

FEMALE PORTRAYAL IN JOHN GREEN'S THE GREAT AMERICAN MORP AND IN VERONICA ROTH'S VIM AND VIGOR

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FEMALE PORTRAYAL IN JOHN GREEN'S *THE GREAT AMERICAN MORP* AND IN VERONICA ROTH'S *VIM AND VIGOR*

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2

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Abstract: The study is designed to be a qualitative descriptive study which aims to analyze and examine the portrayal of female characters in John Green's short story titled *The Great American Morp* and in Veronica Roth's short story titled *Vim and Vigor*. The study uses post-feminism theory in conducting analysis on the portrayal of female main character. Identification of character portrayal is conducted by using Murphy's theory of characterization. The study finds that Green and Roth both portrays their female character under girl power discourse. They normalize that women trait like being lonely, unhappy, introverted, unique, emotional, indecisive, ordinary and being feminine as empowering and acceptable, and not to be taken as weaknesses. Green emphasizes female rebellion toward traditional and popular convention or practices, while Roth encourages an open and positive attitude toward unconventional relationship. She also highlights the existence of mental health problem in female, specifically in young adult female.

Keywords: *female portrayal, young adult literature, girl power*

INTRODUCTION

Young adult literature, a genre that emerged relatively recent, addresses a wide range of contemporary issues relevant to young adults. These themes, as identified by Trupe (2006), encompass everyday challenges such as friendships and dating, as well as more serious issues like drug abuse, sexual violence, and the quest for self-identity. They resonate with young adult readers by reflecting their experiences and societal realities. As explained by Pramesti (2015) themes of love, friendship, and adventure, to name a few popular ones, are approached by some writers with humor and playfulness and by others with anxiety and a serious writing tone. Some of the most common themes in YA novels are about coming of age, self-discovery, and first love. They often also touch on typical teen aspects of being quick to love or hate someone or to have emotions that run rampant (Pramesti, 2015).

Bennet & Royle (2004) argue that literature not only reflects society but also actively contributes in shaping it. This perspective underscores the importance of young adult literary works as influential tools that shape perceptions and ideas about the world. Younger's (2003) research examines representations of female sexuality in over fifty young adult texts. She concludes that these representations can either reinforce traditional stereotypes or offer alternative portrayals. Example of the first function includes text like Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, which may be seen as a reinforcement to traditional views of female portrayal in the character of Meg March and Beth March. On the other hand, example of the alternative function of young adult literature is the *Divergent* trilogy novels' portrayal of Beatrice Prior. It portrays alternative and empowering depictions of female character.

21

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the female portrayal in the short stories titled *The Great American Morp* by John Green?
2. What is the female portrayal in the short stories titled *Vim and Vigor* by Veronica Roth?

The study aims to investigate and analyze portrayal of female characters in John Green and Veronica Roth short stories. It employs Murphy's theory of characterization. The objective of this study is to analyze and examines the female portrayal in John Green short stories titled *The Great American Morp*. Furthermore, this study also seeks to examines the female portrayal in Veronica Roth's *Vim and Vigor*. The theoretical significance of the study is in its attempt to provide a useful addition to existing research being done on young adult literary as well as on the area of female portrayal in the literary works. It also attempts to o²⁴ useful addition on previous researches on feminist studies. The practical significance of this study lies in its attempt to provide a possible guidance on the construction and development of social awareness in relation to gender equality.

23

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have been conducted in the area of portrayal of female character in literary works. Sene (2022) analyzes Flora Nwapa's novel *One is Enough*, focusing on the portrayal of Nigerian women. Nwapa's depiction diverges from traditional portrayals by African male writers, who often present women as silent and excluded from decision-making. Nwapa's female characters are depicted as outspoken, freely expressing their opinions, and physically resisting male dominance. The novel challenges societal norms by demonstrating that women can find happiness and fulfillment outside of marriage, countering the belief that married women are inherently luckier²² an single women. Dhobi (2022) examines the portrayal of South Asian Muslim women in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Taslima Nasreen's *My Girlhood*. Monica Ali portrays her protagonist as a woman who listens to her intuition and asserts her agency after experiencing suppression of her desires and feelings. Ali's character navigates cultural challenges with boldness and resilience, integrating into new environments proactively. Taslima Nasreen's work, analyzed from a radical feminist perspective, features female characters who resist male domination in personal and societal realms, advocating for autonomy and equality. Alessa and Al-Harby (2023) study Sarah Perry's depiction of women in the Victorian era through *The Essex Serpent*. Perry's novel portrays complex female characters who defy stereotypical portrayals of Victorian women as either headstrong or weak. The central

character, Cora, navigates towards freedom, challenging the societal misogyny that confines women to domestic roles and devalues their capabilities. Lalmuanpuui (2019) examines John Green's portrayal of gender in his novels, focusing on characters like Margo Roth Spiegelman and Alaska Young from *Paper Towns* and *Looking for Alaska*. Green's character challenge traditional gender stereotypes by embodying independence, adventure, and resilience. They reject conformity to societal norms, seeking autonomy and defying expectations imposed by gender roles.

These studies together illustrate how literature functions as a stand for challenging and redefining societal standards regarding female identity, independence, and roles. Each authors explores various sides of female experiences, emphasizing complexities and offering narratives that empower and redefine the roles of women in literature and society.

METHOD

This study employs an extrinsic approach, since it uses post-feminism theory in conducting analysis on the portrayal of female main character in the two short stories. Extrinsic approach, as described by Eaglestone, is an approach of how one examines the composition of a painting” (as cited in Gerdin 2016). With an extrinsic approach, Eaglestone describes it as “looking through a window to another world”. He explains that this might ask questions “about the historical significance” and “who the people are” in the painting. When explaining an extrinsic approach, he states that “the literary text is part of the world and rooted in its context”. The extrinsic approach could look at things such as “the history behind a book, psychology, gender issues, the authors intentions, social issues and much more” (as cited in Gerdin 2016). The study therefore will see the two short stories through post-feminism perspective and girl power discourse in analyzing the portrayal of main female characters. Girl power, a subset that lies within the realm of postfeminist interpretation, emphasize that a well-groomed, sexual, feminine body is a site of liberation by which girls attract boys’ attention but use their freedom to choose what they desire (Bae, 2011).

Based on point of view of its objective, this study is designed to be a descriptive study which employs qualitative interpretation. “Descriptive study attempts to describe systematically a situation, problem, phenomenon, service or program, or provides information about, say, the living conditions of a community, or describes attitudes towards an issue” (Kumar, 2011:10).

This study uses textual analysis as its research instrument. Textual analysis is a type of qualitative analysis that focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of a text. Textual analysis involves understanding language and symbols present in texts to gain information regarding how people make sense of the text. Textual analysis is done in order to interpret the text to get the sense or meaning out of it (Arya, 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Portrayal of Maggie in John Green’s *The Great American Morp*

The central female character in John Green's short story titled *The Great American Morp* is Maggie. In American popular culture, prom is an old institutionalized event held by schools for their students. There are several level of proms being organized during high school namely junior prom, sophomore prom and senior prom. Students are dressed formally and dancing under supervision of parent's representation and teachers. It traditionally aims to provide a supervised and safe outlet for young adults to socialize with their opposite gender through the activity of dancing. Male young adult would ask a friend whom he is attracted to or he already has a relationship with, to be his prom date. The female young adult will also be his dancing partner for the entire event. The most important and anticipated prom is the senior prom because it will be the last prom before the students graduate and leave for college. In modern day American popular culture several traditions are associated with the event of prom such as prom king and queen selection, wearing corsage, coming to prom venue in hired limousine, losing virginity, thematic prom venue decoration and a hired DJ instead of live band performance.

Maggie the central female character in John Green's short story is a high school senior facing her upcoming prom. Instead of attending prom, she and her best friend Carly organized an alternative version of prom called the morp. Maggie is portrayed as being unique, rebellious, courageous, responsible, ordinary, introverted, intellectual, happy and fulfilled, emotional and being a people pleaser.

Green portrayal of female character in his short story has a girl power point of view, a subset in postfeminist perspective. The short story specifically advocates the representation of women's thoughts and feelings in their own case as well as their role in culture and society. The portrayal of female character in *The Great American Morp* also confronts both the ideology of male superiority over women as well as the conventional notions or generalized beliefs about women and beauty.

In the short story, Green's female portrayal normalizes that women feeling is important and acceptable. It is not to be taken as a symbol of weakness. Maggie, the central female character is first portrayed as introvert, unique, emotional, and ordinary which by conventional notion is considered as stereotype female weaknesses. However, this accompanied with her being portrayed as a responsible but rebellious and courageous girl has opposed the generalized belief of women. By portraying his female character as courageous girl who bravely challenge both popular notion and the hegemony of traditional prom for her cause, Green has support the idea of confronting male superiority over women.

In accordance to feminist perspective, Green portrays her female character as being fully agentic which means they are able to take initiative, making decision and to take control over their own life. Defying the ideology of male superiority furthermore, Green described her female character as intellectual being, perhaps even portrays more intelligent than male characters.

In John Green's *The Great American Morp*, Maggie is depicted as a uniquely independent character from a young age. Her habit of sleeping on the floor as a child, aiming to break a world record, continues into her senior year of high school. This choice reflects Maggie's belief that a slight discomfort enhances her comfort. Green portrays Maggie's commitment to this unconventional practice as a symbol of her independent thinking and willingness to challenge societal norms. Her reaction to her mother's comparison with

homeless people underscores her sensitivity to injustice and highlights her strong-willed nature. Overall, Maggie's character exemplifies a defiance of norms and a celebration of uniqueness in Green's narrative

In the short story, Maggie is depicted as a rebellious and courageous high school senior who challenges societal norms and expectations. She asserts her individuality by playing the clarinet in the school band, despite it not being a popular choice. Maggie confidently dismisses concerns about being seen as unpopular, showing her rebellious spirit against conforming to peer pressure.

Maggie decides not to attend her senior prom, which her parents are hired as prom photographer—a decision motivated by her discomfort with their presence and behavior around her friends. Instead, she and her friend Carly invent the concept of a "morp," a parody of prom that rejects its traditional elements like dates, formal attire, and professional photographers.

In the story Maggie is portrayed as being responsible. Although not opposed to the idea of drinking, Maggie dislikes the taste of alcoholic beverages. She is described commenting on beer tastes as carbonated pee, wine tastes like spoiled grapes which gives her a headache, and anything harder than that tastes like dragon breath. Her dislike of drinks prevents her from any irresponsible behavior caused by drinking. The portrayal is explained in the story when she commented on the brown liquor that her best friend Carly stole from her father liquor cabinet for the morp.

In John Green's *The Great American Morp*, Maggie is portrayed as ordinary. She is a character who defies societal norms surrounding beauty and popularity. Unlike her popular best friend Carly, Maggie is portrayed as an ordinary high school student who lacks conventional attractiveness and social status. Green critiques the societal emphasis on physical appearance by presenting Maggie's ordinariness as a form of empowerment, aligned with post-feminist perspectives. Maggie's self-awareness of her differences from Carly highlights her resilience and determination to define her worth beyond superficial measures. Overall, Green's portrayal of Maggie encourages readers to reconsider societal expectations and values, emphasizing the importance of self-acceptance and individuality.

In the story, Maggie repeatedly found herself in a situation where she has no choice but to agree with Carly and Tyler, even though she inclined toward the opposite. When planning to organize the morp, Maggie and Carly were conversing about the venue for the morp. Carly decided that they would have the morp at Maggie's house, since her parents would be away at prom night. And Maggie, without a chance to voice her refusal, reluctantly agreeing with her.

The short story recounts Maggie's triumph over the traditional expectations of prom. As her alternative event, the "morp," grows crowded with uninvited guests, Maggie finds satisfaction in creating her own memorable experience. Tyler, a member of a punk rock band, confesses his crush on Maggie during their performance, further bolstering her happiness. Previously marginalized in her school band for playing clarinet, Maggie feels validated when she joins Tyler's band onstage and receives applause from the crowd. Winning the "Morper of the Year" trophy completes her sense of acceptance and fulfillment, marking a pivotal moment of recognition among her peers.

B. Portrayal of Eddie in Veronica Roth's *Vim and Vigor*

The central female character in Veronica Roth's short story titled *Vim and Vigor* is Edie. Similar to John Green's character of Maggie, Edie is a high school senior facing her upcoming prom. Edie is portrayed as being anxious, indecisive, clueless, unhappy, lonely, open minded, feminine and happy and fulfilled. Roth portrayal of female character in her short story has a post-feminist perspective. The representation of women's thoughts and feelings in their own case as well as their role in culture and society is emphasized in the text. Indecisiveness and feminine interest, two traits specific to female, are positively explored in the story through female character portrayal. These traits are not to be taken as symbol of female weaknesses, rather they are portrayed as something important and acceptable.

The female portrayal in *Vim and Vigor* also explores the existence of mental health in female, specifically in young adult females. Roth portrays her female character as struggling with mental health condition in a positive sense. This condition did not stop Edie, her female character, to enjoy her youth by coming to prom, building friendship, nurturing her talent as drawing artist. It also did not stop Edie from successfully solving her conflict with her surviving friend Kate and coming to term with her grief of losing her friend, Amy. The story also encourages acceptance ²⁵ both conventional and unconventional relationship, a challenge to the hegemony of the pre-existing traditional conventions of gender stereotypes. It portrays Edie, who identified herself with Vim, who is interested in male demigod. Edie who is conventional in relationship, is open and unopposed to unconventional relationship pictured by her friend Kate in the character of Vigor.

⁴ Anxiety is a future-oriented mood state associated with preparation for possible, upcoming negative events; and fear is an alarm response to present or imminent danger (real or perceived). This view of human fear and anxiety is comparable to the animal predatory imminence continuum. (Craske, Rauch, et al 2011).

Edie, a young woman struggling with anxiety disorder, faces several challenges in her life. She experiences indecisiveness, particularly evident when she cannot choose between two boys asking her to prom, leading to panic attacks. The loss of her friend Amy causes her to withdraw from her remaining friends, Lynn and Kate, as a way to cope with her grief. Edie finds it difficult to communicate her feelings and thoughts, which strains her relationships, especially with Kate. Physical symptoms like shortness of breath accompany her anxiety, prompting her to use distraction techniques, such as sketching, to manage her condition. Despite her therapist's guidance on accepting anxiety, Edie continues to grapple with the fear and uncertainty that anxiety brings into her life.

As Edie grows apart from her two surviving friends in order to be able to forget the loss of Amy, she becomes lonely. Although she builds new friendship with Ariana and Evan, she is still lonely. Evan, who is also lonely because of his separation with his mother after his parents' divorce, befriends Edie because Edie seemed as lonely as he is.

In the short story, Edie is portrayed as being open minded regarding sexual relationship. First she is depicted as being conventional in relationship. She prefers conventional interpretation in relationship. She has a boyfriend named Chris. Edie preferences is also

represented in her preference for which Protectors super heroine is her favorite. Edie identifies herself with the comic superheroine named Vim, who similarly is interested with a male super villain named Antimatter, the son of their evil nemesis. Roth portrays Edie's openness to another interpretation of relationship by showing Edie's unopposed attitude, interested even, to her friend Kate's interpretation of Vigor. Her friend Kate, who identified herself with the comic super heroine named Vigor, regularly writes about Vigor in the Protectors fandom as asexual or with other women. Despite being conventional in relationship, Edie is not opposed to unconventional interpretation of relationship made by Kate. Edie is always interested in how Vigor's relationship is developing. She even sketches Vigor kissing with another female character in the Protectors fandom.

Edie is depicted as embracing her femininity through various actions and choices. After watching the Protectors movie with Kate, Edie willingly helps Kate learn how to apply makeup, demonstrating her skill and preparedness with her makeup tools kept in her purse. Edie pays meticulous attention to her appearance, particularly evident in her selection of a prom dress. Together with her friend Ariana, Edie chooses a striking red full skirt gown, complete with pockets, viewing it as a rare opportunity to wear something bold and memorable. As a patron of post-feminism and girl power discourse, Roth portrays Edie's feminist inclination not as a disempowerment but she portrays interest in makeup and fashion as female empowering vehicle.

Edie is portrayed as clueless as she is uncertain about her connection to Kate's writing in the Protectors fandom. She wonders why it seems easier to contemplate letting go of Kate herself rather than the tangible items associated with their shared interest. This dilemma underscores the depth of her emotional attachment to both her friendship with Kate and their mutual passion for the Protectors.

In the story, Edie arrives at prom alone, rejecting both Evan and Chris as potential dates. Instead, she boldly wears the costume of Vim, a superhero from the Protectors, and chooses her friends Kate and Lynn as her companions. Unlike Evan, who only shows interest in Edie when she's lonely, or Chris, who doesn't understand her sadness, Kate and Lynn accept Edie for who she truly is. They embrace her complexities, supporting her in both her moments of happiness and loneliness, echoing the solidarity of the Protectors' heroines. Throughout the night, Edie rekindles her friendship with Kate and Lynn, creating new memories while honoring their late friend Amy. This act of collective remembrance and celebration symbolizes Edie's liberation and rebellion against societal norms, culminating in her happiness and fulfillment. Initially plagued by indecision and anxiety, Edie finds clarity and peace by rejecting conventional expectations and embracing her identity aligned with the Protectors. Using Vim's persona as a bridge, she seeks forgiveness from Kate, marking a reconciliation that brings her profound happiness and fulfillment. Ultimately, Edie's journey at prom night highlights her transformation from uncertainty to self-assurance, finding joy in collective consciousness and supportive friendships that accept her unconditionally.

CONCLUSION

Text, and that includes any literary works, has the power to influence readers. An existing perspective concerning one certain public matter for example how females should

appropriately dress and conduct themselves in public can easily be challenged by a completely different idea through well written and efficiently circulated literary works. Exactly in the manner of how newspaper opinion and articles influenced and changed public idea over certain matter. New values and truth can be manufactured and conveys to public through literary works. Mind of young adult readers can be shaped, reshaped and influenced through young adult literary works. How John Green and Veronica Roth portrays females character in their short story shows how literary works become a valuable method for shifting ideas and influencing readers.

Maggie, the central female character in John Green's *The Great American Morph* is portrayed as being unique, introverted, ordinary, responsible, rebellious, courageous, emotional, people pleaser and intellectual. At the end of the story, she is portrayed as being happy and fulfilled.

John Green portrays his female character under girl power ¹⁹course, a subset within post feminism perspective. Derived from girl power idea that beautifying practices enacted not for male viewing pleasure but rather as a potential feminist investment and that reshaping the feminine enculturation such as fashion and makeup as a means of female empowerment and agency, he normalizes that women feeling is important and acceptable. By portraying female character as courageous girl who bravely challenge both popular notion and the hegemony of traditional prom for her cause, Green has support the idea of confronting male superiority over women. In coherence to feminist perspective, Green portrays her female character as being fully agentic and intelligent.

Edie, the central female character in the short story titled *Vim and Vigor* by Veronica Roth is portrayed as being anxious, indecisive, unhappy, feminine, clueless, open minded and lonely. At the end of the story, similar to Maggie, Edie is portrayed as being happy and fulfilled.

Through the portrayal of her female character, Veronica Roth confirm her standing for girl power perspective. She emphasizes representation of women's thoughts and feelings and their importance, for example female indecisiveness and feminine interest. These two traits are not to be taken as female weaknesses. Also she underlines the existence of mental health in female, specifically in young adult female. As a confrontation against conventional ideology of relationship, Roth also endorse an open and positive attitude toward unconventional interpretation of relationship.

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