

Abstract

The thesis on "The Construction of Femininity in Girls' School" aims at unearthing the diffusion of the traditional notion of femininity by a patriarchal system, which is done through the educational system of girls' schools. This is achieved by implanting and reproducing the classic idea of femininity for the female students, which would later be acknowledged by these students and applied in the formation of their self-identity of being women. Due to the reason that femininity is manufactured within the confines of the girls' schools, there are significant differences between the feminine ideology within these schools and the ideology practiced in the present-day society. Thus, this reflects that the essence of femininity is not constant, but subject to change, adapting accordingly to the timeframe. Furthermore, the acceptance, negotiation, and resistance of femininity, as determined by the girls' schools, by young women in these schools are also contemplated. The research conducted has employed Feminist Methodology, which emphasises qualitative researches, so as to truly illustrate the genuine experiences of women.

The ideology that men are the breadwinners and the leaders of the family has had great influences on the realisation of belonging to the female gender group. This system of patriarchy has been embedded in most mainstream social institutions, including the educational institution. This research thus reveals the immense authority of patriarchy in the area of girls' schools. This area, when considered, is in fact belonging to women, which comprises of specific rules and regulations as well as rites of passages. These conditions would be based upon the point of gender display. Moreover, this area is also a public sphere, being full of false dimensions. Even though the girls study in these schools where patriarchy has made it a public sphere, these girls are still confined within the private sphere and are greatly pressured through concentrated disciplines to act in alignment with their social status; which in turn is determined by their gender display. In other words, this is the embodiment of the ideological system where men are the leaders and decision-makers, while women are treated as inferiors and are forced into conforming to the patriarchal meta-narrative.

Social control of women is enforced through various means: For instance, the school arena has become an imitation of the general society where women are taught to express their identities in accordance with their gender display of femininity or are trained to recognise their

gender roles expected in their future lives. Social control would be enforced even to the extent of controlling the sexuality of young women through the meticulously crafted belief of the female purity. This in turn leads to this belief reigning over society's judgment of a 'good' woman. Essentially, social control by the institutions and these above examples all support the separation of 'good' women and 'bad' women – following the blueprint of sexuality under male authority and supervision. This overseeing by men is established through efforts to eradicate or blur women's rights to their authority and true self-identity. All of these mentioned methods for creating the acceptable and expected female are conducted under the teachings and disciplines of the girls' schools, which are produced and reproduced through continuous specific socialization processes of these students. Nevertheless, it is not always the case that the students' true self will only conform.

On the contrary, the students endeavour for negotiations through the other sides of their femininity, with the aim of breaking down the rigid regulations manufactured by their schools. Furthermore, the negotiations and latent resistance of the students may vary in extremity as well as varying in methods to achieve their goals. The choice is made by the individual only – she has the ability to choose what she desires or does not desire to do; or she may execute actions that follow the rules and regulations, while simultaneously execute actions which contradict the same set of rules and regulations. The girl students' state of agency portrays the fact that although they may be influenced by the idea of male dominance, they still embody resistance. This can be considered as a beneficial development amongst these students. However, only when this resistance is rooted in eliminating the authority of patriarchy for their search for selves, and not in the mere desire to free themselves from the schools' strict rules, will their resistance attain real significance and gain utmost benefits.

Therefore, the propositions suggested by the researcher are: the researcher has been exposed to the importance of generating immunity from dogmas for young women. This should be further strengthened by incorporating primary-leveled women's studies courses in the secondary school curriculum, which would include simple to understand topics concerning sexuality and the mechanics involved. The researcher considers this to be a leap for feminism through education; the next proposition is acquired from this thesis. In considering the inequality between men and women, it is not enough to recognise solely the role of gender, but the role of

sexuality should also be recognised and not neglected. This is due to the fact that women still have the authority to negotiate under the concept of gender, which although is under the system of patriarchy, still contains loopholes where women may, but not totally, slip through. The concept of femininity associated with the notion of sexuality, on the other hand, is more rigid and binding for women, resulting in women becoming disheartened to even pose criticisms and formulate questions against the subliminal inequality featured within the patriarchal ideology of sexuality. This is because of the strong and harsh negative reinforcements, implemented by patriarchy, experienced by women who decide to go against sexuality. In addition, the lack of women's consciousness in terms of the oppressing principles of heterosexuality under society's system of patriarchy – which gives power and authority to the male to take advantage of women – breeds repetitive and endless sexual violence towards women in society. This infinite violence has become a decaying characteristic of society's vicious cycle of forever-lasting patriarchy.