

The Portrayal of Masculinity in *To Catch A Prince* by Gillian Mcknight

Adisty Tyaputri Ariani
English Language and Literature
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
tyaputriadisty@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study entitled ‘The Portrayal of Masculinity in *To Catch a Prince* by Gillian McKnight’ aims to find the types of masculinity portrayed in the novel and their meanings. It applies a context-oriented approach and employs the textual analysis technique to answer the research questions. The data are analyzed using Rende’s chick lit theory (2008) and Harris’s theory of masculinity male messages (2005). The findings show that masculinity is portrayed through five types: the perfect man, the controlling man, the lover, the forbearing man, and the nature lover. It can be assumed that traditional masculinity which asserts strong, independent, achieving, hardworking, heterosexual, tough, aggressive, unemotional, physical, competitive, and forceful is still prevailed. In this text, it implies that it is related to the masculinity of fairy tales which are known to champion masculinity. The study implies that fairy tales underpin chick lit.

Keywords: masculinity, chick lit, literature, Harris, traditional

INTRODUCTION

According to Klarer (1998), fiction is one of three major literary genres except drama and poetry. Literally, fiction is “literature created from the imagination, not presented as fact, though it may be based on a true story or situation” (Britannica, 2014). It means that fiction is one of literature product which constructed the story either based on imagination or true story. Fiction itself is usually presented in the written form. Moreover, Hoffman & Murphy (2005) added that type of literature in the fiction genre include the novel, short story, and novella.

In general, fiction serves a purpose to entertain its reader. Moreover, a novelist, Martin (2010), added that the purpose of *The Portrayal of Masculinity in To Catch a Prince* by Gillian McKnight—
Adisty Tyaputri Ariani 2 *Supervisor
*Co-supervisor fiction is to broaden its reader’s scope and ability to deal with differences. In other words, fiction is expected to help its reader to find role models or moral lesson to be able to cope with the real world and values. For example, the necessity to

find role models concerns the ability of readers to be able to distinguish good and bad.

One of fiction products is chick lit. Chick lit is fiction about and for the “new woman”, the contemporary reader of postfeminist culture, and a new “woman’s fiction”, a form of popular literature mostly written by women for a female audience (Ferriss & Young, 2006). Nowadays, chick lit becomes a cultural phenomenon that focuses and discusses mostly about contemporary women and cultural issues such as race, identity, consumerism, and identity.

Just like any fiction, chick lit involves characterization. Characterization is one of the important elements in literature. Characters engage the reader’s interest from the beginning of the story (Toner & Whittome, 2003). In addition, Tomlinson (1999) said that characterization refers to the way an author helps the reader to know a character. Moreover, characterization helps author to describe characters physical and appearance and personality easily.

In chick lit, people usually found male characters, for example boyfriends who have prince-like appearance such as handsome, cool, and become ideal men whom every girl in love with. Seen from this side, chick lit creates the assumption to the readers that prince charming is a perfect guy in the story. Prince charming is more likely a piece of puzzle which comes at the end of the story to kiss the princess, take her away and live happily ever and after (Patel, 2009).

How male characters are portrayed in chick lit is often related to the concept of masculinity. Masculinity is “an identity category that refers to the cultural characteristics associated with being a man” (Barker, 2004). It implies that masculinity is an identity of man which is constructed by norms and cultures. Harris (2005) explained masculinity through five aspects consisting of 24 modern male messages which are Standard Bearers (scholar, nature lover, be the best you can, good Samaritan), Workers (technician, work ethic, money, law), Lovers (breadwinner, nurturer,

faithful husband, playboy), Bosses (control, president, hurdles, adventurer, sportsman, be like your father, warrior), and Rugged Individuals (self-reliant, stoic, rebel, tough guy, superman). Male messages are an expression of gender role norms that tell men how to behave.

One of the examples of chick lit which involves male characters is *To Catch a Prince* by Gillian McKnight (2006). This novel belongs to the characteristics of chick lit and from the novel it will see how male characters’ masculinity is portrayed. Departing from the explanation, this present study offers a new perspective in the analysis of *To Catch a Prince* by Gillian McKnight by using masculinity perspective. This present study employs Rende’s chick lit theory and Harris’s male messages as the framework of the study.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is designed under a contextoriented approach and employs the textual analysis techniques to analyze the text. Harris’s male messages (2005) are

applied as the theoretical framework of the study.

Context-oriented approach is “methodologies which do not regard literary texts as self-contained, independent works of art but try place them within a larger context.” (Klarer, 1998, p. 94). Depending on the movement, the study 3 Journal article uses gender perspective as the context, specifically masculinity perspective. Klarer (1998) said that today it would seem impossible to interpret a text by a female author without referring to gender. It implies that in this present study, gender theory plays a significant role in the analysis. This approach is relevant to the study because it sees the portrayal of men in literary texts by female author and what interpretation might be produced from the approach which includes the gender theory as a tool to understand the meaning of the novel.

Meanwhile, textual analysis applies in this paper because the data is in the form of text and focuses on certain events and people instead of numbers. Textual analysis is a way to collect data to produce an interpretation. It is usually useful for

those who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live (McKee, 2003).

In order to support the analysis, selected literature such as theoretical books, encyclopedias, and journal articles are used as points of reference.

In an attempt to answer the research questions, intensive reading concerning related framework was conducted following several sequences which are initiated by reading the whole novel in detail in order to understand major issues of the story and taking memos about it. To collect the data analysis, dialogues, expressions, and narrative events that are constituted as the types of masculinity are highlighted and carefully selected. After that, the collected data are identified by engaging it with the frameworks and previous research that have been elaborated previously. Finally, the data analyzed are generated into narrative passage by making interpretations to draw the findings,

and then discussing the findings to draw the conclusion and gave some suggestions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that there are five types that portray the four male characters in *To Catch a Prince* novel which represents several male messages proposed by Harris (2005)

The Perfect Man

The perfect man is portrayed based on the male characters' look, behavior, and background. Most people usually judge someone from the appearance at the first time. It also happens to Helene and Alexis, the American girls in the text who adore Prince William because of his good looks.

She wanted someone who was more exotic than Scarsdale, not to mention more authentic than Jeremy's dreadlocks. **Plus William was gorgeous. He was stellar – her new favorite word.**
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Basically, chick lit is related to fashion on either the main character or other characters. Therefore, the characters are portrayed as fashionable as possible. Fashion can be an identity for a character in literature. Moreover Ferris & Young (2006) said that fashion is one of conspicuous consumption which bring the readers to their own imagination about luxury lifestyle. Being fashionable also becomes an indicator that the characters in the texts achieve success in both personal and professional sphere. Being fashionable relates to being accepted in character's circle and being aware of branded goods.

Branded stuffs are also referring to how fashionable someone is. Branded stuffs reveal someone's wealth and social class because today's society said that "you are not what you make, you are what you consume. And you are not what you wear but who you wear" (Ferriss & Young, 2006).

His dark hair was tousled in a faux Mohawk, his blue oxford shirt

was torn on one sleeve, **and the laces of his Campers were undone. Just the kind of dishevelment that smacks of wealth.** (p.61)

The excerpt above explains when Helene meets Simon at Piccadilly Circus. Helene described Simon as a messy person but he still looks perky. Helene thinks that Simon is the most authentically English thing she'd seen that day, with today's style and a pair of expensive branded shoes makes Simon look more fashionable. Not only about fashion, but having a pair of Campers also indicates Simon's wealth.

Fashion is not the only important aspect in chick lit. Having good look is another aspect which is often found in chick lit. Fashion and branded stuffs are usually identical with white male and overly muscle body. Therefore, handsome guys with perfect physical appearances are often found in chick lit.

Unlike in London, **the boys were wearing shorts and T-shirts, and the girls couldn't help but notice how good they looked. Laszlo had this amazingly sculpted upper body – the**

shoulders and forearms of a statue – that he usually hid in a baggy sweater and a jacket. Simon was leaner, but somehow already tan, and his muscular legs had fine blond hairs. (p.170)

In the excerpt above, Laszlo and Simon are portrayed as non-fashionable person but they have good physical appearance. Simon and Laszlo have sculpted upper body, it defines that Simon and Laszlo have the ideal bodies neither skinny nor fat. Previously, Helene and Alexis did not realize about the shape of Simon and Laszlo's bodies because Simon and Laszlo's bodies often covered with long sleeved shirts. It implies that in this text having a good look is important, female characters like male characters who have good physical appearance even though male characters are non-fashionable.

Besides fashion, behavior is the other important values in chick lit. In this text, male characters know that having good behavior is important because being fashionable and having good look are not enough to get girls' attention. The first meeting between Helene-Alexis and Simon-Laszlo

makes Simon and Laszlo fall in love with the American girls. That feeling makes Simon and Laszlo want to do everything the best they can for Helene and Alexis. Simon and Laszlo want to prove that their behavior can win the girls' heart. We can see this notion when Laszlo realizes that his joke has gone too far, Laszlo tries to apologize to Helene and Alexis. He realizes his mistake and apologizes earnestly. He also explains beneath it all, he can speak English and he has never kissed a girl like he said before. Laszlo clarifies about what he did, he knows his joke is too much. In fact, he does not want the girls are walk away because of him. His apology also shows how brave and responsible he is.

Not only Simon and Laszlo, but William also has desire to do his best in every situation. As Harris (2005) said that basically, in childhood most parents teach their boys to always be honest, to protect girls, to be optimist person, to not to give up, and do the other good deeds. Do the best in every situation usually use to gain people's respects. By doing their best, people think they can

be more respect and appreciate the presence of someone. He added that in doing something best does not mean that men are ambitious. It is such social goals become morality in a society and influence the behavior. It means the male characters understand the norms accepted in society.

William does his best not only for people around him, but also for people who need helps, for example when he helps building houses for people in need. It implies that William is portrayed as an altruist. He cares about his social life. Harris (2005) said that men who strive to improve their communities belong to 'good Samaritans' male message. A 'good Samaritan' usually becomes a heroic person in their environment. They always prioritized social value and show their care for others. Men who are 'good Samaritans' will do anything for social activities such as making charities concert or being volunteers in some social and religion activities.

Another point to be a perfect man, having good appearance and good behavior are not the only

masculinity features, but intelligence is also the other masculinity features that men needs. According to Harris's aspects of masculinity (2005), a guy who prioritizes his education belongs to 'scholar' male message. The 'scholar' message is one of male messages where men always put their academic and education first. Harris (2005) stated that men who adopt 'scholar' male message make scholar value as their power. By reading books men can explore the whole world. They think they can be the winner without joining any contests. The purpose of being scholar is to find out what they do not know. This notion makes men want to inspire people, and want to be useful for others. It implies that knowledge and education are important.

In addition, family background is another important thing for Helene and Alexis. They think they have to know about the boys' family background like they know William who comes from royal family.

Alexis asked bluntly, "What about your families?" (p.60)

For Helene and Alexis getting a rich man is a prestige. By knowing family background, Alexis can know how wealthy someone is. Therefore, Helene and Alexis try to get William who comes from royal family. They know how wealthy William is, as the excerpt below when Helene and Alexis talk whether William will be the heir of the throne or not.

In this text, the perfect man explains how look, behavior, and background are portrayed the male characters. From this text, it can be seen that perfect man is portrayed handsome, fashionable, and good looking. Not only about good looking, intelligence, good behavior, and family background are also the other aspects of perfect man.

The Controlling Man

The controlling man is a portrayal which portrays how male characters use their power to control others behavior. In this text, the male characters are portrayed as controllers. Basically, man wants to control but does not want to be controlled. A man who has the ability to self-control is considered as a

disciplined and punctual man because he knows his portion in doing something (Harris, 2005). Man thinks he is powerful not because how big his muscle is, but how much he influences others. Most men feel they have responsibility to others, hence they can control someone.

"How do you girls know Nigel?
You've only been here two weeks!
Is there something you're not telling us?" (p.109)

This text shows how surprised Simon is when he knows that Alexis is getting acquainted with Nigel. He feels angry because Helene and Alexis do not tell him that they know Nigel. It shows that Simon is possessive person, whatever known by Helene and Alexis, it should be known also by Laszlo and Simon. It implies that in this context, everything seems under Simon's control.

The explanation above relates to Tufte (2000) who said that the real men do some typical activities such as they work to earn money, they solve problems, they take actions, and they take controls. By controlling, men feel they have power. They feel that

they have influence into someone's life.

This type explains about how male characters are portrayed as a controller. It implies that men have the tendency to control others besides self-control.

The Lover

In chick lit, male characters usually portrayed as romantic lovers. In this text, being lover is about doing things gallantly and longing physical attachment. However, it is contrast to being bad boyfriend who treating girls badly and being a player. This notion is a portrayal of how male characters express their love. In this novel, each male characters show the affection in different ways.

In this text, being romantic is about doing things gallantly and longing physical attachment which involved emotion, joy, and responsibility. It is related to Harris (2005) who said that a man needs a woman for emotional sharing.

Laszlo immediately regretted his behavior; as usual, he was too late. **He really, truly wanted to meet a girl, someone to talk to,**

to kiss. But girls intimidated him, especially pretty Americans with pink hair and so... (p.57)

The excerpt above shows that Laszlo wants to find someone to share and keep his feeling. He is afraid to lose the girls, he regretted his oddity. In this context, Laszlo tries to show that he is responsible with his deed and tries to get his love. Similar to Simon, Laszlo wants to find someone who seems right to be his special friend, someone who knows his condition well.

Doing things gallantly are an expression to show how male characters love female characters. One of the examples is the Simon and Laszlo provides their time for the girls. In this text, Simon and Laszlo try to spend their time to be with Helene and Alexis. The intimacy of these two couples make Simon and Laszlo do not want to lose the girls. Simon and Laszlo try to always make the girls happy. Simon and Laszlo treat the girls like princesses who wait the princes charming come and make the happily ever and after story.

Most girls are happy to be treated sweet and romantic. The

excerpt above indicates to be a romantic guy is not difficult, just a simple praise can makes girls happy. For example when Laszlo expresses his feeling to Helene. Laszlo said that he only falls in love with Helene and no other girls will accompany him to the summer's end dance except Helene. Laszlo's kneeling shows that Laszlo is a good and romantic guy in Helene's eyes. It makes Helene happy because basically most girls are dreamed of it, like a prince in a fairytale who proposed his princess. In this text, Helene and Alexis defined romantic guy like a prince in fairytale, a guy who treat girls gently and proposing a girl to accompany him to the dance party.

In contrast to Simon and Laszlo, Nigel and William are not portrayed as romantic guys. It is shown by how Nigel and William treat and appraise girls. They are portrayed as bad boys who are being players and treating girls badly.

Being players explains about Nigel and William's playboy attitude. Playboys are identical with man who betray a relationship and has many girls in their live. They tend to be not

serious in making relationship with girls. They flaunt their wealth to get attention and to attract women. For example the excerpt below where William, a prince, who is expected as a romantic and perfect guy like a prince in fairytale turned out to have a playboy attitude. He uses his royalty to get many girls.

**Each time, naughty boy, he's
been seen with a different girl
(tsk, tsk).** (p.71)

The excerpt above tells that being a playboy is no longer considered as taboo thing. The excerpt above explains when one of newspapers reported William spotted with different girl in different occasion. In this context, William treats girls arbitrarily without fear of losing because he thinks when he loses a girl, he still has another girls.

Moreover, Harris (2005) stated that playboy image provides men a new arena for heroic accomplishment. Men will be proud if they have some girlfriends. Therefore, when many girls are attracted to them, they will do what they want to do whether girls are getting hurt or not. And it becomes a

habit when they are comfortable to be playboys.

This type explains how male characters express their love to the female character in different ways. Simon and Laszlo are portrayed as romantic lovers who are gentle, respectful, and nice to the girls while Nigel and William are portrayed as playboys who are irresponsible and rude to the girls.

The Forbearing Man

The forbearing man is a portrayal of how male characters try to look fine before others. They usually hide their feelings and emotions. It might be an impact from man's stereotype which taught that a man should be tough and brave. Therefore, they do not show their feelings if they get hurt. In this text, men are like superheroes. They do not want to look sad and weak. It can be seen at William who shuts his emotion off to others. As a prince, he does not want his daily life known by others, he needs privacy to keep his reputation. We can see this notion when Simon and Laszlo spotted Helene and Alexis chatting. Simon and Laszlo know that they are not the

topic of the conversation, they are immediately find some ways to get the girls' attention even though by foolish themselves. In this text, the boys try to make a joke to cover their disappointment. It implies they want to look fine in front of the girls.

Moreover, Harris (2005) said that a man who shows his feelings of vulnerability can be called sissy. Therefore, some men feel that they should be cool, tough, and unemotional. In this context, it implies that Simon is a tough guy. He tries to ignore all of his emotion even though he knows it hurts. In sum, this type explains how men hide their emotion to look fine before others.

The Nature Lover

This type is a portrayal of how male characters have interaction with nature. Nature is such a way to escape from something or usually called refreshing. By exploring nature, men can get relaxed from their busy activities. Moreover, Harris (2005) stated that nature can give new perspectives to live their life. By exploring nature men have time to appreciate God's creation, so that

men become wiser in looking at something.

"We're blokes," said Laszlo.

"Rain only makes us stronger."

(p.58)

The excerpt above tells that Laszlo is friend with nature, he is not afraid of rain. In this text he thinks rain does not make him sick, instead rain give a positive energy to Laszlo.

Basically, men love when they have interaction with nature. As stated in Harris (2005), most men think they can harmonize the freedom of nature and the freedom of mind. Having interaction with nature can make their mood better. As a result, the nature lover is a portrayal how male characters interact with nature. From this text, it can be seen that nature has influence for men.

The Prevalence of Traditional Masculinity

From the explanation of five types that portray masculinity in the novel above, it can be concluded that most all male characters in the novel have those five types which portray their masculinity. However, not only those five types above but also the strengths

and weaknesses are also considered as the characters types that portray the male characters in the novel. The strength can be derived from a good nature of each character while the weakness is the opposite of the strengths which indicates negative behavior. This trait tells about who is good and who is bad.

In *To Catch a Prince* novel, it is found that Simon and Laszlo are described as good guys while Nigel and William are described as bad guys. From the explanation above it can be seen that Helene and Alexis like good guys who are kind, unemotional, romantic, tough, and adventurous. It can be concluded that from the five types of masculinity portrayed in *To Catch a Prince* novel presuppose men should be kind, unemotional, romantic, tough, and adventurous which are indicates the characteristics of traditional masculinity proposed by Tufte (2000).

DISCUSSION

This subchapter is the result and the interpretation from the previous textual analysis that are used to find

out the portrayal of male characters as viewed by the perspective of masculinity. In this section the answer to the questions that underlie the study are answered. The findings presents that there are five types that portray the four male characters in *To Catch a Prince* novel which represent several male messages proposed by Harris (2005). From the findings, it reveals two things: 1) how traditional masculinity portrays the male characters; and 2) the text meets the standard of chick lit.

Tufte (2000) said that traditional masculinity is a man who is strong, independent, achieving, hardworking, heterosexual, tough, aggressive, unemotional, physical, competitive, and forceful. He said that the real man should have those standards and also earn money, solves problems, initiates sex, takes control, and takes physical risk in positive way. However, any man who does not met those standards cannot be called “the real man”. In this text, Helene and Alexis think William has those masculinity aspects.

Moreover, Tuncay (2006) said that everything guys do is for girls, for

example they earn money for girls because men should be traditionally, girls choose boyfriends from the social power and the ability to be a financial provider. In this text, William and Nigel intentionally use their power and their money to get many girls therefore they become players. Being considered as an ideal man makes William acts as he pleases, he is treating girls badly. He only concerns for his excitement and his sexual desire. For example when he meets Alexis at the anti-dance party and touches her off-limits-territory. This character refers to playboy trait. It is also found in Nigel who has many girlfriends even he got a girl pregnant. William and Nigel portray their masculinity by being player and treating girls badly. The characters of William and Nigel relate to Harris's male messages (2005) which give perspective that to be masculine, men are not always portrayed as good men. Male messages are an expression which tells how men should behave based on beliefs, cultures, and minds of individuals.

The text also reveals the female characters do not want to be in love with the rough guy. Helene and Alexis realize there are guys out there who love the girls so much named Simon and Laszlo, guys who accompanied the girls since their arrival in London. Simon and Laszlo do the best they can to impress the girls. Simon and Laszlo want to prove that money and power are not always used to get the girls, but smartness and good behavior also can be used to get the girls. It implies that Simon and Laszlo have good standardbearers. They show the good aspect of masculinity when they react to problems.

Moreover, the findings show that romantic guys, gentle and nurturer guys attract girls and more successful in relationship. Simon and Laszlo show their care by covering Helene and Alexis's head from rain. Simon and Laszlo praise and accept the girls just the way they are. It indicates how Simon and Laszlo love the girls. Simon and Laszlo do not want to lose the girls even Simon and Laszlo stop flirting with any girl except Helene and Alexis. It implies

that Simon and Laszlo are faithful guys. It relates to Harris (2005) who said that faithful guys are loyal and they do not have affairs. What Simon and Laszlo have done describes that they are good lovers. In this novel, the characteristics of Simon and Laszlo impressed Helene and Alexis. From the explanation above, it can be said that in *To Catch a Prince* novel, traditional masculinity is used to describe an ideal man. Even though Simon and Laszlo are not princes but their characteristics are like princes in fairytales which are handsome, charming, rich, smart, and powerful.

Therefore, the findings of the portrayal of male characters presents that all male characters show types of traditional masculinity especially Simon and Laszlo. It can be concluded that male characters must be masculine and good guy. In *To Catch a Prince* novel, bad guy is used to contrast the male characters, so that the female characters will fall in love with good guy.

In addition, *To Catch a Prince* novel by Gillian McKnight conforms to the standards of chick lit proposed by Rende (2008), which are: the main

characters are protagonist teenagers or young female; posh urban becomes the setting; the profession mostly in communication industry; falling in love with male coworker; uses romance as theme; over compulsive behavior; and peculiar mothers that represent foil characters to their 'independent' daughters. Especially, in this text it emphasize on the romance in which a man who has traditional masculinity is promoted as female's source of happiness.

Being in love to someone, trying to express feeling, and just admiring secretly are found at Simon and Laszlo. In addition, conflicts and happy ending are complete the romance theme in this novel. The female characters also having over compulsive behavior which is obsessively dating a prince. It is related to the characteristics of fairy tales in general which are the prince fall in love with the princess at the first sight, then tries to perform heroic deeds to win the princess and happily ever after (Patel, 2009).

As a result, it can be seen how fairy tales do affect today's teenagers' life. The explanation above tells that

'prince charming' does exist, but does not have to be the real prince. However, this novel does not expand young adults' mindsets and imaginations like Howell (2011) said before. This novel makes teenager girls have limited choice of the similar type of guy such as having romantic personality, rich, and attractive physical appearance. From this study, it is necessary to be critical in choosing books for young adults. If this value exposed uncritically, there might be misinterpretation of what type of guy is good.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis in previous chapter, it is found that in *To Catch a Prince*, the portrayal of masculinity is constructed through five types. First, the perfect man, a portrayal of how male characters' look, behaviour, and background. Second, the controlling man, a portrayal of how male characters use their power to control others. Third, the lover, a portrayal of how male characters express their love. Fourth, the forbearing man, a portrayal of how male characters try to look fine before others. And fifth,

the nature lover, a portrayal of how male characters interact with nature. Moreover, all of characters show traits of traditional masculinity especially Simon and Laszlo.

From the findings, it can be derived that traditional masculinity still prevailed. Traditional masculinity is a man who is strong, independent, achieving, hardworking, heterosexual, tough, aggressive, unemotional, physical, competitive, and forceful. He also earns money, solves problems, initiates sex, takes control, and takes physical risk in positive way (Tufte, 2000). In this text bad guys are used to contrast the characters, so that the female characters will fall in love with good guy. In addition the characteristics of chick lit relates to the characteristics of fairy tales which are the prince fall in love with the princess at the first sight, then tries to perform heroics to win the princess and happily ever after (Patel, 2009). It implies how powerful fairy tales affected society.

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