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The Insiders and the Outsiders in Short Fiction: Is the Behaviour of Women and Men Determined by Living in and Living Out?

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Abstract

The study discusses traditional gender roles and the resulting behavior in the selected works of short fiction. These gender roles dictate that men must work outside to provide for their families while women are compelled to remain inside the house, taking care of children and doing household chores. These roles are accompanied by different stereotypical traits: Men are thought to have positive traits like rationality and bravery while women are said to possess negative traits like sentimentality and cowardice. As writers are also part of society, we can expect to see the same gendered thinking in their creations. This research takes up five short stories and looks at the behavioral traits of male and female characters and the connection of these traits with the fact that males are outsiders and females are insiders.

Keywords: Insiders, Outsiders, Gender Roles, Stereotypical Traits, Feminist Stylistics

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Title

The Insiders and the Outsiders in Short Fiction: Is the Behaviour of Women and Men Determined by Living in and Living Out?

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Abstract

The study discusses traditional gender roles and the resulting behavior in the selected works of short fiction. These gender roles dictate that men must work outside to provide for their families while women are compelled to remain inside the house, taking care of children and doing household chores. These roles are accompanied by different stereotypical traits: Men are thought to have positive traits like rationality and bravery while women are said to possess negative traits like sentimentality and cowardice. As writers are also part of society, so we can expect to see the same gendered thinking in their creation. This research takes up five short stories and looks at the behavioral traits of male and female characters and the connection of these traits with the fact that males are outsiders and females are insiders.

Keywords:

[Insiders, Outsiders, Gender roles, Stereotypical traits, Feminist Stylistics](#)

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Introduction

Throughout the world, it has always been thought that men and women should play different roles in society. Tennyson had said that men should work in the field and women should concern themselves with the hearth, otherwise there would be confusion. Men are required to work out of the house and women are required to keep within the confines of the house, cooking food and rearing children. As a result, men are expected to be the providers, and women are expected to be the provided. However, the matter does not end here; different behavioral characteristics are associated with the two genders: Men are thought to be active, brave, confident, rational, and have an

interest in serious matters of life. On the other hand, women are said to be passive, talkative, meek, shy, sentimental, and have an interest in trivialities. These differences between the two sexes were clearly expressed by Gray in his *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (1992). He says that Martians are interested in competency, power, success, and efficiency. On the other hand, Venusians value love, beauty, communication, relations, and support. It is quite natural to assume that these behavioral features are the result of keeping in the house or out of the house. If a person is kept within the walls for most of her life, we cannot expect her to be brave. Similarly, such a person would not be rational as she is only



required to perform household chores. She would also become passive because her world is limited to a small house. She would become talkative as well because the best way to spend time at home is to talk. On the other hand, if a person spends most of his time working outside his house, he would naturally turn out to be somewhat brave. As he is required to solve difficult problems, he becomes rational. As he has to provide for his family, he would also become active. His confidence would grow as a result of handling the world outside. So, we can see that the behavior of men and women is associated with their living in and living out.

This study attempts to find this association in literature which, as they say, is the reflection of real life. The research takes up some short stories in which men keep out and women keep in; it looks at the behavior of the characters in these stories to know whether or not they behave according to stereotypical manner.

Methodology

Five short stories have been selected:

- i The Lottery by Shirley Jackson (1948)
- ii A Man Called Horse by Dorothy M. Johnson (1950/1990)
- iii A Woman on a Roof by Doris Lessing (1963/1990)
- iv The Gift of the Magi by O'Henry (1905)
- v A Perfect Day for Bananafish by J. D. Salinger (1948/1953)

The stories have been selected in such a way as to mirror different experiences of human life. Thus the study does not focus only on the stories carrying the theme of gender; it checks the representation of women and men in stories that cover a wide range of themes. The Lottery (Jackson, 1948) depicts a village where each year an unfortunate person is stoned to death on the basis of a lottery. The theme of the story is the absurdity of traditions and life alike. The lottery is used as a symbol of life to show the meaninglessness and futility of life. The next story A Man Called Horse (Johnson, 1950/1990) highlights racial biases. It presents a white man getting rid of racially biased

thinking. A Woman on a Roof (Lessing, 1963/1990) shows a half-naked woman who is irritated by three men's gaze. In The Gift of the Magi (Henry, 1905), the writer shows the strength and intensity of conjugal love. In A Perfect Day for Bananafish (Salinger, 1948/1953), we see a war-returned soldier, having suicidal tendencies. He cannot adjust himself to the new world and commits suicide in the end.

The study uses Mills' (1995) feminist stylistics as a tool. Mills (1995) stresses that texts should be read suspiciously; she believes that the language which is used in these texts not merely describes reality, it actually shapes reality. In Chapter Six of her book, *Feminist Stylistics*, Mills (1995) discusses the role of language in the creation of characters that are found in different texts. She claims that these characters are extremely gendered. She says that writers make linguistic choices while constructing different characters. These choices are made in accordance with gender stereotypes. Thus she rejects the common belief that writers imitate real men and women while portraying fictional characters. According to Mills (1995: 123), characters are not "simulacra of humans"; characters are nothing but words. These words bring stereotypical characters before us. In this way, she connects characterization with language and gender.

All these stories would be minutely scrutinized, looking at the linguistic choices that a writer makes to construct his/her characters. As Mills (1995) asserts fictional characters are nothing but words, so a character can be analyzed by looking at the words that the narrator uses, which that character himself uses, and which the other characters use about him/her.

The analysis would be made on two levels. First, the researcher would look for clues that show that men are outsiders and women are insiders in the selected stories. Then the behavioral features of male and female characters would be catalogued to see if there is an association between their behavior and their keeping in and out.

Discussion

In this section, the selected stories are analyzed by using Mills' (1995) Feminist Stylistics.

The Insiders and the Outsiders

In this section, the researchers look at the clues in the stories that prove that female characters are insiders while male characters are outsiders.

In the first story *The Lottery* (Jackson, [1948](#)), women were "wearing faded house dresses" (emphasis added; p. 1). It implies that these are housewives, busy with household chores. That is exactly what Mrs Hutchinson declares when she says that she got late because she was busy washing dishes (p. 2); she was still wearing an apron (p. 2). Women are also required to look after the children. So, when they gathered for the lottery, women "began to call to their children" (p. 1). In contrast, male characters are shown as having different manly professions: Mr. Summers, the in-charge of the lottery, has a coal company; Mr. Graves works as a postmaster; Mr. Martin runs a grocery shop; and Mr Hutchinson stacks wood.

Similarly, in the second story, *A Man Called Horse* (Johnson, [1950/1990](#)), stereotypical gender roles are given to both men and women: they are the providers and the provided respectively. Most of the men are hunters and thus "the providers" (emphasis added; p. 129). One of the main characters, Yellow Robe, "hunted with his peers" (p. 129). He has nothing else to do but "to kill buffalo and to gain glory" (p. 129). The white man does not think himself to be worthy of marrying Pretty Calf because he is not a provider (p. 135). This realization urges him to become a hunter and he is determined to go hunting alone (p. 137). After some time, he becomes "the only hunter" (p. 137) and the provider for his family. Men are also shown as warriors in the story. After a war expedition, we are told that "the warriors" are coming home (p. 136). Similarly, the white man is taken to a tepee where an old woman lives with "her warrior son" (emphasis added; p. 128). Yellow Robe has earned a "bearskin belt" (p. 136) due to his services as a warrior. He had "half a dozen clashes" with enemy tribes (p. 136). His achievements are endless in this regard: He was able to bring horses from an enemy camp, led his tribe in two successful attacks, and also snatched a gun from one of his enemies (p. 136). All these things are in sharp contrast to what women are

expected to do. They have to do the "endless work of the women" (p. 129). Pretty Calf loves to learn "the many women's skills"; these skills include tanning hides, making clothes, and cooking food (p. 134). Thus traditional gender roles are assigned to both men and women.

In the third story, *A Woman on a Roof* (Lessing, [1963/1990](#)), again women and men are shown as the insiders and the outsiders. There is no working woman in the story. They are all housewives. The nameless woman has nothing to do except to tan her body. The second female character, Mrs Pritchett is a housewife; she likes to live indoors and hates to expose herself by going on the roof. She also provides a blanket to the three men to save them from the scorching sun. This action is symbolic of another typical role of women: they are required to provide relief to men. The third woman in the story is shown watering a yellow window box in her house (p. 115). However, all the male characters are shown as working outside their houses. Harry, Tom, and Stanley all are sanitary workers.

The fourth story is *The Gift of the Magi* (Henry, [1905](#)). In this story, we have two main characters, a man and a woman; the man earns and the woman consumes. Della is a typical housewife. It is her duty to say "little prayers, quietly, about simple everyday things" (p. 4). She is also required to prepare coffee and dinner for her husband. On the other hand, Jim is required to earn money and provide for the needs of the family. The narrator, again and again, refers to the fact that Jim has an income: initially, he earned "\$ 30 per week" but then his income "shrunk to \$ 20..." (p. 1), and "Twenty dollars" are not enough to maintain the household (p. 1). The narrator also says that Jim was only twenty-two and at this tender age, he had to bear the burden of a family (p. 4). Obviously, this burden is that of Della, who is dependent on him.

The fifth story is *A Perfect Day for Bananafish* (Salinger, [1948/1953](#)). Here again, we have the same roles for men and women. Seymour is a retired soldier while Muriel, her mother, and Mrs Carpenter are all housewives. Similarly, Mrs Carpenter is shown as a

caring mother. She is busy taking care of her child, saving her from being sunburnt (p. 6).

Thus, in all the stories women have been shown as insiders and men as outsiders.

Behavioural Features

Having looked at the fact that men and women have been presented in traditional roles in the stories, now we look at their behavior.

Activity

If women are kept in and men are kept out, it naturally results in making men active and women passive. In *The Lottery* (Jackson, 1948), we see that female children are inactive while male children are active. In order to stone the unfortunate victim of the lottery, all the male children start collecting stones. First, it is Bobby Martin who stuffs "his pockets full of stones" (p. 1). The rest of the boys follow him and start picking up smooth and round stones (p. 1). Harry Jones, Bobby, and Dickie Delacroix, the three boys, "eventually made a great pile of stones" (p. 1). In contrast, the female children remain passive: "The girls stood aside, talking among themselves" (p. 1). Similarly, we can say that men are the doers of the actions while women are the recipients of the actions carried out by men. These are men who conduct the whole process of the lottery; women do nothing in this regard. It is Mr Summers who supervises the lottery. The stool on which the lottery box is kept is brought by Mr Graves. Mr Martin and his eldest son hold the lottery box. Mr Summers and Mr Graves make the slips of paper and put them in the box. Then the Postmaster conducts the proper swearing-in of Mr Summers as the official of the lottery. Mr Summers makes all the announcements. It is Mr Graves who takes slips back from Bill Hutchinson and all his family members when he wins the lottery. Then Mr Graves puts these slips back in the box so that the second round of the lottery could be conducted. Mr Graves also helps little Dave to select his piece of paper and he opens it for him. Thus, these are male characters who commit all the actions regarding the lottery. There is only one action that is carried out by a woman: Mrs. Hutchinson selects a black spotted slip in the second

round of the lottery; this action results in her death. Moreover, men draw for themselves and for their women as well. Women are allowed to draw only when there is no man in the family. As Mr Dunbar cannot come to the lottery due to his broken leg, so Mrs Dunbar "draws for her husband" (p. 3). Before allowing her, Mr Summers makes sure that she does not have any "grown boy" who could draw for her (p. 3). Similarly, a young boy Watson draws for himself and for his mother. People are happy that his mother got a man to do it. Thus men are active and women are passive. They act and women receive the consequences.

In *A Woman on a Roof* (Lessing, 1963/1990), we find the same thing again: Men are doers while women are recipients. Men are shown to be active and their activity irritates the half-naked woman. The major activity in the story is that of looking. There are two sorts of characters in the story: the lookers and the looked-at. Men are Lookers at while women are looked at. Along with looking at the woman, they yell and scream at her as well; one of them, Tom, even approaches her and begs for love. He is active in his imagination as well. He imagines that he is working on a crane; he picks up the woman with that crane and drops her near him. (p. 112). On the other hand, the woman is utterly inactive; she does nothing except hiding from them or ignoring them. Thus men act, and the woman receives.

Identity

As women remain inside the house and men outside the house, men are known to everyone while women remain unknown. This is what we see in *The Lottery* (Jackson, 1948). In order to know a character, the first thing to know is the name of that character. The name is identity. We find a definite pattern and order which is used to introduce the names of different characters. Men are introduced by name much before the women are introduced. First of all, the narrator uses the name of a boy, Bobby Martin; after that, two more boys, Jones and Delacroix, are introduced. Then the narrator uses the name of a man, Mr Summers. The next person to be introduced by name is another man, Mr Graves. Then the narrator introduces us to another

couple of male characters: Mr Martin and his son Baxter. The next name that comes before us is that of Old Man Warner. After eight male characters, finally, a woman's name is announced: it is Mrs Hutchinson. At that moment, the reader is almost in the middle of the story. It shows that the narrator thinks that identity belongs only to the male characters. Besides, even when the narrator bothers to introduce the female characters by names, these are not their original names. These are the surnames of their husbands: Mrs. Dunbar, Mrs. Hutchinson, Mrs. Graves, and Mrs. Delacroix. Only two female characters, Tessie and Janey, are introduced by their own names. However, both these names have overtones of diminution and triviality. /i/ ending often signals diminution or triviality as in puppy, cookie, doggy, kitty, etc. It is also employed in nicknames like Pattie and Charlie. So none of the female characters have been given their own names and thus they have no identity. Identity is something that only belongs to the male characters.

The same thing is found in *A Woman on a Roof* (Lessing, 1963/1990). There are only four characters whose proper names are used in the story. These four characters include three men and only one woman: Stanley, Harry, Tom, and Mrs Pritchett. That one woman does not have her own name; she is Mrs Pritchett which means she is known by the name of her husband. As far as the heroine of the story is concerned, she is not given any name; she is just called the woman. Thus she does not have any identity. It shows that for men, a woman is only a woman; for them, a woman's sex is her identity. Having no identity of her own, she becomes an object to be utilized by the male lookers.

The case is not different in Salinger's *A Perfect Day for Bananafish* (1948/1953). In this story, the dialogues between the mother and the daughter tell us that the name of the female character is Muriel. However, this name is not used by the narrator; the narrator calls her "the girl" throughout the story. The phrase "the girl" is used thirty-one times in the story. It has many overtones and connotations. It has the connotations of sexual availability. It also presents Muriel as an immature and non-serious person. Like

Muriel, her mother too is not given any name: "A woman's voice came through" (p. 3). She has no identity. It is her femaleness that is taken to be her identity. Another female character in the story is called Mrs Carpenter. It is not her own name but the surname of her husband. She is talking to another woman. Again, that woman is nameless. There is only one female child who has a name: Sybil.

Confidence

Another effect of gender roles is that women lack confidence and men are full of confidence. This is what we see in *The Lottery* (Jackson, 1948). There is an interesting use of adverbs on the part of the narrator. Whenever dialogues of different characters are reported, the narrator uses different adverbs with these dialogues. Following adverbs are used to report the dialogues of the female characters: "grinningly" (p. 2), "quietly" (p. 6), "regretfully" (p. 3). All these adverbs show a lack of confidence or confusion. Now, we look at the adverbs that are used to report the dialogues of the male characters: "carefully" (p. 2), "soberly" (p.2), "cheerfully" (p. 2), "petulantly" (p. 4), "stoutly" (p. 4), "gently" (p. 5), "formally" (p. 5), "clearly" (p. 6). All these adverbs show confidence, strength, and positivity.

The same situation can be seen in Johnson's *A Man Called Horse* (1950/1990). In this story, the narrator uses the verb giggle for a female character, Pretty Calf, two times (p. 132, 134). Not only does she giggle, but she also hides her face (p. 132). The action of hiding her face itself shows shyness and lack of confidence. According to Mills (1995) certain verbs, including giggle and simper, are used to refer to stupidity. She claims that such verbs are employed for females and not for males.

Sentimentality

As men are warriors and hunters, they become tough while women become sentimental due to keeping within the walls. In the story *A Man Called Horse* (Johnson, 1950/1990), women are shown to be weeping, crying, and mourning. In particular, Pretty Calf and her mother are shown crying very often.

When Yellow Robe leaves for war, Pretty Calf starts crying (p. 136). His mother has gruesome hands because most of her fingers did not have the first joint (p. 130); it was the custom of their tribe that they cut a finger joint to mourn someone's death. As she had been losing her dear ones, she had mourned for years (p. 137). At the death of her son, mourning extends to three nights (p. 138). She kept screaming until she lost her voice (p. 138). The narrator remarks that she kept on wailing while sitting on her haunches (p. 137). The narrator says that she looked "hideous in her grief" (p. 138). Similarly, Pretty Calf too had her own way of showing her grief: she cuts her hair and slashes her arms (p. 137) when her brother dies. The narrator comments that there were "two grieving women" (p. 137) in that house.

The same is the case with *The Gift of the Magi* (Henry, 1905). The female character, Della, is shown weeping most of the time. When Della feels helpless, she starts howling (p. 1). When she comes to know that Jim has bought combs for her, she feels joy and then starts wailing and shedding tears (p. 5). It is worth noticing that the narrator associates this condition with femininity. On the other hand, Jim never weeps because he is a man.

Bravery

Fighting wars and hunting, make men brave; they start entertaining the notion of honor. In the story *A Man Called Horse* (Johnson, 1950/1990), we find that men value honor and bravery. The White man thinks that if these people were not hungry for glory, their population would have been more than this (p. 128). To show their bravery, the narrator says that they went to "court death" (p. 128). Particularly, Yellow Robe has made it the purpose of his life to "gain glory" (p. 129). He also appreciates others who perform any act of bravery. In their tribe, a man was considered brave if he could steal horses and strike the first coup (p. 133). On the other hand, women are meek and modest. They do not fight wars. They do not perform any act of bravery. The wife of Yellow Robe is smug and meek (p. 134). It is not bravery, but virtuosity which is valued in women. As Yellow Robe's wife leaves her husband for another man, it is said that she

was not a "ba-wurokee [virtuous woman]" (p. 135). In contrast, as Pretty Calf promises that she will always remain with her husband, she is termed as "Ba-wurokee": a virtuous woman (p. 135).

The same image of women is presented in *The Gift of the Magi* (Henry, 1905). Here, the narrator uses different similes for Jim and Della. Della is described as "a little singed cat" (p. 6). In comparison, Jim is described as "a setter" who stops moving "at the scent of quail" (p. 4). The difference between the two similes is quite clear. A cat is smaller in size as well as more delicate and meek than a dog. Unlike a dog, it is not used in hunting. On the other hand, Jim is compared with a setter which is a large dog, bred and trained for hunting.

Similarly, in *A Perfect Day for Bananafish* (Salinger, 1948/1953), Seymour is a retired soldier, hence he is brave. Moreover, he commits suicide in the end. That too requires some form of bravery. On the other hand, female characters are just busy talking and taking care of their beauty.

The same thing can be seen in *The Lottery* (Jackson, 1948). Here, we find that male characters arrive first and then the female characters arrive "after their menfolk" (p. 1). As men work outside and women work inside, so men would be brave enough to come out of their houses without any hesitation while the women would be hesitant to leave the security of their houses. Moreover, women are not brave enough to stand alone; that is why they are shown to be "standing by their husbands" (p. 1). As women stay inside, they cannot muster up the courage to face the outside world and thus they always feel insecure without men.

Sex Objects

If a woman is not required to work outside, it is thought that the purpose of her life is only to satisfy men within the house. That is what men want from women. They look at women as sex objects. It is evident in the story *A Woman on a Roof* (Lessing, 1963/1990). The woman is a sex object for Tom. The only thing which attracts his attention is her nakedness; he wants to control and possess her. When Stanley says that the woman is naked, Tom is "excited

and grinning" (p. 110). He is "craning his head" in all directions to see the woman (p. 110). He and Stanley go to the furthest location in order to look at the woman (p. 111). His mind was stuffed with the thoughts of the naked woman (p. 111). He is completely charged up when he finds her "rolling down the little red pants over her hips" (p. 111). At night, he dreams that she had hugged him, touched his hair, sat him in her bed, and gave him "some exhilarating liquor" (p. 115). This dream clearly pictures his lustful thoughts. To realize his desires, he goes to the woman and begs for her love. However, she ignores him completely. As a result, he "felt panic" (p. 117). He is disappointed by her attitude. He goes to the pub and "gets drunk, in hatred of her" (p. 118). It shows that he wanted to use the woman as a sex object only.

In *The Gift of the Magi* (Henry, 1905), Della is objectified and treated as a beautiful object for the satisfaction of the male gaze. Her hair is compared with inanimate objects. The narrator compares it with a cascade twice (p. 2, 3). Her hair is also termed "the mass" (p. 3), treating it like an inanimate thing. Another thing with which her hair is compared is "Her Majesty's jewels and gifts" (p. 2). The comparison of her hair with inanimate things gives her the qualities of those things: "natural, passive and consumable" (Mills, 1995: 134). Similarly, we are told that there were two possessions that Jim and Della valued the most. Jim's possession is a watch, an inanimate object. On the other hand, Della's possession is her beautiful hair, a part of her body. Thus, an inanimate object (a watch) is juxtaposed with a part of a woman's body (hair). As both the things are termed as "treasures" (p. 6) and possessions, thus Della's hair is treated as if it were an object and not a part of her body. Besides, both the watch and the hair are sold. There is nothing uncommon in selling a watch but Della has to sell a part of her body. It is pertinent to mention here that men have been selling and buying women since antiquity. Thus it can be said that this selling of a part of a woman's body is an expression of the male desire to be able to buy women, to sell women and to possess them like soul-less objects to satisfy the sexual desires of men. This idea is

validated by the fact that Della is called "the mistress of the home" (p. 1). According to Goddard and Patterson (2000) and Sunderland (2006), the word mistress has negative connotations. So, the word mistress makes her something to be used by men.

Interest in Beauty

The next result of keeping women in is that they become extremely interested in their beauty. That is what we see in *A Perfect Day for Bananafish* (Salinger, 1948/1953). Muriel exclaims that she is so sunburnt that she "can hardly move" (p. 3). She adds that although she is burned still she will survive (p. 3). It means that she thinks that being sunburnt is so bad that it can kill her. At the very beginning of the story, she is busy nurturing her beauty; she plucks out a couple of hairs in her mole (p. 3). She also puts lacquer on her nails. Even Seymour knows how much she values her beauty. When he is asked about the whereabouts of his wife, he thinks that she would have gone to the hairdresser to get her hair dyed (p. 6).

We find the same thing in O'Henry's *The Gift of the Magi* (1905). Della is presented as a woman who is extremely caring about her beauty. After having a fit of crying, she takes care of "her cheeks with the powder rag" (p. 1). After that, she goes to a pier-glass to have a look at herself. She again looks at herself for a long time, "carefully and critically" after having her hair cut (emphasis added; p. 3). She repairs her beauty by using curling irons (p. 3). She is so worried about her looks that she requests God to make Jim think that she is still beautiful even after having her hair cut (p. 4). She is afraid that Jim might kill her because she has lost her beautiful hair (p. 3). The narrator says that the curls "made her look wonderful..." (p. 3).

Similarly, in Lessing's *A Woman on a Roof* (1963/1990), the half-naked woman keeps lying in the sun in order to tan her body. Although she is criticized and tortured by men, still she keeps taking a sunbath.

Freedom

As men work outside, they like freedom. In Lessing's *A Woman on a Roof* (1963/1990) men prefer to work on the roof; they do not like to work in the basement.

They do so because on the roof, they “felt free, on a different level from ordinary humanity, shut in the streets or the buildings” (p. 112). This ordinary humanity, shut in the buildings, obviously refers to women. Later, when they were compelled to work in the basement, they hated it because they “felt excluded, shut in the grey cement basement” (p. 114). This love for freedom is again highlighted when take off their shirts and vests, exposing their upper body (p. 114).

Similarly, in Johnson’s *A Man Called Horse* (1950/1990), the white man is held captive by the Crow people. The white man is always thinking to run away from there and have his freedom. In the end, he does win his freedom and returns home.

Trivialities

Living at home and doing petty chores make women interested in trivialities. This is what we see in the character of Muriel in *A Perfect Day for Bananafish* (Salinger, 1948/1953). She has to wait for hours for her long-distance call. Here the narrator says ironically “She used the time, though” (p. 3). She spends this time on trivialities. First, she reads an article published in a women’s magazine. As the article is in a women’s magazine, it makes it petty because most of these magazines focus on beauty tips, body care, and relationships. After reading the article, she cleans her brush and comb (p. 3). Then she takes “the spot out of the skirt of her beige suit” (p. 3). After that, she removes “the button on her Saks blouse” (p. 3). Then she plucks out a couple of “hairs in her mole” (p. 3). When her phone started ringing, she was adorning her nails. She does not attend the call immediately; first, she takes care of the nail of her little finger (p. 3). Then, she replaces the cap on the lacquer bottle; after that, she dries her wet hand. Her last activity before picking up the phone is that she places an ashtray near her.

Not only she is shown to be busy with trivialities, but she is represented as a woman who ignores the serious concerns of life. During the phone call, her mother is worried about Seymour’s health and keeps asking different questions about him but Muriel ignores her concerns. She is more interested in her

dress, hotel room, face, and daddy’s car. She does not allow her mother to talk about Seymour’s mental health and changes the topic again and again. She evades her mother’s questions about Seymour’s health by asking about her daddy’s car (p. 3). Her mother answers her questions and then again asks about Seymour’s health. Here, Muriel changes the topic again and asks her mother about a book. Her mother returns to the same topic again but this time it is Muriel’s concern with the cigarette that diverts her mother’s attention. When her mother asks her to come back as Seymour’s mental health is deteriorating, Muriel starts discussing the matter of her being sunburnt (p. 4). Once again, her mother comes to the same topic and asks Muriel whether she has discussed Seymour’s condition with any psychiatrist. She answers this question briefly and then again starts discussing the clothes of the wife of the psychiatrist. However, her mother again shows her concern for Seymour’s mental health. But, as before, Muriel changes the topic by talking about the cost of the call (p. 5). Muriel’s mother again tries to discuss a serious matter with her and reminds her that she has been waiting for years to see Seymour. However, yet again, Muriel dismisses the topic and says that they should “hang up” as Seymour is about to arrive (p. 5). However, her mother does not finish the call and asks Muriel as to where her husband was. Muriel says that he was on the beach; it gives her an opportunity to divert the topic to a non-serious issue that Seymour is reluctant to take his bathrobe off when he goes to the beach. She also informs her mother that Seymour looks pale. After that, she starts discussing his tattoo. So, Muriel diverts the attention of her mother from a serious matter to trivial things nine times.

Similarly, in *The Lottery* (Jackson, 1948), we see that when men gather, they start discussing serious matters like tractors, rain, planting, and taxes. (p. 1). However, women only exchange greetings and have “bits of gossip” (p. 1).

Interest in Dressing

Another thing, that is the result of conventional gender roles, is women’s interest in dressing. That is what we find in *A Perfect Day for Bananafish*

(Salinger, [1948/1953](#)). Muriel takes special care of her clothes. She does not allow her wet hand to touch her dressing gown. The narrator tells us in detail about different items of her dress. She was wearing mules and "her rings were in the bathroom" (p. 3). She is not only interested in her own dress; she also notices what other women are wearing. Thus, she tells her mother about the "awful dinner dress" that the doctor's wife was wearing (p. 5). She also tells her that she had "some of the padding taken out" of her coat (p. 5). She thinks that her clothes are terrible this year (p. 5). She is also worried about her ballerina which she thinks is too long for her (p. 5).

Muriel's mother too is extremely interested in dressing. She talks about the dress that they had seen in Bonwit's window (p. 5). She keeps asking different questions from Muriel about her coat (p. 5), this year's clothes (p. 5), and ballerina (p. 5).

Other female characters, Mrs Carpenter and a nameless woman are also interested in dressing. The woman is excited about the way another woman used her handkerchief in her dressing (p. 6). She wishes that she could know "how she tied it" (p. 6). Mrs Carpenter agrees with her: "It sounds darling" (p. 6).

Talkativeness

One more result of keeping within walls is that women become talkative as it is one of the ways of spending time. They are so talkative that they do not allow one another to talk; that is why they keep interrupting others without waiting for their turn. In *A Perfect Day for Bananafish* (Salinger, [1948/1953](#)), we have a long conversation between Muriel and her

mother; both of them are eager to talk. That is why they interrupt each other and their sentences remain incomplete. In the short space of three pages, both women interrupt each other twenty-one (21) times. That shows how talkative they are.

Similarly, in *A Woman on a Roof* (Lessing, [1963/1990](#)), Mrs Pritchett is chatty. That is why she is liked by the three men, especially Stanley. The half-naked woman is not liked by him because she does not chat with the men.

In *The Gift of the Magi* (Henry, [1905](#)), there is a little conversation between Della and Jim. Jim speaks very little but Della speaks a lot. Della uses 186 words while Jim just uses 83 words in this conversation. The narrator associates two qualities with Jim: "Quietness and value" (emphasis added; p. 3). Thus the male character is presented as quiet and the female character is presented as talkative.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above discussion, it is concluded that the stories having traditional gender roles present their characters with traditional qualities. Women are presented as passive, nameless, shy, sentimental, and meek. They are shown to be interested in beauty, dressing, trivialities, and talking. On the other hand, male characters are presented as active, confident, and brave. They have their own identity. They look at women as objects created for their satisfaction. They are also interested in freedom and serious concerns of life. All these behavioral features are a result of men being outsiders and women being insiders.

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