Reconstruction of Mother-Daughter Relationship by Breaking the Canon in Betty Friden Way

Dr. K. Ezhil

Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages, SRMIST, Kattankulathur,
ezhilk@srmist.edu.in

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the pervasive impact of societal stereotypes on the mother-daughter relationship, analyzing how these ingrained norms obstruct healthy development and communication between mothers and daughters. Drawing on Betty Friedan's concepts from *The Feminine Mystique*, this study examines the ways in which traditional expectations of femininity, motherhood, and womanhood perpetuate cycles of misunderstanding and limitation within this crucial familial bond. By highlighting the restrictive roles imposed on women and the consequent strain on mother-daughter dynamics, the paper advocates for the dismantling of these stereotypes through the implementation of robust support systems. These systems, encompassing education, community support, and policy reform, are essential for fostering environments where mothers and daughters can thrive in mutual respect and understanding. The ultimate goal is to create a shift within the family unit that leads to healthier relationships and greater personal fulfillment for both mothers and daughters.

Keywords: Mother-Daughter Relationship, Societal Stereotypes, Family Dynamics, Gender Roles, Feminine Mystique, Intergenerational Conflict

INTRODUCTION

"That mothers trained daughters to take their place as the next generation of mothers seemed completely natural to both, since whatever unhappiness they might encounter, they were aware of no alternatives." (Forsyth 45)

In general, Mothers of all times are furiously engaged with building boundaries for their daughters whereas daughters get frustrated and anxiously finding ways to get escape from those boundaries. These contrary courses of mother's constructive process and daughter's breaking process need a reconstruction to put an end to the vicious cycle of frustrated mothers and furious daughters. Modern mothers or deliberate mothers are wishing to provide a space for their daughters to lead the life of their own but unfortunately, they can see only the scary dead ends ahead which turn them typical mothers later. This inappropriate mother's behaviour could be a result of their insecure feeling in the direction of society's unfair attitude on women especially through the lens of media. Media is a powerful play station by which slavery/dependency is retained with the help of threatening details. Highlights of a few child abuse cases are enough to threaten the mothers and for the young daughters to be educated about good touch and bad touch with a terrific notion, which in turn make two more generations of women to get stagnant. It's a push for the mothers, who were the wishers to be the carefree daughters, to restrict their own daughters in stereotypical ways. Meanwhile, instead of thinking about the freedom of their daughters, mothers focus on, to convince and calm down themselves with the state of 'understanding mother' – mothers starting to empathize with their own mothers. After which they decide to be stereotyped mothers. Subsequently, the mothers stop hesitating to repeat what their mothers did to them. That is when all the effective, progressive, and constructive process gets decline, and the same old thoughts and practices replaced. From then on, mothers start to believe firmly that involving in a family system is the only suitable and safe way of life for their daughters which consists of marriage, wifehood, and motherhood.

On the other hand, the rebellious daughters are compelled in a position to prove that they are leading a successful life which encompasses a lot of efforts, to their mothers and others. This proof of daughters to their mothers could be a self-made compulsory agenda as they tried to break the boundaries of their mothers at their young age or even after that. They also try to prove that they have achieved what their mothers have missed in their adulthood. But unfortunately, the daughters fall into the trap of power players and materialists and divert themselves from their progressive agenda. The primary traps set for the young women are 'standards of beauty' and 'fantasy of marriage.' The 'standards of beauty' attracts the focus of young women toward it and make them to take it as their conscious choice even though it affects the health and sometimes is fatal in nature. Power players use this 'standards of beauty' primarily at workplace, movies, advertisement and matrimonial. Materialists make use of these situations and make money by selling beauty products and cosmetics that can beautify and change the appearance at a high cost and with deadly effects. The next trap is 'fantasy of marriage' which is not only a subtle but a mysteries trap. As per the popular saying 'everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die', women wish to get married but sees marital responsibilities as a burden or the point of stagnant. The fantasy over the marriage for women is not on the segment of life but only as an occasion. Women are available with a lot of knowledge to dream about on the day of marriage. They fantasize about their wedding dress, jewels, beautified appearance, the pride being a bride before the crowd and the gratification of the completion of one of the agenda from the checklist of life. To say it more precisely, women think only about the wedding when they think about the marriage. If they try to see the other gray parts behind the colourful bright wedding, they see a raw, dark and rough space that may fear them and make them not to think about it. Both traps are placed very carefully over women/daughters than men of which they crave insanely strong.

Societal forces, particularly media and entrenched stereotypes, play a powerful role in reinforcing the boundaries between mothers and daughters. Media, through its portrayal of idealized femininity and motherhood, perpetuates rigid norms that dictate how women should behave, both in their roles as mothers and daughters. These portrayals often depict women as caregivers who find fulfillment only within the confines of domesticity, while simultaneously upholding unrealistic beauty standards and glorifying self-sacrifice. As mothers internalize these images, they impose similar expectations on their daughters, believing that conforming to these societal ideals is the only path to acceptance and success.

Drawing on Betty Friedan's seminal work, *The Feminine Mystique*, this paper investigates how the traditional expectations perpetuate cycles of limitation and discord within the mother-daughter relationship. Naomi Wolf points out the popular misconception regarding motherhood and the lack of a strong support system for a mother: "Becoming a mother requires a supreme focus, a profound discipline, and even a kind of warrior spirit. Yet our culture prefers to give women doggerel: it suggests that motherhood is simple and effortless. It calls motherhood 'natural'" (3). Friedan's analysis of the restrictive roles assigned to women offers a lens through which we can examine the impact of these stereotypes on the dynamics between mothers and daughters. By exploring the challenges faced by women due to these societal constructs, this paper advocates for the dismantling of stereotypes through the development of robust support systems. These systems—encompassing educational initiatives, community support, and policy reforms—are essential for fostering healthier relationships between mothers and daughters. The goal is to highlight the need for systemic changes that enable both mothers and daughters to transcend traditional roles and embrace a more supportive and understanding relationship. Sheryl Sandberg says that the main hindrance that stops women to take up leading roles is gender stereotyping, which is introduced to daughters during their childhood, and as a result, there is no room for role models for the daughters to follow (22). Through this examination, the paper aims to contribute to a broader discourse on gender roles and familial dynamics, ultimately promoting a more equitable and nurturing environment for future generations.

At the core of this study is Feminist Theory, which provides a critical framework for examining the mother-daughter relationship within the context of societal stereotypes and gender roles. Feminist Theory challenges the traditional, patriarchal norms that confine women to restrictive roles, as explored in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. By critiquing these structures, it offers a pathway to understanding how these roles are inherited and reinforced, particularly through the expectations imposed on mothers and daughters. The theory underscores the ways in which women's identities are shaped by external forces, including media, cultural norms, and family expectations, all of which contribute to the perpetuation of restrictive boundaries. This analysis not only highlights the emotional and psychological toll of these gendered expectations but also advocates for a reimagining of familial roles, promoting more equitable and supportive relationships between mothers and

daughters. Through this feminist lens, the study seeks to dismantle harmful stereotypes and encourage the development of healthier dynamics within the family.

This paper explores the complex dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship, highlighting how societal stereotypes shape their roles and identities. Using Feminist Theory, it critiques patriarchal structures that perpetuate these stereotypes and calls for dismantling such norms. The study emphasizes building support systems to foster healthier, more empowering relationships between mothers and daughters for mutual growth and fulfillment.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the impact of societal stereotypes on the mother-daughter relationship and to identify the need for effective supportive systems. The research begins with a comprehensive examination of societal stereotypes and their influence on familial dynamics, drawing on theoretical insights from feminist literature. The aim is to analyze the prevailing cultural narratives that shape mother-daughter interactions and the associated emotional complexities.

Feminist Theory serves as a critical analytical framework for this study. It investigates how patriarchal structures perpetuate traditional gender roles and expectations that significantly impact mother-daughter relationships. As bell hooks emphasizes, "Feminism is for everybody," suggesting that the implications of feminist thought extend to all societal relationships, including those within families. This framework enables a thorough analysis of intergenerational conflict and the emotional strains imposed by societal norms, revealing the challenges women face in navigating their identities and familial roles.

The study will also incorporate significant works within feminist literature, including Naomi Wolf's *Misconceptions*, Marilyn French's *Her Mother's Daughter*, and Shelley Phillips's *Beyond the Myths*. These texts will inform the analysis of how societal constructs surrounding femininity and motherhood shape the experiences of women, ultimately reinforcing stereotypes that affect the dynamics between mothers and daughters. As Wolf asserts, "When women are able to talk about their lives, they can create a shared understanding that can lead to transformative change." This quote emphasizes the importance of understanding women's narratives, and the study will analyze these narratives through a critical lens to reveal how they reflect and resist societal expectations.

Through this methodological framework, the research aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in mother-daughter dynamics, ultimately advocating for systemic changes that promote healthier, more equitable relationships for future generations. By illuminating the nuanced interplay of societal influences, personal aspirations, and emotional bonds, the study aims to empower both mothers and daughters to challenge restrictive norms and redefine their roles in a supportive environment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review for this study focuses on understanding the impact of societal stereotypes on the mother-daughter relationship through the lens of feminist theory and gender studies. Central to this exploration is Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which critiques the restrictive roles imposed on women in the mid-20th century, providing a foundational perspective on how societal expectations shape women's lives. Friedan's work underscores the ways in which traditional gender roles limit women's personal development and relational dynamics, setting the stage for analyzing similar effects within the mother-daughter relationship.

Building on Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* offers a critical examination of how women have been historically defined by their relationships to men and societal expectations. De Beauvoir's analysis of the "Othering" of women provides valuable insights into how these societal constructs impact familial relationships, including those between mothers and daughters. Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* further contributes to this discourse by addressing the development of female identity and moral reasoning. Gilligan emphasizes the relational aspects of women's experiences, highlighting how stereotypes can distort mother-daughter interactions.

Naomi Wolf's *Misconceptions* adds another layer by discussing the societal pressures surrounding motherhood and the unrealistic expectations placed on women. Wolf's exploration of the complexities of maternal identity and societal norms illuminates the struggles mothers face, which in turn affect their relationships with their daughters. Marilyn French's *Her Mother's Daughter* delves into the intergenerational dynamics between mothers and daughters, analyzing how societal expectations and familial legacies shape women's lives. French's work provides essential context for understanding the emotional and psychological impact of these stereotypes on mother-daughter relationships.

Additionally, Shelley Phillips' *Beyond the Myths* examines the stories that women tell about themselves and their roles within the family, challenging traditional narratives and offering insights into how these myths influence the mother-daughter dynamic. The work of bell hooks, particularly in *All About Love*, explores the concept of love as a transformative force, examining how societal expectations hinder genuine emotional connections. Hooks' insights into love and relational dynamics are crucial for understanding the quality of mother-daughter relationships and how stereotypes can undermine them.

Moreover, Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* offers a psychoanalytic perspective on the socialization of gender roles, discussing how maternal roles are constructed and perpetuated through societal expectations. Chodorow's work provides a framework for analyzing how these constructed roles impact the dynamics between mothers and daughters. Studies on contemporary gender norms, such as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, explore how gender identity and roles are performative rather than innate. Butler's theories on gender performativity are particularly relevant for understanding how societal stereotypes are enacted and reinforced in everyday interactions, including within the family.

This literature review synthesizes these perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of how societal stereotypes shape the mother-daughter relationship and identifies gaps that this study aims to address. It will also highlight successful interventions and support systems discussed in the literature, setting the stage for proposing practical solutions to improve mother-daughter dynamics. Ultimately, these insights will serve as a foundation for fostering meaningful change within these relationships.

RESULTS

The analysis of the literature reveals several key themes regarding the impact of societal stereotypes on the mother-daughter relationship, highlighting the complexities and challenges faced by women across generations.

The results of this study highlight the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, the intergenerational transmission of stereotypes, and the significant influence of media on shaping women's identities. As Betty Friedan and Marilyn French emphasize, societal pressures often confine women to conventional roles, perpetuating limiting beliefs from mothers to daughters. This cycle of conformity to narrow ideals of femininity stunts personal growth and autonomy. Additionally, Simone de Beauvoir and Naomi Wolf illustrate how these stereotypes are passed down, hindering daughters from forging authentic identities as they navigate their mothers' experiences and societal expectations. Media representations, as discussed by Wolf and Shelley Phillips, further exacerbate these pressures, reinforcing unrealistic ideals of beauty and success, leading to anxiety and a sense of inadequacy in daughters. Furthermore, bell hooks and Carol Gilligan reveal how societal expectations can erode emotional connections, complicating the mother-daughter relationship by limiting open communication and empathy. However, the literature also suggests pathways for change, with Judith Butler and Nancy Chodorow advocating for a redefinition of gender roles and maternal identities, promoting open dialogue and emotional authenticity to challenge and break free from restrictive societal norms.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

BETTY FRIEDAN'S CONCEPTS OF FEMININE STEREOTYPES

Betty Friedan's concepts of Feminine Maturity, Feminine Normality, Feminine Adjustment, and Feminine Fulfillment illustrate how societal stereotypes shape women's identities. Feminine Maturity begins when women recognize societal expectations, particularly around domesticity and motherhood, but often leads to acceptance rather than resistance. As these roles are internalized, they become Feminine Normality, where women view these expectations as natural and essential to their identity. Feminine Adjustment follows, with women actively conforming to these stereotypes, often sacrificing personal desires to fit traditional roles. Finally, Feminine Fulfillment is the stage where women fully live out these roles, believing they will find satisfaction, but as Friedan argues, this fulfillment is often shallow and unfulfilling. Her framework critiques how this cycle limits women's personal development and reinforces restrictive gender norms.

FEMININE CANON

Feminine maturity involves understanding the stereotypes that confine women to traditional roles. The expectation that men should hold authority perpetuates male dominance in both familial and societal structures, while the belief that women find fulfillment only as wives and mothers limits their personal and professional aspirations. These norms, internalized as natural, push women to prioritize family over their health, happiness, and career, reinforcing gender inequality and hindering progress. Additionally, mothers often pass these

expectations to their daughters, perpetuating the cycle of inequality and limiting personal growth across generations.

Feminine normality, adjustment, and fulfillment often involve accepting, practicing, and passing on stereotypes. Women feel pressured to conform to roles like caregiver and homemaker, with media and cultural narratives reinforcing these narrow definitions. This dynamic affects the mother-daughter relationship, where traditional roles are modeled and transmitted, restricting daughters' aspirations. Balancing career and family responsibilities often leads women to sacrifice personal goals, sustaining the stereotype that fulfillment is tied to domestic roles. This generational transmission limits opportunities for women and upholds societal structures that reinforce gender disparities.

BREAKING THE CANON

Breaking the canon of traditional gender roles requires embracing needed feminine maturity, adjustment, normality, and fulfillment. These elements are essential for empowering women to challenge societal stereotypes, pursue diverse aspirations, and redefine their identities. By fostering environments that support personal growth and equitable opportunities, both mothers and daughters can break free from restrictive norms and achieve true fulfillment.

Achieving necessary feminine maturity involves encouraging women to question and break free from restrictive gender norms, promoting personal and professional growth without societal limitations. This requires creating support systems that balance family and career responsibilities, ensuring women can pursue their aspirations while managing their familial roles. By fostering an environment that values individual growth, women are empowered to explore diverse paths and achieve a balanced, fulfilling life. Anne Morrow Lindberg in *Gift from the Sea* makes her choice very clear: "I mean to lead a simple life, to choose a simple shell I can carry easily—like a hermit crab" (19). In the mother-daughter dynamic, this maturity is essential for challenging traditional expectations, enabling daughters to pursue goals beyond societal constraints. Inclusive education and gender-equitable family environments play a critical role in supporting these broader aspirations, offering both mothers and daughters the tools to explore and succeed in diverse roles.

Necessary adjustment and fulfillment focus on balancing personal and professional aspirations, allowing women to achieve harmony between their ambitions and family responsibilities. Flexible work policies and equitable systems are vital in supporting both mothers and daughters as they navigate these roles without being confined to traditional stereotypes. Real fulfillment comes from pursuing personal passions and individual talents, setting powerful examples for future generations. Mothers who break away from conventional roles inspire their daughters to recognize that success is not limited to traditional paths. Sheryl Sandberg, who motivates women to occupy lead roles, in the text *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, says, "A truly equal world would be one where women ran half our countries and companies and men ran half our homes. I believe that this would be a better world" (7). By fostering an environment where diverse achievements are valued, both mothers and daughters can redefine what fulfillment means, breaking the cycle of restrictive gender roles and expanding possibilities for future generations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the pervasive influence of traditional gender roles on the mother-daughter relationship and their broader implications for women's personal and professional growth. The perpetuation of these stereotypes, rooted in societal expectations and cultural norms, restricts women's potential by confining them to predefined roles such as caregivers and homemakers. Feminine maturity, as discussed, is shaped by an internalization of the belief that a woman's ultimate fulfillment is found in her roles as wife and mother, reinforcing male dominance and limiting women's aspirations, making it difficult for them to explore their identities outside the realm of family and caregiving.

Mothers play a significant role in transmitting stereotypes, often unconsciously passing down traditional values to their daughters. The study emphasizes how cultural and media influences reinforce these norms, creating a narrow definition of feminine normality. Having internalized these expectations, mothers may encourage their daughters to follow similar paths, perpetuating the cycle of gender inequality. This intergenerational transmission limits daughters' choices, forcing them to conform to societal ideals that prioritize familial duties over individual ambitions. Consequently, women struggle to reconcile their personal desires with family and societal expectations, restricting their growth and maintaining the status quo of gendered division.

Furthermore, the study underscores the concept of feminine adjustment, where women must constantly

negotiate between their roles as caregivers and their professional aspirations. The pressure to fulfill both family and career responsibilities often leads to personal sacrifices, as women adjust or abandon their personal goals to meet societal expectations. This balancing act reinforces gendered expectations that women bear the brunt of domestic and caregiving duties, limiting their opportunities for career advancement and personal fulfillment. These sacrifices come at the cost of individual growth and freedom while perpetuating stereotypes for future generations.

The final concept explored in this study, feminine fulfillment, reveals that traditional views of success are narrowly defined through roles such as motherhood and domesticity. As mothers pass on these stereotypes to their daughters, the next generation of women continues to face similar societal pressures, limiting their potential to explore diverse careers and personal goals. Thus, the reinforcement of these stereotypes sustains systemic gender inequalities, constraining both mothers and daughters in roles that prioritize domestic life over broader achievements.

Ultimately, breaking this cycle requires conscious efforts to challenge and redefine these traditional norms. By fostering a culture that encourages gender equity, promotes diverse female identities, and supports women in balancing personal and professional aspirations, society can work toward a future where women are free to pursue fulfillment on their own terms.

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