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Analysis of Junot Diaz’s *How to Date a Brown Girl (Black Girl, White Girl, or Halfie)*

Written by Junot Diaz, *Drown* is a short story collection outlining the life of Yunior, a Dominican-American young boy. The collection includes *How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie,* a well-written short story presented as a dating manual to the teenage boy. The story shows excellent thematic and character development. Through Yunior, the author analyses the themes of race and ethnicity, family and parenting, love, friendships, and relationships, and sex, sexuality, and masculinity among others. The analysis of the various themes offers an in-depth understanding of the story and the influence of the different themes on social interaction and integration. This essay identifies and discusses the themes of masculinity, ethnicity, family, and relationships critically by examining the life of Yunior and his family. It delves deeper into outlining the attitudes of Yunior about masculinity and the possible influence on his relationship with Beto. Further, it highlights the interconnection of his attitudes regarding masculinity to his ethnicity.

Diaz outlines the various issues of masculinity. According to the narrator, there are various behaviours and attributes a man should show or possess. For instance, according to the narrator, a man should be able to provide without depending on the assistance of the government. Then assertion is that the social class of a man defines who they are and their ability to provide for their family or in the case of Yunior, the girlfriend. The author advises Yunior to hide the government provided cheese so that the girl he is expecting does not see it. About this the author writes, “Clear the government cheese from the refrigerator…hide the cheese in the cabinet above the oven, way up where she’ll never see” (Blackstone and Talbot 64). The concept of masculinity as depicted in the story shows that the society looks down upon men who depend on aid such as Welfare or Food Stamp. In this regard, Yunior was supposed to act above his social class to cover up for the low status.

Additionally, the author describes masculinity as the ability of a man to defend himself and his family. Diaz presents Yunior as weak and unable to protect himself contrary to what the society expects of men. The narrator argues that a man should never lose a fight, more so on the first date, as this would mean the end of the relationship. This shows that the society expects men to act violently when need be, to protect themselves and those they love. Failure to do so or losing in the process portrays a man as weak. The narrator says, “never lose a fight on the first date or that will be the end of it (Blackstone and Talbot 66).” Such portrayal of masculinity depicts the society’s expectation that men should offer security. Further, the narrator shows that married men should be able to protect their families at all cost. The failure to protect oneself, girlfriend or fiancée, and the family shows a man as undeserving of any intimate relationship (Diaz).

Additionally, masculinity is greatly defined by the physical appearance of a man. Men are described as strong and masculine. The description of Howie and the father of the Yunior’s date shows the position strong and masculine men hold in the society. The features should inspire fear and show the ability to have superior power over others. The narrator asserts that the father of Yunior’s date sounded “like a principal or a police chief, the sort of dude with a big neck, who never has to watch his back (Blackstone and Talbot 65).” The description shows that most men who hold higher positions in the society depict the same physical qualities. Additionally, about Howie, the author writes, “Howie weighs about two hundred pounds and could eat you if he wanted (Blackstone and Talbot 65).” This further shows the kind of men who control the society Yunior lives in.

Further from the aforementioned, the history and relationship of Yunior and Beto show another critical issue of concern in the society. Yunior and Beto were childhood friends who played together and spent most of their time together. However, Yunior realized that Beto was homosexual after two sexual encounters. These ended their relationship and while Beto left the city, Yunior remained. The latter was fearful that he would end up “abnormal”, a *pato*. Without his best friend Yunior was left “drowning” in a repetitive and boring life. About Beto, Yunior said, “he was my best friend and back then that mattered to me more than anything” (Binnick). A life without his childhood frind was without motivation, boring, and he often felt lost. However, the perception the society had about homosexuals would not have him have it any other way. He feared becoming abnormal and being disrespected and excommunicated by the society which disregarded homosexuality as an abnormality.

The relationship and history of Yunior with Beto portray an unhealthy relationship between his father and the entire family. While describing the sexual encounters with Beto and revisiting his memories, Yunior shows the fear that his father might one day know of the occurrences. He feared his father mostly for his abusive and violent nature. The narrator says, “I don’t know about you, but my pops hits like a motherfucker” (Diaz). While this may show that his father used to beat him, it may also mirror an unhealthy relationship between his parents. Most probably, his father used to beat up his mother, and hence the fear. Additionally, it may portray a relationship that was based on fear and intimidation thus lacking in love, affection, and sincerity.

The attitudes Yunior had about masculinity will influence his relationship with Beto significantly. The author believes a man should depict the attributes and behaviours the society expects of men. For instance, the society views homosexuality as an abnormality and thus it may be difficult for the duo to maintain a healthy relationship since Beto wants an intimate relationship (Diaz). Additionally, the fear of his father may drive Yunior even farther from Beto. Further, the relentless effort by Yunior to have a girlfriend shows minimal chances for the development of their relationship.

As a Dominican immigrant, Yunior’s life is shaped greatly by his ethnicity. His ethnicity defines his attitudes about masculinity significantly. For instance, his ethnicity makes him view violent masculinity as a norm since men are supposed to be violent and fearless, able to defend themselves and their loved ones at all cost, even when it requires one to be violent (Horn and Mellon). The life of Yunior seems to rotate around the issue of masculinity from his relationships with parents, Beto, and the girls he wants to date. Though he disdains violent and negative masculinity, he seems to support it by striving to form relationships with those who promote it. Further, Yunior seems willing to advance negative masculinity when it shows the possibility of benefitting him. These attitudes are the same as those portrayed by men of his ethnic group such as his father.

Works Cited

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