

## MALE CHARACTER'S GENDER ROLES AND GENDER DEVELOPMENT IN YAOI MANGA *AOZORA NO SUNDA IRO WA*

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### ABSTRACT

One genre that has been growing rapidly in *manga* is *yaoi*, which sells romance between beautiful young boys and men. In *Aozora no Sunda Iro wa*, I want to reveal how Sugiura takes female role in his same-sex romantic relationship and why Sugiura has dominant feminine features which leads to his feminine role. I used gender role theory and attitudinal pathway gender schema theory. I find out that Sugiura has female-like body-type. He is neat, supportive, sensitive, innocent, weak, and submissive. He is motherly and economically dependent. In addition, Sugiura became feminine because of Fukada's involvement in Sugiura's childhood, his masculine value was rejected while he was encouraged to hold feminine value. In conclusion, Sugiura is a feminine *uke* by showing feminine qualities in his persona code, emotion code, and action code which are resulted by Fukada's involvement in his childhood.

Keyword: gender role, gender development, *yaoi*.

*Manga* is defined as a comic book created in Japan, or by Japanese in Japanese language (Gravet, 2004). These days, *manga* has become so popular and easy to find. One of the genres in *manga* that becomes popular today and has been growing rapidly is *yaoi*, which sells romance between beautiful men (*biseinen*), or beautiful young men (*bishounen*). *Yaoi*'s popularity has been increasing internationally and rapidly since April 2005, with the result 785.000 web pages for the keyword "*Yaoi*" in Google Search (McLelland, 2005). In October 19, 2013, the number has increased with 25.100.000 results for the keyword "*Yaoi*", 6.010.000 results for "*Boys' Love*", and 2.350.000 results for "*Shounen ai*" with Google Search.

*Yaoi*, also known as *Boys' Love (BL)* or *shounen-ai*, is a genre that focuses on the romance between two beautiful androphilic boys or men. The word *yaoi* was generally believed to be first introduced in *doujinshi* market in the late 1970s by Yasuko Sakata and Akiko Hatsu. It stands for *Yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi* which means "No peak (climax), no fall (punch line/denouement), no meaning". This phrase was first used to refer how *yaoi* usually focuses on explicit sexual scene instead of complicated story and plot. While in Japan, the term *yaoi* is the same as *Boys' Love* or *shounen-ai*, Western fans use them to differentiate the contents of the genre. In this case, *yaoi* is used to describe works that contain largely sex scenes and other sexually explicit themes and *Boys' Love* or *shounen-ai* is used to describe works that focus more on romance and do not include explicit sexual content, although they may include implicit sexual content. A thing to consider about *yaoi* is these *manga* are made mostly by straight women and the targeted audiences are primarily straight young women, which make *yaoi* often categorized as *shoujo manga*. Another genre of male-male romance in *manga* is called *bara*, but unlike *yaoi*, *bara* is made by men and the expected audiences are mainly gay men.

One of the popular *yaoi manga* creators is Tenzen Momoko. She has created 20 *manga* and 2 *doujinshi* and many of her *manga* have been translated, shared by fans through internet, and gotten positive reviews from the fans. In this thesis, I will use her work, *Aozora no Sunda Iro wa (The Colour of Clear Blue Sky)*, as the subject of my research. It is published in September 8, 2008, and translated into English by a fangroup in Livejournal named Attractive Fascinante in March 14, 2009 (Bakaupdates, 2009). *Aozora no Sunda Iro wa* resolves around Sugiura Sakae, a new intern in Furuhasi Central Junior School (Elementary School). The first day he teaches he meets his old teacher, Fukada Ryuuji, who vowed to protect him from his father's abuse in his childhood. He admires the teacher and wants to be a great teacher like him. However, he finds out that his ideal

teacher figure has changed so much because of unpleasant experience in the previous school. Yet, since Sugiura comes, Fukada starts to become tidier day by day and Sugiura starts to feel attracted by his ex-teacher romantically.

I choose this work because the story brings an issue of the ideal portrayal of heterosexual couples while depicting same-sex couples on the story, which can be confusing to many readers who are not familiar with the concept of *yaoi*. Contrary to common folks' belief, *yaoi* is not gay or homosexual *manga*, because it does not portray the realistic way of a gay living in Japan (McLelland, 2006). *Yaoi* brought a gender role issue in romantic same-sex relationship, because *yaoi* is actually depicting heterosexual relationship with between a male and a female in male's body. In *Boys' Love manga*, the main male characters often sorted into two categories: *seme* and *uke*, which respectively means "to attack" and "to receive", according to their roles in sexual intercourse. In the majority of *Boys' Love* works, the *seme* and *uke* do not switch their sexual roles, which allows them to be comparable male and female in traditional heterosexual romantic relationship (Sihombing, 2011). The understanding of *seme* and *uke* being comparable to heterosexual couples and the indication of gender role of male-male romance in this particular *manga* lead me to my topic, which is the gender role and gender development of Sugiura.

In this article, I want to know how Sugiura takes female role in his same-sex romantic relationship with Fukada. In addition of the study, I want to know why Sugiura's adopted the feminine role. To analyze it, I will use one theory of gender study, which is Gender Role and apply it with by Febriani Sihombing's Semiotic Expressions of Couple in Boy's Love manga (2011). Then, for the reason of his feminine role, I will use Attitudinal Pathway Gender Schema Theory because I believed the reasons lie in his childhood.

#### **SUGIURA'S FEMININITY AS AN UKE**

I have mentioned that the concept of *uke* and *seme* can only be concluded when they are compared to each other. Sugiura's femininity is based on Japan's traditional and stereotypical femininity in *shoujo manga* compared to Fukada's masculinity.

#### **Sugiura Sakae's Persona Code in His Femininity**

In a *manga*, a character's appearance is not only a style but also depicts the personality of the character (Brenner, 2007). This also applies to *yaoi*. *Uke*, as the 'heroine', tends to be more feminine in physical appearances than the *seme*. There are three elements of physical appearance that I will analyze: body figure, skin tone, and eyes' shape. I find Sugiura's physical appearance suits the typical heroine's characteristics mentioned above.

First of all, Sugiura Sakae is depicted shorter than Fukada, short enough that he had to tilt his head up to look at Fukada's face. In fact, he is shorter than all male teacher characters in the book. Sugiura's shoulder is also shown to be much narrower than Fukada, accompanied by much slender waist. He is more fragile and weaker than then normal men and needs to be protected by a strong and reliable lover.

Another feminine appearance that Sugiura possesses is his fair and flawless skin. Compared to Fukada, who also has light skin tone, Sugiura's skin is even paler. It hints that Sugiura does not do outdoor activity as often as his lover does, which granted him beautiful fair skin. Also, he is never portrayed having facial hair such as moustache or beard even though he is in his mid twenties, not even a scene of him shaving it, in contrast of Fukada who has his moustache shown at the very beginning of the *manga*. This confirms that Sugiura's fair and flawless skin to be more feminine than Fukada's masculine one.

Last but not least, heroine characters are usually portrayed with big eyes to depict youth, innocence and purity. Sugiura's eyes are shown to be big and round. His eyes are similar to the female and children's eyes, bigger and rounder than other male characters in the *manga*, which put a distant between him and the other masculine beings. It proves that Sugiura is actually placed on the same position of a female or children, who are innocent and pure and gives him more sex appeal as a heroine, or in *yaoi manga*, an *uke*.

### Sugiura Sakae's Emotion Code in His Femininity

As Febriani Sihombing (2011) mentioned in her theory, another way to observe whether a character from *yaoi manga* is an *uke* or *seme* could be proved through his clothing, expression, thought, and traits. Throughout the story, I found some of Sugiura's qualities prove his femininity in his same-sex relationship with Fukada. These qualities of Sugiura will be explained further in this sub-chapter.

First of all, heroines in *shoujo manga* are usually depicted as plain girls, thus they usually wear neat and decent clothes. In this manga, Sugiura appears to wear his clothes neatly everyday; he wears shirt and long pants with a tie, sometimes accompanied with a suit. The impression is significant when he is compared to Fukada, who is very messy at the beginning at the series. Sugiura wears decent T-shirt and long pants even when he is not working, while Fukada wears nothing but a pair of boxers at his house.

Secondly, he is also supportive as he faithfully performs activity the same way of a heroine who wants to support her lover even though many people do not agree with the hero:

SUGIURA I think I understand... His teaching method may not be going in the right direction. I heard some sensei disagree about it. But if I were a student, I'd want to learn under Fukada-sensei. (Tenzen, 2008, p. 15)

ASAMIYA Fukada-sensei, I heard that your class has shortened the reciting times.

FUKADA Yes. The students decided it.

SUGIURA But they'll still take turns to practice it on stage. (non-speech text near Sugiura) 'He helped to explain subconsciously.' (Tenzen, 2008, p. 15)

The non-speech text indicates that Sugiura backs Fukada up without him realizing it. It is in his nature to support people and help explaining things in their stead to avoid misunderstanding and possible conflict. He supports Fukada by preventing the conflict instead of solving it.

The third feminine quality that Sugiura possesses is his sensitivity. His sensitive nature can be seen mostly, but not exclusively, when it involves Fukada. His heart is easily moved by someone's performance. Sugiura's sensitivity is seen when he watches Fukada does Somersault move and immediately cries after witnessing the jump (Figure 1). He is more emotional than other male teachers, who in contrast, never seen to shed tears. It shows how easily Sugiura feels touched by the things done by the person he loves which suits with the stereotype of female characters.



Figure 1. Sugiura's tears after seeing Fukada's Somersault

The fourth feminine trait that is possessed by Sugiura is his innocence which leads to his tendency to blush in embarrassment a lot of times. He blushes at small touches, gestures, or words of affection, which hints his lack of romantic relationship in the past. He also blushes when he discusses his love life with Asamiya in chapter 3:

SUGIURA Asamiya-sensei, are you going out with anyone?

ASAMIYA [drops the glass he's holding in surprise] You're so direct...

SUGIURA (*blushes*) Ack! Sorry!

ASAMIYA Recently... Are you bothered by something like this?

SUGIURA (*blushes*) Hah?

ASAMIYA Bingo. (Tenzen, 2008, p. 73-74)

From the short conversation, Sugiura has blushed twice. Asamiya, on the other hand, does not blush even though he is surprised by the question. Throughout the book, I find Sugiura blushes 26 times in 57 different panels from total 153 pages, while Fukada only blushes 5 times in 9 different panels. It shows how Sugiura's tendency to blush a lot as a sign of submissiveness because he lets his emotion being swayed by someone more dominant.

The fifth feminine trait that Sugiura possesses is his weakness, both physically and psychologically. He needs to feel the protection, support, and reassurance from someone stronger than him. He is repeatedly asked to rely more on others by other teachers, both males and females. Fukada even asks Sugiura to rely on him:

SUGIURA Please don't come over... I'm sorry... Please... Can you... let me be alone?

FUKADA Why... do you have to take it upon yourself when doing anything? Even if it's not about work, I'm willing to listen to your problems! You can rely a bit more on me! I will... give you strength. (Tenzen, 2008, p. 107-108)

Fukada wishes Sugiura to ask for his help because Fukada thinks Sugiura is not strong enough to handle the entire burden, and he wants to be the one to protect Sugiura. It leads to the love confession, which is encouraged by Fukada, and the union of their romance. Later, Sugiura admits Fukada's protection assures his anxiety to have sex.

The last trait of his femininity is his passive and submissive nature in his relationship with Fukada. Sugiura never takes the initiative to show his feeling unless he is encouraged to do so. He tries to repress his own feeling toward Fukada and causes himself unnecessary angst. Even they become lovers, he never initiates the intimate gesture. He merely waits for Fukada to do the act. Then, when Fukada wants to be more intimate, he lets Fukada get what he wants because he realizes that he has been protected by Fukada. The action of sex is often seen as the climax of the story in Boys' Love. The role of *seme* and *uke* ultimately shown through the bedroom activity, with the *seme* is penetrating the *uke* through anal intercourse. However, Sugiura's submissiveness is done both inside and outside the sexual context:

SUGIURA Ryuu-sensei...

FUKADA ... Sakae, when you call me like that...

SUGIURA Eh?

FUKADA It makes me feel like I'm committing a crime.

SUGIURA ...!! What are you talking about? I'm no longer a kid!

FUKADA Yeah, I know, but...

SUGIURA ... Then... Ryuuji-san? (Tenzen, 2008, p. 143-144)

He chooses to act obediently to his lover's wish like a good wife obeying her husband's demand so they can continue their relationship.

### **Sugiura Sakae's Action Code in His Femininity**

The last code to prove a character from *yaoi manga* is a *seme* or *uke* is through his actions, postures and occupation. However, this action does not necessarily mean doing household chores. Sugiura's feminine action is shown when he takes care of the students, which is typically associated as motherly action. Then, he is not economically independent, which is typically happened to employed women in Japan.

Sugiura's feminine action can be seen when he is taking care of the first grade elementary students who are left by their homeroom teacher and the assistant. Sugiura volunteers to lead the children even though it is not a part of his job. He even asks for permission from Fukada to do the action, showing his submissiveness in their status. After he gets the permission, he tries to get the students' attention by observing their interest to understand them. The children, who previously ignore him, give him their full attention once he knows what they like. He uses personal approach that is typically used by women, making him look like a mother who tries to get the attention of her children so she can guide them according to her way.

SUGIURA Everyone, where's your sensei?

STUDENTS Eh? We don't know...

SUGIURA We have to go to the sport hall. Everyone, please queue up...

STUDENTS (*No one is listening*) Sensei, who are you?/ Where's Yuriko sensei?/ Misa's mother is.../ Yatsu-kun hit me... Wah.../

SUGIURA Everyone, can you be quiet. (*[sees] paper throwing blade*) That is... We're ninjas!

STUDENTS (*surprised [and stare at him]*)

SUGIURA (*seriously*) We'll have to use ninja steps to get to the sport hall. Don't let the enemy know about us. Be quiet.

STUDENTS (*walking quietly*) Sh.../ Quietly... (Tenzen, 2008, p. 69-70)

Later, in chapter 3, Asamiya admits to Fukada that he cannot connect to younger children as well as Sugiura:

ASAMIYA Sugiura-sensei really acted fast. It must be because he has a good sensei. He connected well with younger children. (Tenzen, 2008, p. 71)

It is also hinted in page that Asamiya does not want to take care of the first-grade elementary student. He was grateful that Sugiura takes care of the students immediately so he does not have to. This shows that Sugiura cares about the children and wants to understand their thought, and he is more motherly than other male teachers and acts immediately when it involves children's well-being.

In term of occupation, Sugiura is shown to be more inferior in comparison to the other experienced teachers. While both Fukada and Sugiura teach elementary students, Fukada has higher status as he is the homeroom teacher. Sugiura, on the other hand, is just an assistant of the homeroom teacher. Fukada also teaches math, which is considered to be masculine, in contrast with Sugiura who is responsible to the music club which is more artistic (Wharton, 2012). Then, Sugiura does not have steady income yet. Unlike Fukada who has been a teacher for more than a decade, Sugiura is still a student teacher and has no experience in work field. Also, in contrast to Sugiura, Fukada is shown having a car which, in Japan, equals to steady income. This shows the diversity of their status in their work place, Sugiura having lower status than Fukada.

### **Sugiura's Gender Development in His Childhood**

In this sub-chapter, I will analyze the reason of Sugiura's feminine role in his relationship with Fukada. As I reveal in the previous sub-chapter, Sugiura has several feminine traits. I believe these traits are responsible for Sugiura's feminine role when he develops same-sex relationship with Fukada. In this sub-chapter, I want to seek out the cause of these traits. I found that the cause lies on Fukada's intervention in Sugiura's childhood.

Like other children who created their own schema, Sugiura needed a model for his schema, someone he respected as a fellow male and accepted by the society. This is where Fukada took a very important role in shaping Sugiura's femininity. Fukada was admired for his strong masculine traits by many students, both boys and girls, and one of his admirers was Sugiura. His childhood admiration toward Fukada was evident from chapter 1. It was revealed that Sugiura and his friends "liked to cling to him and looked up to him" because Fukada is young, passionate, and carefree. He is good at sport and has a strong body that can perform Somersault (Tenzen, 2008, p. 4-5), resulting Sugiura to looked at him as a hero. In this sense, Fukada is the perfect model of masculinity for the young students at school, including Sugiura. Sugiura admired Fukada so much that his admiration led Sugiura to choose Fukada as his model for his gender development. His admiration was so strong that he kept searching for Fukada even after he graduated from his school. He still persistently hold his respect and admiration toward Fukada even after he realized that Fukada has changed, keeping the old image of his ex-teacher as his model:

SUGIURA I have never forgotten sensei after all these years. Sensei remembers me too. But I'm not a kid anymore... And the "Ryu sensei" is no longer around too. That is for sure. Why am I... so persistent... (Tenzen, 2008, p. 27)

Sugiura's admiration was so strong that it does not changed even after he was an adult. He even wants to be an elementary school teacher like Fukada so "he could catch up to him one day" (Tenzen, 2008, p. 128). It proves his admiration toward Fukada was so strong it still affects him to his adulthood.

In his childhood, Sugiura's attempt to imitate Fukada is revealed when his father started to abuse him when he was about 10 year old. Sugiura was trying to act strong by refusing to show his weakness to others. One of the attempts was when he wore a mask to cover the bruise on his face. He tried to hide the fact that he got hurt, which meant he was weak, from his friend. He believed that male is strong because Fukada had a strong body. Then when Fukada persuaded him to take off the mask and asked him about his injury, he denied feeling pain:

FUKADA Let sensei know if you feel pain anywhere. Sensei will help you to keep it a secret. I won't tell anyone.

SUGIURA ... Really?

FUKADA I promise.

SUGIURA Sensei, I'm fine... I don't feel pain anywhere... Because... mother helped me to take the pain already. (Tenzen, 2008, p. 36-38)

He denied the pain because he was protected by his mother, a female. Thus, he denied his weak condition by wishing to be strong so he could protect his mother. This OPE was triggered further after Fukada gave him a subtle offer of protection from his father's abuse:

FUKADA Didn't you fall down?

SUGIURA Yeah... It's fine. There isn't any.

FUKADA If you fall down next time, don't hide it from me, okay? (Tenzen, 2008, p. 36)

Sugiura concluded that males were supposed to protect the weak ones. However, he was also a male and accepting the offer would mean that he accepted the idea of being weak and needing protection. It would be a violation of his own belief because he wanted to be as strong as Fukada. Therefore, instead of accepting the offer, he wished to be stronger so he could protect his mother:

SUGIURA I really want to grow up faster, as big as Ryuu-sensei... Grow up faster and become strong. Then I won't have to be protected... I can protect my mother next time instead. (Tenzen, 2008, p. 38-39)

Sugiura had build a schema where being weak and protected was for female only. He refused being weak and protected because he believed he should be the one protecting his mother. However, his wish to be a strong individual to protect the weaker ones, which he concluded from Fukada's action, was denied by Fukada. Instead of giving the approval or support of his idea, Fukada keenly promised to protect Sugiura from his father's abuse. Moreover, Fukada gives him another idea of being strong:

FUKADA Having great strength doesn't mean you're strong. Don't be mistaken! Being violent [his father] doesn't mean you're strong. You have to have a gentle heart. As long as you remember this, you can be strong too. (Tenzen, 2008, p. 39-40)

After giving him the new idea of strength, Fukada even persuasively offered him a protection instead of encouraging him to be physically stronger:

FUKADA I will try my best to help you. Whatever happens... I will definitely protect you. (Tenzen, 2008, p. 40)

Sugiura interpreted it as a discouragement of previous his gender schema, it affected Sugiura immediately because Sugiura looked up to Fukada as the model. Afraid that he would be rejected by Fukada if he refused to accept the new idea of strength, Sugiura then accepted Fukada's rejection as correction of his previous schema, causing it to reform. As the result, instead of rejecting the idea of being weak, he accepted it as the OPE that belonged to both males and females.

Unconsciously, Sugiura's mind adopted the idea that being weak for a male was acceptable because his weakness was accepted eagerly by Fukada. As the result, Sugiura chose to accept the new idea of strength, psychologically strong which is typically associated to women's strength.

Not just his idea of strength, Sugiura's sensitivity was also a trait that is resulted from Fukada's involvement. In the past, Sugiura was shown to be reluctant to cry or show his sadness to others. In fact, after the abuse he got from his father, he decided to put a distance from others instead of searching for help. He did not want show any indication of being sad and hurt and refused to tell his problem because men should not weep. This proves his stereotype that man does not weep, notably because the adult males in the book never seen to shed tears.

However, Fukada persuaded him to show his weakness by offering protection and he finally let himself showed his emotion and cried in front of Fukada. Fukada's reactions of his tears were to give Sugiura a smile and a hug. His reaction could be seen as an approval of Sugiura's action, and as a result, Sugiura started to show more of his feelings with Fukada's encouragement:

FUKADA What club did you join, Sakae?

SUGIURA ... ..

FUKADA Sakae? There are a lot of supportive people around you. You can come and look for me if you meet some unhappy things.

SUGIURA But I'm no longer your student. Sensei, you'll definitely forget me very soon. (Tenzen, 2008, p. 24-25)

Fukada convinced Sugiura to convey his feeling about things that may hurt him. While he started to express his sadness to Fukada, he ran immediately when the tears almost fell (Tenzen, 2008, p. 25-26). However, when he is grown up and cries once again, he lets Fukada chase after him and cries in Fukada's arms. This proves that Sugiura's gender schema had transformed after he cried in the past.

Sugiura's reformed schema adopted the idea that crying is acceptable for him because he got encouragement from his model. This allowed him to think that showing his sensitive feelings toward delicate things is completely tolerable for a male. After he becomes an adult, Fukada comfort him with an affectionate hug proved his belief that crying does not belong to female only.

In summary, according to Sugiura's schema and the reformation in his childhood, Sugiura's weakness was a result from Fukada's involvement for encouraging Sugiura's weakness and Sugiura still hold the idea until he becomes an adult. Sugiura's sensitivity was the result of his reformed gender schema after his action is not discouraged by Fukada. He believed that being weak and crying easily was common for males, thus he accepted the idea in his schema.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis has proven that Sugiura is a feminine *uke* because of Fukada's involvement in his childhood. Despite having good intention, Fukada's actions of helping Sugiura discouraged Sugiura's masculinity and encouraged femininity, and thus unconsciously molded him into the perfect role of 'heroine' in *Aozora no Sunda Iro wa*. Sugiura came to admire Fukada and believed he would be a good model. His admiration for Fukada made him to believe what Fukada says as truth, and unconsciously altered his belief of masculinity. Unfortunately, what he believes to be masculine is actually what the society consider feminine. His altered schema defines who he is in the present, a feminine man who does not realize himself to be feminine. Unknowingly, Fukada shaped Sugiura's schema of what is tolerable for male, making him a feminine man. Sugiura projects his feminine role with persona code which is his feminine appearance, emotion code which is his feminine behavior and traits, and action code which is his feminine acts and occupation.

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