

Deactivating the Gender Discrimination: A Study of Liz Tigelaar's Playing with the Boys

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Abstract

As Simone de Beauvoir said in *The Second Sex* “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (167), the society creates genders and its roles. Most of the gender roles are articulated by men so male domination leads to less priority for women in all the fields. Even in sports, women players are not given importance as men players are given. The protagonist Lucy Malone in *Playing with the Boys*, a soccer player with super accurate kicking ability, takes lead in men soccer team and creates history with her herculean effort. This article proves that a woman with unstoppable attitude in sports can dominate the globe despite all gender discriminations. It further elaborates the deactivation of gender discrimination in sports.

Keywords: Gender, discrimination, male chauvinism, Soccer, Society, Culture

Women are expected to perform certain tasks assigned to their gender by the patriarchal society. They are forced to fulfil the organized system of society. They are assigned to be a mother, to be a cook, to be a model and to be a caretaker. Moreover, they are portrayed as objects in the hands of men. Decentring the feminine autonomy and the feminine capability are the existence factor by the power of men. The clutches of women have slightly released by the writings of Simon de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Virginia Woolf and Wollstonecraft. They nurture the dignity of a woman by their eternal writings. Mackinnon Catherine's *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology* indicates the isolation of woman.

Women's oppression is not just in the head; feminist *consciousness* is not just in the head either. But the pain, isolation and thingification of women who have been pampered and pacified into nonperson hood- women 'grown ugly and dangerous from being nobody for so long'- is difficult for the materially deprived to see as a form of oppression particularly for women whom no man has ever put on a pedestal.(Mackinnon 6)

Gender Discrimination is the greatest issue in every field. Even in sports, it becomes a stereotype tension. The expectation of femininity often results in women being dissuaded from lifting weights, sweating, grunting, being aggressive, participating and competing in sports and

physical activities. Football, soccer, baseball and cricket are exclusively for Men whereas women used these games as second hand. They do not have any game of their own. Especially Football is viewed as the stylish sport of men where a woman cannot equalize the stamina of a man. But this ideology has been cracked by Liz Tigelaar through her creation Lucy Malone.

Lucy Malone is a dependent child of Greg who has lost her mother few months back which has made them migrate to Los Angeles, California. Lucy is crazy about soccer and wants to spend her life by playing soccer. But there come gender discriminations and patriarchal issues. Lucy's father Greg has been portrayed as the classic example of patriarchy.

Caged women are expected to be away from midnight party, outing and hanging out. Society believes that men are born to enjoy whereas women are born to toil. Women are in great depression while fulfilling men's decision. Life long they have been under in the shoes of men. Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy" expresses the caged condition of women. The following lines reveal her situation as foot inside the shoe.

You do not do, you do not do

Any more, black shoe

In which I have lived like a foot

For thirty years, poor and white,

As a stereotype girl Lucy blindly accepts her dad's decision and leaves Ohio forever. At Beachwood, Lucy's school, she starts her new career as a soccer player. Conservative father never allows her to attend a party but this is quite strange because California is the city of gender equality. There men and women are hanging out even in midnight. But her father is just opposite to the reality and probably he is ruining her life.

Society believes that football can be played only by toughest boys but Lucy simply breaks that notion. She has been brought up with the characteristics of toughness and boldness. These elements make her to become a soccer player later a football player. She has Anne, her friend and mother as the back support of her career. Her mother gives her equal responsibility which leads her to become a kicker and always motivates her to be a tough girl.

Her mom, a great skier, had stayed with her as she learned, encouraging her the entire time. As Lucy had taken face plant after face-plant and had begun to cry,

Lucy's mom had told her, 'you're Tough Lucy! Tough Lucy doesn't cry. She gets back up. She tries it again.' (36)

When she loses her mom; she starts sharing everything with her best friend Anne and she plays a role of partner in crime. Lucy's feelings on Ryan, joining the male football team and attending midnight parties are known by Anne. Lucy is a kite whereas Anne is a thread; both are intermingled and Lucy flies happily with the help of Anne.

Martie, Lucy's soccer coach, represents the part of gender equality. According to her, equality between men and women entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. This mentality of Martie pushes Lucy to join in the male football team. She has confidence in Lucy's talent not her gender. A girl in a male football team is forbidden for an outsider whereas it is acceptable in the mind of gender equality. Martie is a backbone of Lucy's achievement and says "you never know what you can do until you do it" (81).

Interestingly Tigelaar offers her female characters with male names like Charlie Brown, Max, and Pickle etc. This act implies the equality sense of author and amplifies that name does not construct gender. It deconstructs the social construction of names giving. The term *Animus* means the unconscious masculine side of a woman. Tigelaar deliberately uses this term in the novel. The central character Lucy overloads with animus which is evident with the kicker role in both the teams. The below words are evident to Lucy's quality of animus.

Tonight for the first time, a girl was going to play football under these lights. She might have looked slight and slender, like she was a fragile doll that could easily break, but she wasn't. If this week hadn't broken her, nothing would. She was fired up. She was ready. (159)

Normally a good kicker can kick thirty feet but Lucy kicks beyond forty feet. This super-accurate kicking style makes her a star figure and finds her a place in male football team. Gym, rod, push-up, squat, bench-press and weight lifting are some of the acts to improve the physical fitness. These segments are related to men players whereas women cannot get the chance to do it. But the society blames that women players do not have the guts to do the exercise. This mind-set has been condemned by Lucy and she lifts more weight than men and she adopts the repetition of exercise as earlier. Charlie Brown is portrayed as the character of animus who is a surfer and even Lucy is surprised by her surfing talent. She assumes her as a boy but in reality that is girl and having the hard quality of surfing.

Male centred society never bows down for female achievements. In the sports field there are very few popular women players than men. Serena Williams, Alex Morgan, Saina Nehwal are some players who make the society to salute. History remembers conquerors not losers. A woman player faces many hurdles to construct a victory. Offredi, Lucy's coach, team mates, her dad and Benjamin's dad are the barriers. Probably they make some partial issues and do not treat her equal with male players. They are not ready to believe her rather they mistreat her. But Lucy overcomes all these obstacles with self-power, self-confidence and hard-work.

Patriarchal society never allows women to win; never allows to achieve and never allows to go high. They have always jealous eye on women's success. Men never let them to shine but underestimate their talents. Men take torture as their weapon to pull back women from their track. It is an irony that men help women to release their clutches. At the same time, they ill-treat them. Lucy approaches this torture from her male teammates. They cannot bear Lucy's triumph and want to deny her ability. They paste her in the goal post in order to dispose her from the team.

The tape was digging into her skin, cutting off her circulation. Eyes wet with tears, she hung there, stunned that her own teammates could be so cruel and so mean. She could make out the bricks of the building and the blades of grass on the field, but just barely. Everything was beginning to blur together. She wondered if she was going to pass out. (129)

The above lines denote the pathetic state of Lucy. She cannot express her agony and went off with great silence. Masculine power mutes the vulnerable voice of women. Precisely men do not want women to overcome rather they suppress them. They think that women are suitable for kitchen than office. So Charlotte Bronte exposes her agony on gender equality through *Jane Eyre*.

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, to absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting, stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (133)

In the present era, women attain high position in many fields and they receive positive compliments. Once they were sensible and vulnerable but now successive and positive. When gender dies, valour wins. Love is eternal and it is a constant thing forever. Women cannot be cheated easily because they are protective and defensive. So men take love as a trap to cheat them. Ryan exploits the infatuation of both Lucy and Pickle.

The world of opportunity sometimes takes the partial decision. Mostly it pleases men and depicts itself a villain to women. Masculinity never encourages femininity rather it finds fault. Social construction world wants to dump women's ability. Men resemble foxes or eagles because they are waiting for their prey's mistake. Once it does any mistake then it has to die. The same treatment has been followed in the life of Lucy. When Lucy tries to kick the ball in front of her coach for the first time she is misled by Devon, fellow player. Adam and Tank always mistreat her with the ball and they will not let her to kick properly. They try to find mistake in her kicking and wish to dismiss her from the team. Even her coach Offredi does not believe in her and questions her capacity. The entire team wishes to send her out except Benji. They do not accept her only because of her gender where she experiences 'gender subaltern'. GayatriSpivak speaks in her famous article, "Can the Subaltern Speak" about the 'gender subaltern' thus:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third- world woman' caught between tradition and modernisation. (cited in Leela Gandhi 89)

The male superstructure does not allow women to shine and to be popular. Benji's father Mr. Mason is an illustration of male superstructure. He fights with coach Offradi for accepting a girl in the male team. Moreover, he expects his son to become a lime light player. He is perfect as a father but he fails to accept gender equality.

Women have faced many issues like gender discrimination, gender inequality, patriarchal problem and gender performativity. Women cannot always put the problem on men. There are men who really enjoy in the success of women. They play the role of husband, father, friend or brother. But the novel has male characters who motivate women. They are Benju, Lucy's beloved, Dr. Cane and coach Offredi. They believe in their talents and not in their gender. But their voice fades inside the world. Those male do not have any guts to amplify their voices. It becomes vulnerable inside the socially constructed rules. When Lucy hangs like a bad in the goal post; Benji cannot attain any words against the huge gang. Offradi

has not replied properly to the questions of Benji's father. They become dumb in the stereotype world.

The protagonist Lucy never minds about her overprotective dad, discouraging teammates and heartless lover. She overcomes the hurdles with hard work and focused mind. She rewrites the history that a girl is capable of playing in a male team. She completely stands as a role model to Beachwood institution. The world has started changing its view on women by Lucy's attitude. She proves that culture or tradition is a social construction. One can easily break those things by their self-confidence. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* describes the meaning of culture that "People make culture. If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, and then we can and must it our culture" (3). She examines the significance of feminist in that essay and amplifies that attributes of women are social construction. Lucy sends out these social constructions and says that a woman should be judged by her ability.

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