

Masculinity Values in Bobo Magazine: A Semiotic Reading of Indonesian Children's Stories

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This article examines the masculinity values constructed in *Bobo*, Indonesia's longest-running children's magazine. Earlier research described *Bobo* as broadly patriarchal. It did not, however, separate the different forms of masculinity the magazine offers or show how they change over time. The study reads three issues published in 1986, 1996, and 2019. The corpus contains fourteen texts: short stories, fairy tales, serial comics, reader contributions, and advertisements addressed to boys. The analysis combines Barthes's semiotics of connotation and myth with narrative analysis of characterisation, agency, and resolution. Findings are interpreted through Connell's theory of hegemonic and plural masculinities. Six masculine positions emerge: the father as calm moral judge; the prince or hero as sovereign protector; the strong boy's body as a commercial project; the industrious boy as future provider; the comic adult man as a figure of ridicule; and the responsible brother who confesses and cares. Across the three issues, the authoritative father moves to the margins, maternal authority becomes more visible, and male protagonists are allowed fear and dependence. Yet two hegemonic markers persist: men still end their stories as providers, protectors, or husbands, and domestic incompetence remains a source of male comedy. The study concludes that *Bobo* does not simply reproduce patriarchy. It softens the *style* of masculinity while keeping much of its *structure*.

Keywords: masculinity; children's literature; *Bobo* magazine; semiotics; hegemonic masculinity; Indonesia

1. Introduction

Children's magazines hold a special place in a nation's cultural life. Picture books are read now and then, but magazines reach children regularly, issue after issue. Over time, they build a stable set of characters, situations, and moral lessons. Children use these to learn how the social world works.

In Indonesia, no children's periodical has held this role longer than *Bobo*. The magazine first appeared on 14 April 1973. Before that, the daily *Kompas* ran a children's supplement. Its success led the company to partner with Bobo's Dutch publisher and launch the magazine in Indonesia. The content was adapted to local culture, and *Bobo*

became the country's most popular children's magazine, with the tagline *teman bermain dan belajar* (a friend for play and learning). It has now passed its fiftieth year. It has accompanied readers through the New Order, the *Reformasi* period, and the digital era. Bobo is therefore more than a product. It is a long-running archive of what adults believe Indonesian children should become.

Gender norms are among the most important values such a magazine passes on, yet they are rarely stated openly. Children's literature has long been seen as a place where adult ideologies are written into texts that seem to centre on the child (Nodelman, 2008). For Hall (1997), representation does not mirror reality; it produces meaning

through signs. Barthes (1972) called the most effective ideological meanings *myths*, because they appear natural.

Masculinity is easily naturalised in this way. It often works as an unmarked norm. Traits given to boys and men, such as courage, reason, leadership, emotional control, and protectiveness, look like simple character traits rather than gendered values. Research on children's fiction shows that stories for young readers repeatedly model "ways of being male" (Stephens, 2002). They usually reward dominant forms, but sometimes leave room for alternatives (Wannamaker, 2008).

Connell's (2005) theory of masculinities grounds this study. Connell argues that masculinity is plural and ranked. *Hegemonic masculinity* holds the most honoured position, while *complicit*, *subordinated*, and *marginalised* masculinities are defined in relation to it. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) later stressed that hegemonic masculinity changes across history and place, so it must be studied in specific cultural settings. In Indonesia, masculinity has been shaped by state ideology, religion, ethnicity, class, and global media. Suryakusuma (2011) shows how the New Order's "State Ibuism" cast women as wives and mothers and, by implication, men as breadwinners and heads of household. Clark (2010) traces how Indonesian masculinities are negotiated in literature, film, and popular culture. Nilan (2009) shows young Indonesian men moving between the traditional responsible provider and newer, global models of manhood. A magazine that began in the early New Order and still publishes today is well placed to show both the persistence and the change of these ideals.

Research on *Bobo* has examined character education, social literacy, and class. Its construction of masculinity, however, has received little attention. Isnania, Martono, and Widyastuti (2020) found that 79.1% of sampled *Bobo* short stories narrated upper-class childhood, showing that seemingly neutral stories carry social hierarchies. The study closest to gender, by Watie, Febriana, and Ersyad (2018), concluded that *Bobo* features many male figures bound by patriarchal culture. This is a useful starting point. Yet it is descriptive, focuses on gender roles, and does not treat masculinity as plural and ranked. It also does not examine how masculine values are encoded through plot, focalisation, and the resolution of conflict. A finding of "dominant patriarchy" leaves a sharper question open: *which* masculine values are rewarded, which are pushed aside, and whether

boys are offered any alternative forms of manhood.

This study addresses that gap. It reads three issues of *Bobo*, published in 1986, 1996, and 2019, through literary semiotics and narrative theory. The three dates span the late New Order, its final years, and the post-*Reformasi* digital era. This allows a cautious view of change across time. The study asks three questions:

1. What masculine values do the stories present as desirable?
2. Through which narrative and semiotic mechanisms are these values made to seem natural for child readers?
3. To what extent do the stories reproduce hegemonic masculinity, and to what extent do they make room for alternative or caring masculinities?

By reading a canonical Indonesian children's periodical through critical masculinity studies, the study contributes to research on gender in Indonesian children's literature. It also offers practical insight for teachers, editors, and parents.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Masculinities as plural and ranked

This study treats masculinity as a set of social positions, not a fixed trait of male bodies. Connell (2005) identifies four relations among masculinities. *Hegemonic* masculinity is the most honoured way of being a man in a given setting. *Complicit* masculinity benefits from that ideal without fully living it. *Subordinated* masculinity is pushed down, often by being linked to the feminine. *Marginalised* masculinity is shaped by class or ethnicity. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) added that hegemony works mainly through consent and cultural example, not force. Exemplary figures, such as heroes, fathers, and champions, matter because they model what most men cannot fully become.

This study also uses the idea of caring *masculinities*. Elliott (2016) uses the term for masculine identities that reject domination and take up values of care, such as interdependence and emotional openness. The concept helps to ask whether *Bobo* offers boys alternatives, and not only whether it reproduces dominance.

2.2 Children's literature and the shaping of boys

Children's texts are written by adults for children. Nodelman (2008) calls the result a "hidden adult":

an adult view of what childhood should be, placed inside texts that appear to speak in a child's voice. Stephens (2002) shows that children's fiction offers repeated "ways of being male." Male characters are usually rewarded for action, competence, and control, and sometimes for empathy. Wannamaker (2008) adds that popular texts for boys often police the line between acceptable and "abject" boyhood, frequently through humour.

2.3 Masculinity in Indonesian contexts

Indonesian masculinities are shaped by the state, religion, family, and the market. Under the New Order, Suryakusuma (2011) describes "State Ibumism," which defined women as wives and mothers serving the nation. In the same gender order, the man was positioned as *kepala keluarga* (head of the family) and breadwinner. Clark (2010) shows how literature, film, and popular culture both repeat and question this model after 1998. Nilan (2009) finds young Indonesian men moving between the responsible provider and newer, consumer-oriented forms of manhood.

2.4 Gender research on Bobo

Several studies have examined gender in Bobo, but mostly through the lens of girls or patriarchy in general. Romadhon (2016) analysed short stories from April to June 2015. She found that girls were mostly portrayed as students, often emotional and caring, and that the stories rested on patriarchal, familial, and *ibnuist* ideologies. Hikmahwati (2014) studied a single 2012 story, "Celemek Raka" (Raka's Apron). In it, a boy who loves cooking is mocked by classmates but praised by his parents and friends for his skill. Hikmahwati read the story as a sign of growing gender equality. Watie, Febriana, and Ersyad (2018) examined issues from May to December 2017. They concluded that male figures were mainly strong, intelligent, leading, and decisive, which they read as patriarchal "temperament" and "status." Isnania, Martono, and Widyastuti (2020) showed that *Bobo* stories mostly narrate upper-class childhood.

Two limits run through this work. First, it treats masculinity as one block, either "patriarchal" or "equal." Second, it studies single moments in time. The present study responds by separating masculine positions and by comparing three issues across 33 years.

2.5 Semiotic and narrative tools

Barthes (1972) distinguishes *denotation*, what a sign literally shows, from *connotation*, the cultural meanings attached to it. When connotations feel natural and beyond question, they become *myth*. Barthes (1977) also explains how captions *anchor* images by fixing one meaning among many. This matters for *Bobo*, where comic panels and adverts combine pictures and words. The study adds three narrative questions drawn from narratology: who acts, who decides, and who is rewarded or punished at the end. Endings matter most, because the resolution of a children's story usually carries its moral.

3. Method

3.1 Design and corpus

The study uses a qualitative, interpretive design with a small diachronic comparison. Three print issues of *Bobo* were selected purposively from the researcher's collection: No. 25/XIV (27 September 1986), the issue of 16 May 1996, and the issue of 9 May 2019, published during the magazine's 46th-anniversary year. The three dates were chosen to cover three periods: the established New Order, its final years, and the digital, post-*Reformasi* era.

From these issues, the study selected every text in which a male figure acts, decides, or is evaluated. Texts about girls only, such as the 1996 story "Siapa Anak Mama?", were excluded. Non-narrative features (science pages, quizzes) were also excluded, except where an image or caption explicitly modelled boyhood. The final corpus has fourteen texts.

Table 1. The corpus

Issue	Title	Rubric	Main Male Figures
1986	"Kacamata Ayah"	Short story (pp. 4–5)	Papa; Iwan (older brother)
1986	"Kelompok Tangan Hitam: Terowongan" (part IV)	Serial story (p. 8)	Four child detectives; Kang Parjo

1986	Paman Kikuk, Husin dan Asta	Comic	Paman Kikuk; Husin
1986	“Pengalaman yang Berharga”	Short story (pp. 20–21)	Two wanderers; a Kakek
1986	“Kisah Seorang Putra Raja”	Fairy tale (pp. 22–23)	Pangeran Ringga; Patih Anggoro; Paman Tirta; Kakek Raja Jin
1986	Vidoran multivitamin	Advertisement	A boy flexing his arm
1996	“Kisah Babo dan Munni”	Fairy tale (pp. 16–17)	Babo (husband); two thieves
1996	“Bersusah-payah Dahulu”	Short story (pp. 48–49)	Budi; Eko; Cecep
1996	“Nenek Moyangku Orang Pelaut”	Reader feature, RCTI <i>Ceria</i> (p. 43)	Narrator; Calus; Bapak
1996	“Ayah dan Tamunya”; “Sepatu Baru”; “Mama”	Reader anecdotes	Ayah; Papa (deceased)
1996	Joni Kuku bersama Vidoran Man; Cerebrofort	Comic advertisement; advertisement	V-Man; Joni; Nico
2019	Bobo comic (scarf episode)	Comic (p. 8)	Bobo; Coreng; Kutu Buku
2019	“Serigala Besi”	Fairy tale (pp. 32–33)	Sukra; Pak Bagus; Serigala Besi
Issue	Title	Rubric	Main Male Figures
2019	Paman Kikuk, Husin dan Asta: “Berlibur ke Gunung”	Comic	Paman Kikuk; Husin

The 1996 Bobo comic “Mencicip Kue” (p. 3) was read as a reference text for family authority, because no adult male appears in it.

3.2 Analytical procedure

The analysis moved in four steps.

1. **Close reading.** Each text was read in full, and its verbal and visual signs were recorded.
2. **Narrative coding.** For each male figure, the study noted his role in the plot, what he does, what he decides, how he feels, and how the story ends for him.
3. **Semiotic reading.** Key signs, such as a father’s newspaper, a flexed arm, or a wedding chair, were read at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1972, 1977).
4. **Theoretical interpretation.** The coded positions were grouped and related to Connell’s

(2005) categories and to the idea of caring masculinities (Elliott, 2016). The three issues were then compared.

Quotations are given in the original Indonesian with English translations. Page numbers follow the printed pages where they are visible.

3.3 Limits of the design

Three issues cannot represent fifty years of publication. The diachronic comparison is therefore *indicative*. It points to patterns that larger samples should test, not to proven trends. Some pages in the 2019 issue were photographed out of order, and two comic episodes could not be read to their final panel. Only the panels that were read are interpreted.

4. Findings

The corpus shows six masculine positions. They are presented below in order of authority, from the

most to the least. A comparison across the three issues follows in Section 4.7.

4.1 The father as calm moral judge

In 1986, the father is the centre of moral authority. In “Kacamata Ayah” (Father’s Glasses), two siblings, Iwan and his younger sibling Resa, break their father’s glasses while fighting over a toy car. Their first thought is about his work: “*Papa pasti tidak bisa baca koran serta buku-buku. Pekerjaan Papa pun pasti terganggu*” (Papa surely cannot read his newspaper and books. His work will surely be disturbed). The glasses connote reading, knowledge, and public work. The broken object is a sign of the father’s intellectual role.

The illustration supports this reading. Papa sits upright in bed with his arms crossed and a lamp beside him. He is drawn as calm and in control, not angry. When the children confess, Papa laughs and reveals that he has already bought new glasses. Mama then gives the moral lesson: “*Mama dan Papa sangat menghargai kejujuran kalian*” (Mama and Papa greatly value your honesty). Papa speaks the final ruling: “*Kembalikan celengan itu ke tempatnya*” (Put the piggy banks back). The plot gives speech to both parents, but the father holds the final decision. He also knows the outcome before anyone else does.

The 1996 reader anecdotes show the same structure in everyday family life. In “Ayah dan Tamunya” (Father and His Guest), the father sits with a male visitor in the front room. When a drink is needed, “*Ayah masuk minta ibu membuatkan minuman*” (Father went in and asked Mother to make a drink). The mother then sends the younger child to borrow sugar. Domestic labour moves down the family ladder, from father to mother to child. The father’s role is to host and to protect the family’s face. The comedy rests on his shame: “*Oo, bukan main malunya ayahku*” (Oh, how embarrassed my father was). In a short joke on another page, “Uang Jajan”, it is Bapak who decides that a helper should be paid.

Two further anecdotes show the father as provider through absence. In “Sepatu Baru” (New Shoes), “*Ayahku sering bertugas di luar negeri*” (My father often works abroad). He returns at midnight with shoes as a gift. In “Mama”, a girl writes that after her father died, “*Mama bertindak sebagai kepala rumah tangga*” (Mama acted as head of the household). Female headship is stated, but only as a replacement that follows a death. The phrase “acted as” confirms the norm it describes: the head of the household is ordinarily the father.

4.2 The prince and the hero: sovereign and protective masculinity

The fairy tales present the most hegemonic masculinity in the corpus. In the 1986 “Kisah Seorang Putra Raja” (The Story of a King’s Son), Pangeran Ringga loses his whole family in a coup by the ambitious minister Patih Anggoro. Ringga survives, gains a magical patron, leads a rebellion, and has weapons forged. In the end, “*atas permintaan seluruh rakyat, Pangeran Ringga naik takhta menjadi raja*” (at the request of all the people, Prince Ringga ascended the throne). The plot sets two masculinities against each other. Ringga is legitimate: he mixes with common people and is chosen by them. Anggoro is illegitimate: he is cruel and grabs power. The story does not question male rule. It asks only which man should rule.

Women in this tale exist to serve and reward the hero. Paman Tirta offers his daughter: “*Biar anak hamba Riantini yang melayani keperluan-keperluan Tuanku*” (Let my daughter Riantini serve Your Highness’s needs). Riantini is “*seorang gadis yang lemah lembut, cantik dan berbudi luhur*” (a gentle, beautiful, and noble girl) who “*pandai menghibur hati Pangeran*” (is good at comforting the Prince). The final sentence joins power and marriage: Ringga takes the throne and asks Riantini to be his queen. Marriage is the hero’s reward, and the woman is one of the goods of victory.

The 1996 “Kisah Babo dan Munni” is more complex. Babo, a husband, leaves home after a quarrel and is turned into a cat by a sorcerer. His wife Munni searches for him for days. As a cat, Babo is ashamed to show himself, but he “*tak ingin melupakan siapa dirinya yang sebenarnya*” (does not want to forget who he really is). His manhood is restored through combat. When two thieves break in, Babo attacks them. A thief’s knife scratches his paw, and the scratch breaks the spell. Protection of the home literally turns the animal back into a man and a husband.

However, Munni also fights. She pulls a thief’s hair hard (“*Dijenggutnya rambut orang itu keras-keras*”). The illustration shows her thrown to the floor, while the cat-husband leaps at the armed men. The text gives her courage, but the image and the plot give the decisive act to the man. The story closes on harmony: “*Mereka rukun buat seterusnya*” (They lived in harmony ever after). The quarrel at the start is never resolved through talk. It is solved by the husband proving himself as protector.

4.3 The strong boy's body as a commercial project

The most direct image of masculine strength comes from advertising, not from stories. The 1986 Vidoran multivitamin advert shows an older boy flexing his arm while holding the hand of a toddler who copies the pose. The caption anchors the image: "*Vidoran menjadikan anak-anak tumbuh sehat dan kuat*" (Vidoran makes children grow healthy and strong). The text says "children", but the picture shows boys and the flexed arm. In Barthes's terms, the denotation is a vitamin. The connotation is male strength. The myth is that a growing boy's body is a project that can be bought and built.

By 1996, this advert has grown into a narrative. "Joni Kukuh bersama Vidoran Man" is a full-page comic in which a muscular superhero, V-Man, fights alongside a king in a battle. The boy Joni and the girl Mimi stand aside and "*menyempatkan diri minum multivitamin Vidoran untuk menjaga kesegaran dan kesehatan tubuhnya*" (take time to drink Vidoran multivitamin to keep their bodies fresh and healthy). The product slogan is "*Sehat tangkas kuat ceria*" (healthy, agile, strong, cheerful). Story and sales pitch merge. The hero's muscles become the brand.

The Cerebrofort advert in the same issue completes the picture. A woman's hand feeds syrup to a boy, Nico, who holds a basketball. The text speaks to the mother: "*Tbu bila perlu memberi Cerebrofort Syrup pada Nico*" (Mothers, if needed, give Nico Cerebrofort Syrup). The boy's active future, in competitions and basketball, depends on the mother's feeding. The division of labour is clear. The boy performs; the mother feeds.

4.4 The industrious boy as future provider

The 1996 issue gives boys a clear economic script. In "Bersusah-payah Dahulu" (Hard Work First), Budi and Eko learned to paint walls from an uncle during a holiday. Their friend Cecep refused. Now the two boys paint neighbours' houses for money. Budi explains: "*Kalau sudah trampil, baru bisa menjual jasa dan tenaga kita*" (Once we are skilled, we can sell our services and labour). They report the results: "*kami bisa beli dompet dan mentraktirmu. Sebagian juga sudah kami masukkan ke tabungan di bank!*" (we could buy wallets and treat you. We also put some into a bank account!). Cecep admits, "*Benar-benar aku rugi*" (I really lost out).

The story is not only about money. Eko adds that skill lets them paint their own house, which "*menghemat biaya dan menyenangkan hati orang tua*" (saves money and pleases our parents). Work is linked to duty toward the family. The illustrations show boys on stools and scaffolding with brushes and rollers. Manual skill, saving, and treating a friend are all coded as boyish virtues. The ending uses a proverb, *berakit-rakit ke hulu, berenang-renang ke tepian* (no pain, no gain), to turn this into a general moral.

The RCTI *Ceria* feature in the same issue moves this script into a working-class, coastal setting. The boy narrator from a fishing village says his friend Calus "*terpaksa berhenti sekolah, lalu mencari uang dengan bapaknya untuk biaya sekolah adik-adiknya*" (was forced to leave school and earn money with his father to pay for his younger siblings' schooling).

The narrator himself goes to sea because "*aku diajak Bapak ke laut... agar aku mendapat ilmu dan pengalaman dari laut*" (Father takes me to sea... so I can gain knowledge and experience from the sea). Masculinity is passed from father to son through work.

One detail complicates the picture. As *pecilan* (deck boys), the two boys cook rice for the crew and clean the boat. Domestic tasks appear inside a male workplace and are accepted without comment. The boys' dreams, however, point back to authority and the nation: Calus wants to become a *juragan perahu* (boat owner), and the narrator wants to join the navy. Calus also shows a marginalised masculinity in Connell's sense. Poverty forces him into early adulthood, and the feature presents this as admirable sacrifice rather than as a problem.

4.5 The comic adult man as a figure of ridicule

The long-running comic *Paman Kikuk, Husin dan Asta* offers a very different adult man. In the 1986 episode, Paman Kikuk carries a stack of plates and decides to wear a cooking pot on his head to carry it too. He praises himself: "*Nah, ini adalah ide cerdas!*" (Now, this is a clever idea from a clever person!). The pot hits a hanging flowerpot. Later, the boy Husin innocently fills the pot with dirty water for the garden, and Paman Kikuk puts it back on his head. The final panel shows him soaked.

The joke is aimed at male self-confidence in domestic work. A reader's letter in the same issue

confirms this reading. The editors explain that in an earlier episode *"Paman Kikuk merasa pintar masak, yakin bahwa masakannya enak"* (Paman Kikuk feels he is a good cook and is sure his cooking is delicious), and that this is where the humour lies. In Connell's terms, Paman Kikuk embodies a masculinity that is laughed at, not followed. Two readings are possible. On one hand, the comic deflates male authority. On the other, it may confirm that domestic work is not a natural male skill. The man in the kitchen is funny because he is out of place.

The 2019 episode, *"Berlibur ke Gunung"* (A Holiday in the Mountains), adds a new element. Husin admits weakness openly: *"Sebenarnya, aku agak kurang suka ke gunung, Paman... Aku enggak tahan dinginnya"* (Actually, I don't really like the mountains, Uncle... I can't stand the cold). In the panels read, the admission is accepted without mockery. Paman Gembul, another comic uncle, appears in the 2019 Bobo comic header bouncing on a trampoline. He continues the same tradition of the playful, non-authoritative man.

4.6 The responsible brother who confesses and cares

A quieter but important position is the boy who takes moral responsibility. In *"Kacamata Ayah"* (1986), it is the older brother, Iwan, who decides to confess: *"Kita harus berterus terang pada Papa... Kita harus meminta maaf atas kelalaian kita"* (We must be honest with Papa... We must apologise for our carelessness). When he faces his father, he speaks *"dengan suara bergetar"* (with a trembling voice). The

story allows the boy to feel fear and guilt. It rewards him for honesty, not for strength. Yet the older brother still leads. The younger sibling suggests paying with their savings, but Iwan speaks for both.

In the 2019 Bobo comic, care and practical leadership are combined. Emak (Mother) insists that the children wear scarves. Upik protests, but *"Emak tak mau tabu"* (Mother would not hear of it). When rain comes, Coreng panics, and Bobo stays calm: *"Tenang saja. Kita pakai syal untuk melindungi kepala"* (Don't worry. We'll use our scarves to cover our heads). Earlier, Bobo says, *"Kita harus berterima kasih pada Emak"* (We must thank Mother). Bobo leads, but his leadership is calm, cooperative, and grateful to the mother's foresight. His friend Kutu Buku then offers shelter at a neighbour's house. Male competence here takes the form of care and gratitude, not command.

The 1986 tale *"Pengalaman yang Berharga"* (A Valuable Experience) shows the opposite case. Two male wanderers argue about the colour of a chameleon and *"nyaris baku hantam"* (nearly come to blows). An old man stops them and teaches that the animal changes colour during the day. He warns them not to judge before they know the facts. Male aggression is presented as a fault, and it is corrected by an older, wiser man.

4.7 Change across the three issues

The six positions are not spread evenly across the three issues. Table 2 summarises where each one appears in the corpus.

Table 2. Masculine positions across the three issues

Masculine position	1986	1996	2019
Father as moral judge or provider	Central ("Kacamata Ayah")	Present, often absent or ashamed (reader anecdotes)	Not present in texts read
Sovereign or protective hero	Prince who wins the throne	Husband who proves himself as protector	Fearful hero rescued by women ("Serigala Besi")
Strong body as commodity	Vidoran advert	Vidoran Man comic; Cerebrofort	Not present in texts read
Industrious future provider	Not present in texts read	Wall-painting boys; fisher boys	Sukra becomes rich through work
Comic, ridiculed adult man	Paman Kikuk	Not present in texts read	Paman Kikuk; Paman Gembul
Caring or confessing boy	Iwan's confession	Not present in texts read	Bobo's calm care; Husin's admitted weakness

The clearest contrast is between the two fairy tales that frame the period. In 1986, Pangeran Ringga wins through rebellion, magical male help, and the will of the people. In 2019, the hero of “Serigala Besi” (The Iron Wolf) is quite different. Sukra is a loyal servant who leaves after fifteen years because “*Saya ingin mencoba hidup sendiri dan berkeluarga*” (I want to try to live on my own and have a family). Out of curiosity, he breaks a taboo and must promise his future wedding day to a demon wolf. He becomes rich, but “*ia takut menikah*” (he is afraid to marry). His fiancée’s father, Pak Bagus, offers male protection: three rows of guards. The guards fail. Sukra flees on horseback. He is finally saved by three grandmothers and their dogs, who turn out to be his old mistress, the sorceress Dadong Tetelu. She frees him as “*hadiab pernikahanmu*” (your wedding gift) and tells him to live carefully.

The 2019 hero is allowed fear, error, and dependence. Real power in the story belongs to an old woman. Yet the frame is unchanged. The hero’s goal is still a family. His success is still measured in wealth. The story still ends with marriage to a “*sangat cantik dan baik hati*” (very beautiful and kind-hearted) daughter, given by her father. Gusti Ayu, like Riantini thirty-three years earlier, has almost no voice of her own.

5. Discussion

5.1 Beyond “dominant patriarchy”

The findings partly confirm Watie et al. (2018). Male figures in *Bobo* often lead, decide, and protect. But a single label of “patriarchy” hides important differences. The magazine does not offer one model of manhood. It offers a *ranked* set of models, which is what Connell’s (2005) framework predicts.

At the top stand the legitimate prince and the calm father. They show hegemonic masculinity in its exemplary form: authority that is gentle, fair, and accepted by others. Below them is the industrious boy. He is complicit with the hegemonic ideal, because he is in training to become a provider. At the margins stand the poor fisher boy, who carries adult burdens, and the farmhand Kang Parjo in the 1986 detective serial, who is watched by the children as a suspect. At the bottom is Paman Kikuk, the man in the kitchen who fails. He is not punished, but he is laughed at. The hierarchy teaches children not only what a man should be but also what a man should *not* be.

The illegitimate men, Patih Anggoro and the knife-carrying thieves, are also important. They show

that *Bobo* condemns violent, greedy masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity in the magazine is not the most aggressive form. It is the form that *controls* aggression for the good of the family or the kingdom. This matches Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) point that hegemony works through moral authority, not through force alone.

5.2 The New Order family and its afterlife

The 1986 and 1996 texts fit closely with the gender order Suryakusuma (2011) calls “State Ibuism.” The mother makes drinks, feeds syrup, and cooks. The father reads, hosts guests, works abroad, and holds the final word. Even the girl’s letter “Mama” confirms the norm by presenting female headship as a replacement after the father’s death.

The 1996 issue adds a market layer. The Vidoran and Cerebrofort adverts turn the boy’s body into a site of consumption. This supports Nilan’s (2009) observation that Indonesian masculinity increasingly blends the provider ideal with consumer culture. In the Vidoran Man comic, the boundary between story and product disappears. Strength becomes something a parent can purchase for a son. The fact that the buyer addressed in the Cerebrofort advert is the mother confirms the old division of care. Women nurture, and boys perform.

5.3 Softer style, same structure

The 2019 texts show real change. The hero Sukra is afraid. Husin admits that he cannot stand the cold. Bobo’s leadership is calm and grateful rather than commanding. Female power is decisive: Dadong Tetelu saves the hero, and Emak’s rules prove correct. The authoritative father, so central in 1986, is absent from the 2019 texts read. These are signs of what Elliott (2016) calls caring masculinities: men who accept dependence and value care.

However, the change is mostly in *style*. Three structural elements remain. First, the male hero’s story still ends in marriage, wealth, and a family he will head. Second, the bride is still given by her father and described only as beautiful and kind. Third, the comic tradition of Paman Kikuk still finds humour in men who try domestic work. In this way, the 2019 issue shows a pattern noted in other children’s media: male characters may become more emotional, but the narrative rewards still follow traditional lines (Stephens, 2002; Wannamaker, 2008).

This also refines Hikmahwati's (2014) reading of "Celemek Raka". That story shows a boy who cooks and is admired, but he wears an apron printed with a fighter plane. The present corpus suggests that such boys are accepted when their domestic skill is framed as talent or professional ability. Paman Kikuk, an ordinary adult man who tries domestic tasks and fails, remains a joke. Domestic masculinity is accepted as skill, not yet as everyday duty.

5.4 The hidden adult and the child reader

Nodelman's (2008) "hidden adult" is visible in the corpus. The adults who wrote these texts place adult concerns, such as public reputation, paid work, marriage, and saving money, inside stories for a readership the magazine itself defines as children aged eight to eleven (Watie et al., 2018). Reader contributions are especially revealing. Children's own anecdotes reproduce the same family structure: Ayah's embarrassment, Ayah's long work trips, Mama as a replacement head. This suggests that the magazine does not only impose norms. It also reflects and recirculates norms its readers already live with, which is how hegemony gains consent.

5.5 Implications

For editors, the findings suggest three practical directions. Stories could show fathers doing everyday care without comedy. Brides and wives could have voices and goals of their own. Male heroes could find resolutions that do not depend on marriage or wealth. For teachers, *Bobo* texts are useful for critical literacy. Children can be asked simple questions: Who decides in this story? Who does the housework? Who is laughed at, and why?

6. Conclusion

This study asked what masculine values *Bobo* presents, how they are naturalised, and whether alternatives exist. It answers in three points.

First, *Bobo* offers six ranked masculine positions, not one. These are the moral father, the sovereign or protective hero, the strong body as commodity, the industrious future provider, the comic man, and the responsible, caring boy. The most honoured positions combine authority with gentleness and self-control.

Second, these values are naturalised mainly through three devices. Endings reward the protector, the provider, and the honest son. Everyday objects, such as glasses and newspapers, a flexed arm, or a wedding chair, carry gendered meanings without stating them. Comedy marks the man who does not fit, especially in the kitchen.

Third, the three issues suggest a shift from the authoritative father of 1986, through the working and consuming boy of 1996, to the more vulnerable and care-oriented male figures of 2019. This shift is real but limited. It changes how men feel and behave inside stories. It changes less how stories end and what men are rewarded for. In short, *Bobo* has softened the style of masculinity while keeping much of its structure.

The study has clear limits. Three issues cannot represent the whole history of the magazine, and some 2019 comic episodes were read only in part. Future research should sample more issues per decade, include the full run of each comic series, and study the *Bobo* digital platform. Reception studies with child readers would also show whether boys and girls read these masculine positions as the texts seem to intend.

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