

GENDER INEQUALITY ANALYSIS IN ALICE MUNRO'S *BOYS AND GIRLS*: AS A FEMINISM STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on feminist studies. It is aimed to find out the causes of gender inequality experienced by the girl character and explain the impact of gender inequality on the girl character. This study is based on the theory of Liberal Feminism by Mary Wollstonecraft. This theory explains that men and women should be treated equally as human beings. The result showed that the girl character experienced gender inequality in her family. The data of this study was taken from the short story, especially from the narrative and point of view of the girl character. The causes of gender inequality and the impact of gender inequality on the girl character were discussed in the analysis of the Boys and Girls short story. The finding concluded that this short story is about a girl who experiences inequality in her family.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Feminism Study, Gender Inequality in Family.

INTRODUCTION

The gender inequality that a girl experiences in her family is discussed in this study. Gender inequality in the family or society is the main subject of feminist theory. Feminism exists to bring about gender equality for men and women. Women don't want to be oppressed and ostracized by men. They want to be valued for who they are. Women want the freedom to decide what to do as well.

In "Boys and Girls," a short story by Alice Munro, gender inequality is present. The protagonist of this short story is a girl who deals with gender discrimination in her family. She began to feel unjustified when she was eleven years old simply because she is a woman. She was always being demanded upon as a daughter. Even the freedom to select what she likes and dislikes is denied to her. The girl also views her mother's role as one of a 'lady' who must submit to her spouse and perform household duties without fail. The girl will occasionally quarrel or act in a way that goes against how women should act, and when this happens, she will be reminded of proper behavior. In her patriarchal home, men are always given priority. Patriarchy is a hereditary culture in the family.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a feminist approach which is analyzed from a short story by Alice Munro entitled "Boys and Girls". The feminist approach is a method of dealing with issues of gender inequality and oppression that frequently affect women. The theory used is the theory of Liberal feminism by Mary Wollstonecraft. This theory explains that men and women should be treated equally as human beings. The researcher has used this short story as the main source of info.

Liberal feminism is the one that emphasizes gender inequity the most. Liberal feminism wants women to be free of oppressive gender norms, such as those that are used as a pretext to put women in inferior positions or even to make them invisible.

Women's inequality is mostly caused by sexism, which is discrimination based on gender. The argument for overcoming it is that women can claim equality with men based on fundamental human ideals, and that gender imbalance is a result of society's patriarchal system (*Feminisme Liberal*).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This discussion explained some of the findings and discussion points. In the story, the girl character has an inequality of rights throughout her childhood. The rights that the girl character should have cannot be obtained. The girl character suffers from gender inequality, she can't do whatever she wants, she has to follow her parents' orders by working at home even though she hates housework.

This study's theoretical base is the theory of gender inequality feminism, which analyzes liberal feminism, which is gender inequality that seeks to ensure that all humans have the same rights regardless of gender. Liberal feminists believe in the liberal concept that men and women are created equal, have equal rights, and must have equal opportunities (*Feminisme Liberal*).

The Causes of Gender Inequality Experienced by 'The Girl' Character.

The girl character in the story experiences gender inequality. This story begins with a woman who tells her childhood life that she did not get freedom. She became a "girl" who had a hard time because she felt that women were looked down upon by men. Women are always synonymous with work at home while men do work outside the home. The girl is always given homework by her parents, she hates homework. The girl prefers to help her father work outside the home. However, she couldn't do it because of the existing rules.

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The Inequality Caused by Gender

In the short story, a woman tells about her childhood life where she felt that she was treated differently from her younger brother. She received different treatment from her own parents and grandmother, which made her jealous of her younger brother. As shown in:

What did she mean about Laird? He was no help to anybody. Where was he now? Swinging himself sick on the swing, going around in circles, or trying to catch caterpillars. He never once stayed with me till I was finished.

Based on the sentence, it can be seen that the girl is jealous of Laird who never helps and just plays, but Laird never gets a reprimand or even a rule like she always gets.

In addition, the girl must also follow the rules which make her stay at home. Like a girl has to do the work that has to be done inside the house, while a boy does the work outside the home. The girl judged that housework was not suitable for her and she saw her mother who always did the housework as if it was endless which resulted in her mother not having time for herself. As shown when the girl commented on her mother:

'It was an odd thing to see my mother down at the barn. She did not often come out of the house unless it was to do something hang out the wash or dig potatoes in the garden. She looked out of place, with her bare lumpy legs, not touched by the sun, her apron still on and damp across the stomach from the supper dishes. Her hair was tied up in a kerchief, wisps of it falling out. She would tie her hair up like this in the morning, saying she did not have time to do it properly, and it would stay tied up all day. It was true, too; she really did not have time.' And *"It seemed to me that work in the house was endless, dreary, and peculiarly depressing'.* (Paragraph 12)

'She was plotting now to get me to stay in the house more, although she knew I hated it (because she knew I hated it) and keep me from working for my father.' (Paragraph 17)

In the statement, it can be concluded that the character of the girl does not like housework because her housework is endless. The girl prefers to help her father work outside the house instead of helping her mother, it makes her mother feel annoyed with her.

When her mother was talking but the girl ignored her, her mother said *'I just get my back turned and she runs off. It's not like I had a girl in the family at all'* (paragraph 16). This statement seems to explain the character of the girl who is not like girls in general.

According to Mary Wollstonecraft's theory, women's behavior was expected, imposed, and endorsed by social norms, morals, law, and cultural traditions, and refusal to conform to these norms resulted in women being classified as witches or monsters. As a result, women accepted their subjugation and feminine roles. She thinks that society

creates "so-called feminine traits" in women (Mambrol 2016). Based on Mary Wollstonecraft the emphasis on duty within the family and in civic interactions echoes their critique of the "rights" approach.

In this case, it can be seen that the girl character does not have the freedom to choose what she wants to do. The girl must obey and follow the existing rules.

Man is The Most Dominant than Woman

There is an idea that men are superior and have a very important role in the family compared to women who are only inferior. The existence of a patriarchal system also has an impact on the roles of men and women. The patriarchal system places men in the most important or central position, while others, such as wives and children, are positioned according to the interests of the patriarch (men). The girl character is just a girl who wants freedom in doing everything, but she can't get it. Everything she will do has been arranged by her parents, she just has to do it properly. As shown when the girl said:

'The word girl had formerly seemed to me innocent and unburdened like the word child; now it appeared that it was no such thing. A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become. It was a definition, always touched with emphasis, with reproach and disappointment. Also it was a joke on me.' (Paragraph 21)

This sentence shows her disappointment. She is the girl so she feels what the girl means. She felt the burden she had was real. She has to be a woman who follows the rules, doesn't argue, and does what she's supposed to do. Being a girl who has to get used to unfair rules.

'Once Laird and I were fighting, and for the first time ever I had to use all my strength against him; even so, he caught and pinned my arm for a moment, really hurting me. Henry saw this, and laughed, saying, "Oh, that there Laird's gonna show you, one of these days!" Laird was getting a lot bigger. But I was getting bigger too' (Paragraph 21)

Based on the text above, it can be seen that men are always superior in strength, considered stronger. And women are always labeled as weak creatures. This is something that also triggers gender inequality, especially within the family. Boys are always treated differently from girls.

'My grandmother came to stay with us for a few weeks and I heard other things."Girls don't slam doors like that." "Girls keep their knees together when they sit down." And worse still, when I asked some questions, "That's none of girls' business." I continued to slam the doors and sit as awkwardly as possible, thinking that by such measures I kept myself free' (Paragraph 22)

Such was the life of a girl at that time. She will always be reminded of her nature and how a girl should behave. She is just a girl who is always asked to be feminine like girls in general. Even though she is just a girl but she dares to rebel and fight. She felt annoyed because her attitude must always be controlled and regulated by her parents or grandmother who embraced patriarchy.

In the story, it is written that the fox owned by the girl's father was fed horse meat. Usually, the girl's father will buy horses that are old or that the owner no longer needs. One day his father bought 2

horses which the girl and Laird named Mack (a stallion) and Flora (a mare). The girl likes Flora more because of her speed.

When the day of Flora's shooting arrived, the girl and Laird (her brother) witnessed it, they were eagerly waiting for that day. They witnessed what happened at that time, as well as when Flora tried to escape. As shown in:

'Henry had just brought Flora out, and she had broken away from him. She was running free in the barnyard, from one end to the other. We climbed on the fence. It was exciting to see her running, whinnying, going up on her hind legs, prancing and threatening like a horse in a Western movie, an unbroken ranch horse, though she was just an old driver, an old sorrel mare' (Paragraph 39)

The girl likes Flora (the mare) because of her fast and bold character. It's like reflecting the character the girl wants, which is to be bolder. Unknowingly, she even helped Flora escape so she wouldn't be shot. It's shown in:

'Instead of shutting the gate, I opened it as wide as I could. I did not make any decision to do this; it was just what I did' (Paragraph 42)

What the girl did was known only to him and Laird, it would be a secret between the two of them. However, over dinner, his father says that he managed to find and shoot Flora. At that time Laird said that the girl who made Flora managed to escape. Laird's statement made everyone shocked and her father was a little angry making her so scary that she cried. As shown in:

'Laird looked across the table at me and said proudly distinctly, "Anyway it was her fault Flora got away. She could of shut the gate and she didn't. She just open' it up and Flora ran out' and 'Everybody at the table was looking at me. I nodded, swallowing food with great difficulty. To my shame, tears flooded my eyes' (Paragraph 48)

The girl felt intimidated and made her cry, even though she knew that it was true she helped flora to escape

Strong Self-Confidence

The strong self-confidence of the girl character makes her always get reprimands from her mother and grandmother. The girl will always rebel and insist on doing what she wants. As shown in:

She had a dead-quiet regretful way of talking about me that always made me uneasy. "I just get my back turned and she runs off. It's not like I had a girl in the family at all." (paragraph 16)

In that sentence, her mother seems to be complaining about the attitude of the girl who never waits for her to finish talking. The girl behaves not like a girl in general. Another confidence can be seen in:

When I asked some questions, "That's none of girls' business." I continued to slam the doors and sit as awkwardly as possible, thinking that by such measures I kept myself free' (Paragraph 22)

From that statement, we can see that the girl character really wants freedom. She has strong self-confidence, so she is not easily influenced by her mother and grandmother.

The Impacts of Gender Inequality on ‘The Girl’ Character.

The gender inequality experienced by female characters in this short story is caused by the imbalance of rights of girls and boys. The existence of this gender inequality has resulted in several things happening, especially for the girl character.

Keep Doing What She Want

The girl is still a girl who can't be ordered. She always did whatever she wanted, which was against her patriarchal family. In a patriarchal system, women are required to follow the rules of the man (as the center) in the family, but the girl often does not follow the existing rules. As shown in:

I was given jobs to do and I would sit at the table peeling peaches that had been soaked in hot water, or cutting up onions, my eyes smarting and streaming. As soon as I was done I ran out of the house, trying to get out of earshot before my mother thought of what she wanted me to do next. (paragraph 12)

The girl still does what she wants even though her mother and grandmother always forbid (it makes her look like a rebellious girl). As shown in:

She was always plotting. She was plotting now to get me to stay in the house more, although she knew I hated it (because she knew I hated it) and keep me from working for my father. It seemed to me she would do this simply out of perversity, and to try her power. (paragraph 17)

All the attempts her mother made to stop the girl were never successful. The girl is always rebellious and refuses to obey the rules.

The Girl Want To Do What Men Do

What the girl character wants is freedom. She wants to do anything without gender restrictions. As a result of this gender inequality, she is increasingly determined to do what she wants. The girl will do the work that is generally done by men, if she wants to do it. She doesn't want to be confined to working at home, she hates that. She prefers to help out with her father's work outside the home. As shown in:

It seemed to me that work in the house was endless, dreary, and peculiarly depressing; work done out of doors, and in my father's service, was ritualistically important. (paragraph 12)

The sentence above shows how she hates homework, and she considers her father's work (outside the house) more important.

Can't Control Emotion

The impact of gender inequality is that the girl becomes unable to control her emotions, especially when she is still a young girl who is unstable. Moreover, the girls are just children who are very easy to influence. This gender inequality sometimes makes the girl think that a woman should act like this. She will always accept what adults say even if she doesn't like it.

At the end of this story, it is seen that the girl accepts when she cries and her father says '*She's only a girl,*' where the sentence seems to describe that girls are easy to cry, and look weak. Because what her

father said made the girl can't control her emotions, so she said *'I didn't protest that, even in my heart. Maybe it was true'* as if she agreed with her father's words, which seemed to think that she would cry easily.

However, when she grows up, the girl is free from the shadows of her family, household chores, or anything that gets in the way. She can work and do whatever she wants, regardless of whether it's a man or woman job. As shown in the sentence *'These stories were about myself when I had grown a little older; they took place in a world that was recognizably mine, yet one that presented opportunities for courage, boldness, and self-sacrifice, as mine never did.'*

As Mary Wollstonecraft said that men and women are equal, and women want the same freedom as men.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is to find out the causes of gender inequality in the family experienced by girls and the impact of gender inequality on girls in Boys and Girls short stories, the researchers analyzed using liberal feminism theory, which means that humans have the same rights regardless of gender. The researcher focuses on the girl character in the short story. The girl character in this short story is related to the life of a girl in the family and the girl feels the inequality caused by gender between males and females. The girl feels the injustice that is happening because of the patriarchal system in her family. She is always demanded or given rules that he must do and obey. Even in behavior, she must also follow the standard of

behavior of women in general, which refers to the existence of a patriarchal system.

This study also discusses the impact of gender inequality experienced by female characters in this short story. As a result of this gender inequality, it make her can't control her emotional and keep going to do what she wants to do. Not only that, but the impact of this gender inequality also made her feel unhappy in her life at that time.

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