EXPLORING FEMININITY AND SELF-EXPRESSION THROUGH FEMINIST CRITICISM IN "KOMI-SAN CAN'T COMMUNICATE"

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Abstract

The representation of women in popular media often reproduces ideal constructions of femininity shaped by patriarchal values, such as beauty, silence, and obedience. The manga Komi-san Can't Communicate is an interesting example because it features a visually ideal female character who experiences limitations in expressing herself. This study aims to analyze the representation of femininity and Komi Shouko's struggle for freedom of expression using Beauvoir's existentialist feminist perspective. This study uses a qualitative approach with content analysis of the first volume of Tomohito Oda's manga Komi-san Can't Communicate. The data is analyzed through indicators of femininity and self-expression, including verbal and nonverbal aspects, supported by representation theory and the concepts of voice and silence. The results show that Komi's femininity is represented through the stereotype of the ideal woman, which emphasizes beauty, silence, idealization, and immanent conditions, placing her as an object in patriarchal constructions. However, this manga also shows Komi's struggle to achieve transcendence through subtle expression strategies, such as the use of writing, gestures, and silence as a medium of agency. These findings show that women's freedom and existence are not always realized through vocal resistance, but can also be achieved through negotiation of existing social boundaries. Thus, this study contributes to enriching feminist studies in popular media by showing the complexity of representations of femininity and the process of achieving female subjectivity in contemporary manga.

INTRODUCTION

Gender stereotypes about women are still strongly embedded in social life (Napp, 2023). Women are often associated with nurturing and expressive traits, while men are portrayed as ambitious and dominant (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). These

stereotypes describe views about the roles and behaviors considered appropriate for men and women, which are formed through social and cultural processes (De Gioannis, 2023). Moreover, patriarchal systems as well as the media reinforce these stereotypes, limiting women's self-expression and impacting their psychological well-being (He et al., 2024). This tendency is also reflected in popular culture, such as in manga that serves not only as entertainment but also as a cultural text that shapes gender norms (Rohmah & Rosyidha, 2025). Many manga works depict women in accordance with traditional expectations, such as being beautiful, gentle, and dependent on men, reinforced by linguistic aspects through the use of pronominal systems, verbal endings, and gender markers that place women in a passive position (Jayaputri, 2024; Syuhra et al., 2023).

One work that presents an ideal construction of femininity is the manga *Komi-san Can't Communicate* by Tomohito Oda, which tells the story of Komi Shouko, a beautiful, quiet, and elegant new student with the goal of making 100 friends (Natasya, 2021). Behind her perfection, Komi has a communication disorder that makes it difficult for her to express herself and causes her to feel isolated (Haq, 2023; Kazoritta, 2023). From a feminist perspective, Komi's experience of being idealized representhow women are constructed by societal standards that value beauty, modesty, and silence as marks of femininity (Ridwan, 2022). Feminism itself is a movement and ideology that aims to define, uphold, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality between men and women (Mohajan et al., 2022). According to Beauvoir's existentialist feminism, men are positioned as free and transcendent subjects, while women are reduced to the Other, confined to domestic roles (Mahon, 2015). Women's existence is only achieved when they are able to assert themselves as independent subjects (Salsabila et al., 2023). This idea is expressed in Komi's struggle to break free from social constraints and feminine stereotypes that limit her freedom.

Previous studies have shown that gender representation in manga remains uneven. Perez (2022) found that shonen manga often presents women as passive figures, while men are depicted as dominant. Ellecosta (2023) also asserted that manga is a "genderized" medium, although more independent female characters are now beginning to emerge. Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory has also been widely applied to realist literary works. The research by Priyadharshini et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of self-awareness and transcendent actions in determining women's existence. Meanwhile, the research by Martinus & Marsih, (2022) indicated that female characters can achieve their existence by balancing domestic and public roles and rejecting dependence on men. The research by Jalu et al. (2023) focuses on the psychological aspects of the character Komi Shouko in the manga *Komi-san wa, Komyushou desu*, which shows symptoms of social anxiety but does not explain the underlying gender constructs. Based on these studies, it can be concluded that studies on gender representation in manga generally still focus on the imbalance of roles between men and women, as well as on the psychological aspects of characters without reviewing the social culture that shapes them. Although some studies have applied existentialist feminist theory to realist literary works, its application to popular media such as manga is still limited. This research attempts to fill the gap by applying existentialist feminist theory to the manga *Komi-san Can't Communicate* to analyze the representation of femininity and women's freedom of expression.

Therefore, this study offers a unique perspective through the application of

Beauvoir's existentialist feminism theory in the analysis of contemporary manga, a field that still rarely uses this theoretical perspective. This study provides a new perspective on how *Komi-san Can't Communicate* depicts the tense relationship between social expectations and individual freedom, by placing women not only as objects of representation, but as subjects who actively assert their existence and agency. This study analyzes how femininity and freedom of expression are depicted in *Komi-san Can't Communicate* using Beauvoir's existentialist feminist perspective, specifically to examine how patriarchal values shape women's identities and limit their expression in Japanese popular culture. To achieve these objectives and examine how femininity and freedom of expression are represented within the framework of patriarchy, this study presents the following research questions:

1. What feminine stereotypes are attached to Komi's character?
2. How does this manga represent Komi Shouko's struggle to gain freedom of expression?

The results of this study are expected to enrich the discussion on gender representation and provide a better comprehension of women's struggle to achieve subjectivity and independence in literary works and encourages readers and media to be more critical in understanding how popular culture shapes the ideal image of women and its impact on society's view of women in real life.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Existentialism in Feminist Theory (Simone de Beauvoir)

The concept of "The Other" in existential feminism describes the position of women as passive and opposed to men (Jiang, 2021). According to Beauvoir, this condition is not natural, but rather the result of a patriarchal culture that places men as the main subjects and women as objects, trapping women in passive state (immanence) (Ridwan et al., 2024: Barnaba, 2025). Meanwhile, transcendence is the process whereby women transcend the limitations that confine them in order to gain a sense of self and control over their own lives (Nirwana & Darmawan, 2025). Thus, existentialism connects existence and self-expression, where authentic life is born through the courage to use freedom and awareness of responsibility in creating meaning in life (Saputra, 2025).

In summary, Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory provides a framework for understanding the position of women as "the Other" in a patriarchal social system. The concepts of immanence and transcendence are key to open the way for women to achieve freedom. In the context of this study, Beauvoir's theory is used to examine how Komi Shouko struggles to break free from the social constraints that bind her, and how this process becomes a form of freedom as a female subject.

Definition of Femininity

Femininity is a polysemic concept that has evolved from traditional ideals of gentleness and obedience to modern notions emphasizing strength, independence, and freedom of expression (Tolochin, 2023; Nur, 2020). According to Beauvoir, femininity is not biologically determined but socially constructed, contrasting women's position as "the Other" within patriarchy (Colenutt, 2021). This view underlies Butler's theory of gender performativity, which sees femininity as a repetitive social practice rather than an innate identity (Kakoliris, 2025). Consequently, the "ideal" woman is shaped by patriarchal expectations that define women's roles in domestic and aesthetic domains

(Mathew, 2018).

Thus, the concept of femininity can be understood as a social construct that is formed and reproduced through patriarchal culture and ideology. This is important for this study because the image of femininity in *Komi-san Can't Communicate* is not only presented as an innate trait of Japanese women, but as a result of social expectations of how ideal women should be gentle, polite, and quiet.

Feminist Representation in Popular Culture

Media is an influential aspect in shaping and reproducing social perceptions of gender. Various forms of media often present gender stereotypes that reinforce traditional views and normalize the objectification of women (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Similarly, the image of women in anime and manga is still influenced by gender stereotypes, masculine views, and a lack of representation of women's voices (Feng, 2024). This is due to the masculine structure of the anime industry, where production and the market are dominated by men, resulting in representations that favor a masculine perspective (ibid). Visual and narrative patterns in various manga genres also tend to emphasize the image of the "ideal femininity." For example, the use of visual elements such as revealing clothing, sensual poses, and seductive gestures form representations of femininity that are associated with physical attractiveness alone, while narratively, women are often positioned as objects of male desire (Jayaputri, 2024). In this case, gender representation of feminine stereotypes can be understood as how media constructs and depicts images of women based on socially accepted notions of femininity, often depicting them as gentle, emotional, dependent, aesthetically and sexually pleasing (Wang, 2024).

In order to understand how visual media shapes the image of women, Mulvey's (1975) male gaze theory is relevant in explaining that visual media often presents women as objects of male gaze. This can be seen through elements such as framing, lighting, and expressions that shape the ideal feminine image as a representation of the patriarchal gaze (Mulvey, as cited in Buckland, 2025). Furthermore, the male gaze are driven by two mechanisms, voyeurism (looking at others with desire) and narcissism (looking at and admiring oneself through identification with male characters) (Krijnen, 2017). Thus, it produces an image of "to-be-looked -at-ness" (women reduced to aesthetic objects for male visual pleasure) (Smelik, 2016). In its application to anime/manga, this theory is evident through the practice of fanservice, close-ups of the body, and voyeuristic angles that mimic the gaze of heterosexual men, although recent studies show a shift in representation where female characters are beginning to be depicted as having agency, but this still operates within a patriarchal viewing structure (King & Mendoza, 2023).

Thus, this concept is relevant in the manga *Komi-san Can't Communicate*, where the character Komi Shouko is depicted through visuals that highlight her gentleness, silence, and passive beauty as a form of feminine idealization that conforms to the construction of the male gaze. Meanwhile, Komi's quiet and shy image not only appeals visually to readers but also shows how female silence can function as a representation of the male gaze that desires women to remain passive and charming.

Feminine Stereotypes in Japanese Media

To understand how feminine stereotypes are formed and continuously reproduced in Japanese media, it is necessary to understand the underlying patterns or referred to as archetypes. This is defined as basic patterns or universal images that exist

in the human unconscious and form the basis for the creation of characters, behaviors, and symbols in literary works and popular culture (Marceline & Mandala, 2023; Ottosson & Grahn, 2021). In Japanese popular culture, one of the most prominent female archetypes is *Yamato Nadeshiko*, the ideal image of a gentle, graceful, and devoted Japanese woman that has become the main representation of traditional femininity as well as the standard of beauty that shapes the way women are represented in various media, including manga and anime (Yoshikawa, 2021).

The *Yamato Nadeshiko* archetype is also closely related to Japanese social values such as wa (harmony) and amae (dependence), where the value of wa emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict in social groups, while amae describes a form of dependence that is socially accepted as an expression of trust and closeness (Marco, 2024). Thus, *Yamato Nadeshiko* is the image of the ideal woman in Japanese culture, combining elegance, gentleness, and high morality, which is used as the standard of femininity that is considered appropriate, where women are expected to be polite, patient, caring, and put other people needs first (Becke, 2022).

In addition to traditional stereotypes such as *Yamato Nadeshiko*, which emphasizes gentleness and obedience, modern Japanese media also presents a new form of feminine stereotype through the figure of the sexualized character, which is a female character presented as an object of sexual attraction constructed to fulfill male fantasies and visual pleasure (Bridges et al., 2015). Sexualized characters are usually depicted by showing off body parts, wearing revealing clothing, displaying seductive expressions, and are often shown through the male gaze; thus, it makes women appear as visual decorations that serve to add attractiveness to the story (Cho et al., 2025).

Based on this description, popular culture has an influence in shaping and maintaining the image of the ideal woman through visualizations that reflect patriarchal values. This is relevant to this study because manga, as a part of Japanese popular culture, is a medium that not only entertains but also shapes social perceptions of gender. Through *Komi-san Can't Communicate*, this study seeks to examine how the representation of quiet and gentle women can reflect the idealized discourse of femininity, while also opening up opportunities to read forms of resistance within it. Furthermore, the concepts of voice and silence are used to explain how Komi Shouko negotiates her identity amidst social norms that demand women to be gentle and quiet. Komi's silence not only shows her limitations in speaking, but also becomes a form of resistance against social pressures that silence women's voices.

Representation Theory

Representation is a complex and diverse process in which meaning is not inherent in objects but is constructed through signifying practices influenced by social and cultural contexts (Platonov, 2024). In this case, the media plays an important role, not only reflecting social reality but also producing and constructing meaning through language, symbols, and discourse (Hall, as cited in Firdhausi, 2024). This process involves two systems: mental representation (forms meaning through conceptual maps in the mind) and language (translates these concepts into shared symbols) (Ayuanda et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, in semiotics, Barthes contributed his views on sign systems (Guimarães, 2015). Barthes views semiotics as the study of meaning-making based on the relationship between the signifier and the signified within a system of signs (Jadou

& Ghabra, 2021). Barthes identifies two levels of meaning (Barus et al., 2025). The first is denotation, which represents the lexical meaning of a sign (Rochayatun & Andriyani, 2019). And the second is connotation that carries additional meanings influenced by social and cultural contexts, which then forms a second system of meaning in the form of fabrication that serve to naturalize certain ideologies until they appear as common truths in society (Chandler, 2021). Thus, Hall's theory of representation and Barthes' theory of semiotics can be used complementarily to analyze how media and visual signs construct femininity in popular culture. As in semiotic terms, gestures operate on iconic, indexical, and symbolic levels, where their meanings derive not only from physical movement but also from the surrounding cultural context (Mittelberg & Hinnell, 2022).

Thus, Hall's theory of representation and Barthes' semiotics is supposed to be important frameworks for understanding how feminine meanings are constructed through systems of signs, symbols, and visualizations in manga. In this study, both theories are used to interpret visual elements such as gestures, facial expressions, and panel layouts that represent the character Komi Shouko as a feminine figure. This analysis helps reveal how the quiet, gentle, and graceful image of Komi in *Komi-san Can't Communicate* is not only visual but also a form of ideological representation of women in contemporary Japanese culture.

Voice and Silence as Representation of Feminine Agency

Feminist perspectives emphasize that representation involves not only visibility but also the presence or absence of women's voices as indicators of agency and power, while silence as a potential space of meaning and resistance, where women articulate emotion and identity beyond dominant structures (Fadilah & Fitri, 2025; Shrivastwa, 2022). Voice is a form of critical consciousness that emerges when women dare to articulate their experiences and resistance to the oppressive system, so that voice functions as a form of consciousness as well as a means of social transformation in digital feminism (Hook, as cited in Biana, 2023). In line with this, Cixous' concept of *écriture feminine* (1975) asserts that voice originates from the body through rhythm, breath, and emotion, which reflects authenticity and the expression of feelings that reject the control of masculine language (Cixous' cited in Stojanović, 2015). Meanwhile, Power-Carter (2020) introduces the Silence Trilogy, which includes silencing, a social process that suppresses a person's expression; silenced, an internal condition when a person loses their voice; and silence, a space where individuals can regain control and agency. Thus, silence functions as a power that enables women to renegotiate their identity and power within a system that silences them (Achiri, 2019).

The connection between voice and silence can be understood through Muted Group Theory, which explains how subordinate groups, particularly women, are silenced by social structures and language controlled by dominant groups (Jan, 2023). The media reinforces this pattern by giving men more space to speak, so that women lose their legitimacy to be authoritative speakers because the dominant language and culture reflect male perspectives (Araújo, 2022; Syahwal et al., 2024). This silencing process occurs through unfair, social norms that place women in a lower position, control, and forms of abuse that make them unwilling to voice their experiences (Kartikawati & Aryanto, 2023). Therefore, Muted Group Theory seeks to understand how language becomes an instrument of power while also opening space for silenced groups to voice their experiences (Barkman, 2018).

In this case, this study seeks to examine how the representation of quiet and

gentle women can reflect the idealized discourse of femininity, while also opening up opportunities to read forms of resistance within it. Furthermore, the concepts of voice and silence are used to explain how Komi Shouko negotiates her identity amidst social norms that demand women to be gentle and quiet. Komi's silence not only shows her limitations in speaking, but also becomes a form of resistance against social pressures that silence women's voices.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative approach, which is used to understand meaning and phenomena in depth through observation and interpretation by researchers (Ultavia et al., 2023). The analysis focuses on examining the representation of femininity and women's self-expression using Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory, supported by representation theory and concepts of voice and silence in the character Komi Shouko. Through this approach, researchers can describe how femininity is represented in manga, while also explaining how the character Komi Shouko expresses herself through verbal and nonverbal communication.

The subject of this study is manga *Komi-san Can't Communicate* by Tomohito Oda, which is the main source of data in this study. The analysis focuses on a single volume of manga that reflect Komi's feminine representation and struggles for self-expression. The main data analyzed are verbal and nonverbal expressions that represent femininity and Komi's efforts to express herself.

The data collection technique used by the researcher was content analysis, which is a systematic method for examining communicative materials such as texts, images, and visual–verbal elements in order to generate valid interpretations about their meanings and contexts (White & Marsh, 2006). Data collection in this study used the deductive content analysis framework from Elo and Kyngas (2008). The data was collected through the following stages: Preparation, Organizing, and Reporting.

In the preparation stage, the researcher selected chapters in the manga *Komi-san Can't Communicate* that included scenes related to femininity and self-expression, then read them repeatedly to understand the context. Next, in the organizing stage, the data was analyzed and entered into a categorization table and coded based on theoretical indicators of femininity and self-expression. Each data unit was labeled using a checklist code to indicate its relationship to the theoritical framework. Finally, in the reporting stage, the researcher presents the coded data, interprets the data, and shows how Komi's representation of femininity or struggle for self-expression is formed, linking it back to feminist theory.

The research instruments consisted of categorization tables and coding checklists. The categorization tables used to answer each data clearly align with theoretical concepts. The process of categorization used guidelines derived form the theoretical concepts, which classified into specific labels such as FEM-Beauty, FEM-Silence, FEM-Idealization, FEM-Immanence, EXP-Write, EXP-Silenced, EXP-Silence, and EXP-Transcendence. Once the categorization was completed, coding checklists were utilized to maintain consistency in identifying and labeling the data according to the established categories of femininity and self-expression.

Table 1. Categorization Table Sample

No.	Chapter	Utterances	Categories	Code
1.	Ch. 1	Woooah, she's beautiful, as expected of this school!"	Feminine stereotypes and idealized woman	FEM-Beauty
2.				
3.				

In summary, this study uses a qualitative approach with content analysis and deductive content analysis techniques to examine the representation of femininity and Komi Shouko's struggle to express herself in the manga *Komi-san Can't Communicate*. This study is expected to discover how manga shapes and negotiates feminine identity as well as explain the process of representation and self-expression of Komi Shouko.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presented findings and discussions simultaneously to provide a clearer comprehension of how femininity and self-expression were represented through the character Komi Shouko in the manga *Komi-san Can't Communicate*. Based on qualitative content analysis, this study identifies a number of scenes and utterances which are then classified into two main focuses. First, representations of femininity; second, forms of self-expression. The discussion focuses on how these patterns emerge through Komi's visual, verbal, and nonverbal aspects, and are interpreted with reference to the theoretical framework used.

Feminine stereotypes attached to Komi Shouko's character

Based on data analysis, 19 utterances and scenes representing femininity were found in volume 1 of the manga *Komi-san Can't Communicate*. These representations are divided into four main indicators, which are feminity as idealized woman, silence as femininity, femininity as idealization, and femininity as immanence, with the stereotype of the ideal woman as the most dominant pattern.

Femininity as Idealized Woman (FEM-Beauty)

The first category is the femininity of the idealized woman, which represents Komi as an ideal female figure through visual beauty by other characters. This representation is seen in the words of other characters, "*Woooah, she's beautiful, as expected of this school!*" (Ch. 1) and the narrator, "*Pale white skin, smooth silky hair, big slit eyes...*" (Ch. 7). These statements show that Komi is represented through ideal physical beauty standards and functions as an object of social gaze, so that the standard of "perfect woman" attached to her actually limits her freedom of movement, because any deviation from this ideal image has the potential to be considered a failure.

Within the framework of Beauvoir's (1949) theory of femininity, this representation positions Komi as the Other, which is a woman defined through the views and judgments of others. The visual glorification of Komi is also in line with Mulvey's (1975) male gaze theory, in which women's bodies are positioned as objects of aesthetic gaze. This representation is also in line with the *Yamato Nadeshiko* archetype, in which the ideal woman is described as beautiful, calm, and attractive without needing to say much.

Silence as Femininity (FEM-Silence)

In addition to beauty, Komi's femininity is also represented through silence. In the scene where she introduces herself, Komi remains silent and unable to speak in front

of the class (Ch. 2). However, this silence is perceived positively by other characters, as in the line "*She's so silent, yet so cool*" (Ch. 14). These statements show that Komi's silence is often interpreted by other characters as a sign of elegance, calmness, and attractiveness, rather than a barrier to communication. Thus, silence is not understood as a limitation, but as a socially attached feminine attribute.

According to Beauvoir (1949), women are often positioned as *the Other*, where passivity and silence are normalized as part of the feminine identity. This phenomenon reflects traditional feminine stereotypes that associate ideal women with quiet and non-vocal traits. Silence is positioned as a sign of modesty and elegance, rather than a form of limitation or suffering. Thus, Komi's silence functions as a tool for normalizing gender ideology that considers women's voices not always necessary in public spaces.

Femininity as Idealization (FEM-Idealization)

The representation of Komi's femininity is further reinforced through a process of excessive idealization. Komi is not only admired, but also positioned as a sacred and untouchable figure, as seen in the lines "*Komi's position in this class will be Goddess*" (Ch. 17) and "*She is the Madonna of this class*" (Ch. 20). These statements position Komi as a figure who must be treated specially. This idealism does not arise from Komi's active actions, but rather from the projection of other characters' social expectations.

The use of hyperbolic language shows that Komi's femininity is not understood as a human identity, but as a symbol of perfection that must be maintained. She is elevated to a high position, but loses her agency as an individual. In Beauvoir's framework (1949), this kind of idealization actually limits women because it places them in a static role that must always be maintained and preserved.

Femininity as Immanence (FEM-Immanence)

The most problematic form of femininity is seen in conditions of immanence, when Komi has no control over herself due to social pressure. This is seen in the scene where Komi is appointed class president without her consent (Ch. 17) and in the statement made by another character, "*If you don't, I won't be your friend anymore*" (Ch. 12). This situation shows that important decisions about her are determined by others, with the result that Komi is not given the space to express her will or refuse.

According to Beauvoir (1949), immanence refers to the condition in which women are confined to passive roles and are not given the opportunity to act as subjects. Komi's representation reflects this condition, as she is more often the object of social decisions than an active agent. Social pressure and feminine expectations keep Komi in a position of confinement, so that her femininity is represented as something that limits rather than empowers her.

Overall, the findings of this study show that the femininity attached to the character Komi Shouko in the manga *Komi-san Can't Communicate* is represented through stereotypes of the ideal woman that emphasize beauty, silence, idealization, and confinement (immanence). In real life, these findings are relevant to social conditions where women are still often trapped in gender standards that emphasize physical beauty, quietness, and passivity as characteristics of the ideal woman. Manga and anime, as part of popular culture, also have an impact in shaping and reinforcing these perceptions.

If the representation of femininity in this manga shows how Komi is constructed as an ideal object, then it is important to see how she responds to this construction. Therefore, the next section discusses the forms of Komi Shouko's self-expression as an

attempt to negotiate between silence, agency, and the process of transcendence.

The representation of Komi Shouko's struggle to achieve freedom of expression

Based on data analysis, 15 utterances and scenes were found to appear as forms of self-expression in volume 1 of the manga *Komi-san Can't Communicate*. These forms of self-expression were classified into several categories, such as silence due to internalized pressure, silence as agency, writing as a medium for self-expression, and transcendence. Of these four categories, the use of writing and nonverbal gestures became the most dominant forms of expression. This shows that verbal limitations did not completely eliminate Komi's agency, but rather encouraged the emergence of strategies for Komi to express herself.

Silence due to Internalized Pressure (EXP-Silenced)

In the opening scene, Komi's silence arises from internal pressure and social anxiety. Data shows that Komi often wants to speak but is unable to make a sound. In Chapter 3, when Komi tries to speak to Tadano but can only manage to stammer ("*Ta-ta-ta...*"). A similar situation also arises when Komi fails to read in front of the class due to nervousness (Ch. 11). In this case, silence occurs because Komi is unable to speak.

This kind of silence can be understood through Muted Group Theory, which explains that certain groups, especially women, often do not have full access to the dominant language. Komi experiences silencing because social and psychological structures inhibit her voice. Thus, silence due to internalized pressure represents a condition in which Komi is still in the position of a social object that does not have full control over her expression.

Silence as Agency (EXP-Silence)

Unlike the previous category, there is also silence that functions as a form of agency. In some instances, Komi uses gestures and body language as a means of communication. In the scene where Komi makes a new friend, she jumps up and down to express her excitement (Ch. 11), and in the scene where Komi shows a piece of paper, her cell phone, and then points to the blackboard in the classroom to indicate that she wants to ask for a phone number (Ch. 16). This situation shows that silence is not always interpreted as silencing, but can also be interpreted as a form of resistance to the patriarchal system.

According to Cixous' theory of *écriture feminine* (1975), expression does not always have to be present in the form of verbal language. The body, facial expressions, and gestures become alternative mediums for conveying meaning. Thus, silence as agency shows that Komi is not always silenced. In some situations, she actively chooses other ways to communicate, so that silence here is a strategy for self-expression. In patriarchal culture, women's silence is often idealized as a sign of obedience and femininity, which reinforces passive gender roles. Komi's silence, however, challenges this expectation by functioning as a conscious strategy of expression rather than submission, thereby resisting the patriarchal assumption that silence equals powerlessness. This is also in line with Power-Carter's theory of the Silence Trilogy (2020), which explains that silence functions as a power that enables women to renegotiate their identity and power within a system that silences them.

Writing as Media for Self-Expression (EXP-Write)

Another finding is the use of writing as a voice substitute. The data shows that Komi consistently uses writing to communicate her identity, feelings, and thoughts. This can be seen in Chapter 2 when Komi writes her name on the blackboard as a form

of self-introduction, which is the first moment that shows that writing functions as an "alternative voice" for Komi. The use of writing is also seen in Chapter 19, when Komi writes expressions of gratitude and apologies, showing that writing is an important means for Komi to express emotions and maintain social relationships.

According to Power-Carter's Silence Trilogy theory (2020), Silence is explained as a form of individual regain control and agency. Thus, writing acts as the main medium that allows Komi to retain her voice and agency within the limitations of her verbal communication. This shows that even though Komi is not yet fully capable of speaking verbally, she has a voice in another form.

Transcendence (EXP-Transcendence)

The last category shows developments in Komi's self-expression. The data shows a moment when Komi began to take initiative and act as a subject. In the scene where Komi states in writing that she does not want to continue relying on Tadano and wants to do something on her own, "I've been relying on you too much lately, Tadano-kun. I'll do it on my own." (Ch. 16). In addition, Komi's attempt to speak on the phone, albeit still stammering, also signifies a new courage in verbal communication "...Th, the number you are calling is un... p-please try again later..." (Ch. 18).

These moments represent transcendence in Beauvoir's framework (1949), which is a shift from immanence to an active subject position. Komi is no longer completely confined by her passive role and communication limitations, but is beginning to show control over her own actions. Transcendence in this study does not mean that Komi is completely free from obstacles, but shows a gradual process towards independence and agency. This is also in line with Hook's theory that voice functions as a form of consciousness and a means of social transformation in feminism. In this context, Komi uses her voice as a form of courage in expressing herself, even if only in written form.

Overall, the research findings show that Komi Shouko's forms of self-expression are represented through layered patterns, ranging from silenced, silence as agency, writing as self-expression, to transcendence. In real life, this representation reflects the experiences of many women who still face limitations in their space to speak due to gender standards that require them to be quiet and polite. Manga, as part of popular culture, plays a significant role in shaping and reproducing these perceptions, because visual narratives such as *Komi-san Can't Communicate* not only reflect social reality but also have the potential to normalize the idea that women must fight harder to have a voice.

The findings in this study support previous research conducted by Salsabila et al., (2023) in their analysis of the manga *Arte*, which shows that women are often constrained by social constructs and patriarchy and strive to achieve transcendence. The difference lies in the form of the female characters' struggles, where Arte displays active and open resistance, while Komi shows a more subtle struggle through silence and writing as a means of self-expression, which still allows for transcendence to be achieved within the framework of ideal femininity.

CONCLUSION

In Conclusion, manga *Komi-san Can't Communicate* represents femininity through stereotypes of beauty, silence, idealization, and immanence, which place Komi Shouko as an object in patriarchal constructs. However, this manga also shows Komi's struggle to expressing herself through verbal and nonverbal. Through the lens of

Beauvoir's existentialist feminism, Komi's struggle reflects a gradual process from immanence to transcendence as a form of affirming female subjectivity.

Further research is recommended to analyze a wider range of manga or compare Komi's character with other female characters to examine the development of representations of femininity and self-expression. In addition, the use of other feminist perspectives could enrich the study of gender representation in manga. Future research could also involve the reader's perspective to understand how these representations influence society's view of femininity.

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