

TOXIC MASCULINITY AS POTRAYED IN *GUNS N' ROSES*' SONGS' LYRICS

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Abstract:

In this life, we are confronted with various cultures that exist, and these cultures are always believed by the community to be good things. For example, the masculine culture in men or commonly referred to as toxic masculinity. This culture has been believed from generation to generation as a reference that men are a gender that must exceed women. What is believed to be toxic are narrow traditional beliefs, attitudes, practices and norms that lead men to the three main markers of power, control and violence. The research aimed to find out the toxic masculinity concepts in Guns N' Roses' songs. The method used in this research was qualitative research method. The data of this research were collected from Guns N' Roses' lyrics. In analyzing the data Kuper's theory about toxic masculinity is used. After analyzing the data the researcher found 28 data that related to the toxic masculinity concept from the lyrics: 9 data of misogyny, 5 data of homophobia, 7 data of greed, and 7 data of violent domination and the type that mostly appeared of toxic masculinity in this research is misogyny.

Keywords:

Guns N' Roses;
Lyrics, Toxic
Masculinity



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INTRODUCTION

Music has become an integral part of young people's lives today, serving as both a form of expression and a means of connection. With the advent of streaming services and social media platforms, access to a diverse range of music has never been easier, allowing youths to explore various genres and cultures. This widespread availability influences their identities, social circles, and even their mental health. Music often provides solace and a sense of belonging, resonating with their emotions and experiences. Additionally, musical trends and viral hits on platforms like TikTok and Instagram can shape popular culture and youth behavior, demonstrating music's powerful role in shaping and reflecting the lives of young people in the modern world.

Furthermore, just as music plays a significant role in the lives of young people today, literature also holds a profound place in society. Literature is an imaginative work that pictures human life in a society which can be enjoyed, understood, and used by society. (Welleck & Warren, 1993) Literature is a means of social expression, a mirror of life, and interpretation of human expressions that help us understand how to live. Literary works

cannot arise from a cultural vacuum. Based on these two opinions, we can conclude that literary works are human in nature and can be created based on the lives of the people who create them. Therefore, literary works can provide a picture of the lives of other humans.

Similarly, songs are a type of literary work that can be created based on the lives of people. Songs are one type of Literary works that can be created based on the lives of the people. Songs have elements in common with speech and poetry, they are a unique form. Griffie (1992) further elaborates that songs are vocally produced, linguistically meaningful, and have a melody. In essence, a song is a piece of music that includes words, which are meaningful linguistically and sung by a vocalist.

Both songs and speech are vocally produced, are linguistically meaningful, and have melody. Both songs and poetry use words to convey meaning, both are usually written down before publication, both can be put to music, and both can be listened to. It shows that a song is a piece of musical composition of words, verse, or poem which is sung or uttered with modulation of the voice which expresses the thought and feeling. The primary components of a song are its words and melody. While rhythm is integral to music, a collection of words without accompanying music does not constitute a song. Typically, songs feature repetitive patterns that facilitate memorization, with lines often repeated multiple times. Though songs are commonly performed by a solo singer, they can also be delivered by duets, trios, or vocal groups.

Lyrics, on the other hand, are verse-based compositions that are sung to a tune within a song. They serve as a means to convey observations or deeply felt emotions. The lyrics of a song reveal its meaning, aiding listeners in understanding the song's purpose. As Intani (2011) notes, lyrics express the true sentiments of the singer. In educational contexts, song lyrics can be a useful tool for language learning, as familiar songs allow learners to sing along and become comfortable with the language. Utami (2018) highlights that lyrics constitute a crucial element of a song, and they can be the subject of academic study. For instance, some songs may be interpreted as societal commentary, and lyrics can be analyzed concerning their unity or disunity with the accompanying music.

This research focuses on analyzing the representation of toxic masculinity in the lyrics of Guns N' Roses, an influential American rock band known for their provocative content. Using Terry A. Kupers' theory of toxic masculinity, the study aims to explore how these lyrics reflect and perpetuate harmful cultural norms associated with masculinity. The research highlights the intersection of music, culture, and social attitudes, emphasizing the significance of lyrical content in understanding and critiquing societal constructs of masculinity.

Masculinity encompasses a complex interplay of cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and socio-cultural experiences associated with identifying as male (George & Loosemore, 2019). Traditional masculinity norms dictate how men should think, feel, and behave, often emphasizing traits such as dominance, strength, and emotional stoicism (McDermott, 2019). Toxic masculinity refers to harmful cultural norms and attitudes that promote these rigid standards, leading to detrimental effects on both individuals and

society. According to Terry A. Kupers (2005), toxic masculinity is characterized by four main traits: Misogyny; this involves a deep-seated prejudice against women, manifesting in various forms of discrimination and violence. It reinforces male superiority and female inferiority, perpetuating systemic inequalities. Homophobia; This reflects a disdain for individuals who deviate from traditional male behaviors or sexuality, reinforcing narrow gender norms and marginalizing LGBTQ+ individuals. Greed; This represents an intense craving for power and dominance, often driven by a belief in male superiority. It fosters a culture of materialism and exploitation. The last one is Violent Domination; This involves using force and aggression to assert control and superiority, glorifying violence as a means of maintaining power. These traits collectively contribute to a culture of toxic masculinity that harms both individuals and broader societal structures.

Research of toxic masculinity has actually been carried out by previous studies for example Iddatul Hidayah's 2020 research, "The Representation of Toxic Masculinity in Gillette Advertisement," explored toxic masculinity within Gillette's "We Believe" campaign using a descriptive qualitative approach and Kupers' theory (2005). The study analyzed the advertisement's linguistic features, categorizing toxic masculinity into misogyny and violent domination. It revealed that the ad normalizes these toxic traits while aligning with movements like #MeToo and organizations such as APA and P&G. The research highlights how Gillette's portrayal both reflects and challenges societal norms of toxic masculinity, aiming to prompt a shift in public perception.

This research focuses on the representation of toxic masculinity in the lyrics of Guns N' Roses, an American hard rock band known for its portrayal of this theme. Using Terry A. Kupers' theory of toxic masculinity, and to find out the mostly appear as proposed by Kuper's theory in a lyric and what kind of men is represented. This study aims to explore how these themes manifest in the band's lyrics and their implications in a social and cultural context.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative research design to analyze the concept of toxic masculinity in the lyrics of *Guns N' Roses* using Kupers' (2005) theory. Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell (2018), involves exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups attach to social issues. This approach is suitable for interpreting the lyrics within their context, focusing on how written materials like song lyrics convey themes of toxic masculinity.

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The data for this research consists of lyrics from various songs by Guns N' Roses, a hard rock and heavy metal band formed in Los Angeles in 1985. The selected songs include "Used to Love Her," "Back Off Bitch," "Anything Goes," "Rocket Queen," "It's So Easy," "My Michelle," "You're Crazy," "One in a Million," "Out ta Get Me," "Move to the City,"

"Prostitute," "If the World," "Mr. Brownstone," "You Could Be Mine," "Garden of Eden," "Double Talkin' Jive," "Welcome to the Jungle," "Paradise City," and "Right Next Door to Hell." These songs were chosen because their lyrics exhibit themes associated with toxic masculinity, allowing for an in-depth examination of these traits.

The researcher employed an observation method to collect data for this study. The process involved three main steps. First, the researcher listened to the songs by *Guns N' Roses* to familiarize themselves with the musical and lyrical content. Next, the researcher carefully observed the lyrics of these songs to identify elements related to the concept of toxic masculinity. Finally, the researcher marked and documented specific lyrics that exemplified traits of toxic masculinity, as defined by Kupers (2005).

Upon collecting the data, the researcher analyzed it through a structured approach. The analysis process began with classifying the lyrics based on the identified traits of toxic masculinity reflected in *Guns N' Roses'* songs. The researcher then examined these lyrics to discern how the characteristics of toxic masculinity were portrayed by the singers. This analysis was supported by relevant theoretical frameworks, particularly Kupers' (2005) concept of toxic masculinity. The final step involved drawing conclusions from the analysis, summarizing how the identified themes of toxic masculinity are represented in the lyrics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

In this analysis, the researcher found toxic masculinity concept by (Kupers, 2005) There were 28 data that related with the toxic masculinity concept and the most appears toxic masculinity concept from the lyrics in the song is misogyny. The data from this research can be seen in the table below:

Table 1 Toxic Masculinity that found in lyrics

No.	Toxic Masculinity Concept	Data
1.	Misogyny	9
2.	Homophobia	5
3.	Greed	7
4.	Violent Domination	7
Total		28

Discussion

Misogyny

Misogyny is a deep-seated prejudice against women, evident in discrimination and violence rooted in gender stereotypes and power imbalances. It reinforces male superiority and undermines women's dignity and rights. For example, the song "Anything

Goes" from *Appetite for Destruction* (1987) exemplifies misogyny through lyrics that sexually objectify and degrade women. Phrases like "*Panties 'round your knees with your ass in debris*" reduce women to mere sexual objects, emphasizing their physical attributes in a demeaning manner. Such language reinforces harmful stereotypes about women's roles and value, contributing to a culture that diminishes their autonomy and equality.

Homophobia

Homophobia within toxic masculinity reflects a fear or disdain for those who challenge traditional gender norms, particularly regarding male behavior and sexuality. It enforces rigid masculine standards by rejecting anything perceived as feminine or non-heteronormative, leading to the marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals. The song "One in a Million" from *G N' R Lies* (1988) exemplifies this through its use of derogatory language and discriminatory attitudes. Lyrics such as "*Immigrants and faggots / They make no sense to me / They come to our country / And think they'll do as they please*" use offensive slurs like "faggots" to demean LGBTQ+ individuals, depicting them as unwelcome outsiders. This language reinforces homophobic and xenophobic views, suggesting that LGBTQ+ people are a threat to societal norms and values. Such lyrics perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to the stigmatization and marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals, reflecting and reinforcing toxic masculinity's narrow expectations of male identity.

Greed

Greed within toxic masculinity represents an insatiable drive for power, wealth, and dominance, grounded in a belief in male superiority. This mindset links success to material possessions, social status, and control, often resulting in unethical behavior and exploitation. The song "Mr. Brownstone" from *Appetite for Destruction* (1987) illustrates this greed through lyrics like "*I used to do a **little**, but a **little** wouldn't do it / So the **little** got **more** and **more** / I just keep tryin' to get a **little** better / Said a **little** better than before.*" The lyrics depict an escalating pursuit of power and success, where initial efforts are deemed insufficient, leading to a relentless craving for more. This cycle of continuous dissatisfaction and expansion embodies the greed intrinsic to toxic masculinity, highlighting how the quest for greater material gain and social status perpetuates unethical behavior and systemic inequality.

Violent Domination

Violent domination within toxic masculinity involves using force and aggression to assert control and showcase strength. This behavior glorifies violence as a means to resolve conflicts and reinforces male dominance through physical aggression, emotional abuse, and controlling actions. The song "Out ta Get Me" from *Appetite for Destruction* (1987) exemplifies this concept with lyrics such as "*They won't break me / They gonna break their teeth on me.*" The speaker's declaration of resilience and invincibility—"They won't break me" and "They gonna break their teeth on me"—demonstrates a defiant stance against any challenge or aggression. This imagery highlights the glorification of toughness and aggression, portraying the speaker as impervious to harm and capable of retaliating against those who confront him. Such attitudes reinforce the harmful notion that true strength is defined by aggression and domination, perpetuating stereotypes of masculinity that prioritize power over empathy.

Characteristic of Misogynistic Men

The data reveals that Guns N' Roses' lyrics exhibit a strong presence of misogyny, reflecting key traits of toxic masculinity as outlined by Connell (2005) in his work on "Hegemonic Masculinities." One prominent trait is the compulsion to dominate and control, evident in lyrics like "*They won't break me*," indicating a belief in exerting power as essential to masculinity. This dominance extends to various social contexts and involves emotional suppression, with aggression being the primary emotion expressed, as seen in lyrics such as "*had to kill*" and "*I'll blow you away*." Such aggression underscores a broader pattern of using violence and control to assert superiority over women. Additionally, there is a marked devaluation of femininity, with misogynistic men often mocking and belittling anything associated with it, further highlighted by objectifying lyrics like "*Panties*" and "*Sexy*." These elements collectively illustrate how the band's lyrics reinforce misogynistic attitudes, emphasizing the harmful impact of toxic masculinity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of Guns N' Roses' lyrics reveals a significant presence of toxic masculinity, as defined by Terry A. Kupers' theory. The research identified 28 instances of toxic masculinity in the band's lyrics, including 9 examples of misogyny, 5 of homophobia, 7 of greed, and 7 of violent domination. The findings align with Connell's (2005) framework of "Hegemonic Masculinities," highlighting how the band's lyrics reflect traits such as dominance, emotional suppression, aggression, devaluation of femininity, and sexual objectification of women. These elements collectively underscore the pervasive nature of misogyny and toxic masculinity in the band's work.

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