

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NORMS IN SHAPING HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF D. H. LAWRENCE AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

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Abstract: *Social norms constitute an essential framework within which the human relationships are formed, negotiated, and transformed. These norms are unspoken rules that guide what is considered to be appropriate behaviour within a society and determine emotional attachment, gender roles, hierarchies and personal identity. The present research paper is a comparison of the social norms in the novels by D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. The attitudes towards social structures of both authors, who are the major representatives of Modernist literature, are rather critical and their approaches are quite different. Lawrence is expecting the presence of instinct, sexuality and rebellion against the stifling norms, and Woolf is focusing on the inner world of the psyche, gender limitation, and the shades of social demand. The way in which social norms shape, control and in a few cases even liberate human relationship is discussed in the paper by examining some of the most renowned works such as Sons and Lovers, Lady Chatterley Lover, Mrs Dalloway, and A Room of One own. According to it, both authors dismantle the norms of the society, yet propose some other concepts of human relations as Lawrence concentrates on the emotional and physical authenticity and Woolf on the intellectual and psychological freedom.*

Keywords: *social norms, human relationships, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, modernism, gender roles, societal expectations, individual freedom, emotional intimacy, class dynamics, psychological conflict, identity formation, cultural constraints, interpersonal relationships, narrative perspective.*

1. Introduction

Human relationships are well deeply embedded in the social structures that define acceptable patterns of behaviour. Social norms refer to rules that regulate the interaction among people, and how the people express love, desire, duty and identity (Miracky *et al.*,2002). Such standards are both historical and cultural relative since they vary with the rest of the societal changes. Literature is a product of human experience and is a rich source in which the dynamics of social norms and relations can be studied.

A huge social and cultural mess in the first part of the twentieth century was the way the modernistic movement in literature emerged. The story telling and the norms of morality that had been established were criticized by other writers such as D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf and they offered the alternatives to view the relations between the humans in a new light. Their literature shows the conflicts between personal needs and social demands, the importance of social norms to the creation of personal and interpersonal worlds.

In the present paper, the author would like to address the topicality of the social norms in the relations between humans in the works by Lawrence and Woolf (Son *et al.*,2013). It looks at how the two authors mirror the social restraints as well as the psychological and emotional implications of these restraints and considers how people revolt or embrace social norms.

2. Conceptual Framework: Social Norms and Human Relationships:

The conceptualization of social norms can be seen as being the unwritten laws that control the behaviour within a society and also how people think, act and relate with one another. These norms are not written down, but possess a tremendous power, which is achieved in the process of socialization beginning with the early childhood stage and continues in life (Martin *et al.*,2013). These norms are important in their transmission and reinforcement by the family, education, religion and the media institutions, so that by their continuance through the generations can be ensured. At the same time, power structures within the society determine the norms that are adhered to, altered or challenged and thereby, tie the social norms to the broader issues of authority, ideology and cultural domination.

Such norms play a role in the construction of identities in individuals and perceptions about others. They dictate concepts of acceptable behaviour, morals and social responsibilities at times on a subconscious level. The individuals internalize these expectations and as such they determine how the individuals relate and interact. Consequently, social conventions get ingrained into the day-to-day routine and not only the external behavior is affected but the thoughts and also the feelings. The internalization can lead to conformity, but can also create a conflict with the person wanting or believing differently than what society wants.

In the context of human relationships, social norms are a certainty in establishing expectations based on gender roles, relationships of classes, marriage, sexuality and emotionally. Considering the example, traditional gender norms are likely to predefine the roles and behaviors of both men and women, which defines the relations and forms the forms of expressing affection, power and reliance (Schapiro *et al.*,1986). Similarly, classes have norms governing relationships across social divisions, and establish what is considered proper in the relationship of communication, association and intimacy. The problem of marriage and sexuality as well possesses norms, which dictate which kinds of connection is acceptable and which is not, which is inclined to accept one type of union and will reject another.

However, these norms are not structural only, but can be a source of tension and conflict. They may experience a feeling of alienation, repression or dissatisfaction in case personal needs, emotions or identities of the people in question are in conflict with the demands of the society. These fights illustrate the restricting quality of social norms and the capacity of the social norms to curb personal liberty and avert the formation of authentic relations (Woodcock *et al.*,1973). At the same time, the dynamic forces can be seen as the catalyst of change since it can prompt individuals to either defy, resist or create new conventions.

Socially, social norms serve as a topic of study and a formative element in narratives. Authors interact with these norms by presenting characters, who negotiate, conform, or defy social

norms. Literature offers a chance to study the complexity of social life and role of norms in shaping human relations by use of characterization, plot development and symbolism. It is also important that the narration techniques are used in this process because they enable the writers to represent both the outer social reality and the inner psychological one.

Through the prism of modernist literature, in particular, the interaction of social norms and the consciousness of people could be investigated (Wussow *et al.*,1998). Modernist writers reverse the emphasis on subjectivity, fragmentation and psychological complexity, to investigate inner world of their characters rather than superficial descriptions of society. This focus allows a more advanced interpretation of the internalization and experience of social norms and how they affect human relationships, which in most aspects are subtle and unrecognized. This sort of analysis of social norms in the literature can prove useful in explaining the general processes of human interaction and social organization.

3. Social Norms in the Novels of D. H. Lawrence:

D. H. Lawrence is very much troubled in the novels by the clash of individual desire and a restraining influence of social norms. Composing in the early twentieth century, a time when industrialization was the order of the day, and moral principles were changing, Lawrence is trying to deconstruct the strict rules of human conduct, especially in the sphere of sexuality, social status, and emotional interaction (Carroll *et al.*,2009). People are always the subject of his fiction, people who cannot reconcile their inner needs with the demands of the society in its need to find out how costly such conflicts could be psychologically and emotionally.

In *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence gives a very reflective analysis on the relationship between Paul Morel and his mother, Gertrude Morel. It is a relationship that is determined by the attachment of the family and the broader social imperatives particularly in the aspect of classes mobility and emotional reliance (Crossland *et al.*,2018). The extreme attachment of Paul to his mother does not allow his possible relationships with women such as Miriam and Clara in any serious romantic relationship. Lawrence employs this dynamic to reveal how social norms concerning family structure and maternal influence can corrupt the emotional development. The inner struggle of Paul is an in-depth psychological entrapment in which social norms and desires of the individual come into conflict and do not allow the emergence of genuine intimacy. By this description, Lawrence implies that societal norms may have a low-key, but effective, influence on the consciousness of individuals, and result in fragmentation and discontent.

Another important dimension by which Lawrence explores the impact of social norms is the structure of classes (Crossland *et al.*,2010). The romance between upper-class woman Constance Chatterley and working-class gamekeeper Oliver Mellors in *Lady Chatterley Lover* is a head-on collision with the hierarchies set up in the classes. Lawrence criticizes contemporary society that is termed as mechanical and industrial which is alienating and spiritually barren. The rigid separation of classes in the novel can be regarded as social barriers that restrain the real human contact. By portraying a relationship that breaks such boundaries, Lawrence is encouraging a more equalitarian, emotionally real interaction. The novel holds

that the only means by which people can get to know each other in a real sense is by rejecting the societal imposed distinctions between them and reemerging to their natural instincts.

One of the primary topics of the criticism of social norms that Lawrence reveals is sexuality. Lawrence dares to show sexuality as a vital aspect of human existence at the period when sexuality was highly regulated by the moral standards. In *Lady Chatterley Lover*, sexual intimacy is described as the physical satisfaction, but also the emotional and spiritual communion (Krouse *et al.*,2004). Lawrence challenges the current tradition of either shaming or immorality in assigning sexuality, but rather he says that it is vital in developing genuine relationships. His treatment of sexuality is a breakthrough on the traditional presentation of sexuality in literature, hence a source of life and reality.

Defiance to the social norms and the endeavor to show their uniqueness and reclaim their emotional and physical freedom is a common feature of the characters of Lawrence. Nonetheless, such a rebellion is usually full of tension, since people have to face the outcomes of going against the social norms. Another theme that is recurrent in his work is the battle between conformity and freedom and the impossibility of self-fulfillment in a constraining social structure.

Lastly, Lawrence considers human relations to be founded on instinct, passion and sincerity. He emphasizes the necessity to follow the inner desires by the actions of the outer world meaning that only when the man can renounce the artificial social limits, he will be able to be really satisfied (Siegel *et al.*,1989). The novels therefore are an effective critique of the conventions that dictate how human beings interact and a more liberated and emotionally honest manner of existence.

4. Social Norms in the Novels of Virginia Woolf:

Virginia Woolf presents quite thought-provoking and elaborate analysis of social norms with a bias on their psychological, cultural and emotional facets. This is contrary to more external or more open criticism of the society, where Woolf attempts to find out how the social demands of the society are ingrained within the human mind, how social demands or needs are being insidiously planted into perception, identity and relationship (Bicki *et al.*,1993). In her writings, we get to know that social norms are not merely external manifestations of the restrictions, but important parts of the consciousness that influences how people think, feel, and how they relate with others.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf paints a picture of Clarissa Dalloway, in full colour, navigating the social life in post war London. The life of Clarissa seems to be externally organized and balanced, because she fulfills her role as an upper class wife and social hostess. But beneath this exterior is an intricate interior world of contemplation, desiringness and silent discontent. The stream-of-consciousness technique helps Woolf to explore what Clarissa thinks, recalls, and feels, and realize the conflict between her public image and inner self. Her choices are affected by gender, social rules about classes and propriety like deciding to marry Richard Dalloway instead of having an emotionally fulfilling relationship with Peter Walsh or Sally

Seton. This struggle demonstrates that the social conventions might limit the freedom of individuals and specify the direction of their relations.

Another area that Woolf explores in her work *A Room of One Own* is the study of the gender norms where she deconstructs the systemic barriers that have historically restrained the pursuit of intellectual and creative talents in women (Page *et al.*,2002). She says that women have been denied material and psychological circumstances to make art due to the entrenched patriarchal regulations. In stating that a woman should be economically independent and have space to write, Woolf criticizes the societal set-ups that restrict women to housework. Her discourse is not purely personal experience but demonstrates the greater cultural and institutional forces that reproduce gender inequality thereby demonstrating the social norms not only influence relations but also the opportunities and identities.

The social influence of the values on the psyche is one of the main concerns in the work of Woolf. Her characters tend to internalize the expectations of the society and it can lead to a feeling of fragmentation, alienation and existential uncertainty. Through her new methods of narration, in particular, the stream-of-consciousness and the free indirect discourse, Woolf attains the effect of flux and contradiction of human thought (Carpentier *et al.*,2013). This helps her to demonstrate the influence of social norms on self-perception and emotional experience in subtle ways. An example of how social pressure, particularly in war, masculinity and mental health, can be devastating, is the character of characters such as Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs Dalloway*.

The relations of classes also play a role in the description of the social life as given by Woolf. But her management of the classroom is subtle, more of the unspoken codes of behavior and interaction that govern social status. Woolf, in her daily experiences, dialogues and social events, demonstrates how the class divisions play an invisible but potent role in forming relations and strengthening social lines. This indirectness is an emphasis to how social norms are very common and in most cases, there is an unwillingness to question them.

At the same time, the work by Woolf implies other possibilities of human relationship. She imagines modes of community and identity to go beyond hard social categories, and focus on empathy, collective consciousness and individual authenticity (Rydstrand *et al.*,2016). Woolf infers that the true value of relationships is based not on social conventions but in true understanding and emotional connection by foregrounding the inner lives of her characters. Her work later gives an image of relationships that is vibrant, open and has lost its shackles to the traditional social norms.

5. Comparative Analysis of Lawrence and Woolf:

Comparative analysis of D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf shows that they have much in common and much in their differences in the approach to the social norms and their impact on human relations (Miracky *et al.*,2013). Being the main representatives of the Modernist movement, both writers are very unsatisfied with the strict Victorian traditions and inherited social system. There is an overall xenophilia of their writings with the confrontation of personal

will and social norms, and with exploring the depths of the human experience that transcends the paradigms of morality and narrative. In that regard, both Lawrence and Woolf are a part of a larger literary agenda that aims at challenging, rewriting and frequently breaking down the power of accepted norms.

Though these issues are common to them, their strategies are fundamentally different with their different focus, tone and methodology. The manner of how Lawrence treats social norms is grounded on a passionate adherence to instinct, vitality and sincerity of emotion. He sees the contemporary society and especially industrial civilization as being oppressive and dehumanizing as it stifles the natural urges which are necessary to human fulfilment. His critique of social norms is thus likely to be rather direct, uncompromising and even harsh. To the society, his characters tend to engage in disobedience acts particularly on the matters of sexuality and class (Siegel *et al.*,1987). To Lawrence, meaningful relationships are achieved by not conforming to artificial norms and instead, by embracing primal and instinctive relationships that connect the physical and emotional parts of human life.

Woolf, on the other hand, is more introspective and psychologically inclined. Instead of the more blatant rebellion to which she is worried, she is interested in the more covert and invisible methods of how social norms are internalized and reproduced in the individual consciousness. Her criticism is therefore finer and functions by analyzing the process of thinking, memories and subjective experiences. Woolf explores the way in which people embrace, challenge or fight with social norms, especially gender roles and gender identity. Her focus on the interior world can be seen as a more general Modernist interest in subjectivity and fragmentation, which enables her to unveil the intricacies of human relations in a society constructed by unwritten rules and cultural forces.

Another major area of difference between the two authors is the depiction of gender relationships (Siegel *et al.*,1987). Lawrence is prone to believe that relationships exist in the form of complementary roles between men and women and they are founded on the differences and instincts that he deems to be natural. Even though his thoughts can be seen as the rebellion of certain social conventions, his gender relations can be viewed as essentialist since he emphasizes more on harmony focusing on polarity. Woolf, though, is far more radical in her treatment of the norms of gender by questioning the foundations of the patriarchal power. She encourages the women to be independent, think and have the power to create and is against the systems that diminish them to lower statuses. Her work is a pointer to the fact that she still had an interest in the issues of equality and representation in which gender is not a category that is determined by biology but rather a social creation.

Narrative technique is also used to determine the contrast between Lawrence and Woolf since this is a way in which they represent social norms and associations. Psychological realism, with which Lawrence works, enables him to depict emotional conflict and mankind and reflect interpersonal relationships in a clear and powerful way. His intrigues are inclined to foresee conversation, bodily action and description, which pay attention to the material aspect of human experience. Instead, Woolf turns to stream-of-consciousness and free indirect discourse

to capture fluidity of thought and plurality of opinions (Liou *et al.*,1993). This approach allows her to go into a lot of research into the inner life of her characters and reveals the intricacy of how social conventions are experienced and negotiated on the level of consciousness.

At the end of the day, although both Lawrence and Woolf criticize the restraints of social conventions, they provide different, but compatible ideas about human relations. The ultimate goal of what Lawrence strives to reach is freedom through instinct and emotional sincerity and what Woolf foreshadows is mental insight and identity redefinition. Their works are abundant and multidimensional in comprehending the role of the social norms in shaping the human relations within the Modernist literary tradition.

6. The Role of Social Norms in Shaping Human Relationships:

The role of social norms in the formation of relations between people is complex and multifaceted as it can serve as both the organizing and restraining forces. On a more basic level, they offer a paradigm of social interaction, by setting up some standard expectations of behavior, communication and expression of emotions. Such norms help people to negotiate relationships with a certain level of predictability and stability so that relations are intelligible and socially acceptable (Pardee *et al.*,2000). Without such normative structures there would be no organization of social life and unpredictable and fragmented relations. In this regard, social norms are involved in creating social order, which enables people to place themselves in a more extensive system of meanings and practices.

Nonetheless, individual freedom can be considerably restricted by those norms that lead to social cohesion. Social norms are more likely to define the range of ways in which individuals can express their identities, desires and feelings by dictating on what is considered as the right or desirable (Reese *et al.*,1996). This restricting nature is particularly evident when personal inclinations fail to conform to the needs in society. When it occurs, individuals may be strained, nervous or even estranged due to the bid to adapt to the inner selves and the requirements of the exterior world. Thus, the social norms do not only regulate the behavior but also the inner world of thoughts and feelings, how the individual sees himself and other people in the relations situation.

Both D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf portray social norms as empowering and restrictive in their works, and play a key role in shaping the relationship between human beings. Lawrence stresses the possibility of inhibiting true emotional and physical relationships by a strict set of norms, especially the ones concerning class and sexuality. His characters usually rebel against these restrictions and want to find back a feeling of authenticity by intuition and passion. Woolf, in her turn, reveals more widespread and a less obvious influence of social norms, which she demands to be internalized in the psyche (Woolf *et al.*,1977). In her characters, the strangeness of the new burden of the social norms, the demands of the society, which encompass their minds, their decisions and their relationships with others, can be found in the most profound ways.

Among the key themes that may be traced in the works of both writers is the clash between the conformity and individuality. The conflict is a manifestation of a bigger issue of survival in the social world where individuals must strike a balance between the need to be accepted socially and the need to remain true to themselves. The relations, in this case, turn into the arenas of negotiation, where people constantly modify their behavior in accordance with inner desires and outer demands (Olk *et al.*,2014). This balance is often the struggle to maintain and make human relationships either satisfactory or constraining.

Both Lawrence and Woolf ultimately suggest that the only means of any meaningful and authentic relationships is a degree of defiance against the social norms. This resistance, in the case of Lawrence, is in the acceptance of the emotional and physicality, the renunciation of the unnatural inhibitions of industrialized and moralistic civilizations. In the scenario of Woolf, it is the growth of mental awareness and mental independence in such a way that individuals can oppose and transcend the norms that characterize them (Schwarz *et al.*,1995). Though they have nothing in common with the methods, both the authors advocate the reconsideration of the social norms and encourage the more conscious engagement with the forces, with the help of which human relations are regulated.

Through this, the analysis of the social norms in their works shows the constraints that are imposed by the society as well as the possibility of change. Breaking the traditional pattern and going further, Lawrence and Woolf make readers think about the more real, more just and caring relations according to the complexity of human life.

7. Conclusion:

The comparative study of D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf shows that the social norms have paramount significance in the process of development of human relations. The two authors condemn the influence of social standards on identity, behavior and interpersonal relationships.

The focus on instinct, sexuality and defiance, by Lawrence, provides a peek into the world of relationships founded on honesty and emotionalism. Woolf emphasis on the psychological depth, along with the emphasis of gender criticism, offers a more advanced perspective on the internalization of social norms and the role of the social norms on the consciousness of individuals.

Combined, their works help to learn more about the intricacies of human relations and the influence of social norms on them. Breaking the traditional pattern and experimenting with new opportunities, Lawrence and Woolf make readers consider what the essence of social interaction is and whether more valuable and satisfying relationships are possible.

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