

Humanizing Women in Children Fiction: A Deconstructionist Reading of Girard's Girl Mans Up



Sana Sajjad

MPhil English, Department of English, Government, College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: sanasajjad605@gmail.com

Asma Aftab

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government, College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

Nafces Parvez

PhD Scholar, Department of English, Government, College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

Abstract: *The present study explores how children fiction nuances the socialization of girls and boys in phallogocentric writings and societies. The teen-protagonists in children fiction highlight the prescribed socialization vis-a-vis the gender binary and contest against the overemphasized concept of girlhood and boyhood. The social prescription of how a girl and boy would behave essentializes their role in traditional patriarchal societies. They grow up as cultural beings and not as individuals. Simone de Beauvoir, a French Feminist Existentialist, jargonizes this socialization as 'the eternal feminine' in order to highlight the nature of gender binary in traditional patriarchal societies. Following this notion of de Beauvoir, this study deconstructs the socialization of children vis-à-vis their relationship with the discursive and non-discursive practices of a given culture. In this regard, this study delimited M-E Girard's Girl Mans Up to deconstruct the concept of 'the eternal feminine' by foregrounding the challenges of a teenage girl that she faces in order to subvert the prescribed gender binary of girlhood and boyhood vis-a-vis a prescribed social hierarchy.*

Key Words: Children Fiction, Deconstruction, Episteme(s), Essentialization, The Eternal Feminine, Feminism

Introduction

Since its emergence as a movement, feminism has been evaluating women's real existence: their socio-political rights, their economic issues, their basic education and their freedom of thought. The connotation of a woman's identity in term of body, became "the symbolic [c]enter of [many feminist's] concerns and debates" in all three waves of feminism (Cooke, 2001, p. viii) and argued against the conventional socio-political perceptions of gender in their vision to balance the society. These movements focused on the sufferings of women and correspondingly asserted the equality of women in every aspect of life: they advocated the equal rights of women in the property and also demanded the right of the suffrage (Libertarian feminism). They also resisted against the othering of women in the man-made class structure hence fought for the rights of working-class women including female laborers (Marxist feminism). They questioned the phallogocentric writings in constructing gender disparity in society and also urged women to write down their own stories (Ecriture feminism). The wakeup-call in Europe in the 20th

century also made the women of marginal communities resist the colonial-cum-patriarchal order vis-à-vis race, class, body, hegemony, and many related concerns (Black feminism).

Notwithstanding the material gains of feminist movement, the feminists all around the world still see and suffer oppression and injustice across globe which in the words of Mukherjee imply as if they did not "exist, then [they]'re invisible, then [they]'re funny, then [they]'re disgusting" (Mukherjee, 1988, p. 26) but were never acknowledged. This historical subjugation of women is based on "essentialization" where they are treated as 'other' regardless of their social and intellectual achievements (Said, 1978, p. xvi). The patriarchal social order sets women as emotional and sensitive to others, interested in children, friendly, attentive to appearance, and a good listener (Murnen et al., 2016). This study argues that this essentialization grows through childhood socialization, constituting social ontology as Simone de Beauvoir says rather emphatically: "One is not born,

but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 14) and similarly one is not born, but rather becomes, a man.

This study focuses on the ways of women’s socialization in traditional patriarchal societies to argue that woman in men’s society as well as in their writings is a falsifying reality based upon their utility. With the delimitation of the children’s fiction of M-E Girard’s *Girl Mans Up* this study: i) highlights the stereotyping of eternal femininity; ii) and retrieves how women were/are considered to be intellectually inferior, physically weak, emotional, intuitive, and irrational; iii) hence (re)configures the concept of ‘the eternal feminine’. This study argues that the process of socialization comprises of accepted and expected behavior patterns and social constructs which the children learn and follow and which eventually constitute the stereotyping of femininity and masculinity in a given cultural order.

Literature Review

With the study of the historic perspective of children’s literature, Roberta Seelinger Trites (1997), an English professor and critic of children’s literature, in *Walking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children’s Novels*, points out how much children’s books are important to help socialize children. She argues that these books are often used as a tool to maintain discrimination in each social order as they have the power to create choices. According to her the “parents and educators recognize books as a way to indoctrinate their children into socially- sanctioned behaviors, and authors have met that recognition for centuries” (Trites, 1997, p. 4). Manjari Singh in “Gender Issues in Children’s Literature,” confirms that “[t]his reinforcement predisposes children not to question existing social relationships. At the same time, however, books containing images that conflict with gender stereotypes provide children the opportunity to reexamine their gender beliefs and assumptions” (Singh, 2009, p. 2). John Stephens, however, in *Language and Ideology in Children’s Fiction* (1992) argues that “[c]hildhood is ... the time for basic education about the nature of the world, how to live in it, how to relate other people, what to believe and how to think – in general, the intention is to render the world intelligible” (p. 8). According to him, the roles as women and men or girls and boys are strictly determined by the given cultural attitudes specific to genders and the contemporary children’s literature should represent the empowerment of women by

giving agency to the female protagonists or other minor characters. Trites in this regard insists on the inclusion of the strong female protagonists to equalize the eternal binary of masculine and feminine in children’s literature. She argues the effects of women empowerment through literature by reversing her role from subservient, submissive and limited being to an active agent and participant. She claims that “the feminist protagonist need not squelch her individuality to fit into society, her agency, her individuality, her choice, and her nonconformity are affirmed and even celebrated” (Trites, 1997, p. 6). Leslee Farish Kuykendal and Brain W. Sturm however raise questions on such efforts of making women empowered. In their article, “We said Feminist Fairy Tales...” they slate the feminists for giving more agency to female characters or protagonists especially in fairy tales to make the contemporary feminine empowered. They argue that the contemporary women’s writings for the children depend on the plain role reversal of the binary gendered system to exhibit the empowerment of girls. They exemplify *The Paper Bag Princess*, the story in which a female brave girl Elizabeth rescues Prince Ronald from a dragon. This story gives independence and agency to Princess Elizabeth, the protagonist, by simply reversing the prescribed eternal-role of prince and princess. On a related note, Kuykendal and Brain (2007) argue that the women writers, as well as their female protagonists, do not need to adopt the stereotypical attributes of boys to gain empowerment and agency, as it is often observed when fairy tales are often rewritten to give superiority to a feminist audience (p. 40).

Different researches in the field have highlighted how children grow to be competent to relate the stories with their own thoughts and experiences hence increase their intellectual ability. These stories with their teaching of socialization become a means for the cognitive growth and emotional maturity of the children who read them. It is, therefore, meaningful to know that the study of children’s literature is effectively relevant to other facets of children’s growth: how they become emotionally and socially competent?

Theoretical Framework

This is a qualitative-cum-descriptive and analytical research conducted under the theoretical frame of ‘the eternal feminine’. Keeping in view the main

argument, the study appropriates the theoretical model of Simone de Beauvoir who insists that women in men's discourse are a falsifying reality based upon their utility. de Beauvoir is among those early feminists who questioned gender essentialism and focused that one grows through socialization: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 14). In her book *The Second Sex* (1949) de Beauvoir dives into the historical wreck (Rich, 1973) of women's identity caused by patriarchy to expose the male psyche and his desire regarding the idea of 'the eternal feminine' or patriarchal socialization of women and its devastating impact on women as a being. With this exploration, she infers that by understanding this concept of the 'the eternal feminine', the women may understand how and why they were/are othered? The study focuses on her arguments to highlight the feminine stereotyping and in this way emphasizes the need to regard women as a being.

de Beauvoir argues that when she was writing *The Second Sex* (1949) as an inquiry into 'the eternal feminine', the first description that came to her mind was "I am a woman" (p. 25): it determines her to find 'what a woman is' and 'why a woman is' what she is and why being a 'woman is problematic' especially in the given social order? Beauvoir asserts: "In our opinion, there is no public good other than one that assures the citizens' private good; we judge institutions from the point of view of the concrete opportunities they give to individuals" (p. 37). But women are convinced to sacrifice for the public interests which are propagated as the only source of their happiness. Hence, Beauvoir argues that women must be cautious while differentiating the private interests and happiness which concretize nothing but the male supremacy. To find this eternal happiness the women lost their autonomous identity embedded in their personal freedom and found themselves as 'other', an object that is forcefully dragged to every 'othered'(marginalized) position of a given social order. Hence, they are forcefully dragged from their 'transcendence' to push the position of 'immanence' – a divine position.

For this epistemological shift, for Beauvoir, the woman is being involved in the concept of 'womanhood' and 'femininity'. Beauvoir names this patriarchal socialization of women that reduces women's ability to achieve transcendence as 'the eternal feminine': a tactic of romanticizing woman to relate her femininity with the immanence in order to

make her an object (p. 13). With this sensation of femininity, she is made to accept passivity by involving herself in maternal caring and submission to males; hence demanded to stay as divine and beautiful. Such is the strong control of this sexist indoctrination that if women did or do not accept this notion of socialization, they are not considered as 'real women'. Hence, Beauvoir claims that the concept of 'the eternal feminine' is a myth fashioned by patriarchy to marginalize women: it made women think of their so-called virginity (wife), holiness (mother), and compassion (sister) (Beauvoir, 1949). Therefore, this idea of 'the eternal feminine' is nothing but a 'myth', nevertheless, despite being so it has constructed a male-dominant society.

Deconstructing 'the Eternal Feminine' in *Girl Mans Up*

Phallogocentric writings support the binaries of man/woman, good/bad, allowed/forbidden to empower 'men's body' that has traditionally been considered as the human norm and becomes the standard against which the difference of 'women's body' is measured (Braidotti, 1991, p. 76). Regarding the difference between man/woman binary, they introduce women like an angel or a monster to promote their difference from human. Hence, in a patriarchal social order, "there is no place for [woman] because she's not a he" (Cixous, 1975, p. 5, emphasis added). Derrida (1985) proposes that in order to reverse the hierarchy of absence/presence, we need to challenge this existing 'transcendental signified' – some absolute standard or coherent unity from which all knowledge proceeds and develops in all phallogocentric discursive and non-discursive practices. He argues that the self-identity and human knowledge spring from difference, not from sameness; from absence, not from presence (Derrida, 1985). In this regard, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) insists that women must rely on their own terms of analysis to liberate themselves from the oppressive patriarchal concept of 'the eternal feminine' that makes them alienated from themselves. She argues that this phallogocentric concept of 'the eternal feminine' constructs not only women but also men (Beauvoir, 1949) and this construction of man/woman binary cannot be accepted because it is too much far from what women are (Cixous, 1975). It "is a destiny imposed on [them] by...society" (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 294).

Stereotyping of Physical Appearance

Stereotype are defined as “learned, widely-shared, socially-validated general beliefs about categories of individuals” [that are] “typically inaccurate. Stereotypes oversimplify and exaggerate attributions made to groups creating distinctions between categories which are greater than actually-observed differences” (Turner-Bowker, 1996, p. 461; Jachowicz, 2010, p. 16). In patriarchal social order, women are expected to be thin and graceful, while men are expected to be tall and muscular. Men and women are also expected to dress and groom in the ways that are stereotypical to their gender – men wearing pants and short hairstyles, women wearing dresses and make-up.

The present article seeks to explore these stereotypical expectations of patriarchal social order in the case of Penelope, a growing teen girl, in Girard’s *Girl Mans Up* (2016). “Ever since [she] started swiping clothes from [her] brother Johnny’s closet, people have been reacting differently to [her]” (Girard, 2016, p. 3). They gaze at her differently as they struggle to understand who she really is? Hence, for her different style, she is the subject of people’s discussion. When she enters the Mall, people stare at her and give her a weird look to understand what she is all about? She knows that the reason is the clothes that she took from her brother’s closet. On the other hand, her male company is also another reason that makes people think of her different. The people are often confused because of her girly physique and boyish getup and company and consider her a tomboy. But, now Penelope has become habitual of their remarks and does not feel shy or awkward to wear Jeans and T-shirts on different occasions with her friends. To be 12 years old is another fact that she cannot understand as her boyish style makes people confused when they first meet her. But it gradually becomes troublesome, especially for her family. In a restaurant, a girl Avery gives her a weird response by asking Penelope, are you “a gay girl?” [or] “Do your parents know?” (Girard, 2016, p. 31). Penelope discusses these remarks with her brother Johnny who always supports her to be brave. He suggests her not pay attention to the comments even of their mother and father: “If it gets to be more than you can ignore, then you tell me, and we deal with it” (Girard, 2016, p. 33). This aspect of the story highlights the feminist outlook of her brother, who does not believe in these patriarchal stereotypes that make women submissive and slavish

to men and their whims. Such a patriarchal mindset is not content with women’s oppression only. It even urges women to forgo the notions of self-reliance and self-independence. On the other hand, the feminists have argued that it is imperative for women to resist this patriarchal hegemony by no “longer to sit with [their] hands folded” (Stewart, 1879, p. 53).

Penelope gradually realizes the gender trouble as she faces many restrictions in her life just because of being a girl. The people of her surrounding expect her to be a girl according to ‘the eternal feminine’ and make her present herself accordingly. In these patriarchal expectations, she does not have any right to take the decisions of her life. Hence, she unconsciously hates these expectations concerning ‘the eternal feminine’. For instance, she hates her “thick, wavy black hair that goes all the way past the middle of [her] back” (Girard, 2016, p. 17). At Christmas or when families come, she “can’t wear a hat because it’ll offend the guests” (Girard, 2016, p. 17). Her mother wants her to keep her hair loose in Christmas or in front of the guests and does not allow her to wear a hat as it annoys others. So, she has to play the role of a decent girl in the presence of other people. She hates such impositions that forbid girls to do the things of their choice and ultimately cuts her thick black hair. But when she does that, her mother rebukes her for this foolish act and becomes panic. She talks to Penelope in an annoying way: “What you do? What you do, stupid girl?” she says. “Why you do that? You no like me. You no like me. You break my heart. So many times, you break heart. No respeto” (Girard, 2016, p. 18). Her mother feels severely hurt as she thinks of the people who do not accept this act of her daughter and may object to her ways of training and educating her daughter. She relates this act with disrespect as the girls in the patriarchal social order are supposed to stay limited within the frame of ‘the eternal feminine’. Penelope, on the other side, thinks that it is her choice to live according to her own perception. She rejects the notion that her hair is the property of the social norms. She is fed up with these expectations that girls do not have any right to decide even the trivial things of their life. She also becomes fed up with the expectations and supposition of people around her and deliberately defies them.

Stereotyping of Personality Traits

The ideas of independence, hierarchy, competition and domination in the patriarchal society are related to

man whereas the ideas of interdependence, cooperation, relationships, community, sharing, joy, trust and peace are often attributed with a woman ([Wollstonecraft, 1797](#)). Hence, Women are often expected to be accommodating and emotional, while men are usually expected to be self-confident and aggressive. In the backdrop of such strict personality construction of male and female in patriarchal social order, this article unfolds the selfish nature of patriarchal masculinity in the context of Penelope's friendship with Colby. Colby is their friend because Garrett fights for him when needed; Tristan does his homework; Penelope helps him to accompany the attractive girls. For instance, at the mall, Colby asked Penelope to show the 'magic' of her boyish appearance in jeans and T-shirts. Her manly look makes the salesgirls feel amused and they eventually became Colby's friends. Unlike Colby whose friendship is based on selfishness, Penelope's friendship is based on values. She helps Olivia when she was pregnant and in trouble. But the perception about the rigid personality traits of patriarchy regarding men and women make people accept them as they are.

Also, the nature of the male characters in the novel explains what a patriarchal social order expects from a male? Males are expected to be utilitarian but females are not. Therefore, society welcomes Colby's utilitarian approach of friendship. Colby likes only those friends who help him in need. For instance, he likes Garrett because he fights for him, Tristan often does his schoolwork and Penelope assists him when he wants to talk to the girls. "Colby always says if we all want to be tight and have loyalty, we each have to be useful" ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 4). If anyone of his friend does not fulfill his expectation s/he would be considered disloyal. Colby gets angry when Penelope asks him about Olivia, his ex-girlfriend (to whom he did wrong). However, on this inquiry, he does not give any explanation, rather warns her to stay away from Olivia and must not ask questions and trust him if she is loyal to him: "I shouldn't even have to give you a reason," ... "You should just trust me. That's loyalty" ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 8).

The presentation of Penelope's family explicates the stereotypical socialization wherein the male and female perform according to their given gender roles. It also produces a gap of thinking between the first generation and the second generation of both genders. For instance, Penelope is different from her mother. She goes against the prevailing assumptions of women

whereas her mother observes and absorbs them with no difficulty. Wearing a flowered summer dress with flip-flops on her feet, Penelope's mother looks like a peasant lady from some Island. "People usually assume she's [her] grandma ... It's like there are a hundred years between [them]" ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 9). As a matter of fact, the conspicuous difference between Penelope and her mother describes the eternally poor condition of women demonstrating the old style of living of her mother and other women of her age. Contrary to it, her mother often criticizes her boyish clothing, and especially forbids her to wear her brother's clothes as it would not do her any "good" ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 9). Her mother often makes her scared from becoming "a punk druggie...a teenage douche" – a kind of spoiled teenager possessing bad qualities and habits such as smok[ing] cigarettes, do[ing] drugs, wear[ing] ripped-up pants too low, disrespect[ing] their parents, ly[ing] and steal[ing]" ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 9).

These stereotyping vividly illustrate the notion of 'the eternal feminine' that is based on the superiority of men by ignoring women and their desires and choices in life, making them feel "inferior or other" in their own eyes and perception (Ebert, 2017, p. 889).

Stereotyping of Domestic Behaviors

Patriarchy expects that women will take care of children, cook and clean the home, while men will take care of finances, work on the car, and do the home repairs. It is difficult to go against these norms because many women have been taught from their childhood a primitive concept of womanhood or maternity that builds up their consciousness and make them cooperative and flexible ([Dunber, 1980](#), p. 50). This internalization makes it difficult for them to talk about equality as they cannot speak against patriarchy or can speak in favor of matriarchy. The patriarchal society, thus, distorts women's identity to make them feel inferior in a male-dominated society (Ebert, 2017, p. 89). The text of the novel portrays the occasion of Penelope's father's birthday while "[t]he women are in and out of the kitchen...serving their husbands like the men won't eat unless food is brought to them ... aunt Joana is the worst, not even sitting down to eat until she's sure my uncle Adão has everything he needs ... Maybe [she] likes it, being a servant" ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 44). Penelope is not very sure about the impact of this act but she does not like the idea of being someone's servant.

This sort of women's engagement in different tasks of serving and setting food on the table explicates the responsibilities of a good woman in a male dominated community. The example of Penelope's aunt sufficiently describes how subservient she is to her husband as she never eats something until she fulfils his requirement. It also highlights the subtle ways women have been othered in patriarchy. In view of Beauvoir, when man asserts himself as a 'free being' the idea of 'otherness' arises. ([Beauvoir, 1949](#)).

In a given social order, the children are even supposed to have toys, not of their choice. The girl's schema for the correct girls' and boys' toy has been developed with the result that the girls play with dolls and boys play with trucks. "The results of these decisions are that the girl will approach the doll, explore it, ask questions about it, and play with it to obtain further information about it" ([Martin & Haverson, 1981](#), 1120). Based on the similar premise, the opposite of this is expected from a boy who is made to play with a toy car, creating a kind of mental schema related to toy cars as they are meant to be "for boys". Therefore, "[t]he results [of this outlook on the part of girl] will be avoidance of the truck with a simultaneous restraint on her part to get any "further information about the truck...as important" for boys, not for her at all ([Martin & Haverson, Jr., 1981](#), p. 1120). Being a girl-child Penelope is supposed to play with girlish stuff and if she does have some boyish toys or things, she will certainly be objected by the people around it.

On a similar note, despite seeing a change in the notion of what is "appropriate" for a girl and for a boy with regards to their respective gender (for example, boys can wear pink, girls can have tools), we do still see many gender stereotypes prevalent in boys and girls clothing, toys, advertisement, and so on. So, if Penelope's activities and interests are similar to boys as she likes to play with ninja turtles instead of dolls, the social order does not let her realize her interest rather makes her change it to follow the norms. For this reason, her mother considers her not a kid but a "big girl" ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 126) and throws her toys. She asks her to "help her scrub the grime off the grill, off the inner walls of the oven ... pull out the stove burners and soak them, replacing the little foil plates that catch all the spills ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 147). On the day of her father's birthday, the guests mostly ask her about "how school is" ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 44) and how she helps her "parents around the house" ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 44). It is a common factor that the patriarchal

social order considers it girls' responsibility to show interest in household chores i.e. cooking, cleaning, etc. It sets an eternal standard for the girls: she is certified as a good girl if she serves her family and relatives according to the traditional norms. Being a female, she has no right to make/take a decision. She is believed to obey wrong or right without any argument and to do everything submissively. Penelope's conversation with Blake also describes that she cannot do anything without her parents' consent: "You don't tell them anything. They decide. It's their house" ... "It's how a lot of parents are" ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 70). Being a daughter, she has not been given any right of expressing her own opinions to her parents even though they (parents) are wrong.

Stereotyping of Occupations

The common assumptions in a patriarchal society are that women are good teachers and nurses whereas men are potentially good pilots, doctors, and engineers. Hence, patriarchy has already defined the role of women "in the house" as a domestic being responsible for all the chores of the house ([Wollstonecraft, 1797](#), p. 56) and "outside the house" as a labor responsible for her full duty in low wages (Shwaller, 1979, p. 78). These extreme stereotypes which reduce women to "angel" and "monster" significantly conflict with a woman's sense of herself ([Gilbert & Gubar, 1979](#)). Therefore, Penelope wants to be a boy because only boys are allowed to do things out of the way, girls are not. Penelope's expectation from her life, her dressing, her interest in landscaping or plumbing, makes her family worried as her mother expects her to be a nurse and find a good boy to be her husband.

The novel opens with Penelope's description of her playing and winning a fight-video-game with her three male friends every time. Garrett, one of her friends, claims, as usual, that being a girl she cannot win this game except cheating. The other male friends, Colby and Tristan, also nod to Garrett in order to save themselves from humiliation and defeat from a girl. They know her skills of playing the game but are not willing to face and accept the reality of losing a game from a girl. Tristan argues that Penelope is a player because she often plays this video game with her brother. Also, on her request to her father for the driving test, she is again disappointed as he assures her to get the license when she would be twenty-eight. She recognizes it stupid: "Johnny can drive because he's a guy; I can't drive because I'm a girl" ([Girard, 2016](#), p.

6). Even Johnny, her brother, is not surprised over the issue as it is the norm of their social order and tells her that she is lucky enough to be allowed to go outside and stay out after the sun sets ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 6). The narrative highlights Portuguese people's social order where a girl is not allowed to do such things which are meant for boys. Such stereotypical socialization creates a difference between girls and boys.

When Penelope asks her mother for a job that Johnny tells her, she “fires a bunch of questions at Johnny” and strictly refuses ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 10). She states if Penelope wants work then she will give her the job to clean the house because to work outside is not suitable for girls. The role of woman “in the house” is a domestic being responsible for the chores of the house ([Wollstonecraft, 1797](#)). Such stereotyping makes women stay in the four walls of the house and manage the entire burden of the household as something very common in patriarchy. Being a male Johnny is allowed to bring girls at home since he was fifteen but she cannot have permission to date, someone, even at home. Penelope resists against such strictness and thinks “What if I want to dress sharp, go to college to study landscaping or plumbing, and meet a nice girl to be my wife? Shouldn't that technically be the same thing, only better because it's actually what I want?” ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 95). In this regard, Penelope does a lot of things that are not acceptable in the predefined social order. For instance, she goes on a date with a girl, Blake ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 95) and share romantic feelings with each other. Being a female, she even goes against the traditional norms that a girl should love a boy but instead of loving a boy, she has feelings for a girl. She just wants “to be next to her, to have her, to be super close to [her] all the time” ([Girard, 2016](#), p. 79).

At one time in the novel, she even has a fight with her male friend Colby at school. . When the school administration calls their parents for violating the rules of the school, Penelope “already know[s] Colby's dad won't have anything to say about this. He'll let him stay home, play video games, and get drunk for two weeks. (pp. 163-164). She knows that Colby's parents will not bother about his suspension from the school for 1 month. However, she knows that it is she who has to pay for it because she is a girl and Colby is a boy, so in the case of a boy, such things do not matter. Here again, the discriminatory behavior of society for a male

or female is visible. This is also very stereotypical that whenever something wrong happens in the life of a girl, society gets too judgmental about her just because of her gender and condemns her choice or whatever little freedom she has. She is restricted to act like a puppet to the extent that “[n]o biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the ... female takes on in society...” ([Beauvoir, 1949](#), p. 283).

Conclusion

Phallogocentric discursive and non-discursive practices publicize women as an inferior entity and eventually led many feminists to deconstruct the misogynist bases of these representation. This has become more crucial in case of many third world cultures where women have neither freedom of thought nor action. In this way, women's writings help women challenge the constructed identity of females in the extreme poles as monsters or angles and allow them to restore their lost self to be 'human'. However, there is a “controversy within feminism itself over the theoretical, political, social and strategic priorities” regarding this humanizing mission (Ebert, 2017, p. 88), implying that women are not othered merely by men but also by the religio-political as well as psycho-social entities that shun females their right to be humans. As an evidence to this, women worldwide are still struggling for political, economic and human rights of education, health and career as the existing patriarchal stereotypes restrain them to get their due rights in society. These stereotypes not only distort women's identity, rather make them subject to an oppressive and sexist ideology. There is a need to increment the discursive forms of children's fiction, written by both women and men in order to create an environment in which women can live equal to men and promote those positive and emancipatory values which are overshadowed by discriminatory gender politics of patriarchy.

The children's literature in general and children fiction in particular has a great role to play in the promotion of women as humanizing agents as these narratives are the potential sites of presenting the positive values of gender equality and egalitarianism. Moreover, they can challenge the neat hierarchical formation of men and women as they are constructed by patriarchy in essentialist terms – denoting women as peaceful, healing, creative and non-dominating, hence “more associational, emotional and sensuous” in

their opinion (Ebert, 2017, p. 91) as against males as aggressive, violent, dominating and authoritative. These discursive accounts can also present the diverse social and cultural possibilities by associating both men

and women from the standpoint of ethical reasoning and moralities by connecting them with an 'ethics of concern and responsibility' ([Gilligan, 1982](#), p. 23).

References

- Beauvoir, S. d. (1949). *The second sex*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Braidotti, R. (1991). *Patterns of dissonance: An essay on women in contemporary*. United States: Cambridge Polity Press.
- Cixous, H. (1975). "The laugh of the Medusa." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*.
- Cooke, M. (2001). *Women claim Islam: Creating Islamic feminism through literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, J. (1985). Structure, Sign, and Play in the discourse of human sciences, in *Literary criticism: A reading*. Das, B & Mohanty, J. M. (Eds). Calcutta: Oxford UP.
- Dunbar-Ortiz, R. (1980). *Roots of resistance: Land tenure in New Mexico, 1680–1980*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Elbert, R. (2017). *Awake in the dark*. University of Chicago Press.
- Gilbert S. M., & Gubar, S. (1979). Infection in the sentence: The woman writer and the anxiety of authorship. In R. R. Warhol & D. P. Herndl (Eds.), *Feminisms: An anthology of literary theory and criticism* (pp. 21-32). New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Girard, M-E. (2016). *Girl Mans Up*. Canada: HarperCollins.
- Hollindale, P. (1997). *Signs of childness in children's books*. Stroud: Thimble Press.
- Jachowicz, M. (2010, Spring). *Courage, charm, and compassion: Gender roles in Newbery Medal winning books*. master's thesis). American University, Washington, D.C.
- Jamal, A. (2013). "Feminism and "fundamentalism" in Pakistan: Gender and class in the secular/religious divide." *Dispatches from Pakistan*. Memon, Q. & Prashad, V (eds.) 141-160. New Delhi: Left word books.
- Kuykendal, L. F., & Brian W. S. (2007). "We said feminist fairy tales, not fractured fairy tales!: The construction of the feminist fairy tale: Female agency over role reversal." *Children and libraries*, Winter.
- Martin, C. L., & Halverson, C. F., Jr. (1981, Dec). A schematic processing model of sex typing and stereotyping in children. *Child development*, 52(4), 1119-1134.
- Mukherjee, B. (1988). *The middleman and other stories*. New York: Viking Penguin.
- Murnen, S. K., Greenfield, C., Younger, A., & Boyd, H. (2016). Boys act and girls appear: A content analysis of gender stereotypes associated with characters in children's popular culture. *Sex roles*, 74, 78-91.
- Nodelman, P. (2008). *The Hidden adult: Defining children's literature*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Rich, A. (1973). *Diving into the wreck: poems, 1971-1972*. New York: Norton
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism: Western conception of the orient*. London: Penguin.
- Showalter, E. (1979). "Toward a feminist poetics," *Women's writing and writing about women*. London: Croom Helm.
- Showalter, E. (1979). Toward a feminist poetics. In Showalter, E. (1985), *The new feminist criticism: Essays on women literature & theory* (125-143). New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Singh, M. (2009). "Gender issues in children's literature." *ERIC Digest*. ED 424591 98. <http://www.kidsource.com/education/genderissues.L.A.html#credits> (Retrieved on December 7, 2019).
- Stephens, J. (1992). *Language and ideology in children's fiction*. New York: Longman Publishing.
- Stewart, M. W. (1879). *Meditations from the pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart: presented to the first African Baptist church and society, in the city of Boston*. Boston: Printed by Garrison and Knapp.
- Trites, R. S. (1997). *Waking sleeping beauty: Feminist voices in children's novels*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Turner-Bowker, D. M. (1996). Gender stereotyped descriptors in children's picture books: Does curious jane exist in the literature?. *Sex Roles*, 35(7-8), 461-488. USA Today's bestselling book list.
- Wollstonecraft, M. (1797). *A Vindication of the rights of woman: With strictures on political and moral subjects*. New York: G. Vale.
- Zia, A. S. (2018). *Faith and feminism in Pakistan: Religious agency or secular autonomy?* Sussex Academic Press.