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Feminism and Emotional Vulnerability Portrayed in "Normal People" by Sally Rooney

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Author's Statement

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma "Feminismus a Emocionální Zranitelnost v Románu Normální Lidé Spisovatelky Sally Rooney" vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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Podpis

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Introduction

Sally Rooney's Background

Sally Rooney is a talented Irish novelist, who has been greatly praised for her writing and hailed as the "first great millennial novelist"[1] by prestigious publications such as The New York Times and The New Yorker. Rooney's affinity for the arts and literature is evident in her writing style, which she began developing at an early age. In fact, she completed her first novel when she was just 15 years old. Her passion for writing only grew stronger as she pursued an English Literature degree at Trinity College, where she honed her craft. Furthermore, her success as a competitive debater earned her the distinction of being the "number-one competitive debater in Europe"[2] at just 22 years old.

Rooney's interest in politics and social issues, particularly Marxism[3], is reflected in her writing, with her characters often engaging in deep conversations about morality and questioning the status quo[4]. Her works frequently explore themes of intimacy, sex, and social inequality, with her characters coming from a range of social classes that inform their relationships and interactions with each other.

Rooney's female characters are a highlight of her writing, defying societal expectations and resisting oppression. These characters face criticism and resistance from their peers, which raises the question of whether they would have been treated differently if they were male. Similarly, Rooney's male characters also challenge traditional notions of masculinity and reject gender stereotypes, exhibiting emotional intelligence that is often underrepresented in male characters.

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[1] Barry, Ellen. "Greeted as the First Great Millennial Author, and Wary of the Attention." *The New York Times*, August 31, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/31/world/europe/sally-rooney-ireland.html.

[2] Dubey, Anna. "Sally Rooney." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 16, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sally-Rooney.

[3] Barry, Ellen. "Greeted as the First Great Millennial Author, and Wary of the Attention." *The New York Times*, August 31, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/31/world/europe/sally-rooney-ireland.html.

[4] Collins, Lauren. "Sally Rooney Gets in Your Head." *The New Yorker*, December 31, 2018. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/07/sally-rooney-gets-in-your-head.

Sally Rooney's literary contributions have established her as a preeminent voice in contemporary literature. Her unique perspective on gender, politics, and societal norms has sparked meaningful conversations and provided readers with new insights. Her writing has captivated readers worldwide, and her books have become bestsellers in numerous countries. Sally Rooney's talent and perspective have left an indelible mark on modern literature.

Introduction to "Normal People"

In recent years, feminist scholars have highlighted the importance of emotional vulnerability in challenging patriarchal norms and empowering women and men[5]. In this thesis, I will explore how this idea is reflected in the novel "Normal People" authored by Rooney. Through an in-depth analysis of eight featured characters, I will argue that the novel portrays emotional vulnerability as a central theme of feminism, leading to gender empowerment and equality.

"Normal People" is Sally Rooney's second and arguably most popular novel, centring on the two main protagonists: Marianne and Connell. Throughout "Normal People", Sally Rooney uses the close third person narrator to skilfully portray Marianne and Connell's journey, which highlights the complexity of relationships and the human experience. As their lives unfold, they are forced to confront the realities of growing up and the changes that come with it. Rooney's use of round characters (those who possess both strengths and flaws) showcases the psychological aspects and traumas that are an inevitable part of human existence.

The story begins during their last year of high school, when they start a secret sexual relationship. Their dynamic is complicated by their differing social status. Connell, a popular and athletic student, feels ashamed of admitting his interest in Marianne, who is viewed as an outsider by his social circle. Marianne, on the other hand, does not even see herself as a part of the social ladder[6]. Their relationship illustrates the anxieties and fear of judgment that can come with high school relationships.

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[5] Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 405–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174166.
[6] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 29.

Connell and Marianne's relationship is further complicated by their contrasting social classes. Connell is working-class, while Marianne comes from a wealthy family. Rooney highlights the disparity between the two by depicting Marianne's home as a mansion with statues and a tennis court,[7] while Connell's mother is described as a cleaner at Marianne's house[8]. Their differing social classes adds further conflict as they navigate their relationship.

After high school, their relationship ends before reuniting at university with a completely altered social dynamic. This time, Marianne holds the higher social status. Rooney explores several themes throughout the novel, namely, the power dynamics in romantic and sexual relationships, feminism, mental health, and being a young adult in the 21st century. Overall, "Normal People" is a poignant and nuanced exploration of the complexities of growing up and the challenges that come with love and relationships.

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[7] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 23.
[8] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 23.

Waves of Feminism

Concept of Feminism

Prior to widespread beliefs instilling male superiority and misogynistic religions, some cultures embraced a more egalitarian approach to gender, granting both women and men the opportunity to be recognized for more than just their sex or live without the arbitrary social standards that are common nowadays[9].

One notable example is the "Onna-Bugeisha" or female samurais in Japan, who were present from as early as 200 CE until their decline in the 17th century, and eventual disappearance in the 19th century as society evolved towards modernisation[10]. Despite their status as equals for centuries, women lost the battle against patriarchy, which refers to the social system that prioritizes men and reinforces male dominance[11], reduced to being viewed as primarily child-bearers and homemakers[12].

Originating from Western Europe, the story of Boudicca, queen of the Iceni, a Celtic Briton tribe, serves as a clear example of the destructive impact of patriarchal beliefs. While Iceni was not a perfect egalitarian society, they were not part of the dominant patriarchy. Boudicca and her two daughters were rightful heirs to the kingdom, sharing the throne with the Emperor of Rome. However, Roman culture already had deep misogyny ingrained in its culture and as they did not permit female rulers, they were stripped of their inheritance and everything they knew[13]. Boudicca fought back, but her tribe could not overpower the Romans, resulting in the expansion of another culture that regarded women as mere objects.

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[9] Kemp, Sandra, and Judith Squires. "Feminisms". *Oxford University Press*, 1997, pp. 247.

[10] Chao-Fong, Léonie. "10 Facts about Japan's Female Samurai Warriors." *History Hit*. History Hit, October 6, 2021. https://www.historyhit.com/facts-about-the-onna-bugeisha-japans-female-samurai-warriors/.

[11] Rawat, Preeti S. "Patriarchal Beliefs, Women's Empowerment, and General Well-Being." *Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers* 39, no. 2 (2014): 43–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090920140206.

[12] Simson, Rosalind S. "Feminine Thinking." *Social Theory and Practice* 31, no. 1 (2005): 1–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23558685.

[13] Owen, Beth. "Unleashing Fury: Boudica, the Warrior Queen." *History Hit*. History Hit, September 14, 2021. https://www.historyhit.com/unleashing-fury-boudica-the-warrior-queen/.

The growth and spread of patriarchy has led to the loss of opportunities and rights for women throughout history. This has created a need for women to fight for their rights and equality, resulting in the birth and development of the feminist movement over the years.

First and Second Wave of Feminism

The First Wave of feminism emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and it was a critical period in the history of the feminist movement[14]. This movement was primarily focused on the inequality between men and women in various countries around the world[15]. Feminists during this time were eager to identify the root cause of gender oppression, and as a result, they delved into various issues such as sexual inequality, hierarchy, and domination[16]. The focus of this movement was on advocating for suffrage and the rights of unmarried women. They also criticized the nuclear family aspect of society, which was a dominant societal norm at the time[17].

The Second Wave of feminism, which is typically categorised as occurring during the 1960s and early 1990s[18], continued to push for women's liberation but also focused on broader societal changes during a period of greater cultural liberties and experimentation[19]. Feminists during this period focused on androgyny and minimizing gender differences[20], encouraging women to leave behind societal expectations and attempt to emulate men in order to gain a more equal place in society. The Second Wave ignited the belief that feminists cannot be feminine, as it risked the deconstruction that the movement fighting for, and it

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[14] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[15] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[16] Kemp, Sandra, and Judith Squires. "Feminisms". *Oxford University Press*, 1997, pp. 182.
[17] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[18] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[19] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[20] Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 405–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174166.

reinforced the standard imposed by society[21]. This is also the time that the term "male gaze"[22] by Laura Mulvey was coined, bringing attention to the objectification of women in the media and how they were only portrayed to appeal to men. This realisation captured the attention of feminists, paving its way onto the feminist agenda.

Despite the aforementioned progress, it is important to recognise that these waves of feminism were not without their shortcomings. The doctrines and battles of the first wave were often extremely racist and classist, as they primarily focused on the problems faced by white, middle and upper class women[23]. This led to the exclusion of women of colour or women from different religious backgrounds, who on top of gender discrimination, faced deeper and more rooted challenges as minorities. During the Second Wave, the diverse social movements that sparked in society in general boosted the inclusion of different races and people from developing countries into feminism[24]. The story and background of these racial and class issues are highly complex and sizeable therefore analysing them is beyond the scope of this text. However, they are important to mention as they identify key differences between movements and progression in different groups of women.

In response, contemporary waves of feminism have sought to challenge these limited views of the movement and push for greater inclusivity and understanding of the intersectionality of different identities and experiences[25]. These waves aim to address a wider range of issues beyond gender inequality alone, including race, class, sexual orientation, and ability.

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[21] Kemp, Sandra, and Judith Squires. "Feminisms". *Oxford University Press*, 1997, pp. 247.
[22] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". *Screen* 16, no. 3, (1975): 6-18, https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6.
[23] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[24] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[25] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.

Third and Fourth Wave of Feminism

The Third Wave of feminism spanned from the late 1990s to the early 2010s[26], and it is often associated with postmodernist feminist thought[27]. However, this view was challenged by Rebecca Walker in her famous article for Ms Magazine, where she asserted that the movement was its own entity and not a mere extension of another branch, proclaiming "I am the Third Wave"[28]. The battle for equality, Walker argued, had evolved but was far from over[29]. During this period, the feminist movement saw an increase in representation from women of different classes and races, as well as the inclusion of men[30]. This challenged the assumption that men and women were separate entities, rather than parts of a whole[31]. The Third Wave was also the first generation to fully grow up with feminist beliefs and influence, as well as having the advantage of the internet, making information more accessible. Feminists during this time also challenged earlier feminist beliefs that devalued and criticised feminine characteristics[32]. Instead, feminists of the Third Wave embraced these characteristics, recognising the differences between passivity and peacefulness, or sentimentality and the proclivity to nurture[33], using them as a source of strength.

The Fourth Wave of feminism is currently in its early stages and is often regarded as an extension of the Third Wave or even as an unnecessary movement[34], given that the primary goals of early feminism have already been achieved, such as obtaining basic human rights. However, if we examine the Fourth Wave in its own right, we can see that it aims to address the division that

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[26] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[27] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[28] Walker, Rebecca. "Becoming The 3rd Wave." *Ms. Magazine*, January & February,1992.
[29] Walker, Rebecca. "Becoming The 3rd Wave." *Ms. Magazine*, January & February,1992.
[30] Turner, Heather A., and R. Jay Turner. "Gender, Social Status, and Emotional Reliance." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 40, no. 4 (1999): 360–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/2676331.
[31] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[32] Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 405–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174166.
[33] Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 405–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174166.
[34] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.

arose between the Second and Third Wave[35]. Feminists of this contemporary era are aware that the world is not a simplistic binary, but rather a complex tapestry of intersecting identities and struggles[36]. This realisation comes from individual introspection, where members of the movement question their actions and motivations[37]. It is a time of self-awareness where decisions require more thought and constant analysis. Feminists ask themselves if their choices are influenced by societal conditioning or if they are exercising the social liberation that early feminists granted them[38]. Moreover, the Fourth Wave emphasises that feminism is not a battle fought by only one gender, but rather a collective struggle for equality among all human beings[39], which is clearly still ongoing to this day.

[35] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[36] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[37] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[38] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[39] Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 405–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174166.

Emotional Vulnerability

Concept of Emotional Vulnerability

The misconception that emotions are a weakness has been ingrained in society's perception of human beings for centuries[40] and it can be traced to the conception of misogyny[41]. This harmful belief has not only impacted women, making them be seen as fragile, unstable, and unfit for relevant roles in the community[42], but men have been affected as well, as expressing emotions has been stigmatised and often associated with homosexuality in the latter gender[43]. This is particularly a problem in societies with a history of homophobia, which still persists in some areas today. Furthermore, the idea of "male thinking,"[44] as described by Rosalind S. Simson in 2005, perpetuates the notion that men are rational, calculating, and unemotional beings. This stereotype suggests that men do not allow themselves to show emotions as it is seen as irrational and weak, characteristics often attributed to women in a derogative way.

As a result, vulnerability, particularly in an emotional context, is considered a weakness and is therefore avoided, without consideration of the benefits of emotionality in people's lives. This type of thinking has had a significant impact on feminism, which will be discussed further in the following point.

Contrast with Feminism

The clash between feminism and emotional vulnerability began when early feminists started suppressing their emotions and avoiding vulnerability to imitate men, instead of seeing it as a source of female power. Women disregarded

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[40] Simson, Rosalind S. "Feminine Thinking." *Social Theory and Practice* 31, no. 1 (2005): 1–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23558685.
[41] Rawat, Preeti S. "Patriarchal Beliefs, Women's Empowerment, and General Well-Being." *Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers* 39, no. 2 (2014): 43–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090920140206.
[42] Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 405–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174166.
[43] Kemp, Sandra, and Judith Squires. "Feminisms". *Oxford University Press*, 1997, pp. 190.
[44] Simson, Rosalind S. "Feminine Thinking." *Social Theory and Practice* 31, no. 1 (2005): 1–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23558685.

emotions and embraced coldness to climb up the social and labour ladder, getting jobs that were considered to be only for men[45]. However, current waves of feminism recognise the importance of emotions in developing knowledge and understanding of situations and prefer to use them as a personal fuel rather than a constraint on gender roles. As one scholar notes, "recognition that emotions play a vital part in developing knowledge (…) [means that] women's subversive thoughts come from emotion and understanding of the situations,"[46] highlighting the benefits of feelings and self-awareness.

The association of femininity with emotions and submission is deeply ingrained in cultural norms[47], which creates a subconscious bias against those who challenge these norms. As a result, individuals who protest against traditional gender roles by embracing their emotions and vulnerabilities are often subject to criticism and ostracism from society. Despite this, the acceptance of emotional vulnerability as a source of power is gaining traction in contemporary feminism, paving the way for a more inclusive and accepting society.

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[45] Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 405–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174166.
[46] Kemp, Sandra, and Judith Squires. "Feminisms". *Oxford University Press*, 1997, pp. 192.
[47] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.

Characters' Analyses

To further examine "Normal People" and its portrayal of feminism and emotional vulnerability this analysis will examine the lives, personalities, and growth of eight key characters: the two protagonists, Marianne Sheridan and Connell Waldron, their respective mothers and four of Connell's friends at school, who also played pivotal roles in Marianne's bullying storyline. Through this exploration, we will gain insight into how the themes of feminism and emotional vulnerability manifest in everyday life, as depicted in the book.

Marianne Sheridan

Marianne pinches her lower lip and then says: Well, I don't feel lovable. I think I have an unlovable sort of... I have a coldness about me, I'm difficult to like[48].

— Sally Rooney, "Normal People"

The first character to be analysed is Marianne Sheridan, the female protagonist. Marianne embodies the complexities and contradictions of modern-day feminism. She is a self-proclaimed feminist and social justice advocate, striving to make the world a better place, yet she also craves emotional vulnerability and has a deep yearning for "her real life"[49] in addition to human connection. Marianne's sense of self-awareness and strong personality helped her navigate through school, where she was often met with contempt from her peers[50], being bullied multiple times by classmates calling her "flat-chested"[51] or starting rumours about her personal life, like her sexual orientation or if she shaves[52], which seems to be deeply rooted into the expectations of women that misogyny[53] has created over the years.

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[48] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 101.
[49] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 11.
[50] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 2.
[51] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 36.
[52] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 3.
[53] Walkerdine, Valerie. "Femininity as Performance." *Oxford Review of Education* 15, no. 3 (1989): 267–79. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1050418.

Marianne is aware of her outstanding intelligence and remarkable achievements. She sees her scholarship to Trinity College as a "matter of personal feelings rather than economic fact"[54] which defies the long-held belief that female success is undeserved[55]. However, despite her confidence, Marianne faces patriarchal structures within her own family (which will be discussed at a later stage) and society at large.

Marianne chooses to study History and Politics, which are typically male-dominated fields with a history of ignoring, bullying, and harassing women who dared venture into the respective areas[56]. Nevertheless, her outspoken nature and strong personality serve her well in university, where she stands her ground in debates and garners admiration in a growing community that recognizes gender equality in the workforce as vital[57].

A key part of the book is Marianne's understanding of the power dynamics that exist between men and women, and also her recognising that men often want to dominate her. She admits, "there has always been something inside her that men have wanted to dominate, and their desire for domination can look so much like attraction, even love"[58]. "Eroticisation of dominance"[59] was criticised during the early waves of feminism, remarkably by Catharine Mackinnon (1988) who mentioned that "feminism identifies sexuality as the primary social sphere of male power"[60]. That definition seems to be a small part of a bigger concept, as it does not consider race, culture, or class, showing the mentality of the Second Wave of feminism[61].

In the novel, Marianne tells Connell about her sadomasochistic relationship with Jamie, her boyfriend at the time, and how he would beat her during sex. While she admits she is not sure she likes it, Marianne proposed it,

[54] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 173.
[55] Walkerdine, Valerie. "Femininity as Performance." *Oxford Review of Education* 15, no. 3 (1989): 267–79. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1050418.
[56] Shames, Shauna L., and Tess Wise. "Gender, Diversity, and Methods in Political Science: A Theory of Selection and Survival Biases." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50, no. 3 (2017): 811–23.
[57] Shames, Shauna L., and Tess Wise. "Gender, Diversity, and Methods in Political Science: A Theory of Selection and Survival Biases." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50, no. 3 (2017): 811–23.
[58] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 192.
[59] Kemp, Sandra, and Judith Squires. "Feminisms". *Oxford University Press*, 1997, pp. 346.
[60] Kemp, Sandra, and Judith Squires. "Feminisms". *Oxford University Press*, 1997, pp. 346.
[61] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.

wanting to experience the power dynamics of a submissive relationship[62]. She looks for something within herself, as she explains to Connell that she likes to know that she would degrade herself for someone if that person wanted to[63]. Her desire for emotional vulnerability and openness is something she craves from new partners[64], yet she had found it in Connell, with whom she feels comfortable without the need to change their dynamic[65].

Marianne's experiences with Lukas during her Erasmus year in Sweden highlight the complexity of her desires. She consents to verbal and physical abuse during sex, but the consent does not seem to come from real desire[66]. This raises questions about the blurred lines between sexual liberation and abuse, a central thought process of Fourth Wave feminism[67]. She describes the experience as "thin and arriving too quickly"[68] and mentions that it "leaves her sick and shivery"[69]. However, it is only when Lukas tells her he loves her that Marianne realizes the emotional vulnerability she craves is not the one that she has been getting. She wonders "is the world such an evil place, that love should be indistinguishable from the basest and most abusive forms of violence?"[70] after realising that allowing herself to be degraded goes against her wishes to be a good person, have the right opinions, and say the right things[71], everything she has fought for as a feminist and believes about herself.

Her relationship with Connell offers a more consensual dynamic where she can embrace her emotional vulnerability without being degraded. Connell understands her desire to be dominated, but he also knows how to leave her open, weak, powerless, and sometimes crying without resorting to violence[72]. By

[62] Eppel, Alan. "Normal People: The Self-at-worst and the Self-at-best." *Journal of Psychiatry Reform* 8, no. 5 (2020). https://journalofpsychiatryreform.com/2020/07/05/normal-people/.
[63] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 132.
[64] Eppel, Alan. "Normal People: The Self-at-worst and the Self-at-best." *Journal of Psychiatry Reform* 8, no. 5 (2020). https://journalofpsychiatryreform.com/2020/07/05/normal-people/.
[65] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 134.
[66] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 190.
[67] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[68] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 190.
[69] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 190.
[70] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 190.
[71] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 241.
[72] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 258.

getting back with Connell, Marianne finds a balance between her gender equality beliefs and her emotional desires, ultimately embracing the power of emotional vulnerability[73].

Connell Waldron

Connell felt a pleasurable sorrow come over him, which brought him close to tears. Moments of emotional pain arrived like this, meaningless or at least indecipherable[74].

— Sally Rooney, "Normal People"

The next character to be observed is the male protagonist, Connell Waldron. Sally Rooney's writing provides a compelling depiction of Connell's mental health, which serves as a demonstration of how feminism has impacted men's lives and how it benefits all genders[75]. Connell's existential crisis and subsequent breakdown are depicted in a way that is both honest and empathetic, and allowed him to explore his feelings about his gender identity, mental health, and masculinity. Throughout the novel, Connell's feelings towards his depression and anxiety centre on the judgement of mental health in society and his peers[76]. This issue seems to be conditioned by the perception of gender roles in society[77]. However, it should be remarked that mental health has no regard for gender and should be addressed seriously[78]. It is important to note that while there is still a stigma around mental health, this has been improving in recent years due to the work of mental health advocates and other movements, including feminism[79].

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[73] Eppel, Alan. "Normal People: The Self-at-worst and the Self-at-best." *Journal of Psychiatry Reform* 8, no. 5 (2020). https://journalofpsychiatryreform.com/2020/07/05/normal-people/.
[74] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 25.
[75] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[76] del Río, María Amor Barros. "Irish Youth, Materialism and Postfeminism: The Critique behind the Romance in" Normal People"." *Oceánide* 15 (2022): 73-80. https://doi.org/10.37668/oceanide.v15i.98.
[77] Turner, Heather A., and R. Jay Turner. "Gender, Social Status, and Emotional Reliance." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 40, no. 4 (1999): 360–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/2676331.
[78] Turner, Heather A., and R. Jay Turner. "Gender, Social Status, and Emotional Reliance." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 40, no. 4 (1999): 360–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/2676331.
[79] Rawat, Preeti S. "Patriarchal Beliefs, Women's Empowerment, and General Well-Being." *Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers* 39, no. 2 (2014): 43–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090920140206.

Connell is also depicted as a feminist character in the novel. He has read feminist novels like "The Golden Notebook" and shows respect for women's decision-making. For instance, when Marianne asks him what he would do if she were pregnant, he replies, "Kind of depends on what you would want to do"[80]. He also displays a deep respect for women's bodies, as demonstrated by his refusal to see the nude pictures of his friend's girlfriend when he was boasting and showing them to his friends, calling out how twisted the action is[81]. However, his friend Rob perceives him as "awfully gay"[82] for his refusal, highlighting how homosexuality is often stigmatized and perceived as making a man less masculine[83]. However, despite his attitudes previously discussed, he exhibited misogynistic behaviour towards certain women, notably Marianne. Rather than standing up for her, he remained silent while his friends subjected her to bullying. Additionally, he succumbed to societal pressure by not inviting her to the Debs, opting instead to attend with Rachel Moran[84], who conformed to the misogynistic ideals of femininity prevalent during their teenage years. This portrayal illuminates the intricate experience of navigating feminism while simultaneously being influenced by a patriarchal society and the weight of peer pressure[85].

Furthermore, the novel highlights the influence that peers and family have on career paths[86]. Connell's decision to study English is not solely based on his love for literature and knowledge but is also influenced by the impulse that Marianne gives him to pursue what he wants, instead of what he believes is expected of him, such as law[87]. Connell's mother is also depicted as open-minded and supportive, which encourages him to pursue his interests regardless of society's perception of the degree.

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[80] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 102.
[81] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 76.
[82] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 76.
[83] Kemp, Sandra, and Judith Squires. "Feminisms". *Oxford University Press*, 1997, pp. 190.
[84] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 54.
[85] Turner, Heather A., and R. Jay Turner. "Gender, Social Status, and Emotional Reliance." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 40, no. 4 (1999): 360–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/2676331.
[86] Mastekaasa, Arne, and Jens-Christian Smeby. "Educational Choice and Persistence in Male- and Female-Dominated Fields." *Higher Education* 55, no. 2 (2008): 189–202. http://www.jstor.org/stable/29735174.
[87] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 20.

It is important to note that certain careers, such as academia or teaching, have been categorized as "feminine" or reserved for "homosexuals or predators," leading to men being a minority in these fields[88]. However, recent research has shown that men in female-dominated areas are more likely to get promoted than women, even when considering the stereotype of men who choose that career path[89]. This disparity has improved in recent decades due to feminism and the fight for gender equality, yet it remains a complex issue that requires continued attention and action. The lack of experience with the difficulties of being a woman in a male-dominated field may also explain why some white men struggle to comprehend or sympathize with the challenges women face in these areas, even when they are in the minority.

By the end of the novel, Connell not only has a better understanding of his own struggles in society, but also of Marianne's. He represents a male who has taken an active part in changing society, embracing the current Wave of feminism.

Lorraine Waldron

Lorraine seems like a really good parent, Marianne remarks.
Yeah. I think so[90].

— Sally Rooney, "Normal People"

Following the analyses of the protagonists, it is important to examine the characters who had the most impact in the development of Marianne and Connell. Due to this, the next analysis will be on Lorraine Waldron, Connell's mother. Lorraine is a consistent and positive character throughout the book, almost serving as a moral compass or a role model for what it means to be a good person. Throughout the book she is shown to be politically conscious as well as a

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[88] Mastekaasa, Arne, and Jens-Christian Smeby. "Educational Choice and Persistence in Male- and Female-Dominated Fields." *Higher Education* 55, no. 2 (2008): 189–202. http://www.jstor.org/stable/29735174.
[89] Mastekaasa, Arne, and Jens-Christian Smeby. "Educational Choice and Persistence in Male- and Female-Dominated Fields." *Higher Education* 55, no. 2 (2008): 189–202. http://www.jstor.org/stable/29735174.
[90] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 42.

feminist, calling anti-abortion thinking a "backwards political view"[91], and highlights her part in rising Connell with "good socialist values"[92]. Her interest in current affairs extends to issues such as Cuba and the Palestinian Liberation[93], demonstrating her engagement with the world around her, which is a core point of the Second and Third Wave of feminism[94].

Lorraine is also open-minded when it comes to sexuality, advising Connell to be safe and use protection if he chooses to explore his sexuality. When she sees Marianne leaving the house in the morning, she does not judge her but rather seems amused by it[95], embracing the liberation of women[96]. Her own experiences as a teen mom and the absence of Connell's father in their lives make her empathetic towards Marianne and other women who have been wronged by men. She takes Marianne's side when Connell is embarrassed to be seen with her[97], recognising the gender dynamics at play[98], and disapproving of the toxic masculinity[99] ingrained in her son by society. Even during her moments of anger, she has emotional awareness and prefers to walk away instead of saying things she will regret[100]. Her empathy towards her sex is also shown during the last chapter, after Marianne had fallen out with her family. Lorraine is the first one to approach Marianne's mother, acknowledging the difficulties of the woman's life, and willing to give her the chance to make amends[101]. Her intention, however, is ignored, but it is another example of the open mentality that she portrays throughout the book.

[91] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 244.
[92] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 47.
[93] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 47.
[94] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[95] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 49.
[96] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[97] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 75.
[98] del Río, María Amor Barros. "Irish Youth, Materialism and Postfeminism: The Critique behind the Romance in" Normal People"." *Oceánide* 15 (2022): 73-80. https://doi.org/10.37668/oceanide.v15i.98.
[99] Rawat, Preeti S. "Patriarchal Beliefs, Women's Empowerment, and General Well-Being." *Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers* 39, no. 2 (2014): 43–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090920140206.
[100] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 56.
[101] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 260.

Lorraine embodies the feminist values of the 21st century[102], having fought for her own life as a single mother, demonstrating her strength and determination, and instilling in Connell a sense of emotional knowledge and accountability, and having an open relationship where things can be discussed freely with no hidden meanings[103], portraying the emotional broad-mindedness that Lorraine embodies. She is never afraid to speak her mind and constantly encourages him to take responsibility for his actions, especially when he makes mistakes[104]. Lorraine also portrays the deep empathy that is key for the Fourth Wave of feminism[105], embracing Marianne at her most vulnerable[106], and recognising the emotional needs of those around her.

Denise Sheridan

Denise decided a long time ago that it is acceptable for men to use aggression towards Marianne as a way of expressing themselves[107].

— Sally Rooney, "Normal People"

The next character to be analysed is Marianne's mother, Denise Sheridan, the antithesis of Lorraine Waldren. Her character in "Normal People" is an example of someone who benefits economically from the existing hierarchy, while refusing to acknowledge the deep issues in the world and the disadvantages that exist for others who do not share her privileges[108]. Although she comes from an upper-class background, she diminishes Marianne's accomplishments and right

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[102] Rawat, Preeti S. "Patriarchal Beliefs, Women's Empowerment, and General Well-Being." *Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers* 39, no. 2 (2014): 43–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090920140206.

[103] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 46.

[104] del Río, María Amor Barros. "Irish Youth, Materialism and Postfeminism: The Critique behind the Romance in" Normal People"." *Oceánide* 15 (2022): 73-80. https://doi.org/10.37668/oceanide.v15i.98.

[105] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.

[106] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 63.

[107] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 65.

[108] Turner, Heather A., and R. Jay Turner. "Gender, Social Status, and Emotional Reliance." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 40, no. 4 (1999): 360–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/2676331.

to equal treatment in their household. Furthermore, Denise is complicit in the abuse inflicted on Marianne by her brother, even ignoring the psychological and physical harm that he causes[109].

Denise's belief that she is not equal and is below her son, who has taken on the role of abuser and patriarch in the family, is deeply ingrained. As Marianne resists the abuse and becomes indifferent, Denise tries harder to subjugate her and mould her into her standard. This allows for men to use aggression towards Marianne as a way to express themselves, a troubling pattern that Denise perpetuates[110]. In one particularly tense Christmas scene, Denise's abusive behaviour is on full display as she strikes the kitchen table with her open palm and accuses Marianne of thinking she's special. Marianne's response, "No, I don't,"[111] reveals the effect that Denise's abuse has had on her. Denise seems to enjoy these moments of power over Marianne, revealing the depth of her abusive behaviour and the destructive impact it has on Marianne's mental health.

Denise Sheridan's sense of superiority permeates throughout her relationships, affecting not only her daughter Marianne but also Connell. Lorraine points out to Connell that Denise might not approve of their relationship because the Waldrons are "a bit beneath her station,"[112] to which Connell remarks that this attitude is "something from the nineteenth-century times"[113].

Denise's lack of support for her gender and daughter, and her aversion to emotional vulnerability, are further exposed in the final chapter of the book. Marianne had cut ties with her family after her brother's physical abuse, yet Denise had made no effort to check on her. When they unexpectedly encounter each other on New Year's Eve, Denise simply walks past them, looking composed as always[114], highlighting the mentality that women need to keep appearances in the outside world[115]. Her archaic mentality is apparent throughout the book, where women are expected to be submissive, everyone must stay within their

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[109] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 65.
[110] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 65.
[111] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 143.
[112] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 51.
[113] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 51.
[114] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 260.
[115] Turner, Heather A., and R. Jay Turner. "Gender, Social Status, and Emotional Reliance." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 40, no. 4 (1999): 360–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/2676331.

social class, and family issues are swept under the rug, never to be resolved or addressed[116].

However, it is relevant to mention that Denise Sheridan had been a victim of domestic abuse for years until the death of her husband[117]. This fact can explain her attitude towards the exterior world, as studies have shown that people who have suffered abuse undergo deep trauma that drastically affects their personalities and mental health[118]. These effects normally portray in psychological distress, avoidance of confrontation, and most relevant to the analysis of her character, a deep lack of empathy[119] with other people in the same situation as them. Studies also have pointed out how people who have been abused become abusers as a way to release the anger and resentment they feel, which cannot be expressed against the main abuser, so they redirect it[120]. Under this context, it can be theorised that Denise's treatment towards Marianne was a projection of her own frustration[121] with the life she had experienced throughout the last couple of decades where every vulnerability was forbidden or punished.

Eric, Karen, Rob Hegarty and Rachel Moran

Everyone knows that Rachel is the most popular girl in school, but no one is allowed to say this. Instead everyone has to pretend not to notice that their social lives are arranged hierarchically, with certain people at the top, some jostling at mid-level, and other lower down[122].

— Sally Rooney, "Normal People"

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[116] Walkerdine, Valerie. "Femininity as Performance." *Oxford Review of Education* 15, no. 3 (1989): 267–79. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1050418.
[117] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 43.
[118] Follingstad, Diane R. "The Impact of Psychological Aggression on Women's Mental Health and Behavior: The Status of the Field." *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 10, no. 3 (2009): 271–89. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26636194.
[119] Latshaw, Beth A. "Examining the Impact of a Domestic Violence Simulation on the Development of Empathy in Sociology Classes." *Teaching Sociology* 43, no. 4 (2015): 277–89. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24887461.
[120] Follingstad, Diane R. "The Impact of Psychological Aggression on Women's Mental Health and Behavior: The Status of the Field." *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 10, no. 3 (2009): 271–89. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26636194.
[121] Latshaw, Beth A. "Examining the Impact of a Domestic Violence Simulation on the Development of Empathy in Sociology Classes." *Teaching Sociology* 43, no. 4 (2015): 277–89. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24887461.
[122] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 29.

To finish the characters' analyses, it is important to examine the behaviour of Connell's friends towards Marianne, particularly Eric, Rob, Rachel, and Karen. Eric and Rob exhibit typical behaviour of misogynistic young males[123] with certain expectations of how women should behave and look. On the other hand, Rachel perceives other women as threats, believing they should satisfy the male gaze[124], and getting jealous when Connell's attention is on Marianne[125]. Their actions towards Marianne are evidence of this. They call her flat-chested and spread rumours about her, as previously mentioned[126], creating a toxic environment for her at school.

During the Debs fundraiser, Marianne is sexually harassed and groped by an older man. Instead of showing support and solidarity, Rachel openly laughs, while Eric brushes off the behaviour as "fun"[127]. Karen is the only character who demonstrates feminist values from the Fourth Wave, offering Marianne reassurance and support during her distress[128]. Additionally, as commented during the analysis of Connell, Rob shows Connell and Eric naked pictures of his girlfriend Lisa[129], further highlighting their lack of emotional intelligence, maturity, and respect for women.

Unfortunately, Rob's lack of emotional vulnerability and adherence to toxic patriarchal beliefs led to a severe deterioration of his mental health, resulting in his tragic suicide[130]. Addressing men's mental health[131] is a significant aspect of the Fourth Wave of feminism, as the neglect of this issue has deep repercussions in society. Rob's necessity to be liked and have a high social

[123] Rawat, Preeti S. "Patriarchal Beliefs, Women's Empowerment, and General Well-Being." *Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers* 39, no. 2 (2014): 43–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090920140206.
[124] Rawat, Preeti S. "Patriarchal Beliefs, Women's Empowerment, and General Well-Being." *Vikalpa: The Journal for Decision Makers* 39, no. 2 (2014): 43–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090920140206.
[125] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 38.
[126] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 3.
[127] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 40.
[128] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 40.
[129] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 76.
[130] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 205.
[131] Turner, Heather A., and R. Jay Turner. "Gender, Social Status, and Emotional Reliance." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 40, no. 4 (1999): 360–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/2676331.

status[132] is learned from the patriarchy, the necessity for an alpha male status[133], and embracing feminist values and rejecting toxic masculinity could have prevented Rob's downward spiral.

After Rob's death, the remaining characters appear to mature and reject their misogynistic beliefs. By the end of the book, Eric, Rachel, and Karen embrace Marianne, accepting and celebrating her presence, indicating their growth and progression towards feminist values.

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[132] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 226.
[133] Turner, Heather A., and R. Jay Turner. "Gender, Social Status, and Emotional Reliance." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 40, no. 4 (1999): 360–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/2676331.

Conclusion

To summarise, Sally Rooney's writing captures the essence of modern literature and the human experience by examining into the intricacies of human nature. As a writer, she explores the boundaries of feminism, and portrays complex relationships and emotional vulnerabilities in a positive light. It is important for writers to address these topics as literature can have a profound impact on society's mindset. Empowering readers, especially those who have been affected by the patriarchy[134], is essential in combating the flaws in our society, and writing characters that imitate the complexity of people in real life gives the opportunity to have a better understanding of the world we live in.

It's clear from the analysis that Marianne Sheridan is a complex character who embodies the contradictions and complexities of modern-day feminism. Her strong personality and sense of self-awareness help her navigate through patriarchal structures in her family and society. She defies the long-held belief that female success is undeserved, choosing to study in male-dominated fields while recognising the power dynamics that exist between men and women. Her experiences with sadomasochism and abuse highlight the blurred lines between sexual liberation and abuse, raising questions that are central to Fourth Wave feminism. Ultimately, her relationship with Connell offers a consensual dynamic where she can embrace her emotional vulnerability without being degraded, finding a balance between her gender equality beliefs and her emotional desires. Marianne's character challenges traditional notions of femininity and opens up important conversations about power dynamics and consent in modern-day relationships.

The second analysis on Connell Waldron points out the impact of feminism on men's lives and emphasises the importance of addressing mental health issues without regard for gender. It also explores the influence of peers and family on career choices and the need to challenge gender stereotypes in the workplace. Through Connell's character development, the novel presents a

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[134] Cowley, Katherine. "A Rising Generation: Women in Power in Young Adult Novels." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1 January 2020; 53 (1): 194–198. doi: https://doi.org/10.5406/dialjmormthou.53.1.0194

powerful representation of a man who has embraced feminist ideals and emotional vulnerability and taken an active role in working towards a more equal society.

The analyses of the protagonists' mothers is a relevant depiction of the different ideals between previous generations. On one hand, Lorraine Waldron is a significant character in the development of Marianne and Connell. As Connell's mother, she serves as a consistent and positive influence, embodying the feminist values of the 21st century[135]. Her open-mindedness towards current affairs, sexuality, and gender dynamics are a testament to her engagement with the world and her empathy towards those who have been wronged. Overall, Lorraine plays a pivotal role in shaping the values and beliefs of both Connell and Marianne, making her an integral part of the novel's narrative. Contrary to this, Denise Sheridan is a complex portrayal of someone who benefits from the existing social hierarchy while perpetuating abusive behaviours towards her own daughter, embodying barely the principles of the First Wave of feminism[136]. Her deeply ingrained sense of superiority and aversion to emotional vulnerability impact not only Marianne but also her relationships with others. While her behaviour is often cruel and abusive, it is important to consider the trauma she suffered as a victim of domestic abuse, which may have contributed to her current personality and behaviours. Nonetheless, the destructive impact of her actions on Marianne's mental health is undeniable, highlighting the importance of acknowledging and addressing the deep issues that exist within families and society at large. She also is a stark reminder that anachronistic attitudes still exist in modern society.

Also, it is important to remark that the behaviour of Connell's friends towards Marianne reveals a toxic environment, characterised by misogyny and patriarchal values. Marianne is objectified, bullied, and sexually harassed, while Karen is the only character who demonstrates feminist values. Rob's tragic suicide highlights the importance of addressing men's mental health and rejecting toxic masculinity, and leaving space for emotions and vulnerability. Fortunately,

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[135] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[136] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.

the remaining characters appear to mature and reject their misogynistic beliefs, embracing Marianne and indicating growth towards feminist values. This serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the need for continued efforts to challenge and dismantle patriarchal systems. Furthermore, the novel positively depicts the ability for misogynistic behaviours and attitudes to be changed and challenged.

It is significant for this thesis that most of the characters are part of the generation that grew up with feminism and continues to evolve into the Fourth Wave of feminism, where emotions are accepted and encouraged, and have a space in everyday interactions in society. This is particularly relevant in the characters of Marianne and Connell. By the end of the book, Marianne and Connell are comfortable within the paradigms of feminism in relation to their personal ways of reaching emotional vulnerability. To portray this, Rooney uses the last chapter of the book to express Marianne's newfound openness:

> How strange to feel herself so completely under the control of another person, but also how ordinary. No one can be independent of other people completely, so why not give up the attempt, she thought, go running in the other direction depend on people for everything, allow them to depend on you, why not.[137] (Rooney, 2018)

Rooney's writing serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of empathy, understanding, and action in creating a more inclusive and equitable world for all genders, and her commitment to use her literary power to positively influence the new generations on the benefits of feminism and emotional vulnerability is remarkable.

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[137] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 262.

Resumé

Sally Rooney je renomovaná irská spisovatelka, která je oslavována pro svůj styl psaní a je označována jako "první velká spisovatelka mileniálů"[138] různými publikacemi. Rooneyho pozadí v literatuře a umění je patrné v jejím psaní, které často zkoumá témata jako intimita, sex a sociální nerovnost a zároveň kladně se staví k společenským očekáváním. Její politické smýšlení a zájem o marxismus[139] jsou patrné v jejích dílech, kdy se její postavy zabývají hlubokými rozhovory o morálce a vyzývají ke změně status quo[140]. Rooneyho ženské postavy vyzývají k potlačení opresí a společenských norm, zatímco její mužské postavy subverzivně zahrnují tradiční genderové role vysokou emoční inteligencí, čímž se stává významným hlasem v současné literatuře, který vyvolává důležité diskuse o genderu, politice a společenských normách.

Tato disertační práce se bude zaměřovat na feminismus a emocionální zranitelnost a bude zkoumat román Sally Rooneyové, "Normální lidé", který zkoumá komplexnost vztahů a lidské zážitky, zejména v souvislosti s životy postav Marianne a Connella. Rooneyová používá kulaté postavy k vykreslení psychologických aspektů a traumat, které se pojí s dospíváním. Příběh začíná v posledním roce jejich středoškolského studia, kdy navážou tajný sexuální vztah komplikovaný svým společenským postavením[141]. Jejich vztah je dále vyzýván rozdílem v jejich společenských třídách[142]. Po střední škole se setkají znovu na univerzitě s jinou dynamikou, která zdůrazňuje mocenské vztahy v partnerských vztazích, feminismus, duševní zdraví a výzvy, které s sebou nese dospívání v 21. století. "Normální lidé" jsou působivým a jemným zkoumáním dospívání a obtíží, které přináší láska a vztahy.

Historicky společnosti přijímaly rovnost pohlaví dříve než přišly

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[138] Barry, Ellen. "Greeted as the First Great Millennial Author, and Wary of the Attention." *The New York Times*, August 31, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/31/world/europe/sally-rooney-ireland.html.

[139] Barry, Ellen. "Greeted as the First Great Millennial Author, and Wary of the Attention." *The New York Times*, August 31, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/31/world/europe/sally-rooney-ireland.html.

[140] Collins, Lauren. "Sally Rooney Gets in Your Head." *The New Yorker*, December 31, 2018. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/07/sally-rooney-gets-in-your-head.

[141] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 29.

[142] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 51.

patriarchální přesvědčení. Příklady zahrnují Onna-Bugeisha, ženské samuraje v Japonsku[143], a Boudiccu, královnu Icenů v keltském Británii[144] před tím, než byli společenskými normami rozděleni.

První Vlna feminismu v pozdním 19. a na počátku 20. století se zaměřovala na nerovnost pohlaví a hlasovací práva, zatímco druhá vlna směřovala k osvobození žen a podporovala androgynii[145]. Druhá Vlna však byla kritizována za vylučování žen různé barvy pleti a náboženského vyznání[146]. Současné vlny feminismu se zabývají širším spektrem otázek, včetně rasy, třídy, sexuální orientace a schopností.

Třetí Vlna feminismu se odehrála od konce 90. let do začátku 10. let 21. století[147] a byla vnímána jako samostatná entita spíše než jako pokračování předchozích feministických hnutí. Třetí vlna přinesla zvýšení zastoupení žen různých tříd a ras, stejně jako zahrnutí mužů[148]. Feministky třetí vlny přijaly ženské charakteristiky, uznávajíce rozdíly mezi pasivitou a klidem nebo sentimentálností a sklonem k péči[149].

Čtvrtá Vlna feminismu se nachází ve svých počátcích a často je považována za pokračování třetí vlny[150]. Nicméně, jejím hlavním cílem je řešit rozdělení mezi druhou a třetí vlnou[151]. Feministky čtvrté vlny jsou introspektivní a klade si otázky ohledně svých akcí a motivací, analyzují, zda jsou jejich volby ovlivněny společenskými normami, nebo jsou opravdu jejich vlastní[152]. Čtvrtá

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[143] Chao-Fong, Léonie. "10 Facts about Japan's Female Samurai Warriors." *History Hit*. History Hit, October 6, 2021. https://www.historyhit.com/facts-about-the-onna-bugeisha-japans-female-samurai-warriors/.
[144] Owen, Beth. "Unleashing Fury: Boudica, the Warrior Queen." *History Hit*. History Hit, September 14, 2021. https://www.historyhit.com/unleashing-fury-boudica-the-warrior-queen/.
[145] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[146] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[147] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[148] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[149] Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 405–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174166.
[150] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[151] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.
[152] Rampton, Martha. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University*, June 30, 2022. https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism.

vlna zdůrazňuje, že feminismus je kolektivním bojem o rovnost mezi všemi lidmi, nejen o práva žen[153].

Dalším aspektem k zvážení je škodlivé přesvědčení, že emoce jsou slabost[154]. Tento stereotyp ovlivnil jak muže, tak ženy a je zejména běžný v společnostech s historií homofobie. Stereotyp "mužského myšlení"[155] udržuje myšlenku, že muži by neměli ukazovat emoce, protože je to považováno za slabost, což se střetává s aktuálními vlnami feminismu, které uznávají důležitost emocí jako zdroje moci. Tradiční genderové role spojují ženskost s emocemi a podřízeností, což vede k kritice těch, kteří se snaží přijmout své zranitelnosti. Navzdory tomu moderní feminismus přijímá emocionální zranitelnost jako zdroj moci, otevírající cestu k více inkluzivní společnosti[156].

Jsou analyzovány několik postav, včetně Marianne Sheridanové. Přestože se setkává se společenskými a rodinnými patriarchálními strukturami, Mariannina sebevědomí a sebeuvědomění jí pomáhají navigovat univerzitním prostředím a excelovat v oborech ovládaných muži[157]. Rozpoznává mocenské dynamiky mezi muži a ženami a touží je zažít. Její vztah s Jamie a Lukasem zdůrazňuje komplexnost jejích touh[158], ale její vztah s Connellou nabízí souhlasnou dynamiku, kde může přijmout emocionální zranitelnost, aniž by byla ponížena[159]. Skrze svůj vztah s Connellou Marianne nachází rovnováhu mezi svými názory na genderovou rovnost a emocionálními touhami.

Connell Waldron je další postava, která ukazuje dopad feminismu na mužské životy. Projevuje feministické hodnoty tím, že respektuje rozhodování žen a jejich těla, přestože za to čelí stigmatizaci[160]. Zároveň zachycuje složitou realitu vyrůstání s feminismem, ale silně ovlivněné tlakem vrstevníků a

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[153] Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 405–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174166.
[154] Simson, Rosalind S. "Feminine Thinking." *Social Theory and Practice* 31, no. 1 (2005): 1–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23558685.
[155] Simson, Rosalind S. "Feminine Thinking." *Social Theory and Practice* 31, no. 1 (2005): 1–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23558685.
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[157] Shames, Shauna L., and Tess Wise. "Gender, Diversity, and Methods in Political Science: A Theory of Selection and Survival Biases." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50, no. 3 (2017): 811–23.
[158] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 132.
[159] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 134.
[160] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 76.

patriarchálními očekáváními ve společnosti[161]. Román také ukazuje vliv vrstevníků a rodiny na kariérové cesty a jak společenské normy mohou odrazovat muže od toho, aby se vydali do *ženských* oborů[162]. Nicméně nedávný výzkum ukazuje, že muži v oborech s převahou žen stále mají výhody oproti ženám[163]. Román nastoluje otázku nedostatečného porozumění a empatie mužů k problémům, se kterými se ženy potýkají v mužských oborech. Connellovy problémy s duševním zdravím[164] odrážejí soudobé hodnocení a stigma ve společnosti, které se postupně mění díky pohybům jako je feminismus.

Další postavou k analýze je Lorraine Waldron, Connellova matka. Je to konzistentní a pozitivní postava, která slouží jako vzor toho, co znamená být dobrým člověkem. Vštěpuje Connelovi dobré socialistické hodnoty[165], má politické vědomí[166] a zastává feministické hodnoty. Lorraine je také otevřená, pokud jde o sexualitu, a radí Connellovi, aby byl bezpečný, pokud se rozhodne prozkoumat svou sexualitu. Jako matka ve věku teenagery projevuje empatii vůči Marianně a dalším ženám, které byly poškozeny muži. Lorraine povzbuzuje Connella, aby si uvědomil svou odpovědnost za své činy a vštěpuje mu emocionální znalosti a zodpovědnost.

Následující postavou v analýze je Denise Sheridan, matka Marianny. Je to postava, která profituje z existující hierarchie v knize "Normální lidé", ale odmítá uznat boj ostatních. Zmenšuje úspěchy Marianne a je spoluviníkem v jejím zneužívání, zatímco věří, že je pod jejím synem. Denise je agresivní během napjaté vánoční scény, kdy udeří do stolu a obviňuje Marianne, že si myslí, že je něco víc než ostatní[167]. Její nadřazenostní komplex ovlivňuje nejen Marianne, ale také Connella a v poslední kapitole se ukazuje, že není schopna poskytnout dceři

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[161] Turner, Heather A., and R. Jay Turner. "Gender, Social Status, and Emotional Reliance." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 40, no. 4 (1999): 360–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/2676331.
[162] Mastekaasa, Arne, and Jens-Christian Smeby. "Educational Choice and Persistence in Male- and Female-Dominated Fields." *Higher Education* 55, no. 2 (2008): 189–202. http://www.jstor.org/stable/29735174.
[163] Mastekaasa, Arne, and Jens-Christian Smeby. "Educational Choice and Persistence in Male- and Female-Dominated Fields." *Higher Education* 55, no. 2 (2008): 189–202. http://www.jstor.org/stable/29735174.
[164] Eppel, Alan. "Normal People: The Self-at-worst and the Self-at-best." *Journal of Psychiatry Reform* 8, no. 5 (2020). https://journalofpsychiatryreform.com/2020/07/05/normal-people/.
[165] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 47.
[166] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 47.
[167] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 143.

podporu. Deniseina archaická mentalita je patrná po celé knize, kde se od žen očekává poslušnost a rodinné problémy jsou ignorovány[168]. Denise Sheridan však byla po mnoho let obětí domácího násilí, a to až do smrti svého manžela[169]. Výzkum ukázal, že takové zážitky mohou způsobit hluboké trauma, které ovlivňuje osobnost a duševní zdraví jednotlivce[170], což vede ke symptomatické psychické úzkosti, vyhýbání se konfrontacím a nedostatku empatie k ostatním v podobné situaci[171]. Kromě toho některé studie naznačují, že ti, kteří prošli týráním, se mohou stát sami týrčími. Vzhledem k těmto faktorům je možné, že chování Denise Sheridanové k Marianne bylo projekcí jejích vlastních frustrací a traumatu.

Pro dokončení analýzy postav je důležité zkoumat chování Connellových přátel k Marianně. Eric a Rob projevují misogynní postoje a šíří zvěsti o jejím vzhledu[172], zatímco Rachel vidí jiné ženy jako hrozbu a žárlí na Mariannu[173]. Během sbírky na charitu je Marianna sexuálně obtěžována a pouze Karen nabízí podporu[174]. Robovy toxické názory vedou k jeho sebevraždě[175], což ukazuje důležitost řešení duševního zdraví mužů[176]. Po jeho smrti zbývající postavy dospějí a přijímají Mariannu, což naznačuje růst směrem k feministickým hodnotám.

Závěrem, psaní Sally Rooneyové zkoumá složité vztahy, emocionální zranitelnost a feministické ideály, které mohou mít hluboký dopad na společnost. V knize "Normální lidé" Marianne zosobňuje složitosti moderního feminismu, odporuje tradičním představám o ženskosti a otevírá důležité konverzace o mocenských dynamikách a souhlasu v mezilidských vztazích. Postava Connella

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[168] Walkerdine, Valerie. "Femininity as Performance." *Oxford Review of Education* 15, no. 3 (1989): 267–79. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1050418.
[169] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 43.
[170] Follingstad, Diane R. "The Impact of Psychological Aggression on Women's Mental Health and Behavior: The Status of the Field." *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 10, no. 3 (2009): 271–89. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26636194.
[171] Latshaw, Beth A. "Examining the Impact of a Domestic Violence Simulation on the Development of Empathy in Sociology Classes." *Teaching Sociology* 43, no. 4 (2015): 277–89. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24887461.
[172] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 3.
[173] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 38.
[174] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 40-1.
[175] Rooney, Sally. "Normal People". London: *Faber & Faber*, 2018, pp. 205.
[176] Turner, Heather A., and R. Jay Turner. "Gender, Social Status, and Emotional Reliance." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 40, no. 4 (1999): 360–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/2676331.

představuje dopad feminismu na mužské životy a zdůrazňuje potřebu výzvy genderových stereotypů na pracovišti. Analýzy matek protagonistů ukazují rozdíly mezi ideály předchozích generací a zdůrazňují důležitost uznání a řešení hlubokých problémů v rodinách a společnosti. Toxické prostředí a růst směrem k feministickým hodnotám přátel Connella zdůrazňují neustálý boj o genderovou rovnost, duševní zdraví, feminismus a důležitost emocionální zranitelnosti. Je relevantní zmínit, že postavy románu jsou součástí čtvrté vlny feminismu, kde jsou emoce přijímány a podporovány. Psaní Rooneyové slouží jako významná připomínka důležitosti empatie, porozumění a akce při vytváření více inkluzivního a spravedlivého světa pro všechny genderové identity.

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Annotace

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Cílem této práce je analyzovat román "Normální lidé" od Sally Rooneyové a zkoumat jeho feministický přístup a spojení s emocionální zranitelností. Počáteční zaměření této práce je poskytnout čtenářům úvod do Sally Rooneyové, následovaný stručným shrnutím "Normálních lidí". Na této základně pokračuji vysvětlením historického kontextu feminismu, definováním konceptu emocionální zranitelnosti a propojením obou těchto myšlenek. K prokázání této práce analyzuji osm postav; dva protagonisty, Marianne a Connell; jejich matky, Denise a Lorraine; a čtyři vedlejší postavy, Karen, Rachel, Eric a Rob. Pozoruji jejich vývoj během románu z feministického pohledu a jak jejich emocionální zranitelnost, nebo její nedostatek, ovlivňuje jejich životy a ty kolem nich.

Klíčová slova: feminismus, emocionální zranitelnost, patriarchát, emoce, Sally Rooneyová, Normální lidé

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the novel "Normal People" by Sally Rooney and examine its feminist approach and the connection to emotional vulnerability. The initial focus of this thesis is to provide readers with an introduction to Sally Rooney, followed by a concise summary of "Normal People." Building upon this foundation, I proceed to explain the historical context of feminism, define the concept of emotional vulnerability, and how the two ideas are connected. To prove the thesis, I analyse eight characters; the two protagonists, Marianne and Connell; their respective mothers, Denise and Lorraine; and four secondary characters; Karen, Rachel, Eric and Rob, and observe their development throughout the novel under the feminist perspective and how their emotional vulnerabilities, or lack thereof, impacts their lives and those around them.