

THE DEPICTION OF WOMAN BENDER'S MASCULINITY IN MICHAEL TEITELBAUM'S *THE TALE OF SOKKA*

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Abstract

*This study has focuses to analyze the masculine women in the novel *The Tale of Sokka* as the characters Katara and Toph represent the nature of men: masculine; strong, tough, and intelligence. For male gender, masculinity becomes dominant in their nature as it is being defined in this study that masculinity stands for the nature of man as they are strong and assumed born to lead. Thereforth, it is interesting to discuss that on how having the character of masculinity in women shape the women differently as different than any women in general. Masculinity theory was used to analyze the character of women benders in the novel: *Katara and Toph*, including their attitude, characters; the way they interact with the men benders in the battle. In essence, this study is under descriptive qualitative research where the primary data were taken from the novel entitled *The Tale of Sokka*, along with a few resources related to the theory of masculinity, taken from literary journal and thesis which became the secondary data used in this study. The theory of masculinity was also used as the core to find out the impact of being masculine for a woman in the society, in this context, being masculine for women benders are important for them to raise their status among the patriarchal society. The results of this study are divided into two: first, by being masculine, women actually can be more confidence to actualize themselves. Second, by being masculine, *Katara and Toph* can achieve and got the admission from men benders that women can be equal with men in the battle.*

Keywords: *Masculinity, Impact of masculinity, woman benders,*

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is defined as a group of works of art made up of words. Tsao in his article explains that literature is the place for author to express their thoughts (7). In literature, Tsao mentions that the thoughts inside of literature are the reflection of the activities as well as the issues that the human face in real life for example the issue of love, phycology, right, gender equity and equality and so forth. . Gender in literature is a

sex of male and female and their characteristics including their roles that represent in literary works. Harper who explains that gender are not always determined by sex but it can be seen by the performance of the individuals; in here the women can reflect the men's roles, and vice versa (541). According to Skitka, behavior and character are influenced by sex; gender roles. Such as woman in common is feminine and vice versa, man is portrayed masculine. Hence, Skitka explains on her article:

Biological sex is one of the first things noticed and encoded during social interaction. As a category, sex is learned early and then reinforced throughout life as a meaningful characteristic with rich connotations and implications. Recently, it has been suggested that there are individual differences in this presumed generic propensity to use sex as a meaningful piece of information when judging oneself or others. Two theories have suggested that some people are more likely than others to use biological sex and psychological gender as the basis for categorizing or assimilating information: gender schema theory and self-schema theory. While similar in some respects, these theories also yield some different predictions about who uses sex in cognitive processing and why. (Skitka 67)

Therefore, performance is portrayed by sex in common. The nature of gender roles are dominated by their sex; for example woman physically looks weaker and smaller than man, and instead of smart, women is believed as less inelegances.

First gender role is femininity that is portrayed by woman, an Indian scholar defines femininity as the nature of women where they have a dominant character of emotional, passive and timid:

“Femininities” and “masculinities” describe gender identities. It refers to the degree to which persons see themselves either as masculine or feminine or what it means to be a man or woman in society. Femininity and masculinity are rooted in the social (one's gender) rather than the biological (one's sex). Members in the society decide what being male or female means for example human characteristics such as to be dominant, passive, aggressive, brave, timid, or emotional. These characteristics are attached with gender roles. Dominant, aggressive, brave are attached with male or masculine identity whereas to be passive, timid and emotional as female or feminine identity. (Kharbe 104)

It states that the role of woman must be in the portrayal of weakness upon them, emotional and less intelligence. Hence woman is not dominant in society. Hereafter, the issue of gender role as explained, it is also reflected in the novel *The Tale of Sokka* by Teitelbaum as it carries the issue of man's gender; masculinity. According to Thessen, masculinity defines follow:

Masculinity is not a natural state; it is a socially constructed, fluid, collective gender identity. It has become commonplace to speak of 'masculinities', the plural referring to the notion that there is no one universal masculinity, but rather dynamic “configurations of gender practice” negotiated in time, ideology and culture (qtd. in Thessen 3)

It has been explained that masculinity is an identity of men, an ideology as well as a practice of their behavior in society. Still in Thessen, he also explains that masculinity is acquired and enacted through certain culturally variable roles and rules in society,

which govern behavior, dress, characteristic, and subjectivity. Moreover, men in society are made rather than born (4). This evidence shows that men with their characteristic like masculinity is highly influenced by the environment, in which the maleness is obtained through their practice in society not as it has been carried since they were born. Therefore, masculinity, or any gender roles do not stand with human since their born, but they are sparked by the environment where they grow up.

Still in masculinity, in Hybbeler's article, it is stated that male is easily be identified that has a masculinity because both terms are difficult to differentiate, besides, being masculine have long been the standard against which gender and social power are measured (qtd. In Hybbeler 35). This quotation shows that men have a social power which lead them to enroll the world. In essence, this evidence also proves that man with his characteristic of masculine is a part his role. The quotations below also explain that masculine is a dominant to men:

According to Hofstede, "Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life." "Femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life." It is important to distinguish gender identity, as presented above, from other gender-related concepts such as gender roles, which are shared expectations of behavior given one's gender. . .of gender identity is also different from gender stereotypes, which are shared views of personality traits often tied to one's gender such as instrumentality in men and expressiveness in women. (qtd. In Kharbe 105)

Moreover, dealing with the masculinity, it also somehow can happen to a woman, even though it belongs to a characteristic of man. One fact that portrays in the novel, the women benders, Katara and Toph are successful to banish the fire nation with their bending skill, and strength. Therefore, the quotation below explains that the practice of masculinity can be done by feminists, as the women can also reflect any possibilities to perform a maleness; having a good leadership, intelligence and so forth. According to Schippers, masculinity can be understood into three aspects:

Firstly, masculinity is a social location that individuals, regardless of gender, can move into through practice. Secondly, it is a set of practices and characteristics understood to be "masculine". Thirdly, when these practices are embodied especially by men, but also by women, they have widespread cultural and social effects. There are individual effects-occupying the masculine position and performing it affects the way individuals experience their bodies, their sense of self, and how they project that self to others. (86)

Moreover, as the masculinity can happen in women, therefore the impact of the characteristic they perform will result a certain movement that will lead to a gender equality. The depiction of women as they are soft and beautiful might go beyond to the depiction of fierce, strong and powerful. Tsao believes that the way men perform themselves in society can also influence the way the women perform themselves, for example the women imitate the way the men lead the society. Moreover, based on the

quotations above, the movement in feminist is normal as the women also might be acting and rolling the male's roles.

Moreover, in the novel entitled *The Tale of Sokka* by Teitelbaum the women characters; Toph and Katara, the women benders are portrayed in masculine. The characters Toph and Katara are not portrayed in passivity in the novel but they perform the male's roles like being a strong girl and clever, for example in the novel when they are faced the attack of the Fire Nation, they can defend themselves, even go beyond killing the enemy. Furthermore, it is interesting to discuss further on how the women characters in the novel survive from the fire nation by beating the men benders and win the war.

The action of the women benders in the novel will be discussed in order to know the women's image about their struggle for equality, and the theory of masculinity is designed to analyze the character. Besides, the characteristic of the women benders in the novel also will be discussed in depth by the theory of masculinity..

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses descriptive qualitative research as the data will be conducted descriptively. Descriptive qualitative research is defined by a scholar named Starman which stated that an interpretative paradigm emphasizes subjective experiences and the meanings they have for an individual. Therefore, the subjective views of a researcher on a particular situation play a vital part in the study results . . . which emphasizes an individual's perspective on the investigative situation, process, relations, etc. (Starman 30)

In organizing the data, this study will use four steps, those are: 1) Reading the novel, 2) Identifying the data, 3) Classifying the data, 4) Reducing the data. The first step of collecting the data is reading the novel. The novel entitled *The Tale of Sokka*. In order to get a deep comprehension towards the novel, the object will be read several times. Reading the novel is the important thing to collect the data. The purpose is to get a better understanding of the novel's content. The second is identifying the data. The identified data will be in the form of narrative, descriptive, monologue, and also in the form of dialogue. The third step of the study is classifying the data. Classifying data is grouping the data according to the problem formulation. There will be a table in classifying the data. It is called as appendix. It consists of columns of number, data, form of data, page, answering problem formulation, comment, and reference. This step will have help to answer the problem formulations of the study. The last method to collect the data is reducing the data. Reducing the data is the process of selecting from a big number of the data to the smaller number. Therefore, reducing the data will help and make easy to analyze the problems in the study.

In this study, the data will be analyzed, and drawn by using descriptive technique. This descriptive technique is stated by statement, description, and quotation or stated through explanation. This step needs collected data that is taken from the previous steps. The complete analysis will be reported in chapter IV which becomes the result of the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the character of women benders that are Toph and Katara, on how they project themselves as different with other women in general that performs femininity.

A. Masculinity as Potrayed in Katara and Toph's Manners

The Tale of Sokka tells about a voyage of the team of Avatar, they are Sokka with his sister Katara, the Avatar itself Aang, and Toph for gaining some information and power to fight against the Fire nation. On the voyage, they face some obstacles such as being attacked by the Fire nation women in Oasis that make them plunge into a battle to the Fire nation. However, Katara and Toph take certain roles to attack the fire nation such as attacking the enemies by bending, leading the team and give the command. "Two girls ambushed us," the captain replied. "One hit me with some quick jabs and suddenly I couldn't Earthbend anymore" (46). In this context, the captain is a man, who is in fact physically strong than a woman got beaten by a woman, named Katara by a quick jab (a punch by a water bend). Thus, Katara here somehow reflects the masculinity in herself that actually passing the capability beyond other women in common perspective. To support this evidence, below is the explanation from the scholar who gives an explanation about the characteristic of women who act like men totally; here, they are called as a masculine woman. Kharbe in his article states that masculinity is represented by naturally strong, timid, and brave:

"Femininities" and "masculinities" describe gender identities. These characteristics are attached with gender roles. Dominant, aggressive, brave are attached with male or masculine identity whereas to be passive, timid and emotional as female or feminine identity. (Kharbe 104)

Moreover, it can be taken an explanation that naturally, woman is actually a *feminist*, who performs the nature of beauty, weak, less intelligence, and pursuing a gender equity as in society. Although, the fate of woman who is actually never being able to compete with men, as their place is at home. However, in the novel, the fact shows vice versa; the women benders are the exception, they can even beat the men with their skill of bending as they go to the battle field with men altogether.

For the following facts, shown that Toph got an admission from all men's benders that they said Toph is the one who tackled all men down in the arena. It is stated that "'Didn't you see the blind little girl there in the arena! That's what the Blind Bandid did to beat all those other guys, unbelievable'. Said Mormont". (33) it explains that the capability between women and men remain the same, even the women as reflected by Toph is capable of combating all man benders on the battle arena, and her strength exceeds the women's common capacity. Therefore, the capability of a girl, with the skill within herself to kill all the villains. Thus, the women bender itself reflects the masculinity in herself that passing the capability beyond other women in common perspective. Moreover, the character of Katara and Toph are definitely different as compared to woman in common perspective; they are not represented as calm, fragile and beauty yet they have an intelligence, strength and the capability to become a leader. This actually reflects the definition of masculinity as defined by Kharbe. Hofstede explains in Kharbe's article that masculinity focuses on men that are supposed to be tough, and focused on material success, meanwhile women are supposed to be more

modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. . . Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.” It is important to distinguish gender identity, as presented above, from other gender-related concepts such as gender roles, which are shared expectations of behavior given one’s gender (105). Related to this explanation, it can be seen in Katara and Toph, who are the women benders performing the masculinity: as they are reflected by tough and intelligence. “After that defeat, the guy who ran the tournament, Xin Fu, made an announcement. “I’m offering this sack of gold to anyone who can defeat the Blind Bandid!” there was silence. “what? No one dares to face her?” he taunted the crowd”. (37). This proves that men see women as less strong than them, but it is proven that in the battle, Toph went stronger and beat them all.

To know further about masculinity in women, some scholars have opinions about other traits of masculinity that reflected by men and they are portrayed by the women benders in the novel. First, Schippers explains that masculinity is about being dominant among society, he stressed that the dominant position of men when it is embodied by at least some men over time and space, legitimates men’s domination over women as a group. He added that men have a good leadership and intelligence (87). Second one, the essence of leadership which belongs to a man is stressed by Harper, she says that men are naturally born with a skill of leadership, they can lead the society and convince them as a leader, and have the ability to lead (541). Moreover, from these two it can be concluded that the essence of leadership is owned by men. However, in the novel, Katara also performs this traits that she can lead the team of Avatar very well and brings it into victory. “His chi is blocked,” she said. Then she asked him, “who did this to you?”. . . “Ty Lee!” Katara exclaimed. “she doesn’t look dangerous, but she knows the human body and its weak points. And that’s when I got my most brilliant idea yet, I knew we could defeat drill – by taking it down from inside (117). This evidence proves that masculine is not just limited to a man but also to a woman. Katara can divide the job and set the strategy on how to beat the fire girl. Katara asked the others to block her hand, and she knows that by blocking that fire girl’s hand, she will not too dangerous for them. Hence, the team of Avatar obeys her role immediately. Moreover, Katara in the novel also reflects the essence of masculine girl besides Toph as she has the brain, who is intelligence, she has the skill of leadership too like men naturally.

B. Masculinity as Portrayed in Katara and Toph’s Appearance

More facts from the novel will be brought and discussed below are related to the types of women as this novel shows that women portrays a masculinity. First evidence, it is when Toph has a competition among earth benders in her district, Toph performs as a participant and she shows herself amazingly. “After a few preliminary matches, the champion came out, and it was a young girl who was blind! She called herself the Blind Bandid. How in the world did she become the champ?” (30). In fact, physically, Toph does not like a fighter, even she is a blind girl but she still has a power a high skill to compete with a man. To prove that Toph actually represents a masculine woman, it can be seen from attitudes as she performs in the battle. First thing first, Toph joins some rounds of bending battle competition among other men benders; as she is actually the one who registered for the competition intentionally. Her intention is not because she wants the rewards, actually, she wishes to prove that she is not just her parents’ little

girl who ask her to stay at the palace all the time and study. Eventually, she won the competition easily. She does not even fight totally to tackle down all her enemies. It was such an easy fight for her. Toph is indeed physically strong, clearly. Moreover, it can be taken a conclusion that related from the fact stated above that masculinity shapes man as strong physically and has the nature to become a fighter and it is proven by Toph. Clearly, Toph here pursues to become a masculine woman because she does not just become a strong woman, but she capable of tackling all the men benders down.

Still, that Toph is considered as a strong girl and represents a masculine woman by the thoughts of her enemy that the men's benders mean to make a competition for her that they will pay the men high if they can beat this blind girl, Toph. In fact, Toph is still unbeatable, which is she is tough enough as a fighter, and even able to beat the men that is somehow impossible for a girl like Toph can make it successful. Hence, this fact represents that woman in this novel, especially the women benders are considered different than any woman in general as women are portrayed weak and less intelligence.

On the other facts which give a clear portrayal of masculinity in woman are the time when the men need an assistance from a girl named Toph, especially while in the battle, Aang needs a help from Toph:

She was the girl in my vision in the swamp". Apparently when Aang was trying to rescue Bumi, the former Earth King had told him to find an Earthbending teacher who waited and listened. "that's what the Blind Bandid did to beat all those other guys," Aang added excitedly. "we've got to find her! (61)

From the fact above, it can be known that in order to fight the fire nation, Aang need to master the earth bend, and others bend: water and fire as he can do air bend. However, among other great earth bend teachers, Aang chose Toph. His choice does not only reflect an ordinary choice, such us how we select the best teacher but Aang chose a woman. From this explanation, it can be taken a conclusion that woman is actually needed regarding to her skill, furthermore, Toph becomes the exception that her skill is totally needed in order to be Aang's teacher.

The fact as elaborated below proves that men adore Toph, Toph is indeed the reflection of a masculine woman as what has been brought to this study that masculine highlight the strength and power in men. Related to the woman, Toph is considered as a masculine woman; about her skill in the fight; her strategy in battle, and how she formulates the war into a victory. This somehow illustrates the masculinity as explained above; courage and brave as well as intelligence. still, the prove that people admit her masculinity:

The Blind Bandid, whose real name is Toph, was not pleased to see us. Especially when Aang tried his best to convince her why she had to be has teacher. And then, get this, we find outh that Toph's parents have no Idea she's the Blind Bandid! They don't know that she is a great Earthbender. They think she is a helpless little blind girl! (65)

This quotation explains that men easily judge women by their look. Even, Toph she is being judged in the family as she is a blind little girl and helpless, and she knows nothing how to fight. However, the quotation in the novel proves something else that Toph is not just an ordinary and blind little girl. As the matter of fact, Toph is a totally strong girl and people notice that she is such a masculine girl; based on her skill and strength as well as knowledge in the battle.

It can be understood that adventurer, or a voyage is rarely found in woman as this contains some of manliness in the risk; for example, on a voyage, there could be a danger, thread, fight, trouble and etc. However, when it comes to a woman who faces this challenge while on the voyage, and they can be successful to get through all of this, and they can be said performing a maleness. Below are the evidence as found in the novel:

“Katara goes to Bashinse with Aang and Toph, again and again she shows her strength by her body movement to tackle down the threads on the voyage “here watch this” she killed them all” (121). As the matter of fact that woman is seen as less in any kind of physical traits; their strength, body, shapes, muscles and et cetera. Based on the evidence shown in the novel, Katara is such an exceptional bender while she has the nature of leader in leading the team of Avatar. Still portraying the woman’s strength, Toph also performs the man’s traits, “Toph showed her strength to the enemies that she got the muscle, she spinned her arms and attacked the fire nation with her earth bending” (174). It is explained that from her appearance, Toph is different than any girls in common, she wears a kind of army’s outfit, and she got no slipper, and also, she has muscle. Hence, she looks strong physically.

The most commonly used female descriptors were beautiful, frightened, and worthless. In contrast, the most commonly used male descriptors were big, horrible, and fierce. However, she thought that this might be due to females fulfilling their stereotypical roles. Further, female characters were found significantly less frequently in pictures and titles. Conversely, she contended that, recently, their representation in central roles had increased in proportion to those for male characters. (Tsao 111) hence, Toph acts as a fighter. “She pushed and knocked the ground by her feet and tackled down the armies in a minute”. (211) Toph is extremely fighter she can defend herself from hundreds of fire nation’s attacks at the same time with her bending move.

Furthermore, the novel entitled the The Tale of Sokka proves that that women can reflect the masculinity toward themselves. Katara and Toph are beyond beating the man in the battle by their skills in bending and their capability in leadership; playing the strategy to kill the fire nation. These attitudes in the novel tell that women benders are not just women, but they are strong and different than any woman in common.

4. CONCLUSION

In the novel The Tale of Sokka, tells about the representative of a masculine woman. Katara and Toph become the highlight of the discussion because they reflect the masculinity: for example, Katara and Toph perform the same rules like men such as they can compete in the battle like men, being intelligence and strong. In the voyage of Avatar, they are Sokka with his sister Katara, the Avatar itself Aang, and Toph go on a quest to fight against the Fire nation. On the voyage, they face some obstacles such as being attacked by the Fire nation women in Oasis that make them plunge into a battle to the Fire nation. However, Katara and Toph take certain roles to attack the fire nation such as attacking the enemies by bending, leading the team and give the command.

Moreover, masculinity can influence the attitude of women as it can project their behavior while socializing in the community; women tend to be brave by being masculine and also pursue the equality in society. As to reflect their masculinity in the environment, women always think that they can actually equalize their role to men in

society by breaking their biological role and the common perspective of their role in society such as women portrayed in less intelligence, weak, high sensitivity, emotional and so forth with being capable and believe that they can perform a good leadership, being intelligence, and physically strong in leading the group in society. In the novel, it is proven that Katara and Toph are portrayed strong and confident with their skill no matter they are actually women.

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