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" Transition of Melinda from Voiceless to Voice in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*: A Feminist Analytic Study "

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Abstract

This study aims to highlight misogynistic oppression of female consent in the novel "*Speak*" by American writer Laurie Halse Anderson. This study is mainly focused on females' consent and oppression. The current study highlights one of the most prevailing evils in society; female consent and gender discrimination. This study focuses on the significance of consent. Sensual consent is generally regarded as an issue about female consent. The objective of this study is to identify how the protagonist became victim of sensual assault without seeking her consent. This study has been delimited to the feminist analytic study of Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Speak* (1999), which deals with gender stereotypes, and how Melinda, the protagonist of the novel is assaulted by her senior schoolmate without her consent and she becomes voiceless. Using a qualitative method, the researcher has applied the theory of consent (2003) by Alan Wertheimer from the field of literature for applying it on the literary texts. This study finds out the problems of consent faced by women. This study concludes that the protagonist, Melinda takes stand for herself against the societal norms by speaking up for herself. This study is an addition to the existing knowledge on gender issues and women suppression. It may help in deconstructing gender discourse and awareness about women consent and their rights.

Keywords: Gender Role, Theory of Consent, Laurie Halse Anderson, Moral significance of Consent

Introduction

Feminism, a social and political movement aimed at achieving gender equality, has been an important force in shaping contemporary society. Drawing on various theories and methodologies, feminism challenges the traditional notions of gender roles and advocates for the empowerment and liberation of women (Allen, 2023). It encompasses a wide range of perspectives and approaches, reflecting its diverse and evolving nature. According to Humm (2021), feminist theory is a comprehensive framework that analyzes and critiques gender inequalities and seeks to dismantle oppressive systems. It provides a vocabulary and conceptual tools to understand the complex interplay of power, privilege, and gender.

One prominent strand of feminist theory is intersectionality, which recognizes that gender oppression intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as race, class, sexuality, and disability. This perspective, as articulated by scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, highlights the interconnected nature of various systems of oppression and emphasizes the importance of addressing multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously. As a matter of fact, feminist activism has been instrumental in challenging discriminatory practices and policies. Women's suffrage movements fought for women's right to vote, while the second wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s focused on reproductive rights, workplace equality, and combating gender-based violence. These movements paved the way for significant legal and social changes, such as the establishment of laws against gender discrimination and the promotion of gender mainstreaming in public institutions.

Feminist theory has also influenced academic disciplines and methodologies. In the field of family and close relationship studies, scholars like Allen (2023) emphasize the importance of adopting a critical consciousness informed by feminist perspectives. They argue that traditional approaches often neglect power dynamics and inequalities within intimate relationships and families. By centering feminist theories and methods, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of family dynamics and develop more inclusive and equitable practices. Moreover, feminist theory recognizes the significance of everyday experiences and personal narratives. Allen, Goldberg, and Jaramillo-Sierra (2022) stress the importance of incorporating diverse voices and perspectives into feminist research and practice. This inclusive approach acknowledges the intersectional nature of identity and promotes a more nuanced understanding of gender issues. To be sure, it is essential to note that feminism is not solely focused on women's rights; it also challenges the restrictive and harmful gender norms that affect individuals of all genders. By dismantling rigid expectations and promoting equality, feminism seeks to create a more just and equitable society for everyone.

The present research study will present a feminist analytic study that explores the process of Melinda's empowerment, highlighting the themes of agency, self-expression, and resilience. By examining the factors that contribute to Melinda's transformation, this study sheds light on the feminist undertones within the narrative and the broader implications for understanding the challenges faced by survivors. Through an in-depth analysis of the novel *Speak*, the researcher will delve into the significance of Melinda's journey and the power of reclaiming one's voice in the face of patriarchy and adversity.

Background of the Study

“It is a melancholy truth; yet such is the blessed effect of civilization! The most respectable women are the most oppressed” (Wollstonecraft, 2014). Feminism is based on the principle equality of woman and man both in economic and social field. Feminists describe the relationship of nature of gender and inequality. Feminists want to promote equality between men and women, economically, politically and socially. “I do not wish [women] to have power over men; but over themselves” (Wollstonecraft, 2014). Different labels have been used by feminists to describe their beliefs, but there are three prominent types of feminism, liberal feminism, socialist feminism and radical feminism. Liberal feminism focuses on gaining equal rights of women and men through legal reform within the framework of liberal democracy. Liberal feminists believe that women should be given the same opportunities as men in political movements. Liberals believe that if men and women are given equal education then they will get equal access to society. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the rights of women* which encouraged women to make separate decisions other than those made for them by society.

Socialist feminism is all about struggling against capitalism and patriarchy while radical feminism seeks to disassemble traditional patriarchal power. Socialist feminists believe that women are oppressed due to financial dependence on men. It argues that capitalism leads to the repression of women. Radical feminism emerged in the USA. It focuses on the policy of separatism. Radical feminists believe that men are the enemy of women and they oppress women through the process of patriarchy. According to first wave society should recognize that women are humans not property. Leaders of first wave focused merely on rights of white women. Second wave started in 1960's and 1970's. Women became active in politics and achieved social and cultural rights. Third wave started in the early in 1990's in North America. It focused on personal empowerment. Racism was highlighted. Fourth wave talks about the rights of Trans and body shaming. “Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.” (Woolf, 1929)

Speak, The Novel

Different writers made different attempts to highlight the issue of male dominance and female oppression. Laurie Halse Anderson is one of them. She is an American writer. She received the Margaret A. Edwards award from the American Library Association for her contribution to young adult literature an illustration of such circumstance has occurred in the novel *Speak* composed by Laurie Halse Anderson. The novel revolves around a thirteen-year-old girl, Melinda who was assaulted and she struggles to put her life back together and find her voice. Melinda attends Merryweather high school and starts her first day with nobody to talk to. She has a secret that she keeps within herself. She was assaulted at a party that she attended with her then-best friend, Rachel, by a senior named Andy Evans. When she called the police, she left the house before they arrived and she never talked about what had happened to her.

Rather she kept it a secret, which eats away her self-esteem. Mr. Freeman is her art teacher who influences Melinda throughout the novel. When Melinda stays home sick from school one day, she watches talk shows and calls her experience “rape” for the first time. Melinda works up the courage to tell Rachel what happened to her, but Rachel accuses her of lying. It is not until

prom that Rachel finally realizes Andy's true character. At the end Melinda is attacked in her closet by Andy. When she yells for help and threatens him with broken glass, he backs off, and the girls on the lacrosse team rescue her. She understands what happened to her and that it was not her fault. She resolves to be a survivor. The research is mainly focused on the misogynistic oppression of female consent. It throws light on the problems of female consent in intimate relations.

Problem Statement

Melinda, the protagonist of the selected novel suffers from hysteria due to not seeking her consent in intimate relations with Andy Evans. She was assaulted without her consent. The preoccupation of this thought made Melinda Voiceless in the social environment. Due to her inability to tell anyone about what happened, Melinda spirals into a dark depression, loses her ability to speak with ease and can express her pain only through physical acts, such as biting her lips and nails. She transforms herself with the passage of time and becomes Voiced. Melinda was assaulted by a senior student Andy Evans without taking her consent. This research work attempts to explore the transition of Melinda from Voicelessness to Voice in the selected novel.

Research Objectives

- 1) To examine the societal influence affecting Melinda from voiced to Voiceless in the selected novel.
- 2) To explore the transition of Melinda against the patriarchal structure from voiceless to Voice in the selected novel

Research Questions

- 1) What societal influence makes Melinda lead from the voiced to the Voiceless in the selected novel?
- 2) How does Melinda rise against the patriarchal structure and transforms from the Voiceless to the voiced in the selected novel?

Rationale of the Study

The rationale for conducting this study is to provide a deeper understanding of the role of consent in the protagonist's healing in the selected novel. The topic of consent has been widely discussed in literature, but there is still a need to explore its application in the context of a specific novel. By focusing on *Speak*, this study will contribute to the field of literature on consent and provide a better understanding of how consent can be applied in literary analysis. Moreover, this study aims to highlight the importance of literature as a tool for comprehending different issues looked by females. Generally, the study contributes to the broader discourse on the relationship between literature and feminism.

Delimitations of Study

The current study will be delimited to the transition of Melinda from Voicelessness to Voice in the selected novel. The study will focus merely on the novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson and its protagonist's experience of assault. It will follow a feminist framework, particularly the theory of Alan Wertheimer, to analyze issues faced by the protagonist. This work would observe and evaluate the novel *Speak* from consent perspective. Other aspects of this novel from the same writer will not be mentioned. Relevant data of the text of the novel will be examined and analyzed.

Research Significance

This research would be an addition in field of studies of literature. It will highlight the oppression, sensual abuse and other elements of feminism in the novel. This analysis of the novel will exclusively explain the patriarchal stance of society. Also, this research will be helpful to the researchers for having the better understanding of sensual assault and how to apply the theory of consent in the field of literature. Moreover, this study has the potential to add to the existing body of literature on the topic, thus paving the way for future research in this area. Finally, this study has the impending to contribute to a greater understanding of the issues faced by assault victims.

Literature Review

González (2022) analyzed Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *MaddAddam* from a feminist perspective. By closely examining these literary works, the scholar uncovers the feminist agenda present within them. González explores themes of women's muted voices, gender oppression, patriarchal control, and resistance, showcasing Atwood's critique of societal power structures. Through the characters' journeys, Atwood highlights women's agency and resilience in the face of oppression. This study reveals how literature can serve as a powerful platform for feminist discourse, challenging traditional gender norms and contributing to ongoing discussions on gender equality.

O'Quinn (2001) explored the silence and voice in Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Speak*. The study focuses on the protagonist's journey as she navigates the aftermath of a traumatic experience and her struggle to find her voice. Quinn (2001) asserted that the novel helped me to remember the distance women have come in recognizing the harsh and unfortunate way of behaving of the hushes that so frequently double-cross them, as well as the vital handling they have consistently finished to hold those equivalent quiet ways of behaving back from becoming disastrous powers. Melinda is finally able to talk about what has happened to her. Melinda places herself in an abandoned janitor closet at school. Under the watchful eye of a Maya Angelou, a writer herself once silenced by assault. Though it is difficult to talk. Melinda recognizes that the closet provides a necessary "quiet place that helps me hold these thoughts inside my head where no one can hear them". It is within the silent space of the closet that Melinda ultimately finds her voice (O'Quinn, 2001).

Latham (2006) argues in his article that Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* recounts the narrative of young person Melinda Sordino's assault, recuperation, and possible emerging as an assault casualty. The novel is surprising in that it reflects the eccentricity of the techniques Melinda uses to impact her recuperation, systems that, oddly, serve both to suppress her voice and to assist her with recuperating/find a voice with which she can speak reality. *Speak* is subsequently a strange novel in that, by introducing a view from the storage room, it questions and undermines prevailing heterosexist presumptions about orientation, personality, and injuries (Latham, 2006).

Kristiana (2012) argues that the main problem of this study is to reveal the coping behavior of Melinda Sordino. The individual psychological methodology is utilized to examine the adapting conduct of Melinda Sordino in confronting her life issues that impacts her character. In view of underlying examination, Anderson creates the main character - Melinda as a way for conveying

her thought regarding pre-adulthood's coping behavior. Laurie Halse Anderson's "*Speak*" needs to pass on an ethical message "supporting yourself as well as other people. You need to support what you put stock in or nothing will at any point change. In view of individual psychological approach the writer finds that the personality of Melinda Sordino gets development in her character that is molded from her work to adapt her concerns in acquiring her life objectives. She gets her solidarity and she can communicate her aggravation and feeling through the Tree Work of art (Coping Behavior of Melinda In, 2012).

Mohammed (2020) argues in his article that *Speak* (1999) is Laurie Halse Anderson's most memorable novel that points out a basic, social issue that is normal to young ladies entering teenage hood in the US. The novel tells the particular story of the assault and resulting specific quietness of a ninth grade protagonist named Melinda Sordino. Since the novel's emphasis is on sensual violence and its related awful reactions, this article offers an examination of the novel through contemporary trauma hypothesis. It presents Melinda's excruciating story by portraying the hindrance that the assault trauma causes in her way of behaving, mentalities, thinking, cooperation, and her general prosperity. As well as uncovering the unfriendly mental impacts on the person in question, it examines the devices she utilizes during her excursion towards recuperating or recuperation. This is done through showing how Melinda's strength not withstanding horrible experience, and acts of resistance to be changed by this experience can be read in the context of recovery instead of illness as the traditional trauma theories could possibly suggest. Perusing the novel from the perspective of contemporary injury hypothesis causes one to understand that Anderson's work satisfies the objective of engaging overcomers of assault, and it subsequently adds to the recuperation of those people who have gone through sensual violence at some point in their lives (Ahmed & Mohammed, 2020).

Rashid (2018) wrote down the social situation of females in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. He is attempting to illuminate temptation of Tess and the fall out of her assault. He talks about assault issues. At the point when Tess is being assaulted by Alec. She becomes modest to society. Tess, a pure woman becomes a fallen woman. Tess shows that how women are unheard. This shows the discrimination among males and females in Victorian culture (Rashid, 2018).

This study is a defense mechanism analysis of the main character in Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Speak*. It aims at revealing how defense mechanism is faced by Melinda Sordino as the protagonist of the novel by applying Sigmund Freud's theory of defense mechanism. This article shows that the protagonist had suppression, legitimization, relapse, projection, separation, and turning to self as defense mechanisms strategies to overcome the conflicts. Uddin (2013) in this article discusses the female protagonist (Nora) of the play "*A Doll's House*". Ibsen in 1879 himself said that the goal of the play was to show a person's independence from the shackles of society. Nora's significant other Helmer's strength over her is unmistakably displayed from the beginning of the play. He names her with various names like warbler, squirrel, and lark. He compares her with creatures and birds.

Her husband treats her like a doll. Before her marriage she was dealt with like a doll by her dad. No one treats her like an individual. This shows the Patriarchal society/male strength (Uddin, 2013). This research entitled *A Feminist Stylistic Analysis in Laurie Halse Anderson's*

Novel *Speak* aims to review the linguistic stylistics that describes how women are presented in a text by using a feminist approach, that is, feminist stylistics. This research not only focuses on the analysis of linguistic stylistics that discuss linguistic structure and how it leaves an effect on the society, but also focuses on how the position of women are presented in the text, as well as the position of ideas or events portrayed in the text. The object of this research is a novel entitled *Speak* written by Laurie Halse Anderson. The words, phrases or sentences, and discourses indicate gender-specific in the novel become the data of the research.

Previous research studies are based on the oppression of females, male dominance, patriarchal society, and feminism that how females are considered inferior to men. They are treated like animals instead of human beings. They are not supposed to leave their homes without the permission of men. But the present research throws light on the problems of female consent in sensual and matrimonial relations. Male members of the society are considered superior in the society. Females are not asked for their consent. Their innocence is taken without their consent even in matrimonial relations females should be asked for their consent. All these writers had their research on *Speak* from different perspectives. However no one has talked about on it through consent's perspective. This work attempts to fill the above mentioned gap.

Theoretical framework

This research work attempts to apply the “*Theory of consent*” proposed by Alan Wertheimer. This theory spins around certain questions i-e for what reason is sensual consent generally regarded as an issue about female consent. When does a lady's consent render it morally or lawfully permissible for a man to have sensual relations with her? Without consent it is legitimately denied to have sensual relations. Alan Wertheimer develops a theory of consent to sexual relations that applies to both profound quality and law in the light of psychology of sensual relations, the psychology of offender.

Alan considers a wide assortment of difficult cases like impulse, misrepresentation, retardation and inebriation. For the center issues about agree to sensual relations come from the way that a few men want sensual relations with females who don't want sensual relations with them. Agree to sensual relations is in issue accurately in light of the fact that individuals would consistently prefer not to take part in sensual relations. In case females were practically consistently envious of participating in sensual relations with some other individuals, we would not have an issue of consent. Sensual consent is an understudied and under guessed idea not withstanding its significance to women's activist analyst. It is usually felt that we should view it as ethically and legitimately permissible to participate in sensual relations if and just if the females, agree to do as such. The present research attempts to highlight the issue of consent and transition of the protagonist from *Voicelessness* to *Voiced* in the wake of immoral issues of assault depicted in the selected novel “*Speak*”. Where the protagonist was assaulted by her senior without her consent. And she went completely silent as she thought if anybody finds out about what happened to her. They will look down upon her. And it would be hard for her to live.

Methodology

This research will be qualitative in nature wherein the textual analysis of the selected data of the novel will be made. The excerpts are taken from the novel to explore the *Voicelessness* of the

protagonist. The present research is theoretical and qualitative in nature. The primary source of the data will be the novel itself.

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