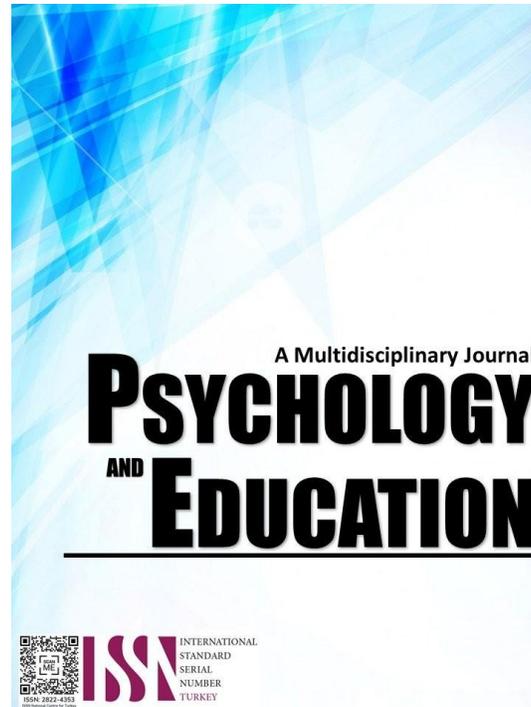


THE WOMAN IN THE SHORT STORIES OF FILIPINO FEMINIST WRITERS: A LITERARY ANALYSIS



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The Woman in the Short Stories of Filipino Feminist Writers: A Literary Analysis

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Abstract

A short story usually has a limited number of characters and focuses only on a single event. Short stories have a unique structure and style that sets them apart from longer works of fiction, and they offer writers and readers a wide range of benefits. This study sought to discover the characteristic of woman as portrayed in the selected short stories of the three Filipino feminist writers; Kerima P. Tuvera, Aida R. Ford and Esterella D. Alfon. Feminist Theory, Sociolinguistic Theory and Readers-response Theory were employed to critically analyze the female characters in the story. The study attempted to meet the following objectives: 1) to characterize woman as depicted by the authors in the short stories in terms of; (a) characters, (b) context, (c) symbolism, (d) theme, 2) to identify how the woman in the short stories advocates the woman's capability in the society; and, 3) to proposed a short story reading and writing model that will help the students invest more time in reading literature. Through examining and analyzing the short stories, different characteristics were discovered. The close textual reading resulted in the study's coming up with the following findings: female characters are portrayed as independent and confident, emotional and innocent young woman, loving mother independent mistress, risk-taker servant, caring and protective mother. Indeed, women embodies diverse qualities that align with their societal roles, ultimately promoting the capabilities of women in the society.

Keywords: *short story, feminism, gender, womanhood, literature*

Introduction

Literature has always been a powerful way for people to express what it means to be human. Across generations and cultures, it has served as a mirror of our thoughts, emotions, and shared experiences. Among its many forms, the short story holds a special place—it offers a glimpse into life's complexities within just a few pages. As Cortázar (1994) once said, a good short story is like a photograph: simple on the surface, but rich with meaning and insight underneath.

Today, however, it's clear that many young people are drifting away from reading, especially printed literature. With the pull of digital entertainment—whether it's social media, online games, or streaming platforms—reading often takes a back seat. While technology has opened up new ways to access information, it has also created distractions that make it harder for the youth to stay engaged with books. Yet, as Singh (2023) reminds us, literature remains an essential tool for growth. It doesn't just improve language skills; it helps readers connect with diverse perspectives and think critically about the world around them.

Despite the challenges brought by the digital age, literature—especially short stories—continues to play an important role in education. Stories are more than just entertainment; they reflect the values, struggles, and identities of people in society. When those stories focus on women and their lived experiences, they open the door to deeper conversations about gender, empowerment, and equality.

This study turns to the works of three respected Filipino feminist writers—Kerima P. Tuvera, Aida R. Ford, and Estrella D. Alfon—whose short stories challenge traditional gender roles and portray women in bold, complex ways. For generations, society has imposed certain expectations on women: to be quiet, nurturing, obedient, while men are expected to lead and dominate. These ideas don't just live in laws or policies—they show up in everyday life and even in the stories we read (Ashcraft, 2015).

Literary representations of Filipino women have evolved significantly over time. As Palanas and Catubig (2023) note, women have been depicted in literature as everything from self-sacrificing and domesticated figures to bold and empowered individuals. Gone is the one-dimensional Maria Clara ideal—in her place, we now see the modern Filipina: assertive, ambitious, and brave.

This research aims to rediscover the relevance of literature, especially among young readers who may feel disconnected from it. By focusing on feminist short stories, the study hopes to inspire students to see literature not as a boring requirement, but as a powerful way to understand others—and themselves. These stories don't just tell us about women's struggles; they invite us to imagine a more just and inclusive world.

In the end, the study also seeks to develop a reading and writing model that brings students closer to the heart of literature. By grounding it in feminist literary theory, the model aims to deepen their engagement, encourage critical thinking, and spark meaningful discussions about gender and identity—making literature not just relevant, but truly transformative.

Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to characterize the representation of women in the short stories of three Filipino feminist writers: Kerima P. Tuvera, Aida R. Ford, and Estrella D. Alfon. To ensure clarity and alignment with the study's focus, the following specific research questions are addressed:



1. How are women characterized in the selected short stories of the three Filipino feminist writers in terms of:
 - 1.1. characters;
 - 1.2. context;
 - 1.3. symbolism; and
 - 1.4. theme?
2. In what ways do the portrayals of women in these short stories advocate for women’s capability and agency in society?
3. Based on the textual data analyzed and interpreted, what short story reading and writing model can be recommended to encourage students to invest more time and interest in reading literature?

Methodology

This study took a qualitative approach to explore how women are portrayed in selected short stories. To gain deeper insights, the researchers used a combination of textual, discourse, and thematic analysis. Feminist literary criticism served as the guiding lens, helping to examine how various literary elements—such as character development, context, symbolism, and overarching themes—reflect and construct gender roles and identities.

Six short stories were carefully chosen from the works of three prominent Filipino feminist writers. These stories were selected not at random, but based on specific criteria: they featured female protagonists, focused on issues relevant to women's lives, and were readily available in published anthologies. The research process involved a close reading of each story, highlighting meaningful passages, and identifying patterns that speak to the experiences and roles of women.

To interpret these patterns, the study combined feminist and sociolinguistic perspectives. The textual analysis looked at the language and structure of each piece, while the discourse analysis shed light on underlying power dynamics. Thematic analysis helped draw out the central messages and recurring ideas related to gender.

Ultimately, the insights gained from this analytical process contributed to the development of a proposed model for teaching reading and writing in literature classes, one that centers on gender awareness and critical engagement. The study upheld ethical standards throughout, citing all literary sources properly and involving no human participants in the research.

Results and Discussion

This study explored how women are portrayed in selected short stories by Kerima P. Tuvera, Aida R. Ford, and Estrella D. Alfon. Using thematic analysis, the researchers examined six stories—two from each writer—through the lens of feminist theory, sociolinguistics, and reader-response theory. The aim was to uncover how these portrayals reflect the complex realities women navigate in society.

From the analysis, five key themes emerged: Independence and Agency, Emotional Vulnerability, Maternal Love and Care, Resistance and Strength, and the Multiplicity of Roles women take on. These themes illustrate the nuanced ways women are written into these narratives as confident individuals, nurturing mothers, emotionally sensitive figures, and resilient survivors. Whether as daughters, wives, mistresses, or caregivers, the characters reflect a full spectrum of female experiences.

Table 1. *Summary of Thematic Findings*

Theme	Character Portrayals	Illustrative Textual Insight	Theoretical Anchor
Independence and Agency	Women portrayed as confident and self-reliant	“She knew how to be alone...” (The Virgin)	Feminist Theory
Emotional Vulnerability	Innocent, emotional, and sensitive women	“She wanted to cry, but...” (The Trap)	Reader-Response Theory
Maternal Love and Care	Mothers as protective, nurturing figures	“She held him close...” (Magnificence)	Feminist & Sociolinguistic Theory
Resistance and Strength	Women enduring hardship and risking for others	“She knew the danger...” (Magnificence)	Feminist Theory
Multiplicity of Roles	Depictions of women as daughters, wives, mistresses, servants, and mothers	Varied portrayals across all stories	Sociolinguistic Theory

Each author brings a distinct focus: Tuvera highlights solitude and emotional tension, Ford delves into the deep bonds and quiet rebellions of womanhood, and Alfon shows compassion and endurance in everyday struggles. These stories move beyond stereotypes, painting women as layered and evolving beings. Language in the stories also plays a key role, subtly situating the characters within (or resisting) societal expectations.

Grounded in feminist theory, the findings affirm that these women are not passive figures but agents of their own lives asserting their value, challenging norms, and navigating social pressures. Reader-response theory emphasizes how readers connect emotionally to these portrayals, while sociolinguistic theory frames how meaning is shaped by cultural context. Symbolism, found in images of domestic life, grief, or motherhood adds further depth to these roles.

In light of these insights, the study supports the use of feminist literature in classrooms to encourage critical thinking, empathy, and

cultural reflection. As a way forward, the researchers propose a reading and writing model that incorporates feminist perspectives, encouraging students to read more deeply, reflect on gender narratives, and connect literature to real-life understanding.

Conclusions

The study finds that the women portrayed in the short stories are not one-dimensional figures, but strong, independent, and emotionally rich individuals who navigate—and often push back against—the limitations set by society. These narratives remind us of the power of literature not just to entertain, but to challenge perspectives, reshape gender expectations, and inspire social reflection. Moving forward, exploring how women are represented in other literary forms could offer a broader view of their evolving roles in Philippine literature. For students, engaging with stories in a deeper way—looking into characters, themes, and the symbols woven into the text—can lead to richer literary appreciation. Lastly, encouraging young people to read short stories can spark meaningful conversations and cultivate critical thinking, empathy, and a greater awareness of the world around them.

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