

The Effects of Social Restraints and Gender Roles on the Female Characters in *Sons and Lovers*

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Abstract:

This study looks at how societal norms and gender roles are portrayed in D.H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers* and how they affect the female characters. In the sociocultural backdrop of late Victorian England, this study examines the complexity of female identity, agency, and autonomy through a thorough analysis of the three main female characters: Gertrude Morel, Miriam Leivers, and Clara Dawes. Using theoretical frameworks from social constructivism, gender studies, and feminist theory, the study explores how societal norms and gender roles influence the relationships, ideas, and behaviors of the female characters. By analyzing the narrative strategies, symbolism, locations, objects, and language that Lawrence uses, the research clarifies the novel's complex representation of social norms and gender expectations. The article also addresses *Sons and Lovers* applicability to current debates concerning gender issues and social standards, emphasizing the novel's lasting value as a piece of literature that elicits contemplation on the survival of patriarchal systems and the necessity of social transformation. The article concludes by outlining potential directions for future investigation and study in this field, such as interdisciplinary studies that look at the intersections between gender expectations and other identity markers and comparative assessments of gender portrayal in other literary works.

Keywords: Social Constructivism, Gender Role, Female, Feminine Identity.

Introduction:

The classic work of early 20th-century literature *Sons and Lovers* by D.H. Lawrence examines the intricacies of human relationships, particularly when they are confined by family dynamics and social expectations. The story is set in the coal mining region of Nottinghamshire, England, and chronicles the life of the Morel family. It centers on Paul Morel, the protagonist, and his connections with two love interests, Miriam Leivers, and Clara Dawes, as well as his mother, Gertrude Morel. Fundamentally, *Sons and Lovers* explores the complexities of social norms and gender expectations that were common in the late Victorian era. In a culture where gender roles are deeply rooted and strictly regulated, the novel portrays the challenges faced by its female protagonists as they attempt to balance what they want in life with the requirements placed on them by both their families and the larger community. Using a critical perspective, the research topic of expectations for women and limitations of society in the context of *Sons and Lovers* aims to examine and evaluate how female characters are portrayed in the novel. The goal of the research is to examine how gendered expectations and cultural standards influence the identities,

interpersonal relationships, and life decisions of characters such as Gertrude Morel, Miriam Leivers, and Clara Dawes. The following are the study's main goals:

1. Examining in detail how women are portrayed in *Sons and Lovers* about the social setting of late Victorian England.
2. Exploring how cultural norms and expectations for women affect the lives and journeys of the female characters, with a focus on relationships, independence, and agency.
3. Investigating how D.H. Lawrence uses thematic subjects, symbols, and narrative devices to portray the challenges and goals faced by the female characters in the work of fiction.
4. Analyzing *Sons and Lovers* connection and importance in influencing debate on gender depiction in the novel and its effects on contemporary culture. By exploring these goals, this study aims to shed light on how gender roles and societal norms are nicely presented in *Sons and Lovers*, providing important insights into the novel's larger themes of identity, love, and social restrictions.

Several theoretical frameworks from feminist theory, gender studies, and social constructivism might offer insightful analyses of the portrayal of female characters and their experiences in *Sons and Lovers* when examining the gender contemplation and limitations of society present in the novel.

Some critics criticized Lawrence for being anti-feministic and misogynistic, while others applauded him for his clever and genuine representation of female characters. In *Son of Woman* (1931) Middleton Murry was the first to accuse him of misanthropy. Murry's critique is what has caused Lawrence's recognition as "the squeaky-voiced, hysterical, impotent prophet of virility" (Simpson 13) reduced. Murry has interpreted Lawrence's stance on feminism as a manifestation of his terrible "hyper-sensitive masculinity" (Murry72). However, some other critics, such as Anais Nin in her writing *D.H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study* has suggested that Lawrence possessed "a complete realization of the feelings of women. As a matter of fact, he frequently wrote in a feminine style. (Nin 66-7,70). On the other hand in the *Studies in Classic American Literature, Volume 2*, He expressed his antifeminist notion in his style by saying "unless a man believes in himself and in his gods, genuinely; unless fiercely obeys his own Holy Ghost; his woman will destroy him, Woman is strange rather terrible phenomenon, to men" (Lawrence 89) . But Walter Morel did not have knowledge or intellect like her. In her work, Nina Haritatu in the article *Emotion and the Unconscious: The Mythicization of Women in Sons and Lovers* represents that "she is the angel in the house, the innocent victim of her husband's uncomprehending coarseness" (Nina Haritatu). In a letter to Rachel Annand Taylor, Lawrence said, referring to his father, "he lacked principle, as my mother would have said. He deceived her and lied to her." (Tedlock 14). It demonstrates how a lady fell into the trap of marriage, bound by the moralistic standards of Victorian society, by addressing falsehoods "but this trapped woman will never break free" (Haritatu). It is clear that Mrs. Morel is portrayed as a devourer of her husband's life in the novel's beginning chapters and as a stepping stone in her children's lives later on, as Judith Arcana asserts in her *D.H. Lawrence Review 20* (1989), "ignores one basic conflict the novel presents: the intensity and power of Gertrude Morel thwarted by the utter impotence of her situation" (Qtd. in Schapiro 22). She also point out Lydia Blanchard's idea of Mrs. Morel, describing that she inhabits a realm that "allows her no positive outlets for her talents and energies, who must live a vicarious existence through her sons" (Qtd. in Schapiro 22). When she expressed to Paul, "I know how hard it is to be a woman," She wanted to express her real feeling as a women. "(Lawrence 17). Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (1971) has stated that she is "the rebellious feminist and political activist . . . whom Paul nonchalantly disposes of when he has exhausted her sexual utility" (Millett 254).

Influence of Feminist Theory, Gender Studies and Social Constructivism in Female Characters of *Sons and Lovers* :

The analysis of dynamics of power, gender differences, and the societal formation of gender roles are central to feminist theory. Feminist philosophy can be used to decode the patriarchal systems that control the lives of the female characters in *Sons and Lovers*, especially Gertrude Morel. Feminist views can be used to investigate how Gertrude's identity and choice are shaped by her responsibilities as a wife and mother, as well as her desires for liberty and self-satisfaction outside of conventional gender standards.

The social, cultural, and historical construction of gender identities, as well as how these constructions interact with additional components of identity including class, race, and sexual orientation, are the main subjects of gender studies. Within the working-class setting of *Sons and Lovers*, gender studies can shed light on the complex interplay between gender norms and class dynamics. This viewpoint can clarify the various experiences of female characters navigating their gendered identities about their socioeconomic origins, such as Clara Dawes and Miriam Leivers.

According to the theory of social constructivism, institutions, and societal norms affect how people behave and how they perceive the world. When used to analyze *Sons and Lovers*, a social constructivist perspective might clarify how cultural norms surrounding gender roles limit the options and possibilities accessible to the female protagonists. Social constructivism can be used to analyze how the characters absorb, comply with, or defy these expectations, as well as the effects of their choices on the social structure of the novel's setting.

The examination of the female characters in *Sons and Lovers* is informed by these theoretical viewpoints, which offer frameworks for understanding and interpreting their experiences. Scholars can explore the implications of gender norms and societal constraints portrayed in the novel by utilizing feminist theory, gender studies, and social constructivism. This allows for a deeper understanding of the characters' struggles, agency, and relationships within the socio-cultural context of late Victorian England.

Gertrude Morel:

It is shown that Gertrude is a determined lady who gives up her own goals and ambitions for the benefit of her boys, especially Paul. She represents the archetypal image of the devoted mother, whose only priorities are her kids and taking care of the house. Gertrude struggles to establish herself outside of her duties as a wife and mother since her identity is so strongly entwined with them. Mrs. Morel's physical and emotional distance from her husband has grown. Gaining more intimacy with her boys, Paul and William, brings her comfort. A man who embodies the most awful aspects of contemporary life is a long way from showing his wife affection. Mrs. Morel connects with nature in the garden, which enables her to experience blissful moments. Her unwavering encouragement of Paul to continue his higher education is credited with helping her establish her identity as a strong woman.

Gertrude wants to be happy, but she can't because of social conventions around marriage and motherhood, which say that taking care of her family comes first. Her affectionate and possessive interactions with her sons resemble the stereotypical image of the dominating mother figure in society.

Miriam Leivers:

It is shown that Miriam is a sophisticated and sensible young woman who finds it difficult to balance her increasing romantic emotions for Paul with her religious convictions. She represents the ideal that society has of the decent lady, whose value is determined by her piety and moral purity. As she struggles with her

wishes and the demands that society has of her as a woman, Miriam and Paul's relationship is uncomfortable and unclear. She highlights the clash between her personal goals and social conventions by getting entangled between her love for Paul and her concern about surrendering her purity of spirit.

Miriam dives into a desired future where love triumphs, escaping the patriarchal oppression that is embodied in her father and brother. She is happiest when she is in the middle of nature. She is inspired to enlighten Paul's spiritual awareness by the pleasant energy she receives from nature. She's like a light shining on him. She serves as his inspiration to experience a spiritual awakening. She turns into his soul partner and helps him find peace. Paul, moved by chastity, recognizes the —Botticelli angel in Miriam, who is “cut off from ordinary life by her religious intensity” (qtd. in Haritatu). Religious customs have —made the world for her either a nunnery garden, or a Paradise, where sin and knowledge were not, or else an ugly, cruel thing (qtd. in Haritatu). Miriam's failure to effectively convey her love for Paul and claim her action is a reflection of the limitations patriarchal standards of modesty and chastity place on women.

Clara Dawes:

Clara is shown as a contemporary, self-sufficient woman who challenges social norms and conventional gender roles. She is a symbol of the early 20th-century New Woman, who longs for liberty and personal fulfillment outside of traditional home arenas. Clara seeks a relationship with Paul on her terms, defying the patriarchal conventions of her era with her boldness and sexual confidence. Clara struggles to find acceptance and a sense of belonging in a traditional community, and the social stigma associated with divorce poses a threat to her independence.

In the novel, she is portrayed in the book as a stunning woman with great beauty “a rather striking woman, blonde, with a sullen expression, and a defiant carriage” (qtd. in Haritatu N.p.). Though ultimately limited by societal biases and peer moral judgments, her relationship with Paul is characterized by passion and emotion.

Sons and Lovers contextualizes middle-class women's roles as dependent figures on their husbands and males via the prism of socioeconomic categories, but it also urges these “inferior” people to rebel for the sake of asserting their control over procreation and gaining economic independence as modernity guarantees women’s shift from reproduction capacities to emancipation” (Manicom 22).

Sons and Lovers portrayal of female characters illustrates the intricate relationship that exists between personal agency, societal norms, and gender expectations. Gertrude Morel personifies the archetypal mother, Miriam Leivers struggles with opposing sexual urges and moral convictions, and Clara Dawes defies expectations as a contemporary, self-reliant woman. In the sociocultural setting of the book, their experiences show how gender norms and societal expectations influence women's attitudes, activities, and interpersonal interactions. The novel focuses on the issue of maternal dedication when mothers are expected to put the welfare of their kids before their own. The dominant mother, whose affection for her sons exceeds her pride and whose life centers around their necessities and ambitions, is embodied by Gertrude Morel. This motif and theme emphasize the societal expectation that women should put their families before their own needs and satisfaction, helping to show Gertrude as a woman whose identity is determined by her duty as a mother.

The conflict between religious morality and human impulses is explored in depth in this novel, especially as it relates to love relationships. The image of the decent woman caught between her love for Paul and her apprehension about surrendering her moral values is embodied by Miriam Leivers. The portrayal of

Miriam as a woman whose internal conflict reflects the cultural expectation that women should uphold conventional ideals of chastity and modesty, even at the sacrifice of their happiness, is aided by this theme and motif.

The novel examines how the woman archetype which is defined by a need for liberty and independence emerged in early 20th-century England. Clara Dawes personifies the motif of the contemporary, self-dependent woman who rejects social norms and conventional gender roles.

The representation of Clara as a woman who rejects patriarchal standards and looks for self-fulfillment outside of traditional household domains is aided by this topic and motif. Her experiences serve as an example of the social reaction that women who assert their individuality and challenge conventional gender norms encounter.

The novel discusses the opposing opinions that are given to men and women when it comes to concerns of love and desire, as well as the stigma that society places on female sexuality. - Symbol: Clara Dawes embodies the symbol of the sexually liberated woman who, because of her rebellious way of life, encounters prejudice and social exclusion. This pattern and theme help to depict Clara as a woman who battles to fit in and be accepted in a traditional culture that penalizes women who reject the rules of gender and female sexuality. In general, these recurrent themes and motifs about social norms and gender expectations support *Sons and Lovers* realistic depiction of female characters and their experiences. The novel highlights the ways in which gender roles and societal expectations shape women's thoughts, actions, and relationships while shedding light on the complexities of women's lives within the sociocultural context of late Victorian England through an examination of the mother's dedication, opposing interests, liberty, and gender.

Narrative techniques and symbolism:

Lawrence reinforces traditional gender norms by depicting the domestic environment as a place of imprisonment for the female characters through the use of vivid imagery and explicit language. Symbols, like the image of the home and fireplace, stand for the cultural ideal of the caring, selfless mother figure that Gertrude Morel personified. The female characters' innermost feelings and wishes are revealed through the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique, which also highlights the conflict between society's limits and personal goals.

Impact on Modern Readers:

Sons and Lovers discussion of universal issues like love, family, and individual identity are why it has endured in the minds of readers. Its detailed depiction of social standards and gender expectations makes readers consider their own experiences as well as the cultural expectations that have shaped their lives. The novel's memorable characters and expressive language make it interesting and approachable for readers of all ages, assuring its continued appeal and significance.

Relevance to continuing talks: In light of current feminist movements and talks about gender equality, *Sons and Lovers* is still relevant to continuing arguments about gender-related problems and societal limits. Its examination of the complexities of women's identity, agency, and liberty speaks to contemporary readers who are addressing related problems in their communities and lives. The novel's portrayal of how gender roles and societal norms influence people's attitudes, behaviors, and interpersonal interactions provokes discussions about the necessity of social reform and the continuance of patriarchal systems.

Controversies and Debates: The novel *Sons and Lovers* has generated discussions and debates about how gender roles and relationships are portrayed, especially in light of Gertrude Morel's character and her controlling parenting. According to some critics, Gertrude's selfless actions uphold obsolete notions of mother sacrifice and gender norms.

Some argue that Gertrude's character offers a realistic depiction of the difficulties associated with parenthood and feminine identity, emphasizing the social limits and influences that influence women's lives. Furthermore, discussions concerning how the novel handles female characters and how it affects how we currently interpret gender and desire continue.

Conclusion:

To sum up, the examination of gender norms and cultural limitations in *Sons and Lovers* provides various significant discoveries and understandings. Gender roles and societal conventions impact the experiences of the novel's female protagonists, who explore the intricacies of female identity, agency, and autonomy within the sociocultural framework of late Victorian England. The work sheds light on the challenges experienced by women in negotiating their responsibilities within a patriarchal society by examining the conflicts between societal expectations and personal wants through the characters of Gertrude Morel, Miriam Leivers, and Clara Dawes. D.H. Lawrence offers complicated perspectives on the connections of gender, class, and identity by illustrating the effects of societal restraints and gender expectations on the lives of female characters through the use of narrative techniques, symbols, settings, objects, and language. Instigating contemplation on the sustainability of patriarchal systems and the necessity of social reform, *Sons and Lovers* continues to strike an emotional connection with readers in the modern era and is essential to continuing discussions about gender discrimination and cultural conventions. The research presented here is important because it adds to our understanding of how gender is represented in literature, particularly in *Sons and Lovers*. This study sheds important light on the particulars of gender roles, societal expectations, and how they interact with other social elements by examining how female characters are portrayed and their experiences inside the novel. Additional investigation and study in this field can involve the following: Comparative evaluations of gender representation in other late Victorian literary works, examining parallels and discrepancies in the depictions of female characters and their lives. Multidisciplinary research that looks at how gender norms intersect with those related to ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other identification markers provides a more thorough knowledge of the nuances of gender portrayal in literature. Research that examines how *Sons and Lovers* is received and interpreted by various readers and cultural context. In a nutshell, *Sons and Lovers* examination of gender norms and cultural restrictions advances our knowledge of how gender is portrayed in literature and encourages more study and investigation into this intricate and varied subject.

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