

“she’s already had everything she needs within  
herself”: Representations of Women’s  
Empowerment in Rupī Kaur’s  
*The Sun and Her Flowers*

Bachelor’s Thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract  Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on osoittaa kielellisiä keinoja, joilla naisten voimaantuminen sanoitetaan intialaistautaisen kanadalaisrunoilijattaren Rupi Kaurin <i>The Sun and Her Flowers</i> –runokokoelmassa (2017). Naisten voimaantumista ilmaisevat kielelliset keinot osoitettiin soveltamalla kriittistä diskurssianalyysiä ja Norman Faircloughn (2001) viitekehystä. Analyysiin valikoituneet viisi runoa edustivat hypoteesia feminismin ja voimaantumisen ilmenemisestä teoksessa esimerkillisesti ja ne olivat pituudeltaan ja sisällöltään sopivia tutkimuksen kohteeksi. Runot ovat 2017 julkaistun best seller –runokokoelman viimeisestä kappaleesta, ”blooming”, ja niiden nimet ovat <i>legacy, human, what is the greatest lesson a woman should learn, medicine ja progress</i> .  Taustakirjallisuudessa paneuduttiin feminismin historiaan, nykyhetkeen ja sen ilmenemiseen kirjallisuudessa, josta pohjautuen Kaurin runoutta tulkittiin. Viitekehystenä kriittisessä diskurssianalyysissä käytettiin Fairclough’n kolmitasoista mallia, joka koostui tekstin kuvailemisesta (description of text), tekstin ja vuorovaikutuksen suhteen tulkitsemisesta (interpretation between text and interaction) ja vuorovaikutuksen sekä sosiaalisen kontekstin suhteen selittämisestä (explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context). Analyysin pääsääntöinen fokus oli tekstin kuvailemisen tasossa, josta voitiin erotella kolme erilaista arvoa; kokemusperäinen, relationaalinen ja ekspressiivinen. Arvoja analysoitiin runojen sanastollisissa ja kieliopillisissa keinoissa, kuten sanavalinnoissa, verbien toimijuudessa, metaforissa, modaliteeteissa, sekä persoonapronomineissa ja niiden ympärille rakennetuissa fraaseissa.  Analyysi osoitti, että naisten voimaantuminen on esillä Kaurin runoissa niin kokemuksellisen, relationaalisen sekä ekspressiivisen arvon myötä. Kielellisiä keinoja, joilla kyseiset arvot ilmenivät runoissa, olivat mm. feminiiniset persoonapronomit ja niiden ympärille rakennetut fraasit, naisten voimaantumista ilmaisevat metaforat, sekä sanavalinnat, jotka ovat erityisesti naislukijalle tunteisiin vetoavia ja samaistuttavia.	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a word that invokes strong emotions and contradictory opinions among people. Some use it as a curse word, some parallel it simply with 'equality', while others propose giving up using the term. The goal behind the feminist movement is to provide equal rights to everyone and fight for sustaining an egalitarian society that benefits all (Meriluoto 2019), even though some people interpret the movement and those who identify as feminists only as hating or devaluing men. The ideology behind feminism in the modern world is very inclusive with its intersectional aspect, even if there is indeed exclusiveness in the term itself.

From the start, feminists felt that their place was in writing about women's lives and contributions to literature, including poetry (Kostić 2005). Feminist writers have had many difficulties in the literary world, which has been and still is, to some extent, saturated with the voices of white men, and where the "male delectations are treated as the definitive barometer of taste" (Khaira-Hanks 2017). As McCormick (2016) put it, female oppression is deeply rooted in the structure of different societies and power structures, and that is something women's writing has questioned through the years, with a commitment to social justice and the exposition of dehumanization.

During the 2010's a new phenomenon called 'Instagram poetry' has emerged. It has enabled modern poetry to go mainstream and become more accessible to people across the world. Rupi Kaur is one the most famous representatives of the genre after becoming an international sensation through Instagram with her short and simple poems. She has been acknowledged as a young and controversial voice of feminism, adding excitement to the field of poetry. She is also the author of two best-seller collections of poetry, *Milk and Honey* (2015) and *The Sun and Her Flowers* (2017).

There is a gap in research on the burgeoning genre of feminist 'Instagram poetry', or published poetry which first appeared on social media platforms. A few papers studying Rupi Kaur's work have been conducted in the recent years from differing points of view, but none of them takes an analytic stance on how feminism or women's empowerment are portrayed in her poems. Feminism in poetry has a long tradition of linguistic research, but the study on feminism in modern day genres of poetry addresses a gap in academia. This thesis attempts to fill in some

missing information in the field through analysing representations of women's empowerment in Kaur's poetry with Fairclough's (2001:128) framework of critical discourse analysis.

The purpose of the present study is to better understand how representations of feminism and women's empowerment are formed in Rupri Kaur's latter poetry collection *The Sun and Her Flowers* (2017). The research questions are the following: How is women's empowerment portrayed in Rupri Kaur's *The Sun and Her Flowers* and by which linguistic elements is this achieved? The questions will be answered with evidence presented in five poems, *legacy*, *human*, *medicine*, *what is the greatest lesson a woman should learn* and *progress*, from the last chapter, "blooming", of Kaur's *The Sun and Her Flowers*.

## 2 BACKGROUND THEORY

### 2.1 Feminism in poetry

#### 2.1.1 Defining feminism

Feminism is a term that has held various definitions throughout recent history. To be clear about what feminism stands for, it is important to acquire knowledge of historical development of the critique feminism refers to, and the actions made in socio-political change in the status of women in various times and cultures. There is a debate whether a fixed or extensive explanation of ‘feminism’ is even possible to assemble, or whether one should talk instead about ‘feminisms’. Nevertheless, what is common for most definitions of the word feminism, is the need for improvement in women’s inferior social position and disadvantaged status relative to that of men.

According to Freedman (2002: 7) today’s definition of feminism should include four points: *equal worth, privilege, social movements* and *intersecting hierarchies*. Her example of a definition, which embraces the variety of ideas that feminism retains, is as follows:

Feminism is a belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth. Because most societies privilege men as a group, social movements are necessary to achieve equality between women and men, with the understanding that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies.

According to Oxford English Dictionary (Feminism, 2012), the word includes a loan from Latin, *femina*, and the suffix -ism, which refers to e.g. an act, belief, system or practise. The word “féminisme” started to be used more widely in the French society in the 1890’s, where it was primarily a synonym for “women’s emancipation”. After gaining recognition in Europe, the word jumped across the Atlantic to United States by the end of the late 1890’s, though it was not commonly used in the United States much before 1910’s (Offen 1988). Nevertheless, it must be noted that feminism as a way of thinking and acting existed long before the word itself was invented and taken to use.

The history of feminism includes a vast amount of actions and movements that have taken place across the world. Western feminism is traditionally divided into three ‘waves’, which characterize different activities feminists have accomplished during them. The first wave, which emerged at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and ended around the second World War, is strongly connected to acquiring basic human rights, such as women’s rights to vote, have education and have access to work (Cova 2012).

Second wave feminism, which prevailed in the 1960’s and 1970’s, was focused on e.g. women’s sexuality including birth control and abortion, which had still been taboos for first wave feminists. Second wave feminism has been criticized for over-emphasizing the experience of white middle-class women (Drucker 2018), and the third wave, beginning in the 1990’s, aimed to change that. The third wave feminism was interested in intersectional issues, and focused on issues related to not only gender, but also to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and identity, religion and class.

The issues that third wave feminism has affected include for instance wage gaps between sexes, bodily autonomy, domestic violence, sexual harassment and female genital mutilation. Adding to the list, modern feminism aims to challenge harmful power structures, traditional gender roles, and stereotyped gender expectations, while simultaneously supporting sexual minorities, trans rights and other issues that make the movement far more inclusive compared to the past.

### **2.1.2 Feminism in writing**

The first English writings that can be seen as *feminist* date back to 16<sup>th</sup> century, though it can be assumed that the general understanding of *what is feminist* has gone through major changes since then. Comprehending demands for change in women’s position in that era requires historical knowledge of the cultural and social contexts. An interesting point that Kristeva (n.d., cited in Kostić 2005) stated, is that feminist writing has nothing to do with the sex of the author, and therefore goes beyond gender differences in the question of feminist literature.

Nevertheless, feminist writing often is based on personal experience, and aims at challenging oppressed position, unequal worth and dispossessed rights of women. For an authentic outcome, women should write themselves and about themselves. As Cixous (1996, cited in Kostić 2005) suggests, “woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into the history –

by her own movement... Write!'. Woman writers have had to fight in the literary world in order to have their voices heard and texts published, but the resilient work has borne fruit and made it easier for the next generations of women to be involved in literature.

Writing has been probably the most important tool for feminism to spread. From the beginning, those who wanted to improve women's position in society felt that their place was in writing about women's lives (Kostić 2005). Writing and reading organize our experience of the world and encourage or discourage change, and those who write and publish, also control other people's perceptions of reality to some extent. Feminism in writing has had decisive impacts in areas such as the publishing industry, academic institutions, and literary criticism, each of which are indications of its pervasiveness (Kostić 2005).

### **2.1.3 Defining poetry**

Poetry is traditionally associated with features of literary texts that include for example rhyme scheme, line breaks, and metaphors. Rhythm and imagery might also be considered as necessities of a poem. However, a text does not particularly require any of those elements to be counted as poetry. According to Ribeiro (2007), what makes a text a poem, is the intention behind it. In short, what Ribeiro (2007) suggests based on Levinson's definition of art, is that for a text to become a poem, the poet has to have either *relational* or *intrinsic* intention to link the text to poetic tradition.

Relational intention means that the author intends the text to belong to the category of poetry, without necessarily being able to define the ways in which their work resembles poems. Intrinsic intention on the other hand means that the author intends to link their work to poetry by writing texts in which the "intrinsic" features, which have been central to the poetic tradition, are evident. By intending their texts to be poems, authors can decide how transparent their attempts are, and the transparency or opacity does not define how "poetic" a poem is or is not (Ribeiro 2007). When comparing poems from different eras and different parts of the world, many similarities may not be found, but according to Ribeiro's (2007) view, anything that intends to fulfil the features of poetry, is poetry.



### **2.1.4 Introducing Kaur's work**

Rupi Kaur was born in Punjab, India, on October 4, 1992, but moved to Canada with her family when she was four years old. She had been keen on drawing from a young age, and her illustrations are still an important part of the aesthetic layout of her works (Kaur n.d.). Kaur became famous during her final year of university in 2015 when she shared a project online called *Period*. It was a final project created for a course of Visual Rhetoric and it included a series of six photos portraying a woman during her period, which were posted on her website and on Instagram. Instagram deleted these photos within 24 hours, and after re-posting them, they were deleted once again with a note which referred the site's terms of use. Kaur wrote a reply to Instagram, shared it on several platforms, and consequently gained a vast amount of attention and started a conversation.

Kaur's poetry deals with topics that are common in poetry, such as love, sex, rejection and loss, but also darker material such as rape, abuse, racism, and oppression for being a woman. She combines the anger at how the world treats young women with the celebrations of femininity in her poetry in such a way, that it appeals to young women, a demographic whose taste is often seen as a byword for 'bad quality' in the misogynist world of literature (Khaira-Hanks 2017). Kaur, as well as many other woman artists, is a victim of snobbery and not being understood by the literary establishment, as her work does not particularly entertain white males, the people who generally speaking hold the positions of power in the publishing industry.

Kaur's poems follow certain stylistics regarding the structure and the outlook. Kaur's poetry does not include capital letters, commas or dots, which is a reference to Gurmukhi script, the written form of Kaur's mother tongue, Punjabi (Kaur n.d.). The poems are not named, although some of them end with a hyphen followed by an italicized explanation, which can be assumed to be a "name" of a poem. The illustrations on the collection, which have been drawn by Kaur herself, are an important part of the aesthetic layout, and they relate to the topics of the page in question.

## **2.2 Language as a tool of reflecting realities**

According to Spender (1980, cited in Hendricks and Oliver 1999), those who control language also control perceptions of reality. Language organizes our experience of the world, but the

ideologies come first, which later are practised by language users. For example, sexism is a set of thoughts, attitudes and behaviours which are reflected in society by the practise of language. In other words, language itself is not responsible for women's oppression, but merely a reflection of that oppression (Kramarae 1981, cited in Hendricks and Oliver 1999).

The English language can be seen as "man-made", and there are various examples that support this view. Sexism is perpetuated by words such as *he* and *man* being used to describe all of humanity, from which *she/woman* is excluded as the "other sex". Even in the word *she*, *he* is included and in *woman*, there is *man*. Changes in language use, for example simply using feminine pronouns more often, would "alter our customs without our being aware of it" (Irigaray 1996: 133, cited in Hedricks and Oliver 1999).

As a contrast to the traditional binary views, *they* has started to be used as an acceptable generic third-person singular pronoun in traditional style guides. The singular *they* is inclusive of all people and it helps readers and writers avoid making assumptions about gender (Lee 2019). This is a welcome change in the academia, and it is important to be encouraged by advocacy groups and publishers such as Merriam-Webster's Dictionary (Lee 2019).

There is a long tradition of discussion about differences in language use between men and women. The implications have been that women's language is subjective, emotional or impressionistic while male language is authoritative and rational (Kostic 2005). The "masculine" style is considered as bold, forceful, and clear etc., whereas the "feminine" style is vague, weak, and tremulous. The tradition of gender roles overall is remarkably narrow-minded, oppressing and outdated from the feminist point of view. In addition, this way of categorizing people as men or women is obviously binary, but there are more than two genders.

Lakoff (1975, cited in Hendrick and Oliver 1999) suggested that discrepancies in language use between men and women may be rooted in deep biological, socio-political, and economic relations, and that the ultimate effect of the discrepancies is that women are systematically denied access to power. Therefore again, to help break the cycle, Lakoff urges women to adopt the language used by people in power (i.e., men). This has gained criticism, for example as Margaret Atwood (cited in Kostic 2005) complains, there is a popular notion about the idea that if women want to improve their position, they must use the "male language", although what they should do, is challenge the traditional sexual differences in language.

### 3 PRESENT STUDY

#### 3.1 The aim and the research questions

The aim of the present study is to analyse Rupri Kaur's poems from her poetry collection *The Sun and Her Flowers* with the framework of critical discourse analysis and feminist research. More specifically, the aim is to define which elements of language use make her poetry empowering for women. In other words, the main objective of the present study is to explore the ways in which Kaur's poetry portrays women's empowerment through language. It is clear to see that such manifestation is portrayed through her poetry, but the present study will attempt to answer how this is done. It seems that feminism in poetry has a long tradition of research, but today's feminist poetesses such as Kaur have gained less attention in the field due to their novelty, which creates a gap in research. Researchers have had more time to analyse the poems from previous eras, and the research gap occurs because Kaur's work is relatively new, although there may be similar features of previous poets and poetesses.

The research questions that the present study aims to answer are the following:

How is feminism and women's empowerment portrayed in Rupri Kaur's *The Sun and Her Flowers*?

By which linguistic elements is this achieved?

#### 3.2 The data

The data of the present study consists of five poems from the last chapter, *blooming*, of Rupri Kaur's poetry collection *The Sun and Her Flowers* (2017). The given five poems were selected because they are some of the best representations of feminism and women's empowerment in Kaur's work, they were suitable and approximately similar in length, and they include enough material to be analysed. The selected poems are called *legacy*, *human*, *medicine*, *what is the greatest lesson a woman should learn* and *progress*.

### 3.3 Methods of analysis

The data from Kaur's *The Sun and Her Flowers* will be analysed with Fairclough's (2001: 128) framework of three stages of critical discourse analysis (CDA), and more precisely, the stage of *description* of a text. According to Fairclough (2001), there are three values of formal features, which are called *experiential*, *relational* and *expressive* values. The values can be found in vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures. The poems will be analysed with shifting focus between what is 'there' in the text, and the discourse type (feminist poetry) which the text is drawing upon (Fairclough 2001). A great amount of emphasis will be on vocabulary and grammar, e.g. 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns and phrases around them, metaphors, agency, and modes.

## 4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 *legacy*

The vocabulary of Rupi Kaur's *legacy* (213), a poem from the last chapter of the collection *The Sun and Her Flowers* (2017), applies to Fairclough's framework (2001, 131) as it includes all of the three; *experiential*, *relational* and *expressive* values of formal features. Experiential value, which carries out representations of the text producer's experience of the social world, can be represented through linguistic features such as rewording, meaning relations and metaphors. Relational value, which has to do with social relationships, can be traced from euphemistic expressions and the formality or informality on words. Finally, expressive value presents social identities of subjects through a text.

Clear evidence of experiential value in the poem *legacy* (Kaur 2017: 213) can be found in its metaphors. L includes two clusters of metaphors. *I stand on the sacrifices of a million women before me* is a metaphor which indicates that the narrator is in a certain place or position (stand) due to the hard work (sacrifices) that previous generations of women have done in the past (women before me). *What can I do to make this mountain taller* (improve the place of "standing") *so the women after me* (next generations) *can see farther* (can do better in life, develop even more), is a metaphor for reflecting what the narrator can do in order to improve and sustain equality and consequently support future generations of women. Both of these metaphors relate to the text producer's experience of the social world and the desire of the narrator to improve standing of women in society.

The auxiliary verb *can*, which occurs twice in *legacy*, refers semantically to probability (Quirk 1976). *What can I do* and *so the women after me can see farther* involve the same modal verb, but represent different degrees of it (Palmer 1990). *What can I do* is a representation of dynamic necessity, which means that external circumstances make the action of improving women's status necessary to fulfil. *So the women after me can see farther* is an example of dynamic possibility, which deals with the "circumstantial possibility", i.e. where the subject is able to fulfil a given action (see farther) if the enabling external factors allow it (mountain tall enough). *Can* is repeated, and it could be assumed that the hope for better standing points and the power of possibility are consciously wanted to be on view.

There are some powerful word choices, e.g. *sacrifices* and *million women*, which better appeal to the reader's emotions, than choices such as *actions* or *hundred people* would. *Sacrifices* can also be seen as a euphemistic expression, since it could be replaced with harsher or more unpleasant words such as violence, suffering or subordination. Those little elements create the emotional, even sentimental tone to narration, which makes it easy for the woman reader to identify with the poem.

Kaur's stylistic decision to exclude capital letters from the poems throughout the collection highlights the first-person singular pronoun "i", since it is usually always capitalized in published works. There is a contradiction between the semantic weight the word carries, and the smallness of that one letter, which can be easily overlooked or lost in a sentence. Kaur explains the choice of "treating letters the same" (Kaur n.d.) with tying the stylistics to her mother tongue Punjabi's written script, Gurmukhi, which does not include uppercase or lowercase letters. As can be assumed, Kaur enjoys the symmetry and straight-forwardness of using solely lowercase letters and feels it as a visual representation of what she wants to see in the world: equality (Kaur n.d.).

#### **4.2 *human***

Reflecting the pressure of looking a certain way and breaking the habits surrounding the phenomenon created by society is in the centre of the poem *human* (Kaur 2017: 224-225). In this five-line poem, several details give evidence that the author intends to take a stand on the problematic nature of beauty ideals dictated by the society. In the print version, H is divided into a spread so that the first two lines are on the left page, and the last three lines and the title followed by those are on the right page. The split is a visual representation of the change in tone between the first two lines and the last three.

Stating that *it is a trillion-dollar industry that would collapse* takes the capitalist view into account when it comes to altering one's looks. Women across the world are convinced daily by e.g. advertising and the media, including social media influencers that the beauty industry always has a new product or treatment that will enhance their looks and consequently improve the quality of their lives. *If we believed we were beautiful enough* indicates that the "consumers" of the industry do not believe they are beautiful enough, and also emphasizes the collectivism of the phenomenon with the pronoun *we*. Additionally, the clause directs the poem to the

woman readers with the slightly gendered adjective choice *beautiful*, rather than e.g. the masculine *handsome* or more gender-neutral *good-looking*.

The first two lines narrate the proposition for change using the modality of a conditional construction, which is a feature of relational and expressive values (Fairclough 2001: 142). On the second page of the poem, the tone changes to more accusing as the narrator switches to *them*. *Their concept of beauty* refers to the society we live in and the mediums through which beauty ideals are conveyed, whereas *is manufactured* suggests that the standards indeed are artificial. The last line, which states *i am not* in response to their manufactured concept of beauty, is the most powerful part of the text in all its bare simplicity.

It can be assumed, that all of the above-mentioned linguistic features reflect Kaur's experiences of the social world, i.e. they represent experiential value (Fairclough 2001). With the evidence provided above, the text producer is not satisfied with society's objective to make people, especially women, believe the way they look is not appealing enough. With that last line of the poem and the title *human*, which follows, the author intends to remind the reader and probably herself too that being beautiful does not require following the unobtainable ideals, but by being your humane self.

### **4.3 medicine**

In the next poem analysed, the author takes a more specific stand on women's emancipation. As the title suggests, Kaur serves an optional remedy for something that can be interpreted as collective lack of self-love. The poem is very tense with only four short lines, which together form a sentence *we need more love not from men but from ourselves and each other*. The phrase *we need* suggests that any reader can identify themselves with someone who wants and has the need for more love and also that the narrator is 'on the same boat' with the reader.

*More love* can be seen as an assumption, that love already exists in the woman readers' lives, but there is space for more. The following two lines *not from men but from ourselves* reveal the problems in many relationships, where validation and acceptance are predicated on other people rather than from within. The last phrase *and each other* adds the communal aspect to empowering one another. Adding to that, *men* can be seen as a reference to patriarchal societies, of

which acceptance women have been dependant on for ages, but according to the narrator, change is probable.

Experiential, relational and expressive values of formal features can all be discovered through both vocabulary and grammar in Kaur's *medicine* (2017: 228). The aspect of experiential value is found in the representations of reality coded in the vocabulary of a text (Fairclough 2001), and in the case of M, the reality seems to require development in the areas of women's self-love and -confidence. As Fairclough discusses, relational value depends on the choice of wordings, and thus helps create social relationships between participants, i.e. the poetess and the readers.

Words and grammatical features are likely to have relational value simultaneously with other values, and that is exactly the case in for instance *medicine*. Kaur (2017) uses vocabulary with experiential values that targets women's empowerment and at the same time bonds with readers who have a similar mindset through the relational value of words and grammar. The vocabulary and grammar of M also include expressive value, as there is evaluation of subjects and their social identities through drawing classification schemes in words (we, not from men, ourselves).

#### **4.4 *what is the greatest lesson a woman should learn***

The fourth poem by Kaur (2017: 233) to be analysed starts with the italicized title, *what is the greatest lesson a woman should learn*, which differentiates it from the other ones in the analysis that have their titles at the end. The title is a reference to the classic "what a woman should be" – styled expression, which have appeared in e.g. magazines, quote canvases, and advertisements through the years. Nevertheless, the poem turns the pressure and expectations targeted at women upside down in the following lines, almost like creating a plot twist.

With the phrase *that since day one*, Kaur reveals to the reader that the content of the lesson learned has always been there, from the beginning. Continuing with the next statement *she's already had everything she needs within herself* appeals to anyone identifying as a *she*, and this way relational value is again evidenced. Having *everything she needs within herself* is most likely intended to refer to improving body image, building self-confidence and being independently content with life without external validation or acceptance from others. In the last



line with the strong utterance *it's the world that convinced her she did not*, the author takes an accusing tone which represents her disappointment with “the world”, i.e. the surrounding society.

Kaur speaks for all of her readers, but for herself too as the poetry deals with her personal experiences of for example the challenges of being a woman with low self-esteem (Spencer 2015). It can be assumed that Kaur has dealt with her issues through poetry, and that the intention behind many of her poems is to speak up and help others to process their insecurities. Empowering phrases such as *greatest lesson, she's already had everything*, and *within herself* intensify the emotive nature and relatability of the poem at the target group, insecure women.

#### 4.5 *progress*

Kaur's fifth poem to be analysed is called *progress* (241). The title, which refers to gradual betterment and a forward or onward movement (Progress, n.d.), is placed at the end of the poem, after a four-line manifestation. The opening line *our work should equip* states that there are more than one person working on something, and the following line *the next generation of women* indicates that the work is done by "us women". The modal auxiliary verb in the first line, *should*, expresses the need and probability of an action of equipping to be taken. The verb *equip* can have a meaning of preparing someone mentally for something or providing certain skills needed for a particular situation (Equip, n.d.), but also supplying one with the necessary tools for a particular purpose. It can be assumed that Kaur aims to address mostly the figurative meanings of the verb.

The third line, *to outdo us in every field*, is a very powerful statement. To *outdo* is to be superior to someone, in the poem to the next generation of women, and when it is followed by *in every field*, one can interpret that the expectations are high for the next generation. Outdoing the present generation in every field is challenging though obtainable, considering that the next generation will be more equipped than the one of today. In the last line, *this is the legacy we'll leave behind*, the narrator declares that the present generation will be able to provide the next generation to outdo us and therefore keep the *progress* ongoing. *Progress* as a title and a full poem refers to the resilient work of women empowering each other, improving equality, healing generational trauma, and passing on better starting points for the next generation of women.

The collectivist aspect of empowerment is again evident in the pronoun choices *our*, *us* and *we*. In Fairclough's (2001:143) framework, the so-called 'inclusive' *we* and the 'exclusive' *we* are mentioned, and the difference between those is the writer's relation to the readers. In Kaur's poetry the *we* is 'inclusive' since it addresses the writer as well as the readers. It is like an invitation for the readers to become allies with the writer, regardless of the place or time where the readers familiarize themselves with the text. This again stresses the unity and connection Kaur and her readership have. As well as empowering the generation of today, *progress* reminds the readers of the responsibility of women to speak up, educate each other, and demand change in order to provide the following generations equal positions relative to those of men.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Feminist approach to empower women readers is evident throughout the analysed poems of Rupi Kaur's *The Sun and Her Flowers* (2017). It is portrayed in every poem of the analysis and presented regarding various areas of women's lives, such as aiming for equality, boosting self-confidence, learning to love oneself, and finding acceptance from within even in oppressed circumstances. Kaur (2017) communicates her views of the social world through poetry with simple, short and powerful utterances, which allow the woman reader to identify with her texts and find comfort and encouragement in various situations. All of these poems deal with the internal understanding women have of their own capabilities, which have been undervalued throughout centuries in patriarchal societies

The linguistic elements that help portray the representations of women's empowerment are diverse. According to Fairclough (2001), pronouns such as *she* and *her*, which are repeated in the five poems analysed, allow the reader to presuppose that the poems are directed to those who identify as women. The frequent use of different forms of first-person plural, where the 'we' is inclusive (Fairclough 2001: 143), makes a connection between the writer and the readership and creates a sense of relatability and trust among the two. Besides pronouns themselves, word choices and phrases around them that apply to the woman reader are an important part of the representations of empowerment. Metaphors, modes, and subjects of different social identities also contribute to the representations of women's empowerment.

Experiential, relative and expressive values were all present in the poems analysed. Kaur writes poetry from personal experiences of the social world, forms relationships with other like her (women, oppressed etc.) and simultaneously expresses her social identities through the text. Kaur's poetry is a great example of feminist writing where issues are presented in an unapologetic and straightforward style in order to question oppression and harmful power structures with a commitment to social justice and overall equality.

The strengths of the present study are its connections to the previous study of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2001), insights of the fairly new genre of Instagram poetry, and the consistency of the findings. Limitations of the present study can be the relatively narrow set of data and the limited length of background theory and analysis. Future research could include for example image analysis on the illustrations of the poetry collection, since they are tightly connected to the poems. There are also topics other than feminism or women's empowerment in Kaur's poetry that could be analysed in terms of critical discourse analysis, such as how are sexual violence, racism, or immigration portrayed in the poems. Another interesting aspect of discourse to analyse would be the interaction between Kaur and Instagram users who comment on posts of her poetry.

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## 7 APPENDIX

Analysed poems from *The Sun and Her Flowers* (Kaur 2017):

i stand  
 on the sacrifices  
 of a million women before me  
 thinking  
*what can I do*  
*to make this mountain taller*  
*so the women after me*  
*can see farther*

- *legacy*

-

it is a trillion-dollar industry that would collapse  
 if we believed we were beautiful enough already  
 (page break)  
 their concept of beauty  
 is manufactured  
 i am not

- *human*

-

we need more love  
 not from men  
 but from ourselves  
 and each other

- *medicine*

*what is the greatest lesson a woman should learn*

that since day one  
she's already had everything she needs within herself  
it's the world that convinced her she did not

-

our work should equip  
the next generation of women  
to outdo us in every field  
this is the legacy we'll leave behind

- *progress*

Abbreviations for the analysed poems:

H: *human*

L : *legacy*

M: *medicine*

P: *progress*

W: *what is the greatest lesson a woman should learn*