a. MASCULINITY IN CRISIS

In 2009, where the movie takes place, the situation regarding gay movement has not reached the peak like today. However, there have already been a good number of movements regarding such issues. This year also marks as the 40 years since the Stonewall Riots movement, an event that plays a great role regarding LGBT issues. Forty years after the riot, several organizations supporting LGBT movement were reported to make a significant progress.

This raise of LGBT movements has also affected the position of men in the society. They start to lose the power that they have hold for a long time. Now men face something called ‘masculinity in crisis’. They start to confuse of what it means to be a man. The crisis refers to the loosening power of old hegemonic masculine trait which are white, middle-class, and heterosexual. The raise of LGBT movements affect to the growing number of homosexual acceptance as well. In 2010, 44% believed that “sexual relations between two adults of the same sex ”were“ always wrong” and 41% held to the opposite judgment that homosexual behavior was “not wrong at all” (NORC, 2010, para. 5). The statistics still show the society who accepts homosexuality is still
less than those who do not. However, the 44% of those who do not accept is a huge decline from 72% in 1990. People, by years, are showing more openness towards homosexual and thus it threatens the heteronormative belief in society.

The crisis is not only affected by the number of gay acceptance, but this period also marks as the first time America has an African American president. Obama brings an interesting discourse regarding masculinity. Being the first African American president, Obama must have several influences towards masculinity in that era. Shaw and Watson in their *Performing American Masculinities* specifically mentioned Obama’s election as one of the most impactful events that is worth analyzing, especially regarding masculinity discourse. His particular identity and its questionings of race, power, and gender are often the subject of impassioned debate (Watson & Shaw, 2011, p. 4). Shaw and Watson illustrated Obama’s representation here as contradictory:

In Obama, we currently have a president who is fully aware that identity is an ongoing construction and, more specifically, that the self is actively gendered as it is presented to the world. And that identity, Obama’s masculinities, is full of essential contradictions. Obama is both a black man and a white man, but also neither completely. He is both feminized and masculinized in the popular media. (ibid., 134). In this kind of situation, the crisis is even worsened because men are now also a target of consumerism and capitalism. This also remarks as the emergence of the term ‘metrosexual’, especially from fashion industry. The term metrosexual denotes a straight man with
some stereotypically feminine traits, such as taste in grooming and culture (Ervin, 2011, p. 59). It comes when fashion and beauty care products start to target men as their target market. Despite the debate on the rise and fall of metrosexuality, it is clear that this phenomenon still gives a large impact on the society. It is not merely an inclusive fashion phenomenon but it also gives a broader analysis on the masculinity itself as Ervin stated as:

Metrosexuality, often perceived as the queering of regular guys, continues to have an impact, whether or not the term itself is considered fashionable or current. Perceiving the metrosexual as a mockery or threat to “real” masculinity, some have tried to put the notion to rest, but the advent of the metrosexual heralds a very real change in the social construction of masculinity (ibid., 60)

Masculinity before the metrosexual era which glorifies the identity of white, middle class, and heterosexual male is now put to test ever since men are now offered to the fashionable world. Men then are perceived as weakened or softened. Metrosexuality is seen as something that blurs the images of straight and homosexual men. That is why, men see it as somewhat threatening. Metrosexuality may be a trivial and flippant notion, merely denoting a change in the buying patterns of an already privileged and dominant class, but in the way people have reacted to metrosexuality, it The Might of the Metrosexual is apparent that metrosexuality is viewed as similarly transgressive and threatening as homosexuality (ibid., 60-61)

While they found their masculinity threatened by the growing number of gay acceptances, new era of masculinity brought by Obama,
and also metrosexual world, there is a need of defense that comes from men. These men, particularly white, middle class, and heterosexual, who feel threatened by those minority powers then build a shield full of men. The emergence of homosocial behavior is then inevitable. Men start to bond with those from their own gender only. Women are often excluded and men start to see them as a threat too. Boudreau explains this phenomenon as:

The womanizing becomes a screen for some kind of homosexual tendencies. At the very least, these men claim to be speaking out for and defending other men who have been mistreated by women. It is for these characters that homosocial bonding is most important. Male bonding, as Katherine Hyunmi Lee notes, “facilitate[s] identification and assuages anxieties by reifying and authenticating unstable and unreal heterosexist masculine ideals” (n.p.). Thus, men come together in groups to reassure each other that their version of masculinity is real (Boudreau, 2011, p. 41)

Bromance genre which also depicts the homosocial behavior also follows the same old pattern about the exclusion of women and their tendency to be homophobic. They bash other group to cover their anxiety. By surrounding themselves with the group of their similar gender, men can feel save, private, enclosed, and free from the threat of other group that start to question their value and position. Homosocial is used as their shield to regain the masculinity back and also prevent them from homosexual tendency. Where heteronormativity goes unquestioned in the male-centered serials and thus functions as a particularly persistent attribute of patriarchal masculinity, the homosocial enclave more openly negotiates heteronormativity as the
men work to demarcate homosocial versus homosexual boundaries (Lotz, 2014, p. 114)

**b. BROMANCE FILM GENRE**

Defining genre in film has been a long debate, especially among the critics, on how to use this tool to analyze such mass products as films. The studies of genre in film are inspired much by those in literature. This is where problems start to arise where films as popular or even commercial product are perceived to be different with literature as high art. Critics began to give their own arguments on how film critics should take the analysis based on this genre.

Genres may be defined a patterns/forms/ styles/structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the film maker, and their reading by an audience’ (Alloway, 1975:28 in Neale, 2000:10). From that definition, it is clear that genre group some films into a certain category according to the formula or pattern that they follow. It means that certain films have their own generic symbol and iconography that differs them from other genres.

This ‘generic’ thing is what later on turns into a debate because some films cannot just belong to a specific genre. Theorists and critics have listed some major genres in Hollywood like the western, the comedy, the musical, the war movie, thriller, the crime or gangster
movie, horror movie, and also science fiction movie. By its
development, Neale has added several genres that can be categorized
as major. To these I have added the detective film, the epic, the social
problem film, the teenpic, the biopic and action-adventure (Neale,
2000, p. 45).

Some films cannot be put into one single genre only. Take an
example of the epic space adventure movie, *Star Wars*. At a glance, the
movie clearly belongs to science fiction genre with its introduction to
android character and the technology in its plot. However, with all the
fights and adventure, *Star Wars* also belong to the action genre. Such
phenomenon challenges the definition of genre in cinema study where
theorists like Jacques Derrida argue about the possibility of texts to
belong in many genres. Hence, to return to Derrida,’Every text
participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text.’(ibid.)

This challenge somehow brings an advantage to the cinema
study as it allows scrutinizing films and explaining their complexity.
This also allows the marriage of two different genres such as those in
bromance film genre. This kind of films can be easily categorized as a
romantic comedy as it usually features in two heterosexual people
finding love for each other. However, defining where bromance film
genre belongs to is not that easy.

This genre may be easily categorized as romantic comedy as
seen from the relationship narrative. Rom-coms usually feature more
feminine world which sell fashion and relationship, something women are fond of. Thus, such narrative usually belongs to romantic comedy or chick flicks which target women as their main audience. There is a gradual change, though. In recent years, however, some movies have blurred—or at least tried to blur—that gender line by making rom-coms ‘‘for’’men. (Brook, 2015, p. 252). This bromance film genre still faithfully follows the rom-coms pattern in the finding love narrative. However, rather than focus on women, it centers on the realm of men’s world. The bromance is a key exemplar, suggests that this marketing turn towards predominantly women viewers resulted not from any essential qualities of male viewers that prevented them from connecting emotionally with romantic comedies but from an ongoing crisis involving the construction of masculinity within the genre (Alberti, 2013, p. 161)

It is then interesting to discuss this genre as there are two different discourses intersected here. Romantic comedy narrative which targets to appeal to women is suddenly served for men. Tamar Jeffers McDonald (2009) calls these ‘‘homme-coms.’’ Homme-coms are movies featuring typical rom-com conventions, but from a male perspective, or designed deliberately to appeal to a male audience (Brook, 2015, p. 252). The exploration of bromance in romantic comedy indicates the evolution of gender, specifically, the search for new constructions of masculine identity appropriate to the “new
climate of social and sexual equality.” (Alberti, 2013, p. 160). If men as in the previous era are given movies about explosions and guns, they now get the same feminine treatment as women.

This is due to the problems discussed before on how men here face a masculinity crisis. Such genre is then created to show how men are actually confusing themselves. While still possessing their masculinity, men, in this genre, is given several feminine treatments. Their characters are softened or feminized (Alberti, 2013:161; Brook, 2015:253; Hammaren & Johansson, 2014:4). This is unlike the alpha-male type where they feature a hypermasculine type. On the other hand, as this genre is called bromance, men who bond with the same sex still possess some of their masculine identities. However, the portrayal of masculinity here is not that usual type like in action movies. Men are rather portrayed as having a gross body and perpetually utter some slapstick jokes. It would seem that if a man cannot behegemonically masculine, he is cast as hypermasculine (violent) or hypomasculine (funny) (Brook, 2015, p. 255).

In bromance film genres, the man is usually portrayed as hypomasculine or funny. Alan from The Hungover, Paul Rudd in I Love You, Man and Seth Rogen from Knocked-Up are a few examples of such type where they do not possess a muscular body but rather seen as fat. They also have their own gangs of men where they usually
fantasize about gross sex scenes or just swearing to each other to show their ‘bro’ identity.

The use of comedy here, both from narrative and characterization is not without any reason. Humor may ease tensions felt about male/male physicality when it is not legitimized by other hypermasculine portrayals (as in war, action, or sports movies) and serves to expand what is acceptable behavior (Sargeant, 2013, p. 15). Bromance film genre is actually in the intersection of masculinity and feminine treat through rom-coms. Masculinity is threatened and men slowly possess feminine traits. However, as this genre works in maintaining masculinity too, the element of humor is needed to make it seem less threatening to the men’s world.

c. Heteronormativity Discourse on Bromance Genre

The masculinity in crisis has brought men into a same-sex bound in which popular culture is famous with the term ‘bromance’. Bromance as a part of homosociality is very likely to happen in Hollywood. The concept is barely discussed by academic scholars but returns regularly in media portrayals in movies, on TV, in gossip magazines, and in more or less obscure blogs and websites (Hammaren & Johansson, 2014, p. 6). Several famous bromances are as follows Justin Timberlake and Jimmy Fallon, Matt Damon and Ben Affleck,
George Clooney and Brad Pitt, even some fictional characters like Sherlock and John Watson and also Captain America and Iron Man.

Bromance is characterized as intimate yet non-sexual. Bromance emphasizes love, exclusive friendship, and intimacy that are not premised on competition and the often described “shoulder-to-shoulder” friendship (ibid.). Thus, even though men are allowed to express their love to their same-sex friends both verbally and physically in bromance, they are all still non-sexual. This is why bromance still somehow falls into the traditional homosociality where it always ends up in the same narrative of maintaining hegemonic masculinity.

This kind of relationship somehow excludes the homosexuals ever since it is a non-sexual bond. This particular boundary reflects the phenomenon of “straight panic” in which individuals experience anxiety about how others perceive their sexuality and, thus, feel a need to confirm their heterosexuality (ibid.). Men then use bromance as their agenda to secure the heteronormative agenda which only strengthens the hegemonic masculinity. This exclusion of homosexuality is the most common language in maintaining heteronormativity in bromance genre despite men at those movies are portrayed to desire a homosocial bonding. Beside homosexuals, men here also exclude women in order to show their hegemonic masculinity. Alberti (2013) explains this phenomenon as part of a
project of reconstructing the heterosexual romantic comedy male hero, a hero who preserves the logic of heterosexual desire but who also questions the very subject position of masculinity itself within the romantic comedy (Alberti, 2013, p. 163).

Heteronormative concept is crucial in gender discourse since it dominates and also makes trouble for minority group, especially in sexual politics. This has been what queer tries to challenge all the time. Heteronormativity features the dominant rule of heterosexual people or those who still hold the idea of traditional nuclear family. This “truth” is the idea that heterosexuality is the “normal” or “natural” way through which human physical and social experience must be lived (Carver, 2007, p. 428).

The idea of man and woman pairing somehow gives no room for the same sex pairings that queer tries to challenge. Bromance idea which puts the two male protagonists as the center unfortunately still falls into this concept. Rather than promoting the queerness by their lead duo, bromance uses its homosocial concept to strengthen the heteronormative agenda, even worse enhance the homophobia. Take example from I Love You, Man. The 2009 film starring Paul Rudd and Jason Segel featured a man who looked for a best man for his wedding. Despite Rudd and Segel had an amazing bond, the heteronormative agenda did not do justice for their relationship. Rudd went back to his girlfriend and remained good friends with Segel only. Bromance
always plays in the area of “we are close but not that close” where their male protagonists reject the whole idea of homosexuality.

Heteronormativity in bromance films is like an asset that cannot be lost. Thus, each film follows a certain formula to maintain this “asset”. In the case of the bromantic comedy cycle, heteronormativity and the power structure of patriarchy are at least partially maintained through a language system, or bromantic vernacular, that “rescues” the everyday closeness of a bromantic relationship from slipping into something that might be construed as either overtly feminine or possibly homosexual (Hartwell, 2015, p. 34). Hartwell who analyzed the bromantic comedy genre stated that the language system used for maintaining this heteronormativity is by the word ‘man’ or ‘bro’. The man word is used as an emphasis of the genre, a reminder that they both embrace the same one and thus cannot be paired. While the bro, as the nicknames of the brother, indicates that the relationship between two males cannot be in sexual way.

Other characteristics that indicate the plot of bromance films as policing heteronormativity are the emphasis on bromance as friends who share benefits and the rejection of homosexuality. This once again perpetuates the ideas of no romantic agenda in the bromance films. The bromance that usually takes a comedic plot also utilizes this to strengthen the heterosexual concept. The bromance might perpetually mentions or indicates their bromance to be homosexual. However, it is
actually the other way around where comedic plot here is used as a mask of their homophobic agenda. Part of the issue of the humor here is the use of homophobic insult (ibid., 40).

d. Semiotic Film Theory

Although it is not structurally the same, film is similar to language with its own set of grammars. Ever since the source of data for this research is a film, there is a need to apply a specific language of film theory.

Amy Villarejo offers an interesting look on the analysis of films. The language of film,” means, then, to suggest that one learn the language of film analysis precisely in order to say something meaningful about a given film, or about cinema (Villarejo, 2007, p. 25). The language of film consists of several devices that create a certain meaning.

Those devices called as the mis-en-scene are as follows: setting lighting, costume and hair, figure, behavior, and cinematography. Setting generally refers to the location used in films. This location can be either fictional or real, even though both of them are ideologically constructed. Shooting on location that is, using settings found in the world rather than constructed in the studio does not mean that the world of the film thus created is not constructed or is simply “realistic.” (ibid., 29). Setting also includes sound stage which enables
the filmmakers to make a location as they wish and props (properties) which amplify the mood.

Lighting in films also functions to set to the mood of the films. The use of the lighting determines our perception of the films. For example, the noir films are easily categorized by its “dark” mood represented in it. In Hollywood system, lighting is divided into the three-point lighting. As the name suggests, the system describes three sources of lighting, and is reliant upon a key l light, a fill l light, and a backlighting order to balance the lighting for effect in any given shot setup (ibid., 32).

The next mis-en-scene element is the costume and hair. Costume and hair is used to define films into certain genre. Because genre is an effect of repetition, we learn its codes so that we can quickly orient ourselves to the new iteration of a given story (ibid., 34). Meanwhile, the make-up element is also essential in creating the image of the character within the films. It is true that the actors play a great role in bringing fictional characters to life but make-up helps them enhance the performance and also create the desired image that the films intend.

In spite of the images that they try to bring to life, actors also have physical movements they present in the films. These are called figure behavior, an element that describe the movement, expressions, or actions of the actors or other figures (animals, monsters, animated
things, droids) within a given shot (ibid., 35). Last but not least, films are the moving pictures shot in a camera. Thus, the cinematography or the movement of the camera plays a significant role. The cinematography includes framing, camera angle, camera distance, and depth of field.

The camera movement is crucial ever since the meaning of the film is generated through the shots, scenes, and sequences. Film is about how images are shot and how to present the shots (Monaco, 1977, p. 163). To achieve the esthetics and also convey the real meaning, film is shot as accurate and effective as possible. Thus, it uses a shared identity that is possible to attract broader audiences. Just like language, film also uses signs. Semiotic theory is then also needed to understands the signs that are coined in the language of film.

The study of signs is very important in popular culture since human beings are best known as sign-making and sign-interpreting. It is with signs that this discussion of semiotics and cultural criticism begins (Berger, 1995, pp. 73-74). The study of signs begin with Saussure’s suggestions that signs are made of two parts: a signifier (sound, object, image or the like) and a signified (concept) (ibid., 74). The relation of these two is arbitrary or as Saussure put, unmotivated. It is based on convention that we have to use codes to understand. In Saussure’s system, he also uses symbols which are the specific part of the signifier. Unlike a signifier and signified, symbol here is not
arbitrary. It is not empty, for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and signified (Saussure, 1996, p. 68 cited in Berger, 1995, p. 77). Symbols here carry meanings for something which are connected to the other texts. Thus, it is too complex to be fully understood.

This signifier and signified theory is different when applied to film, though. Signifier and signified in film appears to be more identical, unlike language that consists of words and letters. Films consist of series of images and they bare some direct relationship with what it signifies (Monaco, 1977, p. 158). The sound, image, and object that is classified as signifier is the concept itself in film. Due to this direct relationship, Saussure’s theory on signs is thus not enough to reveal the real meaning that films try to convey.

C.S. Peirce offers a deeper understanding on signs by divided it into three categories known as trichotomy. They are icons, which communicate by resemblance; indexes, which communicate by logical connection; and symbols, which are purely conventional and whose meanings have to be learned (Berger, 1995, p. 78). Icons refer to a certain image or figure. It can stand alone since icons refer to the individual existence. Indexes, however, usually have a causal-effect connection. Signs as indexes represent as objects of something. Meanwhile, symbols are signs that have to be learned since it is connected to the other texts. It also deals with the familiarity of certain
objects. The way we interpret symbol is influenced by the usual character of the objects. The more familiar we are to the objects, the interpretation gets much easier. Thus, it is something that has to be learned.

Ever since this research centers on analysis of film, the icon is emphasized more than other divisions. This is due to film’s nature that constructs identity through a series of similar images or likeness. Despite its character as being similar or look-alike, icon, as noted by Peirce, can still be divided into another three categories. The division itself is based on the mode of icon in which this category partakes in a text (Pierce, Hartshorne, & Weiss, 1958, CP.2277). They are in hierarchical order, arranged from the simplest one to the highest level of complication.

The simplest form of icon is image. It works as a representation of dyadic relation among objects. This two-way relationship between the objects make image icon easier to decipher. Thus, even though it appears to be the simplest, image icon is actually the highest type of icon among all the other categories since it does not depend on other determinants. It is instantiated icons of immediate, apparent or superficial qualities (Farias and Queiroz: 2007, p. 9). Image icon is defined as the ‘first’ and thus there is no need of ‘second’ and ‘third’ in order to understand it.
Meanwhile, diagram icon is defined as an icon whose similarity with an object is mostly based on shared structural or relational qualities (ibid., pp. 9-10). The similarity between diagram icon and its object only works as an analogy as Peirce claims that there is no sensuous resemblance among these two. Unlike image icon, diagram shall be understood through another element which is part of image icon itself.

The last type of icon that works as a representation of culture is called as a metaphor image. Peirce states metaphor icon as the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else (Pierce, Hartshorne, & Weiss, 1958, C.P. 2277). It means that unlike the two icons above that only draws a connection with other object, metaphorical icon is also related to the social context as a part that triggers any representation. An icon is only possible as metaphor if it already fulfill the requirement of image and diagram at first. Finally, diagrams and images may function as metaphors once their use and recognition becomes a habit. (Farias and Queiroz: 2007, p. 10).

Trichotomy works better for understanding film ever since film constructs itself on a certain formula. This formulaic element or can be seen as the big picture is closely related to what Peirce proposed as icon. The icon is the short-circuit sign that is so characteristic of cinema (ibid., 165). It is the strongest factor since it summarizes all the
film formula into a big picture and thus makes it familiar to audience. This familiarity is important in order to get the right meaning delivered. Signs, however, are not just iconic. They are also a representation. It coins a picture as a symbol of something. The second term, index, as stated by Monaco, offers more complicated definition, especially when it works in film. It is defined as in-between icon and symbol, as well as non-arbitrary and non-identical (ibid.). Index explains that each of the sign has natural relationship to one another and constructs a certain action.

Icons, index, and symbol help in identifying references behind each signs. Signs are representation of several generalized facts among society. However, this trichotomy can only draw a natural connection between text and context but it still fails to address the underlying philosophy that governs us to interpret certain signs, myth. Thus, Barthes’ concept of semiotic is also used in this research since the mythological or ideological order of signification can be seen as reflecting major (culturally variable) concepts underpinning particular worldviews (Chandler, 2002, p. 144)

Cultural criticism cannot be separated from the myth that is going on in the society. Barthes did not see the myths of contemporary culture as simply a patterned agglomeration of connotations but as ideological narratives (ibid., p. 143). According to Barthes, signs work under the umbrella of myth which governs us on how the society
interprets something. There is already historical, geographical, and sociological aspects attached to certain signs that signify them to certain denotations. Like metaphors, cultural myths help us to make sense of our experiences within a culture: they express and serve to organize shared ways of conceptualizing something within a culture (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, pp. 185–6 cited in Chandler, 2002, p. 143).

With the combination of language of films and semiotic theory, it helps to find out not only the construction of masculinity and heteronormativity in film but also the myth and belief of society that underlie the events. It answers both questions how and what.