



Gender learning in Alice Munro's short story entitled "Boys and Girls"

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The issues around gender is inexhaustible since gender can be analyzed from many perspectives. The focus of this paper is to discuss the gender learning experienced by the young girl in a short story entitled "Boys and Girls" written by Alice Munro. The discussion includes the young girl's gender defiance, gender learning, and gender acceptance. To support the discussion several issues around gender are reviewed. Besides a comprehensive definition of gender, issues concerning doing gender, gender identity, gender order, gender segregation, gender learning, gender presentation, gender display, and others are reviewed. The analysis is also combined with the conversation analysis by considering the influence of the language that leads to gender learning of the female character in the short story. The methods used are a combination of library research method with its close reading, qualitative method, and contextual method. The result shows that gender learning is inevitable especially in an isolated place. Although the young girl tries to defy the gender learning she finally has to accept it. This situation correlates with Simone de Beauvoir's statement "ONE is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (De Beauvoir, 1956: 273) in her phenomenal book *The Second Sex*. Thus, the short story implies that being a girl in a strict male context is not easy, she has to surrender to the gender roles that are constructed for her, and the chances to actualize herself is limited or even non-existent.

Keywords: doing gender, gender learning, gender order, gender, conversation analysis

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INTRODUCTION

"Boys and Girls" is a short story by Alice Munro, a Canadian female writer (born 1931). This short story "was first published in 1968 in *The Montrealer*, before it was collected with fourteen other stories and published in Alice Munro's first edition of short stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968)" (Thacker, 2013). "Boys and Girls" is narrated by a young girl and it talks about her experience of becoming a woman. Her surrounding taught her through many ways to become an acceptable woman by avoiding certain attitudes and following certain advices. Although at first she tried to resist the normative rules that she considered as limitations, she finally succumbed to the never-ending gender socialization.

The analysis on gender especially on the gender learning experienced by the young girl in Alice Munro's "Boys and Girl" needs a review on several concepts concerning gender and its socialization. Lorber and Farrel (1991) remind us that "In reality, girls and boys, women and men are more alike than they are different" or as Holmes (2009) says "women and men are not different species". They want to make us aware that basically girls and boys are the same because they belong to the same species. However the similarity quickly evaporates because of the application of "sameness taboo" (Rubin, 1975 in Lorber, Judith and Farrel (1991),

"do gender" ([Lorber, Judith and Farrel, 1991](#)), or differently constructed treatment in daily life ([Holmes, 2009](#)). However, Simone de Beauvoir in her phenomenal book *Second Sex* has made a phenomenal statement "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1956) which [Sveinsdóttir \(2018\)](#) interprets as "the view that gender is a social construct and not determined by biology". [Pilcher and Whelehan \(2004\)](#) interpret de Beauvoir's statement as showing that "gender differences are set in hierarchical opposition, where the masculine principle is always the favoured 'norm' and the feminine one becomes positioned as 'Other'". Thus, implicitly de Beauvoir has indicated the differences between sex and gender which are then elaborated by many others.

Concerning the paired term 'sex and gender', [West and Zimmerman \(1991\)](#) give a brief but comprehensive explanation:

Sex is a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males ... Gender, in contrast, is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category.

Briefly stated, sex tends to be a given biological condition while gender is a socially constructed condition based on a certain biological category. [Pilcher and Whelehan \(2004\)](#) indicate that the subtly imposed difference between sex and gender has the purpose to "maintain a patriarchal system of power and to create a consciousness among women that they were naturally better suited to 'domestic' roles". Holmes also indicates that the maintenance of gender difference is done through gendered socialization because "gender is a major boundary around which resources and prestige and power are divided" ([Holmes, 2009](#)). Thus, there is a hidden agenda behind the sex-gender difference that is maintained from time to time that becomes the concern of many people.

The term gender just appeared in 1970s ([Holmes, 2009](#)). Reskin, B. and Padavic proposed a comprehensive meaning of gender as follows:

"gender as an active ongoing process, rather than something that is readymade and fixed ... something is gendered when it is, in and of itself, actively engaged in social processes that produce and reproduce distinctions between women and men. 'Gendering' and 'gendered' are concepts which 'signify outcomes that are socially constructed and give males advantages over females. They describe the production of assumptions about gender as well as the institutions that are shaped by those assumptions'" (Reskin, B. and Padavic, 1994 as quoted by [Pilcher, Jane and Whelehan, 2004](#)).

The rich meanings contained in the above quotation is in line with the opinions of other experts. The point on the "ongoing process" is supported by Holmes' opinion that "gender socialization is a process that continues throughout our life" starting from childhood ([Holmes, 2009](#)) in which "Gender is not done in isolation, it is done in relation to others" ([Holmes, 2009](#)). Thus gender basically is not

fixed as most biological distinctions.

Meanwhile, the point concerning "distinction between women and men" is also in line with [West and Zimmerman \(1991\)](#) who stated that "the 'doing' of gender is undertaken by men and women" in which "Doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biologically. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the 'essentialness' of gender" ([West, Candace and Zimmerman, 1991](#)). The deliberate construction of gender is also supported by [Charlebois \(2011\)](#) who pointed out that "The lived body is the key site where gender differences are constructed and thus gender (masculinities and femininities) is accomplished". Thus, a human body despite its biological category, is not a neutral zone anymore, it is a gendered zone, which according to [Pilcher and Whelehan \(2004\)](#) "something is 'gendered' when its character is either masculine or feminine, or when it exhibits patterns of difference by gender". In other words, the human body is always burdened by gendered construction.

Since gender is a very rich term, unavoidably there are several terms related to the term gender which will enrich the understanding on the term gender. The first is about gender identity as stated by [Malti dan Douglas \(2007\)](#):

the differing cultural and social roles that men and women inhabit, as well as the ways in which individuals experience those roles, both internally and in terms of the ways they present themselves to the world through their manner of dress, behavior, physical comportment, and so forth.

Gender identity as the outward appearance will be considered as an indication of someone's gender. Another related term is gender presentation which means "how people choose to present themselves despite what category of sex they have determined they belong to" ([Malti-Douglas, 2007](#)) which is different from Goffman's gender display: "If gender be defined as the culturally established correlates of sex (whether in consequence of biology or learning), then gender display refers to conventionalized portrayals of these correlates" ([Goffman, 1976](#): 69 in [West, Candace and Zimmerman, 1991](#): 17). Gender presentation may differ from the expected behavior while gender display follows the norm.

Still related to the term gender is the term gender order which, according to [Pilcher and Whelehan \(2004\)](#) is a patterned system of ideological and material practices, performed by individuals in a society, through which power relations between women and men are made, and remade, as meaningful. It is through the gender order of a society that forms or codes of masculinities and femininities are created and recreated, and relations between them are organized.

Thus, gender is hierarchical, in which male gender has a higher position and has more power than the female gender. Meanwhile, another related term, gender segregation, "occurs when women and men are located separately from one another, while otherwise participating in a broadly similar set of activities ... sustained by 'tradition'"

([Pilcher, Jane and Whelehan, 2004](#)). Thus gender order and gender segregation interrelate in which gender order hierarchically differs the suggested attitudes and norms for each gender while gender segregation separates the function of each gender to produce a complete achievement.

Still related to the rich term gender is about the indispensable agent of gender socialization who is represented by parents who "encourage and discourage different kinds of emotions in boys and girls, tolerating anger more in boys and fear more in girls" ([Birnbaum, D. W. & Croll, 1984](#) as quoted by [Lippa, 2005](#)). Due to the segregated domestic-public tasks based on traditional gender roles: "Women may therefore come to take on numerous domestic tasks because they have learned how to do them quickly and efficiently and to involve their partners would be more time-consuming and less effective" ([Burr, 2022](#)). Conditioned to handle domestic type of jobs, women becomes domestic experts that often feel impatient if helped by domestically awkward men. It makes the job relationship between females and males get more widely separated.

From the term gender which is rich in meanings and facets as has been put forward in the previous paragraphs, it can be briefly synthesized as follows. Gender is not biological, static, or neutral. It is a much laden term and the site of many hidden interests. As a socially constructed term, gender must be dissected carefully and thoroughly. So, the many related aspects of gender must be taken into consideration. Gender construction, identity, presentation, display, order, segregation, or role are some of the related aspects of gender that are important to be taken into account. In doing so, the understanding of gender will be deep and sufficient for a sound analysis.

However, humans are not robots who follow whatever instructed to them. However, their agency is already stunted by the normative convention as stated by [Charlebois \(2011\)](#): "Despite the dynamic nature of gender construction, individuals are not entirely unconstrained to freely do gender, but their agency is somewhat curtailed by social institutions which prescribe situationally appropriate accomplishments of gender". Since humans are not robots despite their gender socialization, their attitudes and responses are sometimes not in line with the society's accepted norms. [Archer and Lloyd \(2002\)](#) state that:

Nevertheless, there is evidence that children can, under some circumstances, behave like the opposite sex ... Children imitated behaviour they viewed as gender-appropriate, irrespective of the sex of the person performing it ... Processes such as imitation, tuition, and feedback from one's own.

Some children, whether consciously or unconsciously, defy the prescribed gender role by doing non normative behavior they consider suitable for them.

Meanwhile, language plays an important role in conveying the prescribed gender construction. One way to study gender and language is through conversation analysis.

According to [Liddicoat \(2007\)](#) "Conversation analysis is analysis of real-world, situated, contextualized talk" or as

stated by [Hutchby and Wooffitt \(2002\)](#) "conversation analysis is the study of talk ... the systematic analysis of the talk produced in everyday situations of human interaction: talk-in-interaction". Thus, conversation analysis focuses on the content of the conversation. This is in line with Sunderland's statement that conversation analysis "enables consideration of construction of gender in that talk ... CA dovetails well with language and gender study ... towards the study of ongoing gender construction in discourse" (2004: 13). The content of conversation analysis may be about the prescribed gender as expected by the society. Meanwhile, discourse with its wider scope than conversation analysis may also embodies how "patriarchy and oppressive norms and social practices are instantiated and reproduced" ([Speer, 2005](#)). In short, whether in the form of discourse or conversation analysis, the embodied contents may be about "the relationship between gender, language and culture" ([Speer, 2005](#)). In other words, the construction of gender and other heteronormative form may be represented through the language used in conversation analysis.

Bearing in mind all the concepts above about the action and reaction of gender socialization, this paper will focus on the gender learning imposed on the young female character and her reactions as presented by Alice Munro in her short story entitled "Boys and Girls". This topic has not been done yet, as shown by the following previous study. A no author's name and no date essay entitled "The gender conflict in Munro's "Boys and Girls"" (The Gender Conflict in Munro's "Boys and Girls," n.d.) basically talks about the young female character's finding gender identity. [Goldman's article \(1990\)](#) entitled "Penning in the Bodies: The Construction of Gendered Subjects In Alice Munro's Boys and Girls" focuses on the specific relationship between the young female character and her father and mother implying the power in the pen/farm. [Stefanovici \(n.d.\)](#) in her article entitles "Traditional Socialization in A. Munro's "Boys and Girls"" talks about the young female's search of individuality among gender roles and stereotypes. [Farrokh \(2017\)](#) in "Being Gender/Doing Gender, in Alice Munro and Pedro Almadovar" is a comparative study about the gender performance. [Murray \(2014\)](#) in "Not Entirely on His Side": The Assumption of Sexed Subjectivity in Alice Munro's "Boys and Girls"" talks about the sexual identity of the young girl. Thus, it can be concluded that there is still a gap on the talks about gender supported by conversation analysis related to gender learning. No articles focus on the gender learning of the young female narrator who at first does not want to follow the prescribed attitudes. Based on the gap that has been found, the focus of this study is on the process of gender construction of the young female in the short story pivoting on the aspects; namely gender defiance, gender learning, gender acceptance, bearing in mind gender in language through conversation analysis.

METHODS

The analysis on "Gender Learning in Alice Munro's Short Story Entitled "Boys and Girls"" uses a combination of research methods. The first one, is library research method which is used to gather data, whether data for the supporting concepts or data from the short story being analyzed. Basically, library research method is done with the help of the library's facilities whether in library buildings or in e-library, searching for relevant printed or electronic books, since "the logic of the library research process is the movement from what exists to what is worth using" (George, 2008). Supporting the library research method is the close reading technique, in which close reading according to Phelan is "close analysis and forming an overall interpretation" (Phelan, 2021), although Phelan preferred to use the term "close analysis" (Phelan, 2021). In close reading/close analysis the data will be analyzed whether it is relevant or not because not all data obtained through library research method can strongly support the theories/concepts borrowed and the analysis of the chosen literary work. The general analysis is based on qualitative research method which is "interpretative research" (Creswell, 2009). For the specific literary analysis, a contextual research method is applied. Context, according to Beard are: "the 'circumstances' that contribute both to its production by the author and to its reception by the reader. Context refers to what goes with a text, rather than what is in it" (Beard, 2004). In other words, context in literary works relates to the outside surroundings of the literary works whether in the form of social or cultural contexts. This is in line with Behrendt's (2008) opinion:

A contextual analysis is simply an analysis of a text (in whatever medium, including multi-media) that helps us to assess that text within the context of its historical and cultural setting, but also in terms of its textuality – or the qualities that characterize the text as a text.

Behrendt (2008) tends to see that contextual analysis must also include textual analysis. Thus, in the contextual literary research a combination of intrinsic aspects and extrinsic aspects are applied.

The intrinsic aspects focus on character, conflict, and setting while the extrinsic elements are about the issues around gender (gender order, gender segregation, gender learning, gender presentation, gender display, etc.).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion on "Gender Learning in Alice Munro's short story entitled "Boys and Girls"" will focus on the young female character. There are three points discussed; namely, gender defiance, gender learning, gender acceptance combined with conversation analysis related to gender learning. Before discussing these points in order to see the overall process of inevitable gender learning, it is better to know the setting of place of the short story. The setting is in

a fox farm in which the father, the fox farmer: "raised silver foxes, in pens; and in the fall and early winter, when their fur was prime, he killed them and skinned them and sold their pelts to the Hudson's Bay Company or the Montreal Fur Traders" (Munro, 1968). It is an exceptional farm which is isolated from the other neighbors and demands hard work even for man. The house is dominated by the mother's work of making "jelly and jam and preserves, pickles and chilli sauce" (Munro, 1968) in the kitchen. Thus, the setting of place is a small world divided into male and female areas. The people in this small world consist of three adults: father, mother, and a male farm helper, and two children: the young girl without name who is the narrator and her little brother. Sometimes this small world has visitors such as the male salesman and the grandmother. The setting of time is not quite clear but it is around the middle of twentieth century. The social setting portrays a low hard working social class without many social interactions. Based on this time, place, and social setting, the young female narrator grows up. During her growing into womanhood, she goes through several stages of gender development as will be discussed in the following session.

Gender Defiance

First, the young female narrator is described as a person who is defying the female gender role. She likes to work helping her father in the fox farm. She helps to give water to the fox, as can be seen in the following quotation: "This was my job in the summer, when the foxes had to have water twice a day ... I had the real watering can, my father's, though I could only carry it three-quarters full" (Munro, 1968). It can be seen how proud she is doing that job. She is so pleased with herself because she is trusted by the father to use his watering can. She considers it as a delegation of authority to her. The young girl also enjoys doing other farm work such as "Besides carrying water I helped my father when he cut the long grass" (Munro, 1968). This kind of work is not a work normatively designed for a female, moreover a young one, however she does not feel forced to do it.

Another event supports the indication of her pride working side by side with her father. She is so proud and happy when her father does not say that she is a girl to the visiting salesman. She returns her gratefulness by working so hard:

Nevertheless I worked willingly under his eyes, and with a feeling of pride. One time a feed salesman came down into the pens to talk to him and my father said, "Like to have you meet my new hired hand." I turned away and raked furiously, red in the face with pleasure" (Munro, 1968).

The young girl's worshipping attitude to her father is clearly seen in the following quotation: "my father was tirelessly inventive and his favourite book in the world was Robinson Crusoe" (Munro, 1968). In her eyes, her father is awesome. He is a kind of inventor who has adventurous spirit indicated by the allusion to the book entitled Robinson Crusoe.

The young girl's closeness to the father is also shown in the naming activity. Naming or labelling belongs to the male's privileges. In this short story, the young girl and her little brother are given the chance to give names to the fox that going to be kept as "the breeding stock" (Munro, 1968). This activity makes the young girl feel that she is accepted in the male world. She also feels that she is more functional in the farm than her little brother: "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" (Munro, 1968). She considers that her little brother is not useful in the farm because he only plays around the farm. She underestimates her little brother's role in the farm.

The young girl's pride to herself in the male's circle is supported by her imagination about herself:

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. I rescued people from a bombed building I shot two rabid wolves who were menacing the schoolyard (the teachers cowered terrified at my back). Rode a fine horse ... acknowledging the townspeople's gratitude for some yet-to-be-worked-out piece of heroism (Munro, 1968).

She imagines herself to be the center of attention because of her heroic deeds. She becomes an indispensable person in the life of many people because only she can save the people from danger. Her imagination is actually her escape from her boring life. Thus the young girl is defying the monotonous life in the farm through her imagination. In reality she tries to be useful in the fox farm by doing farm work usually done by male worker. Besides defying the expected gender role, the young girl also defies the provided zone for her. Instead of staying inside the house, she enjoys being outside working with the father.

Second, the young girl also defies domestic jobs. She does not enjoy kitchen's activities:

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 (Munro, 1968).

Although the jobs given by her mother do not demand much energy as the farm work, she feels suffering doing those jobs. She always finds an opportunity to escape from the kitchen. The young girl also feels that the kitchen is a suffocating place: "I hated the hot dark kitchen in summer, the green blinds and the flypapers, the same old oilcloth table and wavy mirror and bumpy linoleum" (Munro, 1968). For her the kitchen's situation is very different from that of the farm. The farm offers a free challenging life while the kitchen offers a tedious work: "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" (Munro, 1968). It is obvious that the young girl prefers working in the farm. For her, farm work is a real work.

Her defying the domestic job is intensified by her mother's appearance. She looks pale, tired, and messy:

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 ... 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 (Munro, 1968).

In the young girl's eyes, the mother looks like being entrapped with the unending domestic jobs. She is always busy and has no time to take care of her own self. Her time is consumed to help earning money by making "jelly and jam and preserves, pickles and chilli sauce" (Munro, 1968) and to cook for the family.

Third, the young girl defies prescribed femininity. The obvious example can be seen in her reaction to the remarks of the visiting grandma:

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 (Munro, 1968).

Grandma is the agent of normative behavior. Seeing the parents do not educate her grand-daughter according to the norms for the girls, grandma takes over the responsibility. However, the young girl considers that the accepted attitudes for girls as uttered by the grandma are limiting her free spirit. She is expected to be feminine and passive with no desire to ask questions. She defies these limiting rules by keeping doing her unaccepted behavior.

Fourth, the young girl defies the limitation to freedom. This is implied in her action for Flora, the old female horse that is going to be shot because her meat is needed to feed the foxes. Flora, although old and lame, is basically energetic and rather wild. When it is time for her to be shot death, she breaks away and runs along the fenced farm. However, the gate is open. The father orders the children who are nearer to the gate than him to close it so the horse can be caught easily:

I could run very fast. I ran across the garden, past the tree where our swing was hung, and jumped across a ditch into the lane. There was the open gate

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. Flora never slowed down; she galloped straight past me (Munro, 1968).

The young girl is a fast runner and thus she actually can shut the gate close, however she does the opposite thing. She lets the gate opens so Flora can run away leaving the farm.

This action is the manifestation of her wanting to be free from any limitation.

Gender Learning

First, the young girl learns about gender segregation. She observes that her parents have different jobs. Her father is almost always outside the house, raising the foxes and skinning them: "My father removed the pelt inside-out from the body of the fox" (Munro, 1968). Her mother is almost always inside the house, especially in the kitchen:

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 ... her bare lumpy legs, not touched by the sun, her apron still on and damp across the stomach from the supper dishes (Munro, 1968).

The job segregation is typical, the father with the raising and killing while the mother with the cooking and preserving.

Another lesson on gender segregation is when it is the little brother, not her, the older sister who has helped a lot in the farm, who is taken to join the chasing and shooting of Flora: "Laird called to them, "Let me go too, let me go too!" and Henry stopped the truck and they took him in" (Munro, 1968). Only the men are involved, the father, Henry the farm helper, and the little brother. She is left where she should belong to, inside the house. Although she has worked hard in the farm helping the father, her work is not appreciated by the mother: "I heard my mother saying, "Wait till Laird gets a little bigger, then you'll have a real help"" (Munro, 1968). In her mother's eyes, she is not "a real help" as what her little brother will be in the near future. From the words "real help" the young girl learns that she is different from her brother who has the prospect of being considered useful in the farm, not like her. The young girl learns about the gender roles through gender segregation.

Her mother, who is a silent supporter of gender segregation, has provided a separate job for her according to her gender:

"And then I can use her more in the house," I heard my mother say. 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" (Munro, 1968).

For her mother, a girl's place is inside the house, helping the mother. Her mother has been waiting for her full participation with the house work. The words "It's not like I had a girl in the family at all" forces the young girl to realize that as "a girl" her area is inside the house. Her mother's words in her conversation with the father clearly positions the young girl according to her gender.

Second, the young girl learns the gender order. She begins to learn that as a girl she should not work in the fox farm from the words of the visiting salesman: "... my father said, "Like to have you meet my new hired hand." I turned away and raked furiously, red in the face with pleasure. "Could of fooled me," said the salesman. "I thought it was only a girl"" (Munro, 1968). The visiting salesman at first underestimates her presence in the farm, however seeing her

hard work he appreciates her because she is not just a girl. Thus, it implies the gender order in which a girl is not suitable to work in the fox farm even though she works seriously there. Thus, from the language used by male salesman, it can be detected his condescending tone regarding female gender and the capability of working hard in the farm for those categorized as females.

Another lesson about gender order is the incident between the young girl and her little brother. The little brother that she underestimates all this time unexpectedly can beat her in a fight. The comment of the farm-helper, Henry, emphasizes the gender order: "Henry saw this, and laughed, saying, "Oh, that there Laird's gonna show you, one of these days!"" (Munro, 1968). Henry enjoys the young girl's defeat. It indicates that the power position of a girl must be below that of a man, even though the man is younger. Henry's language clearly indicates his pride and certainty that the young Laird will become a stronger male who will take the position of a leader.

The young girl learns about gender order gradually. She becomes sensitive to the theme of gender:

It seemed that in the minds of the people around me there was a steady undercurrent of thought, not to be deflected, on this one subject. 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 (Munro, 1968).

She gradually realizes that her surrounding follows the gender order and expects her to be obedient to it. She cannot ignore this demand anymore. There is no neutral position, everything is gendered. Once she is categorized as a girl she has to follow the gender rule and order. By following all the rules and roles concerning gender, she becomes a woman. She has to learn to become a woman.

Third, the young girl learns the gender difference. Once she realizes about her gender and what her surrounding expects from her, she begins to set a spatial boundary between her and her little brother: "I planned to put up some kind of barricade between my bed and Laird's, to keep my section separate from his" (Munro, 1968). She wants to have a separate and private area for herself. She begins to create her personal zone. Once she learns about gender difference, her relationship with her little brother is not close anymore: "We did not sing at night any more" (Munro, 1968). Their ritual of singing together before sleeping ends. There is an invisible barrier between them.

Gender Acceptance

First, the young girl accepts her gender identity as a female who is expected to be feminine. After dividing the room she used to sleep together with her little brother, the young girl starts decorating her bedroom: "Lately I had been trying to make my part of the room fancy, spreading the bed with old lace curtains, and fixing myself a dressing table with some leftovers of cretonne for a skirt" (Munro, 1968). The feminine items begin to dominate her personal area. Not only that, her imagination about herself has also changed.

If at first she imagines herself as a hero saving many lives from danger, now her imagination about herself is as follows:

somebody would be rescuing me ... And at this point the story concerned itself at great length with what I looked like – how long my hair was, and what kind of dress I had on; by the time I had these details worked out the real excitement of the story was lost (Munro, 1968).

She does not imagine herself as the hero anymore, now she is the one needs rescuing. She is also the one who concerns about her feminine appearance however she does not feel any enjoyment in doing so.

Second, the young girl accepts her gender position as the second sex or the other. Her position as the first child is replaced by her younger brother. This can be seen when they are having dinner:

Laird looked across the table at me and said proudly distinctly, "Anyway it was her fault Flora got away."

"What?" my father said.

"She could of shut the gate and she didn't. She just open' it up and Flora ran out."

"Is that right?" my father said.

Everybody at the table was looking at me. I nodded, swallowing food with great difficulty. To my shame, tears flooded my eyes (Munro, 1968).

Her little brother, Laird, now belongs to the male circle after being allowed to join the chasing and shooting of the old female horse, Flora, in an authoritative and accusing tone reveals a secret concerning her older sister compulsive attitude. Laird's reproachful language in his conversation with the father strongly indicates that as a male he places himself higher than his older sister and has the right to judge his older sister.

The young girl is unable to utter a word. Her emotion replaces her voice. She shows feminine attitude now: voiceless and emotional. The young girl's fragile situation is worsened by the father's cornering question:

My father made a curt sound of disgust. "What did you do that for?"

I didn't answer. I put down my fork and waited to be sent from the table, still not looking up.

But this did not happen. For some time nobody said anything, then Laird said matter-offactly, "She's crying" (Munro, 1968).

Again she is not able to answer the question. She loses her spirit. She is waiting for punishment. Laird's words are the first punishment for her since he draws the attention of the others in the dining table to the fact that she is crying. He exposes her vulnerability, her lower position as the second sex. The conversation analysis shows that the language in the conversation dominated by the males corners the young girl. The father uses demanding interrogative sentence directly followed by the young brother's condescending sentence mercilessly smashes the young girl's ego.

The father's words are the last blow. The head of the family has dropped the labelling decision:

"Never mind," my father said. He spoke with resignation, even good humour the words which absolved and dismissed me for good. "She's only a girl," he said.

I didn't protest that, even in my heart. Maybe it was true (Munro, 1968).

He is not angry. However, his understanding attitude implied in the sentence "She's only a girl" is condescending and final. Nothing can change it. The young girl does not have any other alternative except accepting the father's words. She has to live with that positioning statement: "She's only a girl", no more no less. In other words, her sex limited her choices in life. Because she is just a young dependent girl, so her gender must agree to that limiting attributes. There is no chance for her to step out of that boundary due to her sex. The conversation analysis indicates that the father's choice of words ultimately closes the world of the young girl.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis on the short story entitled "Boys and Girls" written by Alice Munro it can be concluded that gender is a serious case. The demand to follow a certain gender role referring to a specific type of acknowledged sex is imposing in manner although it may not be in the form of physical enforcement. The no-name female girl in the short story represents this condition. Although at first she is allowed to do jobs considered to be male's and is always outside the house despite her mother's protest, finally she cannot escape from the prescribed gender role for her. As soon as the male heir is coming of age, she has to learn to accept a bitter lesson that her place is inside the house helping the mother. There is no escape from the stereotypically constructed gender role for her.

Such an unnegotiable case happens to the young girl because of several factors. She lives in a strong patriarchal surrounding. The older males just tolerate her unfeminine participation in the field to some extent because she is useful while waiting for the male heir grows bigger. For the older females if not reminding the appropriate manner for young female to her, they will ask her to stay indoor to help with the domestic jobs. The isolated area of their dwelling, due to the unusual profession of the father, makes the patriarchal situation with strict division of gender roles not easy to bend or break. Thus, the no-name girl is trapped in a situation where traditional gender role is strictly applied.

This article focuses on one particular aspect of gender; namely, gender learning, which is also enriched with the conversation analysis on the language used leading to inevitable gender learning of the no-name young girl. However, the short story is rich in meaning. As a rich short story, of course there have been several articles analyzing the short story as can be seen from the previous study mentioned before. Most of the articles focus on gender with its various factors; however, the point on complicated patriarchal power applied by the male and female characters in the short story has not yet analyzed comprehensively. So, there is still a gap to focus on for the next analysis.

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