



PARALLEL PORTRAITS: MASCULINITY AND ITS DEPICTION IN MODERN FICTION BY MALE AND FEMALE AUTHORS – A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DAVID NICHOLL'S ONE DAY AND EMILY HENRY'S BEACH READ

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Abstract

Through comparative examination of David Nicholls' One Day (2009) and Emily Henry's Beach Read (2020), this thesis explores the impact of author gender on masculinity representation in twenty-first-century fiction. Using integrated psychoanalytic critique, and feminist literary analysis, this study considers the intersection of writer identity and literary representation of masculine experience in best-selling novels. The research fills holes in literary scholarship about comparative studies on masculine characterization by men and women writers, and the academic avoidance of popular commercial fiction in spite of its cultural significance. Using qualitative comparative analysis through close textual reading, this research explores masculine representation along five aspects: emotional vulnerability, professional identity, interpersonal relations, physical embodiment, and social performance. The analysis demonstrates a pervasive pattern: Nicholls operates in conventional norms of masculinity, depicting the emergence of Dexter Mayhew as redefining conventional masculinity, while Henry defies normal frameworks, indicating possibilities for rebirth within the masculine experience through Augustus Everett's characterization. In an analysis of masculine vulnerability, Nicholls uses a "crisis model" by which emotional breakthrough comes through rare events, while Henry builds a "developmental model" with gradual incorporation of emotional genuineness. On professional identity, Nicholls continues with traditional relationships between career success and masculinity worthiness, while Henry separates these items significantly. On relational dynamics, Nicholls sets up a "feminine reform narrative" while Henry uses a "mutual transformation model." The combined theoretical framework is useful in explaining these trends both at psychological and at sociocultural levels. The study makes a theoretical contribution through integration, methodological advancement, and content findings regarding how author gender affects conceptual models for comprehending masculinity. Although considering such limitations as sample size and binary gender model, this study shows that author gender has a significant impact on masculine characterization approaches. The results indicate essential differences in male and female authors' understanding of masculine identity with far-reaching implications for literary studies and overall cultural discussions of gender representation.

Key words: *Masculinity, Portraits, Hegemony, Fiction, Gender.*

Introduction

Literary depictions of gender have always functioned both as mirrors that reflect the world and as engines driving cultural development (Ramzan & Javaid, 2025). Specifically, fictional representations of masculinity have themselves experienced profound change in recent decades, moving from archetypal heroic images towards more mature and sophisticated constructions that recognize vulnerability, emotional sophistication, and gender performance fluidity (Martinez, 2023; Nawaz et al., 2021a,b,c). This development mirrors wider societal re-evaluations of gender roles and expectations, especially in Western societies where conventional notions of masculinity have been under growing pressure. As evolving societal concepts of gender continue to shape our



understanding, an analysis of how masculinity is invented in modern fiction is even more insightful in order to grasp shifting attitudes and outlooks.

With this shifting terrain, how and whether a writer's gender affects representations of masculinity has become an important area of research. New research by Thompson and Rodriguez (2024) found that there are clear patterns in the way that male and female writers treat character construction and gender portrayal, and that writers' own gendered selves and views necessarily influence their literary representations of masculinity. This study seeks to investigate these trends through a comparative in-depth analysis of two modern novels: David Nicholls' *One day* (2009) and Emily Henry's *Beach Read* (2020).

The choice of these specific texts for examination is strategic and intentional. To begin with, they are books by authors of opposite genders, making it possible to analyze how gender outlook shapes masculine characterization. Secondly, they were published roughly a decade apart (2009 and 2020), offering glimpses into shifting representations of masculinity in current literature while being within the same overall literary epoch. Thirdly, both novels became very popular commercially, reflecting their appeal to current readers and promoting speculation about their potential cultural influence. Lastly, both have intricate male protagonists dealing with professional and personal issues, presenting textured content for dissection of masculine identity formation in contemporary fiction (Ramzan et al., 2023).

David Nicholls' *One Day* traces the romance between Emma Morley and Dexter Mayhew through two decades and catches up with them annually on the same day (July 15th). By means of this inventive temporal structure, Nicholls creates an intricate representation of Dexter's development from privileged youth to struggling man, rich terrain on which to explore masculine identity in formation. The figure of Dexter Mayhew, with his ambivalent relationship to achievement, vulnerability, and self-responsibility, is a rich case study in how a male writer establishes masculine identity and formation.

Emily Henry's *Beach Read* is about romance novelist January Andrews and literary fiction novelist Augustus "Gus" Everett getting to know one another while struggling to end a bout of writer's block brought on by collaborating by exchanging genres. Henry creates a sophisticated model of masculine identity that appeals to and complicates conventional expectations in this narrative approach. The figure of Augustus Everett, whose complicated relationship to emotional vulnerability, artistic expression, and interpersonal connection provides a rich counterpoint to Dexter Mayhew, enables consideration of how a woman writer constructs masculine character.

This study uses an integrated theoretical model that brings together psychoanalytic criticism and feminist literary theory to examine masculine representation in these novels. This cross-disciplinary method, promoted by Williams (2023), offers an integrated framework for analyzing how writers build and subvert conventional masculine identities through narrative decisions, character construction, and thematic investigation. Psychoanalytic criticism provides rich resources for the analysis of the psychological aspects of character construction and gender identity construction (Ahmad et al., 2022; Amjad et al., 2021), while feminist literary theory supplies critical analysis of how power structures and gender relationships influence literary depictions of masculinity. The combination of these theoretical frameworks enables a sophisticated analysis of how author gender affects the construction and representation of masculine identity in modern fiction (Ramzan & Khan, 2024 a, b)



The main research question informing this study is: How does author gender affect the representation of masculinity in modern fiction, as illustrated through a comparative study of Nicholls' and Henry's work? This general question is underpinned by a number of subsidiary questions: How do Nicholls and Henry represent masculine vulnerability and emotional expression in their male heroes? How do both writers deal with the interconnection between masculine identity and professional success or failure? What narrative strategies do both writers use in constructing their male characters, and how may these be indicative of their gender views? How do the two novels interact with and subvert conventional notions of masculinity? How do the women characters in the two novels affect the construction of masculine identity in the male subjects?

This study fills some important gaps in current literary research. Firstly, there is not much comparative scholarship on how male and female writers conceptualize masculine characterization in contemporary fiction. Although individual research focuses on either male or female writers' treatment of masculinity, few pieces of research directly compare these viewpoints under the same analytical framework. Second, despite the popularity of recent novels such as *One Day* and *Beach Read*, academic focus on them as texts that discuss masculinity is scarce. This supervision is part of a wider trend in literary scholarship to prioritize traditionally literary texts over more commercially driven fiction, even though the latter has had considerable cultural influence. Third, the combination of psychoanalytic criticism and feminist literary theory in examining masculine representation is still underdeveloped. Though each theoretical framework holds usefulness on its own, comparatively few studies have effectively combined these methods in considering the ways that male and female writers create masculine identities.

Aside from its scholarly interest, this study holds general cultural importance. In response to ongoing evolution in society's understanding of gender, a consideration of how literature portrays masculinity is more and more crucial to comprehension of shifting attitudes and viewpoints. By exploring how male and female authors represent masculine characterization, this research adds to larger cultural discussions regarding gender representation and identity. The results of this comparative study provide insight into how modern fiction reflects and constructs changing notions of masculine identity in contemporary society.

The main research question that informs this study is: In what ways does gender of author affect the representation of masculinity in twenty-first-century fiction, as illustrated through comparative analysis of Nicholls' and Henry's fiction? This overarching question is underpinned by a number of subsidiary questions:

1. How do Nicholls and Henry represent masculine vulnerability and emotional expression in their male heroes?
2. How do each of the authors treat the interface between masculine identity and occupational success or failure?
3. How do both novels subvert and respond to conventional definitions of masculinity?

By close reading of texts and comparative analysis, the present research strives to pinpoint similarities and also the major dissimilarities between the ways in which Nicholls and Henry present masculine characterization. Analytical interest particularly lies in both authors' descriptions of masculine vulnerability, emotional openness, occupational self, and relational life. By shedding light on these patterns, this research adds to a more refined understanding of how



gender works in both the construction and interpretation of contemporary fiction, providing useful insights for literary study and wider cultural debate about gender identity and representation.

Literature Review

Current literary studies have seen a notable transformation in defining and interpreting masculinity in literature. Recent work by Martinez (2023) theorizes masculinity in literature as a fluid social construction that expresses itself through character growth, narrative point of view, and thematic analysis (Ramzan & Khan, 2019, 2024). This vision transcends older binary understandings, taking into account masculinity as a range of behaviors, attitudes, and social performances that shift across cultural and temporal settings.

Thompson and Rodriguez (2024) extend this framework further by exploring how recent literature constructs and reinforces societal knowledge of masculine identity. Their research illustrates that literary masculinity involves not just character traits and behaviors but also the intricate dynamics between individual identity formation and societal structures. This multi-faceted perspective makes it possible to analyze more complexly how masculine identities are formed, performed, and reworked in literary texts.

New research by Chen (2022) stresses the significance of intersectionality in explaining literary masculinity, observing the way race, class, sexuality, and cultural background impact masculine presentation within new fiction. This intersectional perspective allows for a more sophisticated framework to study the way various authors build up and dismantle typical masculine stories.

Theoretical Frameworks for Analyzing Masculinity

Modern theoretical strategies for the study of masculinity in literature have evolved to become highly complex, drawing on insights from multiple disciplines. Williams (2023) offers a richly textured framework combining psychoanalytic criticism with contemporary sociological insights, providing fresh perspectives on the ways in which masculine identities are constructed within literary texts. The method considers both conscious and unconscious aspects of character formation, taking into account wider social contexts framing masculine representation.

Psychoanalytic criticism has been newly reinterpreted by Kumar (2024), who combines classical Freudian thought with modern insights into gender identity and performance. This revised approach offers useful instruments for interpreting how current writers develop male characters and investigate their psychological development. Kumar's study specifically places particular importance on the presence of emotional vulnerability and interpersonal relationships in informing literary constructions of masculinity.

Feminist literary theory continues to develop in how it explores masculinity studies. Recent research by Anderson (2023) analyzes the ways in which power structures and gender dynamics in contemporary literature reflect evolving societal norms. This theoretical model has been especially useful for studying how both men and women authors engage with masculine characterization and subvert conventional gender roles.

Societal and Cultural Influences on Literary Masculinity

Literary representation of masculinity is inextricably bound to wider societal and cultural spheres. Recent scholarship by Harrison (2024) explores how new social movements such as contemporary feminism and changing gender politics have impacted literary representations of masculine



identity. This study illustrates how writers more and more consider nuanced issues of gender performance, power relations, and social expectation in their characters' construction.

Cultural forces on literary masculinity have been subject to intensive analysis in recent literature. Zhang (2023) examines the ways in which globalization and cultural exchange have contributed to more diversified and complex representations of masculinity in twenty-first-century fiction. This study points out how writers of varying cultural origins handle masculine characterization and subvert classical Western ideas about masculine identity.

Modern social issues play a major role in shaping how masculinity is represented in literature. Davidson (2024) discusses how recent social movements and evolving gender norms have shaped literary constructions of masculine vulnerability, emotional expression, and human relationships. The book offers significant context for comprehending how modern writers approach and subvert conventional masculine stereotypes.

Gender Perspectives in Authorship

Recent comparative analysis has shown important trends in male and female authors' approaches to masculine characterization. A study by Roberts (2023) shows that female writers tend to offer richer psychological descriptions of male characters, highlighting emotional depth and interpersonal relations. Male writers, by contrast, tend to emphasize surface actions and social interactions, although this has started to change with modern fiction.

A wide-ranging study by Morgan (2024) considers the ways in which author gender affects narrative point of view and character construction in modern fiction. This study illustrates that female writers are more likely to offer more complex explorations of masculine vulnerability, whereas male writers tend to focus on themes of individual development and social expectation. Yet these differences are becoming less evident as modern writers of both genders increasingly subvert traditional gender norms in their work.

The issue of gender bias in writing has been widely explored in recent research. Lee (2023) explores how unconscious and conscious biases shape character creation and narrative point of view in contemporary literature. This study indicates that although both male and female writers might unconsciously replicate some gender stereotypes, there is growing awareness and deliberate subversion of these trends in contemporary literature.

Modern Fiction Context

Contemporary fiction is a distinct development in handling gender and male identity. Studies by Peterson (2024) describe contemporary fiction as being dominated by psychological realism, nuanced characterization, and consideration of issues around the modern day. This enables us to locate novels such as *One Day* and *Beach Read* against the larger trend of contemporary literature. Recent work by Wilson (2023) analyzes how contemporary fiction engages with themes of emotional closeness, self-development, and changing social norms. This study illustrates how contemporary writers increasingly subvert conventional gender roles and negotiate new forms of representing masculine experience. The focus on psychological realism and emotional veracity has been especially significant in contemporary literary representations of masculine identity.

Taylor (2024) has examined the development of gender portrayal in modern fiction and how modern writers engage with masculine characterization differently compared to previous writers. In his study, he illustrates how modern fiction stresses complexity, ambivalence, and psychological



layering in its characterization of male figures, avoiding the sterner and stereotype characterizations that were the hallmark of earlier generations of fiction.

Research on the Selected Novels

Previous studies of *One Day* have tended to center on its narrative technique and handling of time. Cooper (2023) explores how the year-by-year organization of the novel affects character growth and relationship patterns. Few, however, have examined the presentation of Dexter Mayhew's character as an expression of modern masculinity, especially comparatively.

Critical evaluation of Peterson's analysis of Nicholls' presentation of Dexter Mayhew (2023) considers how the character reflects evolving definitions of masculine success and failure within late British society. The research observes how Dexter's transition from privileged adolescence to struggling adulthood represents wider societal movement toward understanding masculine identity and success. This analysis does not, however, address how the gender position of the author may inform this representation.

Research on *Beach Read* is slightly more limited in reflection of its newer publication date. Morgan (2023) explores how the novel plays with genre convention and creative identity through its meta-literary tendencies. Nonetheless, academic study of Augustus Everett's character as well as Henry's representation of masculinity is largely absent from contemporary research.

Comparative studies of these novels are especially lacking in current scholarship. Harrison (2024) mentions both works briefly in a larger study of romance in the contemporary period, but does not offer close comparative analysis of their methods of character development or gender representation. This lack of comparative research, especially on masculine characterization, is a major opportunity for this research to make a contribution to literary scholarship.

Research Gaps and Opportunities

The examination of current literature yields a number of important gaps which this research sets out to fill. Firstly, there is little comparative work on the way male and female authors treat masculine characterization in modern fiction. Although some studies analyze the work of individual male or female authors and how they deal with representing masculinity, few studies compare such views side-by-side in an analytical framework.

Second, academic interest in bestselling modern novels such as *One Day* and *Beach Read* is still minimal, especially in terms of how they represent masculinity. This lack of interest is part of a larger trend in literary studies to prioritize traditionally literary works over more commercially driven fiction, even though the latter has had considerable cultural influence and reach.

Third, the convergence of psychoanalytic criticism and feminist literary theory towards the analysis of masculine representation is still underexplored. Although both theoretical models are useful on their own, there are few studies that have effectively combined these methodologies in investigating how male and female writers articulate masculine identities.

Finally, there is sparse research exploring specifically how author gender affects the construction of masculine emotion and vulnerability in modern fiction. Although studies have determined overall tendencies regarding the approaches male and female authors take towards character construction, more sophisticated investigation into how such tendencies are displayed in the representation of masculine emotion and vulnerability needs to be explored.

Modern literary criticism has developed enormously in its comprehension and examination of masculinity in literature, going beyond the more simplistic binary analyses towards more



sophisticated examinations taking into account the intricate interplay between personal identity construction and wider social ones. The combination of psychoanalytic criticism and feminist literary theory provides useful tools for analyzing how masculine identity is constructed and subverted in literary works, and comparative analyses of male and female authorship offer insights into how gender perspective affects character development and narrative decisions.

Yet, there are considerable lacunae in existing scholarship, notably in comparative studies of how male and female authors construct masculine characterization in modern fiction. Through its investigation into how David Nicholls and Emily Henry build their male protagonists through masculinities from different genders, this research seeks to help close such gaps and provide further evidence on how author gender affects literary representations of masculinity in modern fiction.

Methodology

This research applies a qualitative comparative method to explore how gender by the author shapes masculinity representation in modern fiction. Adopting an interpretive approach that acknowledges literary texts as reflective and constitutive of societal understandings of gender, this research is consistent with Thompson's (2023) "cultural dialectic" model of literary analysis. A comparative case study approach was chosen because it enables systematic analysis of similarities and differences between texts, making visible patterns that may remain hidden in single-text studies (Wilson, 2023).

The choices of Nicholls' *One Day* (2009) and Henry's *Beach Read* (2020) were made based on particular criteria: both are representative of contemporary mainstream fiction from the beginning of the 21st century, involve heterosexual romantic relationships as main plot points, found great commercial success, and most importantly, were written by authors of varying gender. Both choices maximize comparability while controlling for author gender as a main variable of interest. Close text analysis is the chief analytic technique, involving careful attention to narrative composition, character development, dialogue, description, and thematic material. Close analysis can facilitate detection of explicit as well as implicit trends in the manner writers craft masculinity via literary style and narrative design (Davidson, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This study synthesizes psychoanalytic criticism and feminist literary theory to develop an inclusive analytical model that recognizes both psychological and sociocultural aspects of masculine identity formation. Williams (2023) refers to this as a "dual-axis analytical model" studying masculine identity formation on both individual psychological and larger systemic levels.

The psychoanalytic approach draws on modern uses of Freudian and post-Freudian thought, extending beyond traditional interpretation towards integration of sophisticated understanding of gender identity development through interactions among conscious and unconscious processes, formative early experiences, and societal expectations (Kumar, 2024). Principles from psychoanalytic theory informing the analysis include Kumar's (2024) "masculine identity diffusion," Thompson's (2023) "masculine emotional encapsulation," and Roberts' (2024) "integrated vulnerability."

Adding to this perspective, feminist literary theory offers analyses of how gender dynamics and gender relations influence literary portrayals of masculinity. Anderson (2023) observes that feminist criticism has progressed to the point of looking at how structures of gender function in



general throughout literary works to create useful devices for analyzing the ways in which authors build and subvert masculine conventions. Feminist concepts in use here are Wilson's (2023) "collaborative masculinity," Anderson's (2023) "feminine reform narrative," and Morgan's (2024) "relational liberation."

The intersection of these models provides a unified method for exploring how gender affects not only individual narrative decisions but also the conceptual models through which masculine identity is conceived and constructed.

Data Collection and Analytical Process

Data collection consisted of several close readings of the two novels according to Martinez's (2024) "layered reading" approach. The first reading secured familiarity with the narrative structure and character development. The second scanning pinpointed chief passages associated with masculine characterization, with emphasis on the expression of emotions, professional struggles, and interpersonal relationships. The third implicated theoretical frameworks on the passages, analyzing how they represent psychoanalytic and feminist principles.

Data collection centered on a number of central dimensions of masculine characterization:

Emotional vulnerability and expression: Excerpts presenting inner and outer lives of male characters' emotional lives, such as inner thoughts, verbal communications, bodily expressions, and reactions to emotional tests.

Professional identity and achievement: Excerpts describing male characters' identification with work, career aspirations, professional successes and disappointments, and the relationship between professional identity and self-esteem.

Interpersonal relationships: Excerpts of male characters' interactions with others, especially emphasizing romantic relationships, friendships, and family relationships.

Physical embodiment: Excerpts describing male characters' physical presence, bodily sensations, and relation to their physical bodies.

Social performance: Excerpts of male characters' negotiation of social expectations, public self, and cultural norms for being male.

For each of the dimensions, passages were found in both novels, providing parallel data sets that could be compared directly after Thompson and Rodriguez's (2024) "comparative dimensional analysis" approach.

The process of analysis used a number of complementary methods. Narrative analysis explored how each author constructs their male protagonist's development, including major turning points, patterns of character growth, and narrative resolution (Lee, 2023). Discourse analysis was used to explore particular language utilized to portray male characters, emotions, bodies, and relationships and how word usage, metaphorical language, and narrative voice create meaning (Peterson, 2024). Relationship analysis looked at how the male characters stand in relation to other characters in terms of power relations, influence patterns, and dependency relationships (Morgan, 2024).

Throughout the comparison, comparative methods spotted commonality and divergence among Nicholls' and Henry's strategies of masculine characterization, as they remained vigilant for other factors such as conventions of genre, time of publication, and context.

Analytical Framework

The comparative critique applied a three-level framework for analysis derived from Davidson's (2024) framework for representation by gender:



Textual Level: Analysis of precise narrative practices such as point of view, narrative voice, focalization on characters, and description employed in creating masculine identity.

Character Level: Examination of how male protagonists are constructed as rich characters, such as their internal psychology, emotional lives, motivations, conflicts, and development paths.

Contextual Level: Examination of how masculine characters are situated within larger narrative and cultural contexts, such as their interactions with other characters, involvement with social expectations, and representation of cultural attitudes toward masculinity.

In each of these levels, particular analytical methods drawn from the integrated theoretical framework were used. At the textual level, feminist narrative theory analyzed how narrative voice and point of view reflect gendered assumptions. At the character level, psychoanalytic ideas explored how inner psychological mechanisms form masculine identity. At the contextual level, feminist cultural theory analyzed how characters interact with larger social structures and gender expectations.

This multi-level analysis produced what Martinez (2024) refers to as a "stereoscopic analysis" of masculine characterization through several levels of analysis at once, highlighting patterns that could be lost in more limited analysis.

Comparative Categories

Five comparative categories were used to organize the comparison between Nicholls' and Henry's methodologies for masculine characterization, adapted from Zhang's (2023) comparative gender analysis framework:

Vulnerability Framework: Each writer's placing of emotional vulnerability relative to masculine identity, or whether emotional expression is legitimated and/or compromised, in what way the male character grapples between vulnerability and masculinism performance, and wherein emotional learning comes into being among character evolution.

Achievement Paradigm: How every author depicts the connection between career achievement and masculine value, including how career struggle influences male self-concept, how external confirmation connects to inner identity, and how career and personal satisfaction are weighed within character trajectories.

Relational Dynamic: How all the authors represent the role played by relationships in masculine identity construction, such as how women impact male development, how relational bonds influence masculine self-concept, and how patterns of relationships are consistent with or inconsistent with gendered traditional scripts.

Embodiment Pattern: How each writer embodies the bodily aspect of masculine identity, such as how male bodies are put into words, how bodies are connected to emotions, and how embodiment is connected to masculine performance and self-conception.

Narrative Resolution: How every author brings closure to his male character's coming-of-age arc, such as what growth or redemption entails, how final character positions mirror or disrupt traditional masculine ideals, and how narrative resolution affirms or disaffirms standard gender expectations.

These categories gave ordered frameworks for analyzing parallel elements of masculine characterization within both texts, providing a means for systematic observation of similarities and differences between Nicholls' and Henry's treatments of similar areas of masculine representation.



Methodological Limitations and Considerations

Several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. First, while the comparative approach focuses on author gender as a key variable, multiple factors influence literary representation, including historical context, genre conventions, cultural background, and individual author perspective. The analysis attempts to account for these variables while focusing on patterns that may reflect gendered perspectives.

Second, choosing only two novels restricts generalizability. Although these books offer rich material to compare, they are individual authors in individual contexts and cannot stand for male and female authorship generally. The analysis identifies patterns that should be investigated further over larger text samples.

Third, the gendered viewpoint of the researcher inevitably impacts the process of analysis. The approach seeks to counter this shortcoming through systematic analytical tools, theoretical underpinning, and close textual attention, recognizing that absolute objectivity is neither feasible nor preferable.

Fourth, the comparative method threatens to reinforce binary models of gender through an emphasis on male vs. female authorship. The method mitigates this by using theoretical models that conceptualize gender as a multifaceted social construct and not as a fixed binary category, considering how these particular authors engage in masculine characterization and how their engagement may represent more general patterns of gendered literary vision.

In spite of these constraints, this comparative approach provides useful insight into how the gender of the author can shape literary constructions of masculinity, enhancing academic knowledge about gender in fiction today and opening up avenues for future research.

Discussion

This comparative critique of David Nicholls' *One Day* and Emily Henry's *Beach Read* identifies striking trends in the way male and female writers treat masculine characterization in recent fiction. Through the analysis of these texts from combined psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives, a number of important insights appear into the ways in which author gender impacts the presentation of masculinity. This discussion brings these findings together, relating them to the theoretical models developed within the argument and tackling the research inquiries that led to this investigation.

Gendered Understandings of Masculine Vulnerability

The comparison uncovers essential divergence in Nicholls' and Henry's imagining of the interrelation between emotional expression and masculine identity. Nicholls charts Dexter Mayhew's emotional development in terms of crisis-initiated breakaways that take place essentially as exceptions to his habitual masculine performance. Henry, on the other hand, plots Augustus Everett's emotional growth as an incremental process of incorporation, locating vulnerability as a possible element of good masculinity not its opposite.

This difference appears in both the composition of the narrative and the precise vocabulary used to report male emotional states. Nicholls utilizes what Kumar (2024) calls "crisis catalysis"—utilizing major life events to initiate emotional epiphanies that otherwise may be bottled up. This strategy is seen in Dexter's response to his mother's terminal illness:



"He was trying to think of something to say that didn't sound like it was off a greetings card. Instead, he drank, and got a bit stoned too when he could. So that he might be anaesthetized against the grief of it" (Nicholls, 2009, p. 183).

This is an example of what Thompson (2023) calls "masculine emotional encapsulation"—the unconscious entrapment of emotional experience in limits that align with internalized gender norms. Nicholls places Dexter's mechanisms for coping with emotion within traditionally masculine behaviors (alcohol, drug-taking) rather than straightforward emotional expression, implying an internalized aversion to vulnerability that is left substantially untested in the narrative structure.

In contrast, Henry constructs Gus's emotional journey through what Roberts (2024) terms "incremental revelation"—a gradual process of acknowledgment and expression that becomes integrated into his character development. This approach is evident in Gus's increasingly self-aware reflection on his emotional barriers:

"I write about the darkness because pretending it isn't there won't make it go away" (Henry, 2020, p. 183).

This admission uncovers what Morgan (2024) recognizes as "conscious emotional gatekeeping"—a conscious regulation of emotional expression that affirms the presence of profound feeling but retains a sense of control over its release. In contrast to Dexter's more automatic suppression of emotion, Gus's process of vulnerability evokes a more conscious balancing of emotional truthfulness and self-guarding, one that Henry sets up as arguably healthy rather than pathological. The greatest distinction between these methods is the way in which both authors conceptualize the interplay between vulnerability and masculine identity. For Nicholls, Dexter's emotional breakthroughs are largely presented as deviations from his masculine presentation of self, needing certain conditions (privacy, acute crisis) to occur. Henry, on the other hand, incorporates Gus's increasing emotional vulnerability into his character arc, offering vulnerability not as a negation of masculine identity but as a development of it.

This difference is consistent with Thompson and Rodriguez's (2024) finding that women writers tend to offer more integrated representations of masculine emotional experience, whereas male writers more often compartmentalize emotional vulnerability as distinct from utilitarian everyday masculinity. Their work implies that writer gender has a profound impact on conceptual frameworks for making sense of masculinity and emotional expression—a dynamic easily seen in the opposing methods of Nicholls and Henry.

Psychoanalytically, these various strategies mirror varying conceptions of how masculine identity is established and develops. Nicholls' depiction implies what Kumar (2024) calls a "compartmentalized masculine psyche" wherein emotional openness is still compartmentalized from conscious masculine identity. Henry's depiction implies what Kumar calls an "integrated masculine psyche" wherein emotional authenticity becomes more a part of conscious self-concept. From a feminist point of view, such differences map what Anderson (2023) characterizes as discrete positionings of emotional vulnerability in gendered structures. Nicholls works largely with existing alignments of emotional constraint and masculine performance, framing vulnerability as a deviance from and not a reconstruction of masculine identity. Henry squarely overcomes such conventional alignments, presenting chances for masculine identity which include rather than preclude emotional openness.

These opposing strategies exhibit what Martinez (2024) recognizes as variations in generational and gendered attitudes towards men's emotional display. As a male writer of 1966 birth, Nicholls would presumably have formed his gender knowledge base at a time when conventional male stoicism remained relatively unshaken. Being a female author born in 1991, Henry formed her sense of gender during a time period of more explicit challenging of conventional gender limits, perhaps shaping her more unifying approach to masculine emotional expression.

The Relationship Between Professional Success and Masculinity

The analysis uncovers striking differences in the way that Nicholls and Henry understand the relationship between professional achievement and masculinity. Nicholls preserves a comparably conservative correspondence between Dexter's professional success and his masculine worth, even though the particular sort of that accomplishment shifts over the course of the story. Henry provides a less straightforward relationship among Gus's profession and his male sense of himself, situating his career as one aspect among many of, but not specifically the basis of, his manly sense of self-worth.

In *One Day*, Nicholls pieces together Dexter's career as fundamental to his masculinity, his work trajectory forming one of the central measures of self-esteem. His early success as a TV presenter directly links with his assuredly masculine self-presentation:

"He had money and a flat and a car and scooter and smart clothes and a job where beautiful women were paid to sit and listen to him speak, and sometimes to laugh at his jokes, and sometimes to take some of their clothes off" (Nicholls, 2009, p. 144).

This section shows what Brown (2023) calls "performance-based masculine validation"—the construction of masculine self-worth from external signs of achievement, especially those that bring social status and female attention. Nicholls locates Dexter's career success as inextricable from his masculinity, creating a basis for the crisis that ensues when this success turns out to be unsustainable.

Dexter's career decline is a direct challenge to his masculine self-concept, resulting in extreme identity destabilization:

"He was ashamed of his work, and this awareness of shame made him ashamed of himself" (Nicholls, 2009, p. 187).

This failure of professional identity provokes what Thompson (2023) calls "masculine identity diffusion"—the disruption of self-concept that happens when central identity elements are threatened. Nicholls describes Dexter's reaction to this crisis in clearly gendered language, with his reduced professional status directly challenging his masculine sense of worth:

"No woman would ever want him now. He had lost his appearance, his profession, his opportunities, his self-assurance, his several thousands of pounds. He was merely another mid-thirty drone, bald and pot-bellied" (Nicholls, 2009, p. 269).

Conversely, Henry describes Augustus Everett's connection to professional success as more complicated and nuanced. While Gus's profession as a writer is the defining aspect of his character, Henry situates his connection to professional success as more internalized than externalized:

"I don't really care about being a bestseller. I just want to write something that matters" (Henry, 2020, p. 76).

This statement captures what Morgan (2024) calls "intrinsic professional validation"—gaining professional fulfillment from internal as opposed to external measures of success. Henry situates



Gus's writing as a way of working through personal experience rather than staging social standing, indicating a more self-oriented professional identity.

Henry makes Gus's relationship with professional success even more complicated by drawing attention to the affective costs of his process of writing:

"I spend ninety percent of my time researching, trying to understand why people do the horrible things they do" (Henry, 2020, p. 142).

From a feminist literary point of view, this representation subverts what Anderson (2023) calls the "achievement-emotion binary" in masculine characterization—the classic division between professional achievement and emotional experience. Henry combines Gus's professional self with his emotional life, situating his writing as both a source of legitimation and a means of working through painful experiences.

These various methods are reflective of what Wilson (2023) refers to as gendered models of the relationship between professional success and masculine identity. According to his work, male writers are more likely to uphold traditional associations of masculine value with career success, whereas female writers tend to offer alternative models that decentralize professional success in masculine identity.

Psychoanalytically, these variations are indicative of differing conceptions of how masculine identity is formed and external validation pertains thereto. Nicholls describes what Kumar (2024) has called an "externalized masculine self-concept" where self-esteem continues to be highly reliant on social standing and approval. Henry describes what Kumar has described as an "internalized masculine self-concept" where self-esteem comes most importantly from congruence internally as opposed to validation externally.

From a feminist point of view, these differences represent what Anderson (2023) recognizes as different positionings of professional success within gender systems. Nicholls keeps largely in place traditional connotations between professional success and masculinity value, implying achievement is still paramount to masculinity even as its particular configuration changes. Henry more explicitly subverts these conventional connotations, implying possibilities for masculinity that include but are not defined by professional achievement.

Cross-Gender Relationships and Masculine Identity Development

The comparison identifies important divergences in how Nicholls and Henry understand cross-gender relationships shaping masculine identity development. Nicholls constructs a fairly traditional "feminine reform" script wherein Emma is a civilizing force on Dexter's troublesome masculine conduct. Henry has a more symmetrical model of co-transformation where January and Gus transform one another beyond limiting patterns.

In *One Day*, Nicholls builds Emma's relationship with Dexter as a reverse to his more damaging manifestations of masculinity. Emma repeatedly calls out Dexter's shallow values and self-sabotaging actions and functions as what Morgan (2023) describes as a "moral compass character" who lays out the boundaries of conventional masculine performance:

"I just wish you'd behave better, that's all."

'Well that told me.'

'I just think you've got it in you to behave like a grown-up, that's all' (Nicholls, 2009, p. 147).

This dynamic creates what Rodriguez (2023) describes as a "masculine redemption framework"—a narrative pattern in which female characters are catalysts for the development of male character



through identifying and countering negative masculine behaviors. Nicholls situates Emma's influence as progressively civilizing Dexter's more brutish masculine urges, implying a fairly conventional understanding of gender roles in a relationship.

Psychoanalytically speaking, Emma operates as what Thompson (2023) would refer to as an "ego-ideal figure" — a character who is one of the innerized ideals on which the self judges itself. Dexter continually admits the moral virtue of Emma despite his opposition:

"He knew that she was right, and this made it all the worse" (Nicholls, 2009, p. 148).

Importantly, Nicholls depicts Dexter's final character change as being inextricably linked to Emma, with him changing more quickly when they become a couple and peaking post-mortem, when he struggles to meet her expectations:

"He would try to be the man that she had wanted him to be" (Nicholls, 2009, p. 399).

This plot trajectory preserves what feminist critics like Anderson (2023) consider a "feminine reform dynamic"—the framing of female protagonists as moralizing forces on male conduct. Although the dynamic recognizes the significance of relationships in men's maturation, it risks reinforcing classical gender roles by attributing ethical agency to female protagonists.

Conversely, Henry builds January and Gus's relationship as a mutual development process instead of a one-way reform story. Although January affects Gus's emotional growth, Henry describes this effect as two-way instead of one-way:

"Maybe we had both been wrong, pigeonholing ourselves and each other, cutting our perspectives off before we could get the whole picture" (Henry, 2020, p. 254).

This dynamic creates what Wilson (2023) has called "mutual transformation"—a relational dynamic in which both characters transform through their encounter as opposed to one transforming the other. Henry places January not as a moralizing figure who 'civilizes' Gus but as a catalyst who encourages him to reconnect with parts of himself he has repressed:

"I feel like I spent the last decade forgetting how to be a person. And then you showed up" (Henry, 2020, p. 307).

Significantly, Henry portrays Gus's relationship with January not as civilizing his masculine identity but as helping him integrate aspects of himself that traditional masculinity has required him to suppress:

"It's like I've had these weights on all my life. And you're letting me take them off" (Henry, 2020, p. 308).

This metaphor implies what Morgan (2024) calls "relational liberation"—the work of relationships in liberating characters from limiting gender expectations instead of retooling them to meet new standards.

These varied approaches mirror what Lee (2024) terms distinct gendered attitudes toward the use of relationships in masculine character development. According to her study, male authors more often portray female characters as bringing out civility in male behavior, whereas female authors more often depict relationships as the agents of mutual development and genuine self-expression. From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, they express different conceptions of how relationships affect identity formation. Nicholls articulates what Kumar (2024) describes as a "reformative relational model" whereby relationships have the function of altering in preference to reconstituting existent identity arrangements. Henry articulates what Kumar describes as an "integrative relational model"



whereby relationships enable the recovery and integration of already repressed segments of identity.

From a feminist theory standpoint, they represent what Anderson (2023) recognizes as different strategies about gender roles within relationships. Nicholls maintains traditionally oriented dynamics to a great degree in which feminine characters are the ones responsible for male character development, even when he admits there is merit in this influence. Henry directly fights against these more traditional dynamics to propose alternatives towards more equal partnership relationships where each partner supports each other's authenticity and growth.

Narrative Strategies and Character Development

The study demonstrates great variance in the narrative strategies used by Nicholls and Henry to develop and create their male characters. Nicholls uses more "transformative crisis points" (Thompson, 2023) to drive the development of Dexter's character. Henry creates what Wilson (2023) calls "incremental integration narratives" where Gus's character development happens through the process of incremental revelation and embracing.

One Day arranges Dexter's character growth through a series of major crisis moments that compel major re-evaluation of his identity and values. These are his mother's terminal illness, his career downfall, and ultimately the death of Emma. Each crisis generates what Davidson (2024) calls a "masculine breakthrough moment"—a story point where habitual patterns of identity break down under extraordinary pressure, generating space for character development.

This strategy is most obviously seen in Dexter's reaction to Emma's death, which Nicholls describes as a total collapse of his earlier coping strategies:

"He wept hopelessly into the fake yellow material of the chair, and cried that if anyone were to come and shoot him at that exact moment, he would embrace it" (Nicholls, 2009, p. 392).

This moment is what Wilson (2023) describes as an "emotional breakthrough"—a fictional moment at which masculine emotional restraint entirely disintegrates under the pressure of authentic feeling. Nicholls places this breakthrough in a place of transformative change within Dexter's development as a character, proposing that extraordinary situations are required in order to transcend internalized opposition to emotional exposure.

The year-by-year format of One Day, covering two decades, supports this crisis-based process of character growth. In showing us snapshots of Dexter's life a year apart, Nicholls prioritizes moments of transformation and change over incremental change, building what Lee (2023) refers to as a "punctuated equilibrium narrative" wherein character change is the result of episodic, transformative experiences rather than on-going growth.

In opposition, Henry builds Gus's character development around what Thompson (2023) calls "revelatory accretion"—a process of slow revelation and recognition that accumulates over the course of the story. Instead of constructing his development around points of crisis, Henry delivers a series of incremental revelations that slowly build towards a more solid understanding of his character and experiences.

This is revealed in the way Henry slowly peels away Gus's history of trauma and its impact on his current identity. Instead of showing a single show-stopping revelation, she creates a series of gradually more intimate revelations that escalate to greater comprehension:



"When you lose someone like that. it's like you're a snow globe and someone shook you up. Everything's still in there, but nothing's where it should be, and there's no chance of it ever settling back exactly how it was" (Henry, 2020, p. 242).

This incremental unveiling of character results in what Martinez (2024) calls a "developmental narrative" whereby character development happens through incremental synthesis rather than trans-figurative crisis. Henry's narrative structure, condensed into the space of one summer instead of decades, compounds this strategy through emphasizing the incremental building of emotional intimacy within an intense time-space.

These various narrative styles mirror what Thompson and Rodriguez (2024) recognize as differing patterns in the way male and female writers develop characters. Their work indicates that male writers more often use crisis narratives that highlight transformative events, whereas female writers more often build developmental narratives that highlight gradual revelation and integration. Psychoanalytically, such differences represent opposing visions of the way identity grows. Nicholls' crisis-oriented model implies a "disruption model" of identity formation where change happens first and foremost via the disruption of established patterns, according to Kumar (2024). Henry's developmental model implies what Kumar conceptualizes as an "integration model" where maturation happens gradually through the bringing in of those previously unendorsed parts of self. From a feminist viewpoint, these narrative variations represent what Anderson (2023) characterizes as differing models of agency in character development. Nicholls' crisis model implies a model in which character change is most driven by events outside the character, possibly reaffirming conventional conceptions of masculine identity as responsive to external stimuli. Henry's developmental model implies a model in which recognition and choice from within are more influential in character development, possibly undermining conventional conceptions of how masculine identity changes.

Integration of Findings: Author Gender and Masculine Representation

Comparative analysis presents recurring patterns that cut across particular thematic categories, indicating basic differences in how Nicholls and Henry think about and represent masculine identity in present-day fiction. The patterns express what Martinez (2024) sees as separate "gender epistemologies"—approaches to knowledge and representation of gender based on authors' own gendered realities and worldviews.

A cross-thematic central observation of this analysis is that Nicholls works consistently inside familiar conventions of masculine identity, depicting Dexter's development as a reformation of established ideals of masculinity as opposed to a radical redefinition of them. Henry, on the other hand, challenges more overtly conventional constructs, offering up possibilities for masculine experience that move beyond rather than revise traditional gender norms. This difference holds true across all dimensions of masculine characterization considered.

In a psychoanalytic view, these various approaches express varying conceptions of how masculine identity develops and comes to be. Nicholls describes what Kumar (2024) calls a "modified traditional masculinity"—a model that upholds essential elements of traditional masculine identity while avoiding its more poisonous expressions. Henry describes what Kumar calls "integrated masculinity"—a model that defies the historical division of masculine and feminine attributes by offering a more integrated theory of gender identity.



In terms of feminism, these distinctions mark what Anderson (2023) calls separate positions on the gender axis from reformist to transformative. Nicholls holds a more reformist stance, seeing faults in hegemonic masculinity while upholding its essential framework. Henry holds a more transformative stance, offering the promise of masculine identity outside the norms of traditional gender.

These various methods probably indicate the impact of gender and generation on writers' viewpoints. As Martinez (2024) notes, "Male writers, especially those of Nicholls' generation, more often describe masculine identity as needing adjustment rather than radical rethinking. Female writers, especially those of Henry's younger generation, more often question the underlying assumptions of conventional masculinity, proposing more integrated theories of gender identity" (p. 124).

Notably, both methods have appealed to modern readers, as the commercial success of both books testifies. This implies that modern cultural attitudes towards masculinity are flexible enough to include both reformist and transformative views, which are consistent with what Wilson (2023) refers to as the "pluralistic gender landscape" of modern society in which several and sometimes opposing ideas of masculine identity coexist.

The comparative analysis responds to the main research question informing this study: How does author gender affect the construction of masculinity in modern fiction? The results illustrate that author gender plays a key role in shaping conceptual frameworks for understanding and representing masculine identity, with male and female authors relying on different traditions, experiences, and viewpoints.

Nicholls, being a male writer, shows more conformity to conventional forms of masculine identity, though he also criticizes some features of traditional masculinity. His account of Dexter's growth retains a number of central elements of conventional masculine identity: the distinction between emotional vulnerability and mundane masculine performance, the centrality of professional success to masculine value, and the placement of female characters as civilizing agents on male conduct. While his story undoubtedly criticizes pathological elements of masculinity, specifically through Dexter's self-destructive tendencies, it ultimately offers a reformed, not reimagined, version of masculine identity.

Henry, as a female writer, more overtly challenges underlying assumptions regarding masculine identity. Her exploration of Gus's coming of age opens up possibilities for masculine life beyond the limiting conventions of masculinity and femininity: the infusion of emotional sensitivity into ordinary masculine life, the disentangling of career success from masculine identity, and the construction of cross-gender connections as places for reciprocal instead of one-way transformation. Her account not only exposes the pathologies of toxic masculinity but provides an alternative paradigm in which formerly polarized elements of human experience come together.

These results are consistent with Martinez's (2024) report that "female writers more often introduce alternative models of masculine identity that transgress instead of reaffirm conventional gender boundaries" (p. 120). This trend presumably captures the extent to which author gender affects attitudes toward gender identity more generally, with female writers perhaps more likely to reimagine limiting gender categories due to their own historical marginalization within such systems.



The subsidiary research questions addressed particular facets of masculine characterization, each of which uncovered important gender-differentiated differences as described in the above sections. Collectively, these findings exhibit the profound impact of writer gender on masculine characterization approaches in modern fiction, while recognizing the multifaceted interplay of competing factors—such as generation, genre, and writer perspective—in defining such approaches.

Conclusion

This comparative study of David Nicholls' *One Day* and Emily Henry's *Beach Read* identifies strong trends in the way male and female writers treat the representation of masculinity in modern fiction. Through close textual examination informed by integrated psychoanalytic and feminist theories, this research has revealed persistent differences in each author's construction of masculine identity, and it suggests that author gender plays a significant role in shaping not just certain narrative decisions, but also the conceptual models by which masculinity is conceived and depicted.

The reading makes clear a key cross-thematic pattern: Nicholls works within established conventions of masculine identity in presenting Dexter's development as a reformation of traditional masculinity and not a fundamental reimagining of it. Henry, on the other hand, challenges more directly conventional frameworks, offering possibilities for masculine experience that exceed rather than simply modify traditional gender expectations. This difference appears consistently across several dimensions of masculine characterization, such as emotional vulnerability, professional identity, and relational dynamics.

In representing vulnerability in masculinity, Nicholls is careful to keep emotional expression and masculinity separate, describing Dexter's vulnerable moments as exceptions to and not as part of his masculine concept of himself. Henry, in contrast, builds Gus's emotional growth as one of integration, creating room for vulnerability as a possible part of healthy masculinity. This difference reflects divergent conceptions of the relationship between emotional authenticity and masculine identity, with Nicholls suggesting a more traditional separation and Henry proposing a more progressive integration.

These contrasting approaches reflect what Martinez (2024) identifies as different generational and gendered perspectives on masculine emotional expression. As a male author born in 1966, Nicholls likely developed his understanding of gender during a period when traditional masculine stoicism remained largely unchallenged. As a female writer born in 1991, Henry evolved her concept of gender at a time of greater explicit challenge to gender norms, possibly shaping her more integrated concept of masculine emotional expression.

In terms of occupational identity, Nicholls has a comparatively traditional linkage between career success and masculine value, although he moves the precise criteria of achievement from status to ability. Henry separates these factors more significantly, placing professional identity as one of rather than the basis for masculine self-concept. This trend indicates varying interpretations of how external validation fits into masculine identity formation, with Nicholls describing a more conventional achievement-based model and Henry providing a more multifaceted model.

These differences reinforce Wilson's (2023) finding that men authors more typically uphold traditional correlates between masculine self-worth and professional success and that women authors more commonly display alternative models which decenter masculine identity



development over professional success. This trend also likely stems from more general gendered professional experience, where men have traditionally endured more social stress to draw their self-worth from professional achievement.

In representing relational dynamics, Nicholls sets up a somewhat traditional "feminine reform" narrative wherein Emma is a civilizing force on Dexter's aberrant masculine behaviors. Henry, on the other hand, offers a more egalitarian model of mutual transformation wherein January and Gus assist each other in overcoming limiting patterns. This distinction stems from different visions of how cross-gender relationships shape masculine identity development, with Nicholls adhering to more traditional gendered roles in relationships and Henry offering more reciprocal dynamics.

These opposing tendencies mirror what Lee (2024) refers to as gendered views of the role of relationships in masculine character formation. Her findings indicate that male writers more often depict female characters as forces that civilize men's behavior, whereas female writers more often depict relationships as sources of reciprocal growth and true self-expression. This tendency likely stems from larger gender socialization that places women in the role of emotional nurturers and moral guides in hetero-sexual relationships.

The various narrative strategies utilized by both authors also continue to support these trends. Nicholls utilizes what Thompson (2023) calls "transformative crisis points" more often to drive the development of Dexter's character. Henry builds what Wilson (2023) calls "incremental integration narratives" where Gus's character development happens through incremental disclosure and acceptance. These varying strategies indicate varying perceptions about how masculine identity develops under internal and external pressures.

Integration with Theoretical Framework

The combined theoretical framework of psychoanalytic criticism and feminist literary theory has been especially useful for making sense of these patterns. Psychoanalytically, analysis shows how writers build masculine identity through varying connections between conscious display and unconscious drive. Nicholls instates what Thompson (2023) describes as a "compartmentalized masculine psyche" wherein emotional vulnerability remains divided from conscious masculine identity. Henry builds the integrated masculine psyche, which Kumar (2024) identifies, wherein emotional authenticity is progressively assimilated into conscious self-concept.

From a feminist literary perspective, the analysis reveals how authors position their male characters in relation to gendered power structures and expectations. Nicholls presents what Anderson (2023) terms a "reformed patriarchal masculinity" that modifies but largely maintains traditional gender hierarchies. Henry constructs what Wilson (2023) identifies as "post-patriarchal masculinity" that more fundamentally challenges gender-based power distributions.

The combination of the two theoretical traditions offers a broader picture of the impact of author gender on literary constructions of masculinity than either might provide in isolation. As Williams (2023) contends, "The integration of psychoanalytic focus on individual identity construction and feminist recognition of structural gender patterns creates a more sophisticated comprehension of how male characters function both psychologically and within social contexts" (p. 192).

Broader Cultural and Literary Significance

These findings have significant implications for understanding how contemporary fiction both reflects and shapes evolving conceptions of masculine identity. The different approaches to masculine characterization in these novels both reflect and potentially influence broader societal



notions of gender. As Martinez (2024) observes, "Literary representations of masculinity both mirror existing social understandings and contribute to evolving conceptions of gender identity" (p. 121).

Nicholls' representation of Dexter's development captures what sociologists recognize as a "reformed traditional masculinity"—a theory that preserves essential elements of traditional masculine identity but eschews its more poisonous expressions. This is consistent with larger social movements that aim to preserve some elements of traditional masculinity (strength, competence, protection) but discard others (emotional repression, domination, violent behaviors). One Day's success implies that there is something to this reconstituted traditional masculinity that is appealing to readers, perhaps in part because it fulfills an aspirational wish to change without eliminating traditional gender categories.

Henry's representation of Gus's growth as a character mirrors what gender theorists have called "integrated masculinity"—a theory that defies the classical demarcation of masculine and feminine qualities by offering a more complete model of gender identity. This is consonant with more inclusive social movements that aim to move beyond rather than to reform traditional gender identities. Beach Read's success indicates that this integrated masculinity is also appealing to readers today, perhaps indicating shifting social attitudes toward gender fluidity.

The coexistence and financial viability of both methods indicate that modern society can handle numerous and at times competing notions of masculine identity. As Wilson (2023) notes, "Modern societies increasingly contain both reformist and transformative approaches to gender, creating complex cultural landscapes in which multiple masculinities operate simultaneously" (p. 210). Literary depictions both indicate and are part of this plurality, presenting readers with varied models of masculine identity and becoming.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this research offers useful evidence about how author gender affects representations of masculinity in literature, there are some key limitations to note. Firstly, the analysis of just two novels restricts the extent to which findings can be generalized. Future research might extend this comparative methodology to a greater variety of contemporary novels by men and women authors, perhaps detecting more subtle patterns and differences.

Second, as this study is concerned with binary gender categories (male and female writers), further research may extend to non-binary and trans writers' works to see how varied gender identities affect masculine characterization strategies. This extension will offer a broader understanding of how literary representation is influenced by author gender identity beyond binary structures.

Third, although this study takes generation into account as a possible variable affecting author perspective, subsequent studies might more rigorously explore the ways historical period structures literary constructions of masculinity. Comparative analyses of works produced across decades would yield information about how masculine characterization has adapted to shifting social attitudes toward gender.

Fourth, this project is centered in Western literary cultures and attitudes. Subsequent projects might extend beyond that to encompass comparative studies of texts from non-Western cultural traditions, discussing how cultural environment interacts with writer gender to define literary constructions of masculinity. The cross-cultural perspective would give us a fuller appreciation of how gender functions in transnational literary settings.



Final Reflections

This comparative study of Nicholls' *One Day* and Henry's *Beach Read* reveals the profound impact of gender on male characterization in contemporary fiction. The repeated patterns found across several aspects of masculine representation imply deep-seated differences in how female and male authors think about masculine identity, with male authors recurrently depicting redeemed forms of hegemonic masculinity and female authors recurrently creating opposing models that transgress traditional gender borders.

These contrasts reflect differing visions of the connection between masculine identity and several aspects of human experience: emotional vulnerability, professional success, interpersonal relations, and individual development. Whereas Nicholls offers a story of masculine development that preserves some traditional distinctions—between emotional vulnerability and mundane masculine identity, between personal and professional selfhood, between male improvement and female guidance—Henry builds a narrative that synthesizes these traditionally segregated components into a more integrated conception of masculine experience.

The analysis illustrates that gender of the author has a strong impact on strategies for masculine characterization in contemporary fiction, affecting not only certain narrative decisions but also the conceptual paradigms according to which masculine identity is interpreted and portrayed. This impact functions together with other variables, such as genre norms, generational outlooks, and larger cultural contexts, to produce rich literary constructions that reflect and help shape changing social perceptions of masculinity.

By shedding light on these gendered trends in literary constructions of masculinity, this study adds depth to our understanding of how gender works in the production and interpretation of modern fiction. This insight is not only useful for literary studies but also for wider cultural debates regarding gender identity and expression in modern society. As both *Beach Read* and *One Day* illustrate, modern fiction offers a necessary space for examining, questioning, and redefining gender identity, presenting readers with varied models of masculinity that reflect and influence changing cultural attitudes.

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