



A STUDY ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PORTRAYAL IN SAYAKA MURATA'S *CONVENIENCE STORE WOMAN*

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Abstract: This paper throws light on the psychological portrayal in Sayaka Murata's novel *Convenience Store Woman*. The protagonist, Keiko Furukura, grapples with societal expectations, conformity, and identity, offering a unique perspective on individuality and societal norms. The novel delves into the impact of the convenience store environment on Keiko's psychology and the role of relationships in her development. This paper serves as a commentary on mental health and societal pressure, prompting readers to reflect on their experiences with societal expectations and their consequences on mental well-being. Through Keiko's struggles, Murata raises thought-provoking questions about the boundaries of societal expectations. This paper offers a multifaceted exploration of the human experience and emphasizes the power of individuality. "Convenience Store Woman" is a testament to Sayaka Murata's skill in crafting a psychologically rich and emotionally charged tale, leaving readers with a renewed perspective on the complexities of the human psyche.

Keywords: Conformity, Human experience, Identity, Individuality, Psychological portrayal.

Introduction

In this paper, the focus will delve deeper into the intricacies of Murata's novel *Convenience Store Women*, focusing specifically on the psychological portrayal of its protagonist, Keiko Furukura. The novel offers a captivating exploration of societal expectations, identity, and the human desire for acceptance through the lens of Keiko's unconventional life working at a convenience store in Tokyo. Murata skilfully delves into the complexities of Keiko's psyche, providing readers with a thought-provoking perspective on conformity and individuality.

Convenience Store Woman takes readers on a journey into the mind of the protagonist Keiko Furukura, a woman who challenges societal norms by choosing to work at a convenience store long past the expected age for such a role. Murata's portrayal of Keiko's psychological state offers a unique perspective on the human desire for acceptance and the complexities of societal expectations. By immersing readers in Keiko's world, Murata prompts us to question the boundaries between conformity and individuality, inviting us to reflect on our perceptions of societal norms and personal fulfillment. Through her exploration, Murata crafts a compelling narrative that captivates readers and challenges conventional notions of identity and societal roles. The novel encourages us to examine the psychological impact of conformity to societal expectations and the internal struggle for acceptance and belonging. Murata's masterful depiction of Keiko's psychological journey offers readers a compelling narrative that challenges traditional notions of conformity and individuality.

Narrative Craftsmanship is the portrayal of the protagonist's struggle with societal expectations in "Convenience Store Woman"

Throughout the novel the protagonist, Keiko Furukura faces an ongoing struggle with societal expectations. As a woman in her thirties, she is pressured to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations. Keiko's job at the convenience store provides her with a sense of purpose and belonging, yet it is viewed as unconventional and unacceptable by those around her. Keiko's family and friends consistently question her choices, emphasizing the societal norms of pursuing a traditional career and finding a husband. Their disapproval magnifies the pressure on Keiko to conform, leading her to question her worth and identity. The constant scrutiny from her social circle creates a psychological burden for Keiko, as she grapples with the conflict between her personal fulfillment and societal expectations. As Keiko navigates her internal struggle, she finds herself torn between embracing her individuality and succumbing to the pressure to conform. Her job at the convenience store becomes not only a source of comfort and purpose but also a means of fitting into society's mold, despite its unconventional nature. The novel portrays the profound impact of societal expectations on an individual's sense of self-worth and Identity, highlighting the challenges faced by those who deviate from traditional norms. Keiko's journey reflects the broader societal issue of rigid expectations placed on individuals, particularly women, to adhere to predetermined roles and paths. The novel delves into the complexities of societal pressure and the toll it takes on an individual's mental and emotional well-being. Through Keiko's experience, the author sheds light on the determined effects of societal expectations and the internal conflict it engenders. Sayaka Murata keenly immersed these details in between chapters. For instance, it is

visible in the portrayal of the protagonist, Keiko Furukura, and her struggle with societal expectations. Keiko's character challenges traditional norms and societal pressures by choosing to work in a convenience store long-term, despite society's expectations for her to pursue a more conventional career or lifestyle. Her dedication to this job raised eyebrows among her family and friends, who questioned her choice but surprisingly, Keiko's liking for working in a convenience store can be seen as a form of distraction against social pressure at a certain age. She by immersing herself in the routine and structure of her job, Keiko finds a sense of purpose and belonging that shields her from the external pressures to conform to traditional expectations. Working in a convenience store allows Keiko to create a world where she feels in control and accepted, despite societal norms dictating otherwise. Sayaka beautifully unfolds these indications in between chapters. Wherein, the following lines stand as proof that at the beginning of the novel, Keiko refers to convenience stores as the "World of Sounds" while Sayaka vividly explains contents that express these emotions through words and gives an extra remark for certain contents for instance:

“Tinkle of the door chime to the voice of TV celebrities advertising new products over the in-store cable network, to the calls of store workers, the beeps of bar code scanners, the rustle of customers picking up items and placing them in baskets, and the clacking of heels walking around the store. It all blends into the convenience store sound that ceaselessly caresses my eardrums” (Murata 1).

Sayaka Murata quotes these lines to define how the structured environment of the store provides her with clear guidelines and tasks, offering a sense of stability and fulfillment that she may not find in other aspects of her life.

In this way, Keiko's fondness for her job can be interpreted as a coping mechanism—a way for her to navigate the complexities of societal expectations by focusing on something that brings her joy and a sense of identity. The convenience store serves as a refuge where Keiko can escape the judgment and scrutiny of those around her, allowing her to carve out a space where she feels valued and understood. At a certain point in the novel, a character named Sirahuttersa few hurtful words to Keiko which reflects his deep-seated misogyny and disdain for societal expectations.

You're still in a dead-end job at your age, and nobody's going to marry an old maid like you now.

You're like a secondhand goods. Even if you are a virgin, you're grubby. You're like a Stone Age woman past childbearing age who can't get married and is left to just hang around the village, of no use to anyone, just a burden” (Murata 91).

By calling her a “Stone Age woman past childbearing age” and comparing her to “secondhand goods,” Shiraha showcases his belief in traditional gender roles and societal standards that devalue women who do not conform to these norms.

According to Keiko-Marriage was just a matter of paperwork. “An erection is a psychological phenomenon”. She describes her just existing and not minding about any other ideas or things. By choosing to prioritize her own happiness and fulfillment over societal expectations, Keiko reaffirms her autonomy and agency in shaping her own identity and path in life. Murata finally concludes eccentrically by crafting that

“I was wasting time talking like this. I had to get myself back in shape for the sake of the store. I had to restructure my body so it would be able to move more swiftly and precisely to replenish the refrigerated drinks or clean the floor, to more perfectly comply with the store’s demands” (Murata 162).

Whether it’s a better ending or not ultimately depends on individual interpretation. For Keiko, returning to the convenience store symbolizes her commitment to living life on her own terms and finding contentment in a place where she feels most authentic and valued. It can be viewed as a victory for self-acceptance and defiance against societal pressures that seek to dictate her worth based on traditional standards.

Conclusion

In “Convenience Store Woman,” Sayaka Murata skillfully portrays Keiko Furukura’s struggle with societal expectations, highlighting the challenges of defying traditional norms. Through Keiko’s journey, the novel explores the complexities of societal pressure on individual identity and self-worth. Keiko’s choice to work at the convenience store despite societal disapproval reflects her defiance against conventional roles, emphasizing the importance of embracing one’s uniqueness. Ultimately, Keiko’s story serves as a powerful reminder of the significance of self-acceptance and staying true to oneself in the face of societal pressures.

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