

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter I is the beginning part of this study. This chapter contains the introduction of the study that regarded as the basis for the researcher in writing the study. It explains the background of the study, statements of the study, objective of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, approach to the study, and organization of the paper. These explanations are divided into seven subsections, which are as follows:

1.1 Background of the Study

Gender is one of the most fundamental ways in organizing the social life of human beings. It matters from the little things in someone's life to their most profound aspects. Feminists see gender as a 'construct'; they believe that gender is a socially constructed concept that creates the differences between women and men in various areas such as roles and responsibilities (Ashraf, 2018).

Gender identities refer to what it means to be a woman or a man in society. 'Masculinity' and 'femininity' are the consequences of a process of socialization that begins in childhood. This framework defines masculine as active, strong, and brave; while femininity is being visualized as passive, gentle, and cooperative. Men and women act in certain ways because the society already establishes the idea of what it means to be man and woman, and the people who does not conform the stereotypes of manhood and womanhood are usually being judged.

The term 'toxic masculinity' has become a universal explanation for sexism and male violence since it was first defined in the early 1990s by Frank Pittman who claims that toxic masculinity is an exaggerated masculinity caused by absent fathers and overbearing mothers. Pittman also states that the most masculine thing a man can do is be a father, with an assumption that fathers somehow inherently teach healthy and 'real' masculinity in their sons. Some men who believe that there is a certain way to be a man and they will condemn on the rest of them that does not follow the way is the type of man that has toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity is linked to aggression, misogyny, and negative health outcomes such as drug overdose and suicide (Salter, 2019). Toxic masculinity is toxic because of its causes and effects.

One of the novels that tackle toxic masculinity is *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. It is written by Benjamin Alire Sáenz. It takes setting in El Paso, Texas, during the late 1980s, the story follows Aristotle, a teenager that suffers with self-doubt and builds thick walls around him. Aristotle believes that he has to act the same way like men around him, especially his father who does not really like to talk about anything except if it is necessary and his brother that is locked up in prison. Aristotle represses all the feelings he has as unorthodox coping methods. Until one day he meets a teenager around his age named Dante who has a complete opposite personality with Ari. Dante is self-assured, articulate, and has an open and unique perspective on life.

The novel illustrates a clear image of toxic masculinity, especially for Latinx teenagers. According to Gary Barker:

There is an immense pressure for young men, both Black and Latino to conform to certain standards of toughness and financial prowess – often by any means necessary. By attempting to meet these standards, poor minority men often get themselves in trouble – through violence that ultimately leads to a run-in with the law (2005, p. 417).

Aristotle has to hide his feelings and build walls around himself because he does not want to be seen as weak, and even though the novel's setting of place is 1980s, Aristotle's story still can be reflected on what happens to male teenagers nowadays. What happened to Aristotle and Dante in this novel are effects of society's toxic masculinity.

The writer chooses to analyze *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* because the novel reflects on how toxic masculinity influence male teenagers. Even though this research focuses on fictional characters and the analysis of work that is also fictional, the stories of these characters resemble the same issues that current male teenagers may be experiencing.

1.2 Statements of the Study

Statement provides the issues or problems which necessary to get solved. It contains the intention of the writer on discussing the topic. The questions of the research are written in this part of thesis. Based on the background of the study above, this research is arranged into three statements as follows:

1. What are the types of masculinity of the male main characters in *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*?
2. Why do the male main characters in *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* consume on toxic masculinity?

3. What are the traits of toxic masculinity reflected in *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*?
4. What are the impacts of toxic masculinity for the characters; Aristotle and Dante?

1.3 Objective of the Study

An objective is a significant part of a study. This part can be the guide for the researcher to reach the purpose of the study. This research has some objectives of the study as follows:

1. To categorize the types of masculinity of the male main characters in *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*.
2. To find out the cause of toxic masculinity.
3. To reveal the traits of toxic masculinity that are described in the novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*.
4. To analyze the impacts of toxic masculinity towards the two male main characters.

1.4 Scope of the Study

Limitations are important to maintain the focus of the research in order to keep it in boundaries. The writer will limit the analysis on three areas, which are the causes of toxic masculinity, the traits of toxic masculinity, and the impacts of toxic masculinity in the novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study of toxic masculinity towards male teenagers can be a learning for society as a whole, especially male teenagers, to show how we should reconstruct masculinity into something that is more positive. It can be a reference for students to conduct literary researches that discuss related problems.

1.6 Approach to the Study

Methodology is necessary in order to analyze the research problems in conducting this study. The writer uses queer and gender studies approach and method of the study to analyze the research problems in this thesis.

The writer applies toxic masculinity theory in this research. It is applied to identify toxic masculinity traits described in the novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. The writer uses a theory written by R.W. Connell in her book entitled *Masculinities*. The framework that she wrote is that to understand masculinity, we have to learn types of masculinity and their relationships to one another (Connell, 2005).

In conducting the research, the writer reads the main data which is the novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. Then, identify the data from the primary source. The writer also uses library research to collect data and facts. Library research is being conducted by reading journal articles and books, browsing through the internet to gather the data that are required for the

research. After collecting data, the writer starts analyzing the data using the selected theory. Next, the writer interprets the results.

1.7 Organization of the Paper

This study will be divided into five chapters. The chapters' details are as follows:

Chapter I contains the introduction of the research and it includes the explanations of background of the study, statement of the problem, objective of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, approach to the study, and organization of the paper.

Chapter II contains the synopsis of the object, which is a novel entitled *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, and then followed by the biography of its author, Benjamin Alire Sáenz.

Chapter III contains the review of related literature. This chapter contains subsections which are previous studies, literature, novel, intrinsic elements with its classifications and elaborations, queer and gender study, explanation of R.W Connell's *Masculinities*, R.W Connell's definition of masculinity, explanations of types of masculinity according to R.W Connell and its classifications, explanation of toxic masculinity, explanation of cause of toxic masculinity, and traits of toxic masculinity and its classifications and elaborations.

Chapter IV contains of findings and discussion which are the analysis of the object using R.W Connell's theory of toxic masculinity. This chapter

discusses the findings and discussions in order to provide the answers of the statements of the problem that has mentioned in Chapter I.

Chapter V contains the conclusion of the study and the researcher's suggestion for the readers.