003).

The collapse of the national economy causes the first reason. The rise of unemployment has significantly grown among Japanese men. Second, the women's participation in the labor force multiplies as well as the double-earner family. This reveals that traditional gender roles no longer become the prevalent concept in the Japanese family. The decreasing birthrate is caused by women's hesitation to have babies, considering the absence of father assistance in taking children (Roberson, 2003).

Several points are believed to be the standard of what it means to be a man. The most powerful is the antifeminine norm. Men learned to reject all things considered feminine because femininity is more valued than masculinity. Men were also expected to be the family's breadwinners by working a high-paying jobs. Men who work as nurses, teachers, and nannies, or in other jobs considered feminine jobs viewed as incompetent and lack of ambition. Further, men are required to be strong, brave, and confident (Lindsey, 2021).

The dynamic changes of hegemonic masculinity can be observed through anime, particularly in *The Way of the Househusband*, directed by Chiaki On. This anime is about Tatsu, an ex-member of the Yakuza gang, who later became a househusband after being discharged from prison. Meanwhile, his wife, Miku, carries out the role of breadwinner of the family. Tatsu took care of every house chore, such as cooking and cleaning, and take care of his wife when she got home from work feeling exhausted (On, 2021). This anime was released on Netflix in 2021 and consists of ten episodes in the first season. Until the writing of this research, the next season is not yet released. This anime was used because of the depiction of the shifting of hegemonic masculinity. This research aims to describe the further changes in hegemonic masculinity in contemporary Japanese families in *The Way of the Househusband* anime.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

State of the Art

According to the research through the internet, several researchers have completed research on masculinity in Japanese drama, manga, and movies. They are Rouli Esther Pasaribu (2020), Muhammad Danansyah Lukman (2021), and Fajria Noviana (2019).

The first research conducted by Pasaribu was titled *Freeter, Arafo, House Husband: Shifting Image of Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasized Femininity in Four Japanese Television Dramas*. This research used qualitative and descriptive methods and Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. Data used in this research are Japanese TV dramas *At Home Dad*, *Around 40: Chuumon no Ooi Onna Tachi*, *Freeter*, *Buy a House* and *Wonderful Single Life*. This research concluded that Japanese TV dramas after 2000 show alternative masculinity and femininity (Pasaribu, 2020). The similarity between Pasaribu's research and our research was the use of Connell's hegemonic masculinity. Pasaribu used Connell's paradigm of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, which later concluded alternative masculinity and alternative femininity that express habits of diverging from the norms of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. Meanwhile, our research used Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity which was defined as the legitimate form of masculinity, which later conclude the changing image of hegemonic masculinity.

Next research conducted by Lukman titled *Maskulinitas Shufu yang Direpresentasikan Tokoh Tatsu dalam Manga Gokushufudou Karya Kousuke Oono*. This thesis analyzed the manga version of *The Way of the Househusband*, titled *Gokushufudou*, by applying the qualitative method and Beynon's concept of masculinities (Lukman, 2021). This research aimed to describe the masculine value depicted by Tatsu. The similarity between our research and Lukman's was the data source; both are *The Way of the Househusband*, even in a different version. The difference is the masculinity concept that was used. My research used Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity.

The last research completed by Noviana titled *Representasi Maskulinitas Modern Laki-Laki Jepang Dalam Film Perfect World Berdasarkan Semiotika Barthes*. This research analyzed the representation of modern masculinity of Japanese men in the *Perfect World* movie by using the qualitative method and using Chafetz's concept of traditional masculinity and Barthes' semiotics (Noviana, 2019). This research aimed to describe the concept of masculinity in contemporary Japan depicted by the male main character of the movie. The similarity between this research and my research was that both aimed to describe masculinity in contemporary Japan through anime or movies. The difference is the theory and concept that were used. Noviana uses Chafetz's concept of traditional masculinity and several article and journal that relates to modern masculinity and our research used Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity.

Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity

According to Connel, the definition of hegemonic masculinity is

“The configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005)

Several patterns relate to hegemonic masculinity, and Connell proposed four of them as the main pattern that operates in defining masculinity (Drianus, 2019). The first is hegemonic masculinity. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as a form of gender practice that came in the form of acknowledgment received on the issue of patriarchal legitimation, which secures the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. Briefly, domination is not always through violence; it can be through culture and institution. The second is subordinated masculinity, a masculinity form that becomes the target of hegemony, for example, a gay man towards a heterosexual man in a specific culture. Subordination comes in many forms, such as physical violence and economic discrimination. The third is complicit masculinity. The complicit masculinity is not directly dominating women or other men, but indirectly participating in hegemonic masculinity by perpetuating and receiving benefits from the patriarchal structure. The last is marginalized masculinity. An example of marginalized masculinity is the black athletes in the United States, their achievements are visible but this can not construct the social authorization of the black people in general.

To further analyze the hegemonic masculinity value and the shifting or changing of it, this research will apply the first pattern of hegemonic masculinity.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research applied the qualitative method and was classified as library research. There were two objects in this research. The first object was the material object: the first season of the anime *The Way of the Househusband*. The second object was the formal object, the hegemonic masculinity of the male main character. This research analyzed through a sociological approach to literature focusing on gender roles by using Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity.

There were three steps in conducting this research. The first step was collecting the data by watching the anime *The Way of the Househusband* and taking notes on the dialogue and scenes of the anime. References used in this research were from related books and journals. The next step was analyzing the data that were related to hegemonic masculinity by classifying the data with Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. The last step was presenting the results by using the analysis descriptive method to describe the hegemonic masculinity in the anime *The Way of the Househusband*.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing and classifying the data, three points were found in this research. Which are consistent physical images, reformed clothing appearance, and the changing role in the family.

Consistent Physical Image

Tatsu's physical image is what society has always called a masculine man. He has a tall, strong, and muscular body with the typical Yakuza tattoo filling his back and upper arm. Though he is no longer part of the gang, he still maintains his body in a well-built shape and does not remove his tattoo, as we can see in the scenes below.



Figure 1. Tatsu's upper-front body tattoos



Figure 2. Tatsu's back tattoos

Reformed Clothing Appearance

The Yakuza gang is also famous for its standout clothing. They usually wear suits and sunglasses (Raz, 2011). After leaving the gang, Tatsu still wears suits and sunglasses as his daily outfit, but what makes it different is that he now wears an apron daily and everywhere, not only at home, as we can see in the scene below. The apron was obviously to keep clothes clean especially while cooking or cleaning, but it also has implicit meaning, which serves as a symbol of Tatsu's role changing; from a Yakuza member to a househusband.



Figure 3. Tatsu shops in the supermarket in his apron while still wearing a suit and sunglasses

The Changing Role in the Family

1. From Breadwinner to Househusband

Being in the Yakuza gang is always associated with money. They do businesses that involve a lot of money so the gang member earned from there to provide for their family. After being discharged from prison and leaving the gang, Tatsu changed his role and became the househusband. He does every house chore every day, such as cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry, as we can see in the scenes below. He does his role very well and without grumbling. While on the other hand, his wife, Miku, is the family's breadwinner by working as a full-time designer.



Figure 4. One of Tatsu's everyday chores: cooking



Figure 5. One of Tatsu's everyday chores: cleaning



Figure 6. One of Tatsu's everyday chores: doing laundry

2. From Dominating to Caregiving

Since they were boys, men always learned that they are supposed to dominate others, including their family members and caregiving roles are always considered feminine. Yet, in this anime, we can see that Tatsu also takes care of his wife when she got home from work and feels exhausted. He prepares the massaging tools to make her calm after work, as we can see in the scene below.



Figure 7. Tatsu prepares massaging tools for his wife

CONCLUSION

From the results above, we could conclude that “The Way of The Househusband” anime portrayed some value of hegemonic masculinity that was shifting or changing, which is househusband masculinity. This anime also proved that gender roles were adjustable and adapted to the times. This shifting value or image of hegemonic masculinity is still underestimated, so therefore anime can be the media to promote and publicize this shifting image, considering that anime is watched by people from various backgrounds and ages. Thus, viewers can get a new understanding of this matter.

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