

In the novel *Dork Diaries: Tales from a Not-So-Fabulous Life* by Rachel Renee Russell, the story follows middle-schooler Nikki and her trials and tribulations through her experiences in middle school as if she is writing in a diary. She goes through drama with the popular girl, issues with making friends, and her first crush on a boy. Throughout reading the novel, there is evidence of typical case prototype of Nikki along with many of the other characters in the story, as well as issues with Nikki's agency.

Right from the beginning of reading this novel, it is very evident to the readers that Nikki is an extremely typical case character. She starts off the novel in her first diary entry with stating "I considered it a necessity of life, second only to maybe oxygen" (p. 1) in referring to her begging her mom for a new cell phone. In this moment, the writer is trying to make Nikki seem like a "relatable" character to the readers by her begging her mom for the newest version of a cell phone so that she can make friends at her new school, which she ultimately does not get, but by doing so, she is generalizing the readers that their ultimate goal is to be popular and be included, which isn't the case with every single reader. Therefore, Nikki has become a typical case character right off the bat; all that Nikki cares about is being a popular girl and fitting in to the crowd at her new school, so she has become a stereotype of a 14-year old girl in middle school. Also, because the novel is set up to be Nikki's diary and written as if she is writing the story herself, the author has included quotes such as "Talk about a CRUDDY lab partner ☹!" (p. 263) to seem like she understands how pre-teen girls communicate, with all capital letters and lots of punctuation marks. This falls into the typical-case prototype because it is generalizing that this is the way that all 14-year old girls communicate: with lots of all-capital words, emoticons, and lots of punctuation.

Nikki is not the only character in the book that falls into the typical case prototype, however. Makenzie, the popular girl that is constantly picking on Nikki also falls into this category. Throughout the novel, Makenzie is constantly making remarks such as "Don't you need a LICENSE to be that UGLY?" (p. 33) towards not only Nikki, but other people in the school that aren't as popular as she is. Makenzie is being portrayed as a stereotypical popular girl throughout this book; popular girls are stereotyped to be these overly-beautiful individuals with no flaws that judge and make fun of those who aren't as popular as them, coming off as bratty or snobby. Makenzie is the perfect portrayal of this stereotype, because she is constantly bullying Nikki, whether it be about her art or her style, and is always trying to find ways to embarrass her in front of everyone at school.

The typical-case prototype of both of these characters, along with the other characters in the novel provide a didactic tone throughout the entirety of the story; right off the bat, Nikki lacks complex, dual emotions and is only portrayed as having one emotion at a time. Nikki is not able to have the capacity to feel the complex emotions due to being stereotyped to her age, where she is defined by still being too young to experience more complex feelings and is instead confined to "childish" emotions such as anger over a more complex emotion as defiance or bravery towards fighting back against Makenzie's taunts. Nikki has numerous occasions

throughout the story where she has the opportunity to stand up for herself and possess these complex, dual emotions where she is nervous but is also being brave, but instead keeps all of her thoughts in her head about the situation and just takes the taunts by Makenzie, and is therefore confined to her “childish” emotions. And Makenzie is also confined to these “childish” emotions; the readers never get a backstory or any reasoning as to why Makenzie acts the way that she does towards the others in her class, which could have provided her with more complex emotions. Maybe Makenzie’s parents weren’t giving her enough attention at home so she has to compensate her sadness and frustrations towards her parents by gaining the attention of her fellow classmates, but because of the typical-case writing of this novel, Makenzie’s character was written with the intention of just being a “stereotypical and relatable” bully that is typical case for a middle school. She was not written with the ability to have these complex emotions and backstory that could have helped the novel not be as didactic and lacking with the storyline.

Agency is also a very difficult topic throughout the novel, because the author tried to make it seem that Nikki has more agency than she is actually given. Because the novel is written in a format that makes it seem that Nikki herself is writing the entirety of the story in a diary, the reader would assume that she has a good amount of agency because she is writing her story how she wants it to be told. However, this is quickly proven to be wrong; Nikki mentions that “My mom had given me two things; a DIARY and irrefutable evidence she IS, in fact, CLINICALLY BRAIN DEAD!!” (p. 10), meaning that Nikki did not even start off her story with her own agency. Her mom provided her with the diary for her birthday, and Nikki didn’t have any interest in writing in the diary when she was first given in, so she not only didn’t have any agency with deciding to choose to write her own story, but also did not wish to claim any agency with the diary to start off. Granted, as the story progresses, she becomes more and more fond of writing her story in her diary, but it is important to remember that Nikki was given the agency of the diary from an adult, specifically her mother, and therefore has dependent agency because as soon as the diary is full, her agency is gone because she no longer has a medium to write her story in.

Nikki’s agency is also suppressed throughout the rest of the novel as well due to either adults or Nikki’s other peers. One of Nikki’s biggest challenges throughout the novel is that she has a difficult time communicating and making friends with her peers, and she believes this to be because she doesn’t have a cell phone. However, as evident from the first few pages of Nikki’s diary, her mom gives her the diary instead of a “shiny new cell!” (p. 12), and even though the diary does give Nikki some dependent agency, her mom is withholding agency from Nikki that could have developed into independent agency, with Nikki having the ability to communicate with whoever she wants at any time that she wants, within limitations of her parent’s cell phone plan, rather than keeping all of her thoughts to her diary, which doesn’t communicate to anyone but herself. Nikki was also beginning to gain some agency later on in the story with the creation of her own expression through her entry for the art contest at her school, when her agency is once again taken away by her parents when her dad’s van “slowly crushed glass, antique wood frame, my hopes, and my dreams...” (p. 286). As Nikki states herself, her agency gets crushed with the other parts of her painting because she no longer has her own work that she completed without the help of anyone else, including adults, but was quickly destroyed by an adult in power. And although it was not intentional on her dad’s part, it

still represents how easily Nikki's agency is controlled by the adults in her life and that she does not possess much agency of her own.

Overall, due to the typical-case stereotype portrayal of the characters as well as the lack of independent agency that Nikki possesses, the novel had a didactic tone throughout the entirety of the story that took away from what could have been an interesting look into Nikki's mind. If instead the focus of the story wasn't on trying to portray "relatable" characters and only stick to stereotypes, the readers could have gotten an interesting view of Nikki with complex emotions as she was trying to find her way around her new school, and could have provides the readers with backstory of the other characters and show their reasons that they act the way that they do. The lack of agency for Nikki as well as these dull, simple characters caused the story to be monotone and didactic that only focused on the outer experiences of the characters and not their inner feelings.