

# MASCULINITY IN *METROPOP* NOVELS

Nisfatul Syarifa, Azizatus Zahro\*

Department of Language Education, Indonesian and Local Literature

Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: [nisfatulsyarifa@gmail.com](mailto:nisfatulsyarifa@gmail.com)

Article History:

Submitted: 22 June 2020; Revised: 9 October 2021 Accepted: 28 December 2021

DOI: 10.26858/retorika.v15i1.14065



RETORIKA: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra dan Pengajarannya under  
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

ISSN: 2614-2716 (print), ISSN: 2301-4768 (online)

<http://ojs.unm.ac.id/retorika>

**Abstract: Masculinity in *Metropop* Novels.** Masculinity refers to the ideal nature of male constructed by society. Developments in various sectors allow masculinity to flourish, one of which is metrosexual male. Metrosexual refers to a man who is very concerned about his appearances. It emerges due to the impact of popular culture and hedonism lifestyle on modern urban society. This study aimed to analyze the masculinity of metrosexual characters in *metropop* novels. Masculinity in *metropop* novels depicts masculinity in an urban life setting that puts forward physical characteristics such as a good looking face, fashion trends, branded goods and the economic as well as social stability.

**Keywords:** masculinity, character, metropop novel

Masculinity in a broad sense can be interpreted as a construct containing male characteristics commonly possessed by men, while female traits are known as femininity. Masculinity in Indonesia is generally identified with the depiction of a man who is agile, nimble, and manly (Noviana, 2015). However, each region has different perceptions of male nature because masculine constructs are often influenced by the way a culture views the ideal role of a man. Masculinity is constructed by culture. Demartoto (2010) states that masculine traits are not innate. All masculine traits will be imposed on a man by the society in which he is born. Masculinity and femininity are not binary characteristics. As stated by Zahro (2017), femininity and masculinity can be opposite, similar, or even identical in certain aspects.

In Indonesia, the social construction of masculinity that appears on the media can be grouped by year period (Demartoto, 2010). One of them is masculinity in the 2000s which shows the development of masculine traits towards dandy men who are called metrosexual men. The phenomenon of metrosexual men emerged as a result of popular culture and the hedonistic lifestyle that developed rapidly in modern urban societies. This phenomenon was marked by the development of science and technology and an increase in the standard of people's lifestyle. As a result, the need to fulfill one's own desire to keep "up to date" is always increasing (Rahmawati, 2013). The modern urban lifestyle that views physical appearances as an important aspect makes men feel more comfortable showing their feminine and dandy side. The phenomenon of metrosexual men is often encountered and

found, especially in metropolitan cities in the world and in Indonesia. Masculine appearance is no longer synonymous with hard-working men who are what they are, but men who care about their appearance and take care of themselves, but still play a role as a man. During its development, it is increasingly natural for men to use body care products.

The emergence of the metrosexual men phenomena in Indonesia has increasingly blurred the boundaries of masculine traits. The spread of the metrosexual lifestyle is heavily influenced by media such as pop novels. Pop novels sell better in the market because they are easier for readers to digest (Harum, 2018). One of the pop novels circulating in Indonesia is a metropopolis that contains the life story of popular culture. The word metropopolis is coined from the words 'metropolitan' and 'popular'. This term is used by Gramedia Pustaka Utama to name their popular novels and is often compared to urban lit by Kensington Books (Intan, Handayani, & Som, 2019). For a metropolitan novel to be published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama, the theme of the story must be related to metropolitan life, the character written must be someone who is close to the conditions and activities of the metropolitan society in Indonesia. The physical setting used in the metropolitan novels is urban areas or big cities where people in their late twenties to early forties reside. The metropolitan novels use light and relaxed language that is often found in everyday life (Fitriana, 2010). The masculinity of metrosexual male characters in the metropolitan novels can be translated into several aspects, including physical aspects, fashion aspects, social status aspects, and personality aspects.

## METHODS

The current study belonged to a qualitative study which aimed to analyze 5 metropopolis novels. The five metropopolis novels are (1) *Miss Pessimis*, a 272-page novel which was written by aliaZalea and published by PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2010; (2) *Sunshine Becomes You*, a 432-page novel which was written by Ilana Tan and published by PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2012; (3) *Critical Eleven*, a 344-page novel which was written by Ika Nastassa and published by PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2015; (4) *Love on Probation*, a 328-page novel which was written by Christina Juzwar and published by PT

Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2016; and (5) *Honeymoon Express*, a 312-page novel which was written by Mia Arsjad and published by PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2017.

The data consisted of narratives, dialogues, and monologues from the five novels which indicated behavior, perceptions and motivations related to constructs about physicality, fashion, social status, and the personality of male characters in the novels. Since the data were interpretive, this study used a human instrument, where the researcher served as the main instrument. The researcher acted as the main instrument in data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of meaning.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

In general, the results of this study were categorized into four groups, the construction of metrosexual male masculinity in metropopolis novels based on physical aspects, fashion aspects, social status, and the aspects of personality. The four categories can be seen in Table 1.

### *Attractive Face*

For a metrosexual man, face is an important part. As is well known, qualifications and job demands as well as efforts to attract the opposite sex are the main factors that are considered to underlie this principle (Hasyim, 2017). In metropopolis novels, the faces of male characters are always depicted as attractive. It is described that they have good looks on the level of gods in Greek mythology, stunning eyes (sharp, intense, shady with beautiful eye color) and an almost perfect facial construction (thick eyebrows, sharp nose, beautiful lips).

The Greek god analogy can be found in the figure of Ervin in *Miss Pessimist* (aliaZalea, 2010). aliaZalea chose this analogy as a description of how attractive Ervin's face is in the eyes of women who idolize him. The description of Ervin's character also includes the way he smiles or stares, which leaves a big impression that no one can ignore.

In addition, charming eyes are found in some metropopolis novels. Alluring eyes indicate sharp, intense, calm eyes that have a beautiful color. Ale in *Critical Eleven* (Natassa, 2015) is described as someone who has an intense gaze when speaking. Apart from Ale, Ares in *Love on*

Probation (Juzwar, 2016) is also described as a man who has sharp eyes and beautiful eye color. Natassa and Juzwar use the depiction of a man with sharp eyes as a sign of masculinity. Meanwhile, Arsjad chooses to use a shady eye description for Alva in the *Honeymoon Express* (Arsjad, 2017) to show an attractive man with a gentle character.

Alex in *Sunshine Becomes You* (Tan, 2012) is mentioned as a charismatic and charming man. Tan uses the word "charismatic" to show Alex's leadership character. Another image used to show the attractiveness of a character's face is a good facial construction. Ervin in *Miss Pessimis* (aliaZalea, 2010) is described as

a person with perfectly sculpted lips, a sharp nose, and thick eyebrows. Ale in *Critical Eleven* (Natassa, 2015) and Ares in *Love on Probation* (Juzwar, 2016) are also described as men who have thick eyebrows or sideburns on their jaws as an added value in masculinity in terms of their physicality.

Furthermore, each writer tends to have a different and varied style in depicting the character's face. However, men in the metropolitan area have always been or are often described as having an attractive face. An attractive face is not always associated with handsomeness, but can be better described by the term "good looking".

**Table 1. The Results of the Study**

No.	Focus	Aspect	Description
1.	Physical aspects	Face	attractive, handsome, well-groomed, charming, and charismatic face
			sharp/intense/shaded eyes with beautiful colors
			up to date and neat hairstyle
		Figure	a smile that leaves a high impression on others
			sharp nose, thick eyebrows, strong jawline, beautiful lips shape
			tall
2.	Fashion aspect	Style and accessories	dashing, full, muscular, muscular, well-built, and has broad shoulders
			Well-groomed
			Wears expensive and branded clothes
3.	Social status	Successful	Neat and stylish
			Wears sophisticated and luxurious accessories
			Has a big responsibility
			Has a high position
			Well-appreciated by society
			The job is fit to his career aspirations
		Settled	Receives a higher education and in a prestigious place
			Owens a luxurious private vehicle
			Lives in a luxury residential complex in the city center
		Powerful	Has a lot of savings and all the items needed
			Has power over oneself, such as having confidence in life choices and making decisions
			Has power over others such as being respected by others, has influence over others and can rule over others
4.	Personality aspects	At work	workaholic, hardworking, job-loving, efficient, and perfectionist
		In social circles	Reflects the nature of the new man as narcissist (arrogant, authoritarian, and consumerist) and the nature of the new man as nurturer (understanding, romantic, and jealous)

### ***An Ideal Body Figure***

Everyone's ideal physical criteria are different, but there is always a similar tendency in choosing a perfect or ideal body figure. One of the most common benchmarks is having a tall body. Ervin in *Miss Pesimis* (aliaZalea, 2010), Alex in *Sunshine Becomes You* (Tan, 2012), Ale in *Critical Eleven* (Natassa, 2015), and Ares in *Love on Probation* (Juzwar, 2016) are depicted as

tall men. In addition, they are also described as men with masculine posture. Masculine posture refers to a well-built, full, muscular, sturdy body and a broad chest. This depiction can be found in Ervin in *Miss Pessimis* (aliaZalea, 2010), Ale in *Critical Eleven* (Natassa, 2015), Ares in *Love on Probation* (Juzwar, 2016), and Alva in *Honeymoon Express* (Arsjad, 2017). The appearance of masculine figures has a high tendency. It indicates that in metropop novels,

masculine figure is considered a crucial criterion in embodying a masculine male character.

Another ideal criterion of a male character in a metropop novel is a well-groomed body. Ervin in *Miss Pessimis* (AliaZalea, 2010) is a figure who really cares about his body. As depicted in the novel, he regularly washes hair with fragrant shampoo. In addition, Ares in *Love on Probation* (Juzwar, 2016) has many tattoos all over his body, especially on the arm area. Juzwar uses the depiction of the tattooed Ares to emphasize his "free" and masculine character. Some people think that tattoos are associated with macho figures. Metropop novels, through the male characters, show how the stereotypes of the general public shape the condition of the male body that is considered transcendent. The masculine construct assumes that masculine men are men who dominate both in terms of character and physique. Domination from a physical point of view is portrayed in tall, handsome, or muscular men.

### *Fashion Styles and Accessories*

The character's fashion styles and the up-to-date accessories they wear are underlined in all the metropop novels. Ervin is described as a brand-oriented man in *Miss Pessimist* (AliaZalea, 2010). Alex always looks 'perfect' in *Sunshine Becomes You* (Tan, 2012). Ale is a simple figure in *Critical Eleven* (Natassa, 2015). Ares appears as a macho man in *Love on Probation* (Juzwar, 2016) and Alva looks trendy in *Honeymoon Express* (Arsjad, 2017). Ervin is a male figure who has impressive fashion styles and accessories. He always wears clothes with famous and expensive brands that show a certain social class, such as Hugo Boss.

Alex is a perfectionist who always looks neat with accessories that complement his appearance according to the current world fashion. In addition, Ale himself is someone who has minimalist yet "masculine" fashion styles and accessories, seen from his selection of fashion items that tend to be simple but typical of men such as sneakers, t-shirts, and a men's watch. On the other hand, Ares is a macho male figure who is identical with macho fashion and accessories such as ripped jeans or short-sleeved T-shirts that show off his arm muscles. Alva is a figure who always looks trendy by wearing glasses. Even though the male characters in the metropop

novels have varied fashion styles, they tend to be described by trendy styles of clothing and accessories. They are depicted as modern men typical of metropolitan society.

### *Becoming Successful at Work and Education*

Success can be defined as accomplishments. Career success can be assessed from several aspects such as responsibility, position, appreciation, and the suitability of the job with the aspirations of the individual. Ares in *Love on Probation* (Juzwar, 2016) is described as a person who has a big responsibility leading an advertising company. Apart from Ares, Ervin in *Miss Pessimis* (Aliazalea, 2010) is portrayed as someone who has succeeded in getting a promotion and becomes a leader in his division.

Alex in *Sunshine Becomes You* (Tan, 2012) is a reliable pianist who has received good appreciation from the people who are into classical music. Alva in *Honeymoon Express* (Arsjad, 2017) and Ale in *Critical Eleven* (Natassa, 2015) are described as men who have successfully obtained their dream job. Alva becomes an animator while Ale has succeeded in becoming the engineer as he aspired to be.

Apart from work, another form of success found in the metropop novels is success in education. In the novels, it is explained that the main male characters are well educated. Ervin successfully completed his double degree at Texas A&M and then earned an MBA at Rice University. Alex completed his education to become a pianist at the Juilliard School, which is a world-class prestigious art school. Ale received a scholarship while studying at Texas A&M. Ares successfully studied in England. Meanwhile, Alva managed to get a scholarship to continue his study in Australia.

Success is known to be one of the barometers to assess the masculinity of a man. One of the characteristics that must be possessed by a masculine man is to be a big wheel or to be successful (Demartoto, 2010: 4). It can be formulated if without success, society will not see a man as a masculine man because he is considered a failure.

### *Financially Secure*

The stable financial condition of a man in the metropop novels demonstrates the maturity of

the male character. Besides, the financial condition of a man seems to be an indicator created by the urban metropolitan community. Metrosexual men, besides paying attention to their appearance, are also financially secure and have abundant wealth to support their hedonistic lifestyle (Triswidiastuty & Kahija, 2015).

Ervin in *Miss Pessimis* (aliaZalea, 2010) has a luxurious M3 car with fantastic value as well as a private elite apartment in the middle of Jakarta as the representation of his financial stability. Not much different from Ervin, Alex in *Sunshine Becomes You* (Tan, 2012) also owns a Lexus luxurious car and an apartment in the New York City downtown. In addition, Ale in *Critical Eleven* (Natassa, 2015) also owns a Prado-type luxurious car and abundant savings so he can build a luxurious private residence for his wife. Meanwhile, Ares in *Love on Probation* (Juzwar, 2016) owns a luxurious car and an apartment in the heart of Jakarta City.

The stability of a man in the metropop novels is symbolized by the possession of luxurious vehicles and luxurious residences in the middle of the city, either apartments or houses. Men, especially those with a metro-sexual lifestyle who are included in the latest consumer class, like various things that represent capitalism, such as loving foreign brands and luxurious goods or living in elite areas or apartments (Mulyana, 2014).

### ***Powerful in Making Decisions***

Power in a broad sense can be interpreted as the influence and power that a person has to regulate those around him or himself. In the metropop novels, this power can be divided into two groups, namely power over oneself and power over others. Power over oneself is found in the novel *Miss Pessimis* (aliaZalea, 2010) and *Critical Eleven* (Natassa, 2015). Ervin has the power to make decisions about the career path he wants without being influenced by the opinions of others around him. Meanwhile, Ale does not hesitate to disobey his father's orders in order to carry out his decision to become an engineer rather than a soldier as his father wishes.

Power over others is explained by the figure of Ares in *Love on Probation* (Juzwar, 2016) who is respected by his colleagues. He has such an excellent reputation and position that he has the power to give orders that no subordinates

can argue. A man's power is usually directly proportional to the position or status and the social role he plays in his social circles. Social status can be obtained voluntarily or by hard work. Metropop novels that contain portraits of urban life give rise to a phenomenon in society that the view that "a "masculine" man is a person in power" is still valid and sustainable today.

### ***A Workaholic Man***

A workaholic can be defined as someone who is "crazy" at work. In the metropop novels, workaholics tend to receive appreciation and are judged as a group that is superior to those who are not workaholics. It is possible because the life of a metropolis city is full of demands for high working hours, busyness, and hard work.

Ervin in *Miss Pessimis* (aliaZalea, 2010) is depicted as a man who really loves his job and always keeps himself busy in the office even though he also always remembers to have fun (work hard play hard). In addition, Ervin also has efficient characteristics that support his workaholic nature. Similarly, Alex in *Sunshine Becomes You* (Tan, 2012) is a man who enjoys his career. Alex is also a perfectionist who always tries to give his best in all his works. Even more extreme, Ares in *Love on Probation* (Juzwar, 2016) is described as a workaholic figure who is willing to spend time on holidays working on his report. While other people generally tend to keep work away on holidays, Ares is happy to keep working on his reports.

People who adhere to traditional hegemonic masculinity understand that the man's workaholic nature is a form of a high sense of his responsibility as the head of the household. The responsibility of men is closely imaged as the breadwinner and driver of the family economy (Primordiyanti, 2010). Hardworking is a label that is normatively attached to the Adams. Therefore, it can be concluded that, apart from all the prerogatives granted by society to men, men are also burdened with binding and burdensome obligations.

### ***Personality in Social Interactions as New Man as Narcissist and New Man as Nurturer***

The term "new man" which is then divided into two, namely as narcissist and as nurturer was first coined by Beynon (Demartoto, 2010). Both

are thought to be men's initial reactions to the feminist movement. The nature or character of a man in social interactions in metropop novels apparently reflects these two masculine concepts that have existed since the 1980s.

The concept of new man as narcissist appears in the selfish figure of Ervin in *Miss Pessimist* (aliaZalea, 2010), in Alex who is arrogant and who loves himself in *Sunshine Becomes You* (Tan, 2012), in Ale who is hedonistic in *Critical Eleven* (Natassa, 2015), and in the authoritarian Ares in *Love on Probation* (Juzwar, 2016).

Furthermore, the concept of new man as nurturer appears in all metropop novels. Ervin in *Miss Pessimis* (aliaZalea, 2010) is very understanding to Adriana, Alex in *Sunshine Becomes You* (Tan, 2012) is loyal to Mia, Ale in *Critical Eleven* (Natassa, 2015) loves Anya very much, Ares in *Love on Probation* (Juzwar, 2016) never gave up to chase Lita, and Alva in the *Honeymoon Express* (Arsjad, 2017) is gentle with Shera.

Men are always identified with low communication skills (both verbal and non-verbal) (Primordiyanti, 2010). However, since the emergence of the feminism movement, men have responded by showing themselves as a new man. They accept themselves and live without

rejecting their natures which are not much different from women's (love, curiosity and understanding for loved ones).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that there are four main aspects that the authors of the metropop novels use to construct the masculinity of the male characters in these novels. The four aspects are physical aspects, fashion aspects, social status aspects, and personality aspects. Based on the physical aspect, the male characters are described as individuals who have attractive faces and ideal body postures. Based on the fashion aspect, they are described as individuals who follow fashion trends and wear accessories to support their appearance. Based on the aspect of social status, they are described as figures who are successful both in work and in education, who have power over themselves and others, and who are financially secure. Based on the aspect of personality, the male characters are described as hardworking individuals and as new man as narcissist and new man as nurturer in social life. This means that metrosexual men in the metropop novels have the same masculine traits as men used to have in the 1980s.

## REFERENCES

- Zalea, A. 2017. *Miss Pesimis*. Jakarta: Penerbit PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Arsjad, M. 2017. *Honeymoon Express*. Jakarta: Penerbit PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Demartoto, A. 2010. "Konsep Maskulinitas dari Jaman ke Jaman dan Citranya dalam Media". *Online*. <https://argyo.staff.uns.ac.id/2010/08/10>, diakses: 9 Maret 2019.
- Fitriana, A. 2010. Karakteristik Novel-Novel Metropop Gramedia. *Skripsi*. Depok: Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya UI, *Online*. (<http://lib.ui.ac.id/file%3Ffile%3Ddigital/20160953-RB01A105ka-Karakteristik%2520novel.pdf>), diakses: 15 Oktober 2019.
- Harum, D. M. 2018. Konsep Maskulin dalam Karya Metropop Antologi Rasa Karya Ika Natassa. *Sawerigading*, 24(2):165–175, doi: 10.26499/sawer.v24i2.538.
- Hasyim, N. 2017. Kajian Maskulinitas dan Masa Depan Kajian Gender dan Pembangunan di Indonesia. *Jurnal Sosiologi Walisongo*, 1(1):65–78, doi: 10.21580/jsw.2017.1.1.1938.
- Intan, T., Handayani, V. T., & Som, W. S. 2019. Citra Perempuan dalam Novel Metropop "Tetralogi Empat Musim" Karya Ilana Tan. *Nusa: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra*, 14(4):583–598, doi: 10.14710/nusa.14.4.583-598.
- Juzwar, C. 2016. *Love on Probation*. Jakarta: Penerbit PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Mulyana, A. 2014. "Representasi Gaya Hidup Pria Metroseksual di Majalah Pria Ibukota". *Online*. Jilid 13 Nomor 1, <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/141997-ID-none.pdf>, diakses: 25 Oktober 2019.
- Natassa, I. 2015. *Critical Eleven*. Jakarta: Penerbit PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Noviana, R. 2015. "Maskulinitas dalam Novel". *Online*. <http://repository.umy.ac.id/bitstream/handle/123456789/6088/Jurnal.pdf>, diakses: 16 September 2019.
- Primordiyanti, F. 2010. Maskulinitas dalam Novel *Revolutionary Road* Karya Richard Yates. *Tesis*.

- Depok: Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya UI. *Online*.  
<http://lib.ui.ac.id/file%3Ffile%3Ddigital/20251440-RB00F198m-Maskulinitas%2520dalam.pdf>, diakses: 3 Februari 2019.
- Rahmawati, P. 2013. Representasi Gaya Hidup Metroseksual dalam Kemasan Produk “Nivea for Men”. *Skripsi*. Yogyakarta: Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni UNY. *Online*.  
<http://eprints.uny.ac.id/21272/1/Putri%2520Rahmawati%252005206241016.pdf>, diakses: 4 Oktober 2019.
- Tan, I. 2012. *Sunshine Becomes You*. Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Triswidiastuty, S., & Kahija, Y. F. L. 2015. “Memahami Makna Menjadi Pria Metroseksual”. *Online*. Jilid 4 Nomor 2, <https://ejournal3.undip.ac.id/index.php/empati/article/view>, diakses: 25 Oktober 2019.
- Zahro, 2017. *Identitas Gender dalam Teenlit*. *Disertasi*. Malang: Pascasarjana Universitas Negeri Malang.