

Toxic Masculinity in the Sadfishing Phenomenon within the #LakiLakiTidakBercerita Hashtag: A Netnographic Study of TikTok Content from the Account @bimbluess

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Abstract: Toxic masculinity is a form of gender injustice reflected through labeling and stereotypes toward men, especially when they attempt to express emotional vulnerability. This study explores how toxic masculinity is manifested in the sadfishing phenomenon on TikTok, particularly through the hashtag #LakiLakiTidakBercerita and user comments on the account @bimbluess. The phenomenon highlights a paradox in which men's emotional openness is often met with responses that reinforce hegemonic masculinity norms. Using a qualitative approach through netnographic methods, this research analyzes digital user interactions as part of participatory media culture. The study is framed by standpoint theory and the concept of hegemonic masculinity to understand how gendered power structures operate in digital spaces. The findings reveal five key themes: (1) toxic masculinity as a generational emotional wound, (2) internalized masculine values as social consciousness, (3) fear of vulnerability and masculine performativity, (4) emotional self-sabotage, and (5) the burden of productivity seen as male destiny. These dynamics show how digital platforms can both challenge and reproduce gender norms.

Keywords: Toxic Masculinity, Sadfishing, TikTok, #LakiLakiTidakBercerita, Netnography, Hegemonic Masculinity

Introduction

Toxic masculinity has persisted since the patriarchal era and is believed to have been passed down from generation to generation (Syahfitri & Mawangir, 2024). In Indonesia, it has become a cultural norm taught by parents from an early age. Boys are taught not to cry, to always be strong, and to be capable in every aspect. However, in reality, not all men meet these expectations. When they are perceived as failing to fulfill the criteria of being a "masculine" man, they are often seen as weak. This is what is referred to as toxic masculinity towards men (Kartika & Iqbal, 2023).

Toxic masculinity is often understood as the internalization of masculine values present in society regarding gender and the traits that men are expected to have based on societal standards (Seravim, 2023). Toxic masculinity is a form of gender injustice characterized by unfair treatment that causes one gender to feel disadvantaged in gender

communication. It stems from the influence of traditional societies that believe men must display strength, resilience, emotional toughness, dominance, and superiority values rooted in patriarchal culture. These expectations are deeply embedded in family and social dynamics within Indonesian society (Ramadhani et al., 2022).

The culture of toxic masculinity substantially affects men's mental well-being. A WHO study highlights that 80% of suicide cases in the United States are committed by men or 2.9% of the population per 100,000 people largely due to the perception of failing to meet societal expectations of masculinity. Men's more impulsive disposition further heightens the emotional drive toward suicide compared to women (Novalina et al., 2021). The term toxic masculinity has a mixed history. On the one hand, it has been used as an analytical tool to critique adherence to rigid masculine gender norms. On the other hand, it was employed by groups such as the Mythopoetic Men's Movement and Promise Keepers in the 1980s and 1990s, which sought to reject the "warrior" form of masculinity—viewed as damaging to the spiritual life of the family—while still promoting anti-feminist politics and a return to traditional patriarchal roles (de Boise, 2019).

The hashtag trend *#LakiLakiTidakBercerita* ("Men Don't Tell Stories") has emerged as a space for men to express their emotions. According to an article published by Magdalene.co on March 7, 2025, this hashtag had generated nearly 500 TikTok videos as of March 6, 2025. Many of these videos use humor to portray how men avoid expressing sadness by engaging in other behaviors. Although entertaining, this trend risks reinforcing the stigma that men should not show emotions, potentially affecting their mental health (Khudori, 2025).

Social media has become an integral part of daily life, enabling individuals to express themselves and share personal experiences. One of the most widely used platforms worldwide is TikTok. This platform is not limited to sharing joy or achievements but also includes content about negative experiences and sadness. Some users share touching or heartbreaking personal stories to gain support or sympathy from the audience. However, this practice can develop into what is known as sadfishing—the act of sharing emotional content excessively to attract attention or sympathy from others (Rahmah, 2024). Features such as short videos, visual effects, background music, and the use of hashtags enable individuals to convey emotions, personal experiences, and perspectives in an authentic and engaging way. This makes TikTok an effective medium for self-expression and the construction of social identity (Pratama, 2023). In October 2023, We Are Social reported that the global TikTok user base is dominated by young men, with male users accounting for 50.8% of global TikTok users, while female users make up 49.2% (Ceci, 2025).

Sadfishing is often understood as a form of sadness expressed as content on TikTok, intended to draw attention and go viral. This psychological vulnerability is often difficult for social media users to fully grasp. As social beings, humans inevitably encounter social

problems that involve deeply personal issues (Putri et al., 2020). Sadfishing is defined as the deliberate act of sharing difficult emotional experiences, feelings of being misunderstood, and interpersonal challenges on social media in order to elicit sympathy and attention from online communities. In a study conducted by Shabahang et al. (2023), it is explained that anxiety, depression, attention-seeking behavior, and low levels of social support are strong predictors of sadfishing among adolescents. Although sadfishing can provide emotional support, it also carries the risk of increasing the likelihood of online bullying, exploitation, and other negative consequences.

Previous research on sadfishing discussed the case of a teenage girl who became a viral topic on social media in 2019, beginning with an Instagram post from the account “Audrey”, which shared her experiences of being mocked, bullied, and beaten by her peers. The post was touching and attracted widespread sympathy, quickly going viral. That study concluded that social media can be used to gain support and sympathy from others, which may lead to a dependency on such platforms (Putri et al., 2020). The sadfishing phenomenon on social media often involves intentionally constructed sadness to provoke reactions.

The TikTok account @bimbluess uploaded a video showing a man sitting in silence, lost in thought. As of 2025, the video has reached 23.6 million views in just nine months. This viral success is driven by communicative attraction among netizens, formed through shared emotional interest in the content, which in turn creates interaction and indirectly supports the content to spread widely. The selection of the @bimbluess account in this study is based on its consistent representation of emotional narratives from men. The account often uses a heartfelt and relatable storytelling style. Several of its videos reflect elements of sadfishing, blurring the line between genuine emotional expression and efforts to gain public empathy.

Research on sadfishing is still relatively new and has mostly focused on celebrities, influencers, or teenage users on platforms like Instagram and Twitter. Previous studies have primarily emphasized personal motives and the psychological impact of sadfishing, as well as audience responses. For instance, Rahmah (2024) found that sadfishing behavior on TikTok is often driven by a desire for attention and social validation, which may negatively impact users’ mental health. However, there remains a lack of research exploring sadfishing within the Indonesian cultural context, especially regarding how this phenomenon interacts with prevailing social norms, particularly those related to men’s emotional expression.

Methodology

To examine toxic masculinity as expressed through the practice of sadfishing in the *#LakiLakiTidakBercerita* trend as portrayed by netizens in the comments on the TikTok account @bimbluess the researcher employed a qualitative approach using the method of

netnography. Netnography is a method used to study the culture of internet users. It is an application or adaptation of ethnographic methods to the online world. Netnography is specifically designed to explore the lives and cultures of people and communities on the internet. It is a relatively new method that is becoming increasingly important today, as the internet plays an ever-greater role in modern life (Eriyanto, 2021).

This study is situated within the critical paradigm, as it seeks to uncover the dynamics of toxic masculinity operating in the digital space through the practice of sadfishing and the public's responses to it through comments. In this context, Critical Netnography is used not only to descriptively understand digital practices but also to trace the underlying ideological dynamics and power relations, particularly within the *#LakiLakiTidakBercerita* content on the @Mr.Biimm account.

Standpoint theory explains that an individual's perspective on social phenomena is shaped by social experiences and power structures (Febriyani & Sa'idah, 2024). Originating from Hegel's ideas, this theory emphasizes that differences in background lead to diverse ways of seeing the world. Harding adds that one's standpoint is influenced by demographic factors, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and economic status. This perspective is widely used in feminist studies, as it helps to understand social experiences from various positions within society (Fridha et al., 2024).

The informants for this study are netizens who posted comments on the TikTok account @Mr.Biimm, specifically those engaging with the *#LakiLakiTidakBercerita* content. Informants were selected based on the most-liked comments. The researcher then exported these comments using an exportcommenter tool and analyzed them as textual data through the lens of Standpoint Theory.

Results and Discussion

In this study, the research object is the TikTok account @bimblueess, which is a personal account owned by an individual user without a background as a public figure, celebrity, or professional content creator. This account falls into the category of non-celebrity or ordinary user accounts, which consistently produces content related to the experiences of men facing psychological pressure, emotional wounds, and feelings of alienation. At the time this research was conducted, the @bimblueess account had 9,241 followers a moderate number for a personal account on the TikTok platform.



Figure 1. Profile of the Research Object

Nevertheless, this account is noteworthy for its consistent production of content that represents the inner experiences of men, particularly related to psychological pressure, emotional wounds, feelings of alienation, and issues of emotional expression within the culture of masculinity. One of the dominant themes highlighted is *#LakiLakiTidakBercerita* ("*#menDontTellStories*"), a hashtag that reflects criticism of hegemonic masculinity norms that compel men to hide their emotions and refrain from expressing vulnerability openly. The @bimblueess account was chosen as the research object because of one particular post featuring a video of a man sitting pensively, which clearly illustrates the phenomenon of sadfishing in the context of the *#LakiLakiTidakBercerita* hashtag. The video has received significant engagement, with a total of 23.7 million views, 2.1 million likes, 10.5 thousand comments, 257 saves, 2 thousand likes on the shared post, and has been shared more than 180.7 thousand times. Such a large amount of engagement demonstrates an extraordinary level of interaction, reflecting how content that features personal and emotional narratives can deeply resonate with a wider audience. This post presents a highly personal, profound narrative, laden with suppressed emotional expression, making it highly relevant and suitable for analysis within the framework of the sadfishing phenomenon. The high level of interaction indicates that this video has become a significant space for TikTok users to access, respond to, and discuss men's experiences that have long been absent from mainstream narratives.

Furthermore, through the lens of hegemonic masculinity theory by R.W. Connell, both the content and audience responses to this video can be viewed as part of a contestation against dominant masculinity norms that demand men appear strong, rational, and unemotional. Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity functions to maintain male dominance within the gender order while simultaneously oppressing alternative or subordinate forms of masculinity. In this context, the emotional experiences of men displayed in @bimblueess' TikTok content, along with the comments from other users, can be interpreted as a form of symbolic resistance against the construction of hegemonic masculinity that has long suppressed male vulnerability.

Thus, the @bimblueess account serves as a highly relevant object of analysis within the context of gendered power structures, men's subjective experiences, and social media as a space for articulating standpoints and resistance to the dominance of hegemonic masculinity in the digital era.

The Origins of the Hashtag #*LakiLakiTidakBercerita* on TikTok

The #*LakiLakiTidakBercerita* ("#MenDontTellStories") trend began to boom around 2023–2024. This trend emerged massively on social media platforms, particularly those popular among Indonesian users. It often appeared in the form of memes, images, or short videos featuring narratives such as "men don't tell stories, but...", followed by scenes depicting men engaging in certain activities as an emotional outlet such as working hard or isolating themselves — accompanied by sad music and emotionally charged visuals. At times, the trend was also used purely as a joke or meme format. However, this format sparked a strong emotional resonance among viewers, especially young men, who found these representations highly relatable to their own experiences. Because many related to this narrative, it triggered significant engagement from netizens, making it go viral across social media, particularly on TikTok. Below is an example of how the hashtag #*LakiLakiTidakBercerita* has evolved within the digital space, especially on TikTok.

Discussion

Toxic Masculinity as an Inherited Emotional Wound

In the analysis of comments within the #*LakiLakiTidakBercerita* trend, narratives emerged about emotional wounds being passed down from fathers to sons. Comments such as

“(3) Telling his parents would only burden them, telling friends is sometimes not the solution, so where can he tell his story? In the end, the aching heart is swallowed.”

This illustrates the standpoint of men who grow up in environments that do not provide emotional space, even within their closest relationships, such as the family. Men in this position carry not only their personal wounds, but also the burden of a familial narrative that regards emotional expression as a sign of weakness. This affirms that their experiences cannot be separated from social structures that are transmitted across generations.

Internalization of Masculine Values as a Form of Social Consciousness

In addition to being shaped by external environments, toxic masculinity is also expressed as something that men consciously internalize. Many comments reflect how men deliberately adopt hegemonic masculine norms, even when they feel emotionally exhausted. Comments such as the following illustrate this:

"(4) Maybe he thinks he doesn't want you to worry... a man's pride is not to complain unless he has truly hit rock bottom."

"(22) If you tell your story, it means you've given up."

These comments indicate that vulnerability has been constructed as a form of defeat. From the perspective of standpoint theory, such reflections reveal how men occupy a position that enables the emergence of critical consciousness and awareness that they are carrying the burden of a social identity they did not choose themselves. Several comments imply that men refrain from sharing their problems not because of direct external pressure, but because they have come to believe that "real men must not appear weak." Within the standpoint framework, this reflection represents a form of awareness rooted in a contradictory social position. Men recognize that they are part of a hegemonic masculine system, yet at the same time feel emotionally marginalized. From this position, a form of critical knowledge about the self and social structures can emerge knowledge that would not arise from the standpoint of dominant groups. Thus, these comments do not merely reflect individual experiences; rather, they represent a form of epistemic agency the capacity to produce knowledge based on lived experiences as men under the pressures of patriarchal cultural norms.

Excessive Fear and the Performativity of Masculinity

The next finding is the presence of comments that show resistance to the narrative of male vulnerability, often expressed through mockery, sarcasm, or dramatization. Comments such as the following:

"(2) I once tried to open up, and instead I got a motivational speech... then they said, 'You used to be strong, why are you like this now?' My story ended up being a joke."

This comment illustrates how male vulnerability is often not met with empathy, but rather dismissed or trivialized.

Similarly, comments such as:

"(6) When you try to open up, it turns into a competition of who's had it worse."
and

"(15) When we open up, sometimes it just gets brushed off and ends up adding to the burden."

These comments underscore that narratives of opening up are not only unwelcome, but often turned into a competition of suffering. This reinforces the dominant standpoint, which pressures men to maintain a performance of toughness while mocking any attempts to challenge this structure. Such attitudes can be read as a reaction from men occupying the

dominant standpoint, who feel threatened by emerging discourses of new masculinities. They maintain hegemonic masculine positions by discrediting the efforts of other men who attempt to confront and express their vulnerability. From the perspective of standpoint theory, this reveals a conflict between two social positions among men: one that seeks to preserve the status quo, and another that is working to build critical knowledge from emotionally marginalized experiences. This dramatization of fear can also be seen as a form of gender performativity, wherein masculinity is continuously constructed and reinforced through social mechanisms — including within digital spaces such as TikTok.

Self-Sabotage

One important finding from the analysis of comments on the *#LakiLakiTidakBercerita* trend is the tendency of men to engage in self-sabotage. This phenomenon arises from the deep internalization of hegemonic masculine values, which pushes men to reject and even blame themselves when experiencing emotional burdens. Comments such as

“(32) You are a man; it is not proper for you to complain — your readiness belongs to no one but your God!”

“(31) YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO BE SICK.”

These comments reflect an extreme internalization of hegemonic masculinity. Men not only feel that they must not share their experiences, but also view pain and exhaustion as something invalid. From the perspective of standpoint theory, this represents a form of epistemic oppression, in which individuals lose trust in the legitimacy of their own emotions.

The comment “(33) Before the IV line is attached, the war machine must not stop” even uses the metaphor of the body as a machine, reinforcing the idea that men are positioned not as whole human beings, but as tools of productivity.

Through the lens of standpoint theory, this comment reflects how men in emotionally subordinate positions end up reproducing the very power structures that oppress them. This form of self-sabotage embodies epistemic oppression—a condition in which individuals lose confidence in the validity of their own experiences and emotional expressions. Men in this position are not merely silenced by society, but have also silenced themselves, believing that to complain is a masculine sin. The knowledge that emerges from this standpoint is highly valuable, as it reveals just how deeply the patriarchal system operates—even reaching into the spiritual and inner realms of individuals.

The Burden of Productivity and Masculine Destiny as Fate

One of the findings that emerged from the collection of comments is the construction of masculinity as being closely tied to constant work and lifelong responsibility. Comments such as the following illustrate this:

"(10) Imagine being a man who is expected to work for a lifetime."

"(34) Men are not born to enjoy life, but to work until they die."

"(35) A man will work his entire life — providing for his family during his youth, and supporting his wife and children after marriage."

These comments reflect the standpoint of working men who live within a value system that compels them to remain constantly productive. These comments do not merely express complaints, but also constitute a form of knowledge born from lived experiences as men burdened by social, economic, and moral expectations. From the perspective of standpoint theory, this highlights how masculine identity is shaped by social-productive relations that position men as the primary providers for their families and society — even at the cost of their mental and physical health.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research conducted on the content and comments of the TikTok account @mr.biimm using the hashtag #LakiLakiTidakBercerita ("#menDontTellStories"), it can be concluded that narratives surrounding men's emotional experiences on social media contain many complex social dynamics. One of the key findings is how toxic masculinity emerges not only as an external social pressure but also as an inherited emotional wound, passed down from previous generations. This wound seems to become a burden that men continue to carry without ever fully recognizing or questioning it.

Furthermore, the internalization of masculine values appears to function as a form of social consciousness. Many men acknowledge that they "choose" to remain silent or suppress their emotions because they feel it is their duty as men — to maintain stability within their families or communities. This indicates that hegemonic masculinity is not only externally imposed but is also consciously accepted and practiced, despite its emotionally detrimental effects. The fear of being perceived as weak, useless, or not "man enough" also emerges as a strong theme.

The comments analyzed reveal how the performative aspect of masculinity is continuously enacted as a means of survival. In some cases, this even leads to self-sabotage, where men feel guilty when they want to cry, ask for help, or simply express their frustrations. Additionally, the burden of productivity and the constant demand to be strong, successful, and a reliable pillar of support is perceived as an unquestionable male destiny. Many feel that this is a fate they must accept, even though deep down they feel exhausted and incapable.

This research shows that social media platforms like TikTok can serve as alternative spaces for men to voice their vulnerability. However, these spaces also reveal that the

struggle against traditional constructions of masculinity is ongoing — a constant tension between the courage to be open and the fear of stigma.

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