

Masculine Signs In A Female Hero: A Semiotic Perspective On Gogo Tomago

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Abstrak

Maskulinitas bersifat dinamis dan dipengaruhi oleh berbagai faktor seperti budaya, lingkungan, pendidikan, ekonomi, dan pengalaman pribadi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memperkaya diskursus gender, khususnya dalam memperluas pemahaman tentang studi maskulinitas pada karakter minor perempuan Go Go Tomago dari film *Big Hero 6*. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, dengan mengacu pada teori semiotika Barthes. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan total 20 data, dengan 5 data terkait penampilan fisik, 1 data terkait fungsi, 2 data terkait emosi, 6 data terkait intelektual, 3 data terkait interpersonal, dan 3 data terkait aspek pribadi lainnya. Hal ini disebabkan oleh fokus karakternya pada kemampuan intelektual dan fisik, ketidakhadiran subplot romantis, serta kesesuaian film untuk penonton keluarga.

Keywords: Barthes, Big Hero 6, Chafetz, Masculinity, Semiotics

Introduction

One of the cultural issues that often emerges in society is the issue of gender. The concept of gender frequently becomes a matter of debate because gender itself is a social and cultural construct attached to women and men. In other words, gender refers to the characteristics and behaviors that are considered appropriate for males and females, shaped by societal norms. Unlike sex, which refers to biological differences, gender refers to social aspects that distinguish the roles, functions, statuses, and identities of individuals in both social and personal life. The term gender is also used to describe behavioral differences between men and women, which are often labeled as masculine and feminine.

Femininity and masculinity are defined as gender identities shaped by society to regulate how men and women are expected to behave in public and private life. Masculinity, for example, is a standard attributed to men. According to Chafetz (1974), masculinity is a set of characteristics that are socially constructed and culturally expected of men. These characteristics



include physical, emotional, sexual, and interpersonal traits that collectively form stereotypes about how men “should” behave.

On the other hand, according to Butler (1990), femininity is not an inherent identity of women, but rather the result of repeated acts constructed by social and cultural norms. In other words, women appear feminine because they are shaped, taught, and expected to act in accordance with those norms. Therefore, social constructs such as femininity and masculinity often become cultural issues, as they are widely accepted by society without being critically examined.

Feldman (2001) also states that when individuals apply a set of behavioral rules to all men and women, beliefs about gender roles become gender role stereotypes. In Western society, women are traditionally viewed as more gentle and nurturing than men. Traits such as domesticity, warmth, beauty, emotionality, dependence, physical weakness, and passivity are commonly associated with femininity. On the other hand, words like unemotional, physically strong, independent, active, and aggressive are used to describe stereotypical masculinity. Consequently, men are expected to behave according to masculine traits, while women are expected to embody feminine characteristics.

There are numerous theories about gender stereotypes and how they create distinct images that apply only to women, as if women are incapable of carrying the same strong labels as men, and are not competent enough to receive the same recognition or hold equal positions as men (Fatimah, Sili, & Asanti, 2019). As a result, women are often subjected to stereotyping. These stereotypes become problematic in society, suggesting that women who display more masculine traits or lack femininity are seen as deviant. However, in reality, according to Halberstam (as cited in Sulistia, 2016), masculinity can indeed appear in or be possessed by women. This means that masculine traits can emerge in women and are not exclusive to men.

Gender issues surrounding the concept of masculinity frequently appear consciously or unconsciously in literary works. Literature can take the form of novels, poems, plays, or films. The issue of female masculinity is often portrayed in literary works, particularly in films. Films depict various

aspects of human life and are the result of work by creative and professional individuals in their respective fields. Film is a captivating art form and is one of the most influential forms of mass media, surpassing newspapers, novels, short stories, and radio. This is due to its audio-visual nature, which can hypnotize or emotionally influence the audience evoking laughter, tears, sadness, anger and films can be rewatched multiple times. Over time, with the increasing number of films produced, the roles of women depicted in film have also evolved.

Many films now portray female characters with different traits, including masculinity. Films that feature female protagonists portrayed from a masculine perspective can impact the audience and broaden their way of thinking. Through films, various issues or themes along with their meanings and messages can be conveyed to viewers. Disney is one of the companies that produces films containing gender issues. The popular films produced by Disney often draw the audience's attention in relation to gender representation.

With the researcher's narrative above, the researcher is interested in raising the topic of masculinity in female characters because many people still do not realize that self-concepts such as masculinity can be found in one individual, in this study are women. In addition, masculinity itself is formed by society, therefore masculinity contains beliefs created by society itself, meaning that there is a possibility that masculinity can appear in women.

In this study, the researcher applies Chafetz's theory of masculine traits along with Barthes' semiotic theory. To support this study, the researcher selected a character from a Disney animated film as the data source, as Disney films are popular, easily accessible, and often portray strong visual and narrative representations of gender. Female characters in Disney films are generally portrayed through stereotypical ideals of femininity, such as being gentle, polite, and traditionally dressed. However, this study aims to explore the representation of female masculinity, which is rarely highlighted in mainstream animated films.

The researcher chose the film *Big Hero 6* (2014), specifically the character Go Go Tomago, as the object of analysis. Although she is not the main character, Go Go Tomago is part of the superhero team and appears as a minor character who still possesses distinct and noteworthy traits. The character Go Go Tomago was chosen for this study because of her captivating portrayal, which successfully captures the audience's attention. This interest stems from her distinctive appearance and behavior, which consistently display strong masculine traits, both through her dialogue and actions. Her unique characterization provides rich data for analyzing these masculine traits in a female character in an animated film. While she does not receive much narrative focus in terms of personal background or character development, her visual and verbal presence consistently reflects masculine traits, such as assertiveness, independence, emotional control, and physical strength. These characteristics make Go Go an interesting subject for analysis, as they demonstrate that masculinity is not limited to male protagonists but can also emerge through female supporting characters in action-oriented, futuristic films.

Method

In this research, the researcher employs a qualitative method as the research approach. This research adopts a qualitative approach as it aligns with the fundamental characteristics of qualitative research, namely describing data in a descriptive manner and focusing on a specific context, which in this case is masculinity traits (Wijaya et al., 2025). This method is chosen because this research analyzes dialogues and scenes involving the character Go Go Tomago in the film *Big Hero 6*, which consist of non-numerical data. Through this approach, the researcher is able to explore the meanings within the dialogues more deeply and thoroughly.

Results and Discussion

A. Results

In this research, the researcher presented the data findings. The data based on *Big Hero 6* directed by Don Hall and Chris Williams according to

the theory from Roland Barthes (1988) and Janet Saltzman Chafetz (2006). After collecting and classifying the data, the researcher found 20 data related to the Stereotypical Masculine Traits from character GoGo Tomago.

Table 1. The Findings of Stereotypical Masculine Traits

No	Stereotypical Masculine Traits	Quantity
1.	Physical appearance	5
2.	Functional	1
3.	Sexual	0
4.	Emotions	2
5.	Intellectual	6
6.	Interpersonal	3
7.	Other personal	3
TOTAL		20

Based on table 1, There are 5 data of physical appearance, 1 data of functional, 2 data of emotions, 6 data of intellectual, 3 data of interpersonal, and 3 data of other personal.

1. Physical appearance

According to Chafetz's ideas about masculinity, traditional masculine physical appearance consists of virile, athletic, strong, sloppy, worry less about appearance and aging, and brave.

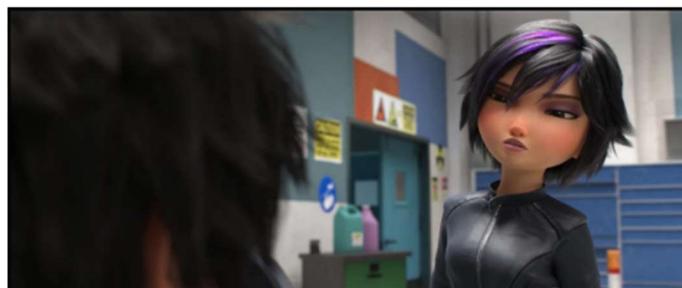


Figure 1. Physical Appearance on GoGo Tomago

Go Go Tomago is a representation of masculinity in terms of physical appearance, especially strong, sloppy and brave. Short hair, leather clothing, and strong facial expressions indicate a rejection of feminine stereotypes. In Barthes' theory, these signs contain the myth that strength, dominance, and assertiveness are masculine characteristics. However, in the context of Go Go's character, this myth is actually dismantled - that women can also

appear with masculine physical characteristics and symbols without losing their gender identity.



Figure 2. Physical Appearance on GoGo Tomago

In this scene, GoGo Tomago shows masculinity in terms of physical appearance, especially strength and courage. This is clearly seen through the scene where he operates a futuristic superhero costume at high speed and takes action against a criminal. His ability to move agilely and nimbly in a dangerous environment further strengthens this impression. The scene he does and his visual appearance depict a character who is not only physically tough, but also brave, active, competent, and heroic. Facing danger and taking risks is often considered a male-dominated area (i.e. heroic physical actions and courage in battle). Thus, GoGo Tomago destroys the gender myth that has been attached to men that physical strength, agility, and courage in dangerous situations only belong to men. He emphasizes that women also have and are able to display these characteristics.

2. Functional

Breadwinner, provider. This area of masculinity focuses on how the man function as the breadwinner or the defender either to his family or to himself.



Figure 3. Functional on GoGo Tomago

In this scene, GoGo Tomago shows masculinity in terms of functional, especially in the provider aspect, which is very visible from her attitude. Her action of giving Hiro a hug to calm him down makes her as a provider in terms of emotion. The scene shows strong emotional and moral support shown by GoGo. In the context of masculinity or traditional gender roles, men are always considered as breadwinners or providers. The provider here can be material or emotional. Historically, this role has often been imposed on men, creating pressure that their masculine identity is closely tied to financial capacity or dominance in providing for all needs. GoGo here shows the attitude of the provider emotionally. So women can also be providers.

3. Emotions

Unemotional, stoic, and don't cry. This area of masculinity is based on the emotional state of a man where they feel less affected by feeling and capable in making logical and rational thinking to resolve their problems.



Figure 4. Emotion on GoGo Tomago

In this scene, GoGo Tomago strongly represents masculinity through her unemotional/stoic control, courage reflected in her calm expression, and confidence in the midst of a frightening situation. This confirms that these masculine traits can be embodied by female characters. Despite being in a clearly frightening and threatening situation, GoGo does not show any expression of fear, anxiety, or panic like her other friends. Her expression remains controlled, serious, or even unemotional, showing an incredible ability to remain stoic under pressure.



Figure 5. Emotion on GoGo Tomago

In this scene, GoGo Tomago significantly displays aspects of masculinity in the Emotional category (Unemotional, stoic, and don't cry). Despite being in a clear state of grief, GoGo is not seen crying or showing excessive or open expressions of sadness. Her expression is somber but controlled, demonstrating her emotional resilience and ability to remain strong or stoic in the midst of loss. This attitude reflects the unemotional characteristics often associated with masculinity, where emotions are suppressed or controlled in order to maintain an image of strength and toughness. Although GoGo is a female character, her behavior in this scene strongly demonstrates the unemotional and stoic characteristics often associated with traditional masculinity, challenging the gender expectation that women will be more emotionally expressive in situations of grief.

4. Intellectual

Logical, intellectual, rational, objective, scientific, practical, mechanical, public awareness, activity, contributor to society, and dogmati.



Figure 6. Intellectual on GoGo Tomago

In this scene, GoGo Tomago clearly manifests masculinity through strong intellectual attributes, particularly in the scientific, practical, and mechanical aspects. She displays the ability to engage directly in technical

work, demonstrate a deep understanding of how things work, and apply her knowledge functionally characteristics that are traditionally associated with the male domain.



Figure 7. Intellectual on GoGo Tomago

In the intense chase scene, GoGo Tomago demonstrates his masculinity through his intellectual intelligence and strong personal qualities. He displays logical and rational thinking by understanding that traffic rules are irrelevant in a life-and-death situation, prioritizing survival over blind obedience. His frustration and taking over the wheel reflect a very practical orientation, as he objectively sees the problem and immediately acts to solve it. In addition, GoGo shows a decisive nature with his statement "That's it." followed by taking control without hesitation, as well as an uninhibited nature in taking crucial initiatives for the sake of the team. In short, GoGo manifests masculinity through intelligence centered on logic, rationality, objectivity, and practicality in the face of a crisis, complemented by the decisiveness and courage to take control.

5. Interpersonal

Leader, dominating, disciplinarian, independent, free, individualistic, and demanding.



Figure 8. Interpersonal on GOGO Tomago

In this scene, GoGo Tomago prominently manifests masculinity in the categories of Leader, Dominating, and Demanding. GoGo explicitly takes the leadership role in this crucial moment by giving the instruction “Hard left!”, he directly directs the vital actions to navigate the danger, showing the necessary initiative and strategic ability. His strong pointing gesture and direct command also show a clear attempt to dominate the decision-making in the midst of the chase. His command “Hard left!” is a very demanding instruction, not just a suggestion, but an order that expects quick and precise execution without question. In short, in this scene, GoGo Tomago clearly manifests masculinity through the attributes of a dominant and demanding leader, showing the ability to take control and direct actions in a high-pressure situation for the safety of the group.



Figure 9. Interpersonal on GOGO Tomago

In this scene, GoGo Tomago shows the side of masculinity in interpersonal terms. GoGo actively takes the role of leader and motivator. in the dialogue spoken by GoGo "we're going to catch Callaghan" here she tries to convince Hiro while giving support through physical contact, namely hugging Hiro. after that she holds Hiro's arm and says "and, this time, we'll do it right". This action shows the initiative to lead and provide support, as well as affirming a common goal. the essence of this scene is how GoGo interacts with others to provide direction and moral encouragement, which essentially reflects the interpersonal aspect of masculinity. It shows that strength and leadership roles, which are often associated with masculinity, can also be manifested through mental encouragement and affirmation of determination, without being tied to biological gender.

6. Other Personal

Aggressive, success oriented, ambitious, proud, egoistical, confident, moral, trustworthy, decisive, competitive, uninhibited, and adventurous.



Figure 10. Other personal on GOGO Tomago

Her actions of taking things directly and without permission can be described as aggressive in the context of social interaction. She does not hesitate to take what she needs, showing the traits of being decisive and uninhibited. Go Go's dialogue "Need this!" is also explicitly egoistical because her priority is her own needs without consideration for others, in this context Wasabi. Although GoGo is a female character, her actions in this scene clearly demonstrate attributes that are often socially associated with masculinity, especially in the categories of other personal especially decisive, uninhibited, aggressive and egoistic. This highlights how the concept of masculinity can be manifested through a variety of behaviors and speech, without being tied to biological gender.



Figure 11. Other personal on GOGO Tomago

In this scene, GoGo Tomago prominently manifests a strong masculinity in the Other Personal category. This is clearly seen through her strong drive to succeed. Despite falling on her first attempt, she does not give up, but continues to try until she successfully masters her new costume, demonstrating a steadfast focus on the end result and achieving

her goals. In addition, GoGo shows a clear sense of ambition; her actions of actively practicing and trying to master her new costume despite the difficulty reflect her high aspirations to become proficient and effective with her new superhero equipment, pushing her to surpass her initial limits. Finally, GoGo's apparent self-confidence, her refusal to accept Hiro's help after falling is a strong indication that she believes in her own ability to overcome the obstacle on her own, and this confidence is validated by her successful control of the costume and her upright and proud posture at the end of the scene. In short, GoGo Tomago in this scene clearly manifests masculinity through her strong drive to succeed, her ambition to conquer challenges, and her unwavering confidence in her ability to achieve her goals on her own.

B. Discussion

This study successfully identified 20 data points demonstrating stereotypical masculine traits in the character GoGo Tomago. Of these data, intellectual traits (6 occurrences) were the most frequent, followed by physical appearance (5), then interpersonal traits (3), other personal traits (3), and finally, functional traits (1). This order of occurrence provides an initial glimpse into how masculinity manifests in GoGo.

These findings align with previous research. For example, research by Saputra and Albab (2024), which analyzed the male character Dom in the film *Jakarta vs. Everybody*, and research by Bililah, Widodo, and Sulistiyaningsih (2024) that examined the film *High and Low the Movie 3 Final Mission*, both found that physical appearance aspects of masculinity appeared very frequently. The advantage of physical appearance as an indicator of masculinity lies in its ease of visual identification. Consistent with this research's findings on GoGo, intellectual and interpersonal aspects were also relatively frequent in these studies, indicating that these traits consistently serve as markers of masculinity across characters and stories.

Meanwhile, Pramesti (2021) research offers an interesting perspective by analyzing Disney Princess characters. Although Pramesti uses different theoretical frameworks, namely Halberstam's theory of female masculinity

and Dr. Sandra L. Bem's Bem Sex Role Inventory, her analysis focuses on female characters, as does this study. Despite differences in theoretical approaches, the findings of masculine traits in female characters across these studies generally confirm that physical appearance is a dominant aspect of masculinity, as it easily helps us identify masculine traits through visual observation alone. This supports the argument that representations of masculinity in media can transcend traditional gender boundaries.

Conclusion

After the researcher analyzes the Stereotypical Masculine Traits in the character GoGo Tomago from Big Hero 6 movie. Based on Chapter 4, it can be concluded, there are 20 data of stereotypical masculine traits found in the character GoGo Tomago from Big Hero 6. The result shows that the researcher found 5 data of physical appearance, 1 data of functional, 2 data of emotions, 6 data of intellectual, 3 data of interpersonal, and 3 data of other personal. From the data that has been obtained, there is 1 type of Stereotypical Masculine Traits that do not exist in GoGo Tomago namely sexual. This is due to her character's focus on intellectual and physical abilities, the absence of a romantic subplot, and the film's suitability for family viewing. GoGo is portrayed as an independent and competent individual, without any romantic or sexual involvement.

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