



Focus of Experiences in 21st Century Philippine Narratives: A Content Analysis

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Abstract: This study generally aimed to examine representations of males and females in the 21st century Philippine literature found in narratives specifically in the short stories taken from each of the timeframes of 21st century, 2001-2006; 2007-2012; and 2013-present. Specifically, it looked into how females and males are represented in terms of focus of experience. The study made use of mixed-method, qualitative and quantitative research design, and used narratives in the form of short stories taken from 21st Century Philippine literature to be the corpus of analysis. The narratives are all winners of first (1st) prize Palanca award and represent the three timeframes of the 21st century, 2001-2006; 2007-2012; and 2013 to present. The data from the three narratives were content analyzed with the use of quantification and qualification of statements. Based on the results of the study, women across all timeframes still struggle for their position in the society. Their battle against gender inequality continues even until this time. The three narratives reflect these findings.

Keywords – *content analysis, focus of experience, 21st century narratives, The Home of Sierra Madre, Turtle Season, Zeotrope*

I. INTRODUCTION

Philippines is considered the main player in the international women's arena and this is anchored on a very vibrant local women's movement (Anonuevo, 2000). In fact, based on the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 of the World Economic Forum, the Philippines remains the top country in Asia in terms of closing the gender gap. Compared with its neighbors in the region, the Philippines has the highest percentage of female professionals and technical workers. Moreover, the Philippines is the only country where women have parity to men in senior management roles (Gender Profile in the Philippines). However, despite the remarkable achievements above, thousands of Filipino women suffer from sex and other gender related abuses. Literature, in this case, is a rich source of human experiences that show gender representation. Along this thought, Talosa, A.D. and Temporal, C.M (2018) shared that thoughts, perceptions, and attitude are powerfully influenced by language and, thus, plays a very crucial role in promoting gender awareness and consciousness. Thus, language as used in literature specifically in narratives where significant experiences are underscored, impact readers' gender consciousness, Talosa, AD (2018); Remigio M.T.R. and Talosa, A.D. (2021).

The graphical showcasing of women's advancement in politics, academic and professional excellence, and even in legislation is contrasted by images of prostituted women, battered wives, economically disadvantaged women and exploited migrant workers. Regardless of the effort of the modern women asserting themselves in many aspects of life, gender bias is deeply ingrained in the Philippine culture.

There have been numerous studies in the Philippines and outside about gender equality. In this study, the researcher considers the use of literature in the propagation of gender equality. Language in all forms to include literature is an instrument to voice out ideas and emotions in the core of humanity and reveals values and realities, Talosa, A.D, (2018). To note, in the study on Gender Relationships in the Fiction of Bienvenido N. Santos, Balares (1992), it was pointed out that “any literature is more or less related to history – either political, social, or economic.” Moreover, Richard Croghan (1977) remarks that “the history of a nation can be learned in its constitution, its laws, and its political statement, but to know the history of a nation’s spirit, one must read its literature.” Literature is the reflection of life. When one wants to have a deeper connection to one’s culture, read its literature; that is the power of literature.

This paper aimed to determine how 21st century literature, particularly in narratives present men and women. Specifically, this study sought to identify the focus of experiences of both genders. The narratives used in this paper won the First prize in the Palanca awards for short stories. This research intended to study how government’s efforts at promoting gender equality was translated in the life of every Filipino woman through literature.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study made use of the mixed method — qualitative and quantitative research design. For this particular study, the quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the content analysis with the focus on the gender representation in terms of focus of experience. The study used this method as it quantified the content along characters’ focus of experience. Also, it made qualitative discussions along the same elements through the use of extracts and excerpts to surface the findings along the narratives’ content.

Sampling Technique

The study used narratives in the form of short stories taken from 21st Century Philippine literature to be the corpus of analysis in this study. The researcher selected short story in each of the timeframes in the 21st century literature. The narratives were chosen based on their availability online since not all literature written during this time can be accessed freely online.

Moreover, the narratives should represent any of the three timeframes of the 21st century, 2001-2006; 2007-2012; and 2013 to present. The narratives selected are *Turtle Season* by Timothy R. Montes, *The Home of Sierra Madre* by Sigfredo R. Iñigo and *Zoetrope* by Richard C. Cornelio written in the years 2001, 2009, and 2016, respectively.

Data Gathering Procedure

In examining the gender representation in the narratives through content analysis i.e. focus of experience, the researcher focused on one narrative at a time which took her few weeks to finish. This part was crucial hence, she requested for the validation of the data before she considered the first stage done.

Narrative Sample

The study focused its analysis on the three selected narratives representing each timeframe in the 21st century Philippine literature. In the selection of narratives, the narrative should have won first (1st) prize Palanca award under the short story in English category; also, it has to be

within the 21st century timeframes; and lastly, the narrative has to be available online or from any other source where it can be downloaded freely.

Analysis of Data

The study used content analysis. The data from the three narratives were content analyzed with the use of quantification and qualification of statements. For the quantification, frequency count and percentages were used; whereas for the qualification, statements were extracted as excerpts to serve as corpus for the analysis.

Content analysis was used to determine how females and males are represented in images of females and males, in terms of their visibility/invisibility which is explored by identifying the text focus in terms of experiences in which whose character's experiences were given prominence and who was ignored or neglected.

III. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Content Analysis of the Narratives in 21st Century Philippine Literature

The content analysis for each of the narratives from different timeframes includes highlights for the discussion on characters' focus of experiences. Analyses of these elements are presented in order to show which gender are underrepresented or overrepresented. It is anticipated that the results will indicate which gender is highlighted or downplayed, is uplifted or ignored, and is put in the positive light and negative light.

Focus of Experiences in *Turtle Season* Narrative

Turtle Season is a narrative written during the 2001-2006 timeframe and depicts the struggles of the main character against his own life – with his job and his personal life.

The focus of experiences as content analyzed and shown in Figure 1, displays male experiences as far well represented than female experiences with eighteen (18) experiences focused on them. A stark contrast is noted in the focus of experiences for female characters as they are assigned with very limited experiences or three (3) experiences compared to that of male characters. This analysis shows that in the story *Turtle Season*, male experiences were highlighted while female experiences are put to the background.

More specifically, the story has five (5) male characters namely, Capt. Raul Daza, Lt. Alan Salazar, the unnamed character - the curator, Martin and Prof. Edwin Hernandez. The first character is *Captain Raul Daza*, who plays the main character in the story. He is an officer, a peacekeeper whose job is to protect tourists from terrorists and cultists. He is also a friend to Professor Edwin Hernandez and an impotent husband of Daisy. All throughout the story, *Capt. Daza* never missed a part. At the beginning, he was introduced as an officer then a peacekeeper, a costumer in a club by the beach, a friend, and at the last part as a husband begging for his wife to stay with him.

The second character is *Lieutenant Alan Salazar*, a peacekeeper and is introduced as a young officer since he is fresh from officers' academy. The next character was unnamed, though, the writer made use of the pronoun 'he' hence, the researcher listed *curator* under the male characters. The curator provides relevant information about the film taken by the team of Lt. Salazar from the cultists. It was also the curator who confirmed the authenticity of the film.

Martin, on the other hand, is introduced as Capt. Daza’s favorite club waiter. *Martin*, in the story, does not simply play as a mere waiter, instead he also provides update about the coming of sea turtles.

Lastly, *Professor Edwin Hernandez*, the smart friend of Capt. Daza who is in *Kalayasan Island* for vacation. He is a psychiatric health worker who deals with emotional breakdowns. Because of the way he thinks and the way he explains things, Capt. Daza suspects him to be a heretic or a cultist.

Based on the focus of experiences given to male characters in the story, it is revealed that men hold positions under peace and order. Likewise, men are highlighted to be smart, conversant, and well-informed such as the exemplified in the excerpt, “*Do you think I need an aphrodisiac?*” response of Capt. Daza to *Martin*, the waiter, when the latter asked him if he would like to make a reservation for turtle soup which brought both men laughing together. Also, despite their age, men can be successful in their chosen profession.

The well-informed character Prof. Hernandez has this to say when he asked Capt. Daza if he knew of Sigmund Freud and the latter said he is ready for his lecture:

“Anyway, anyway. Old man Freud believed we are not totally rational beings whose wills can be manipulated that easily. This ancient heretic thought that there is a dark, murky sea inside each one of us. And in this sea, floating like an iceberg, is the undefinable mass of animal surges we try to suppress: sex, violence, the big no-nos of civilization. But it’s there, floating, waiting to emerge from the waters, the iceberg of the Unconscious.”

On the other hand, there are two female characters introduced in the story, the *university student* who is a cultist and *Daisy* who is the beautiful wife of Capt. Daza but an adulterer. The following excerpts illustrate the focus given to the female characters:

“Is she pretty enough to be raped?”. This was asked by Capt. Daza to Lt. Salazar when the latter informed him that a university student was captures along with other twelve cultists.

“Holy Gaia, Daisy, you’re so beautiful. I want you to suck my cock, Daisy?”. Capt. Daza said this when Daisy, his wife, wanted to leave him.

From the above excerpts, this story brings out the unimpressive image of the female gender as it can be noted that the female characters’ experiences are downplayed or placed in the negative light, unlike the focus given to their male counterparts. This result is similar to the study taken by Mustapha (2012) where males are assigned with wider range of experiences than female.

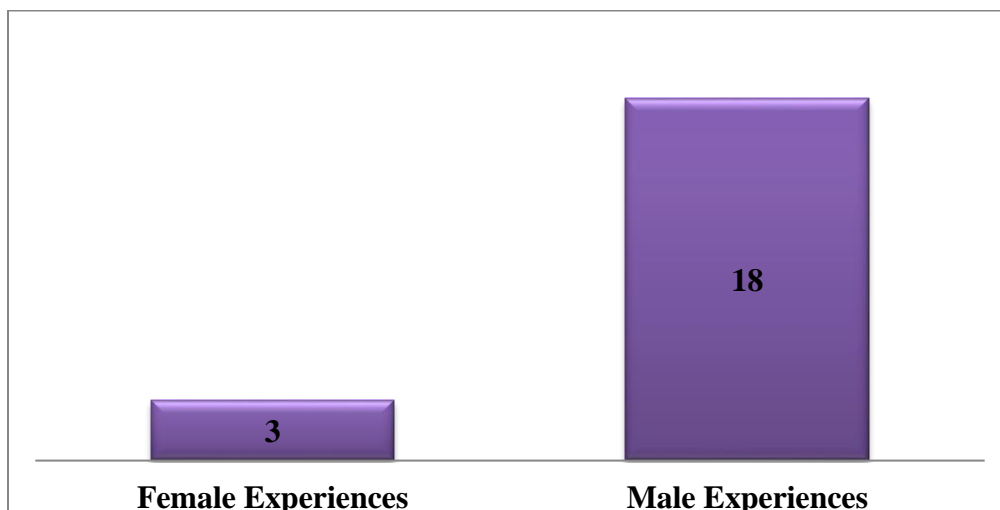


Figure 1. Focus of experiences in *Turtle Season* narrative.

Focus of Experiences in *The Home of Sierra Madre* Narrative

The narrative *The Home of Sierra Madre*, written in 2009 covering the time 2007-2012 timeframe, shows the typical family life as projected in the farm and in a remote place.

Content analysis of the focus of experiences for both male and female characters results to the emphasis on male experiences than that of the female experiences. The male experiences are given prominence with twenty (20) experiences as shown in Figure 2. Again, just like the first story, female experiences are fewer with seven (7) experiences focused on them.

There are eight (8) males namely *the father, the son who is the narrator in the story, Thelmo, Simo, Anton, Ofreng, Pidot and Ulep*.

The father in the story is a retired master sergeant; he served the army for a long time. After leaving the army, he bought homestead and *carabao* to sustain the needs of his family since his pension is not enough for his five children. While he was still in the service he was sent to Korea as part of the Philippine contingent. He also took part in defending the country against the Muslim warriors.

The son, who is the narrator in the story, just graduated from high school and was itching to join his eldest brother in college but was forced to stop and helped in the farm instead. However, not for long, he enrolled in college after their harvest.

Thelmo is the younger brother who also helped in working in the farm during summer vacation but returned in town to attend school after summer.

Moreover, other male characters are mentioned in the story. *Uncle Ulep* lives in *Mal-lungoy* where the narrator used to stay on summer vacations. *Cousin Simo* was asthmatic as a child but mountain air cured him. He likewise helps in the farm but would then join the army in search of new life with *cousin Anton*. Anton celebrated his birthday which was attended by girls in the village. *Cousin Ofreng* on the other hand was introduced in the story as the boy who came a long way from his hometown in the Province of *Pangasinan* to look for a lost *carabao*. *Cousin Pidot* like Simo helps in the farm but died after being bitten by a *kara-saeng* while in the farm to pasture *carabao*.

It can be inferred that though men still dominate farm works which negates the earlier belief that it was women who developed agriculture or cultivation of plants (Eviota, 1994) as cited in Broncano (2013); they also aspire to improve their social status by attending school or joining the army. This means that men do not only showcase their physical strength but also their mental capability. The following excerpts prove this claim:

“I was aghast when my father told me I would have to help him work on the homestead. I was newly graduated from high school. I was itching to join my eldest brother in college and find my destiny. But we were poor, and my parents assured me I would go college like the eldest who was taking up Liberal Arts at Wesleyan.” This was thought of by the son which mirrors his desire to be better in life with education.

In time I realized I could stay here all my life like the few people I had seen who dwelt in far-away huts. To wake up each day to the call of birds, to watch the daybreak over Sierra Madre, to admire the work of your own hands – won’t those be enough for a person to be happy all his life? – while the son at first realized this which could make him simply settle with farm life, he went on with the thought –

“I wanted no more to be part of this forgotten land. I resolved to tell Father about my plan to enroll the next summer, to work for my tuition if necessary.”

In contrast, the story has three (3) female characters mentioned in the story. Among the female characters is *the mother* who has five children including the narrator. The mother served as

a nurse to sick and wounded guerillas during the Japanese regime in the country. At present, she is a housewife but since her husband retired in the army, she starts helping in the farm. In times when the family does not have enough in the table, she goes planting rice with the peasants to help her husband provide the needs in their home. This affirms the role of women in the earlier times that the female’s capacity to nurse children probably led to her becoming responsible for gathering other form of food for them as well (Eviota, 1994) is still carried up to the present.

The two (2) other female characters *Aunt Binang* and cousin *Luzviminda* are the ones who prepared rice cakes and boiled banana leaves flavored with molasses to make tea during cousin Anton’s birthday. Other than that, they are no longer given other experiences.

The female experiences displayed in the story make an impression that women’s experiences in life are focused on assistance and support. Though it is mentioned that the mother served as a nurse, it could be possible that it was when she was not yet married; then, when she got married, her life already focused on her children and became a support to her husband as can be gleaned from the excerpt “*Mother had tried to dissuade him from retiring: a family with five children could not live decently on a soldier’s pension. But he was resolved to leave the barracks for good.*” This was the son’s recollection of the mother who, despite her being opposed with the idea of her husband retiring from military work, still has to support the decision of the husband. This may imply that women are not treated as equal to men but are just supports to them.

This woman experience of the mother is also highlighted in the following:

“As I drifted off to sleep, I heard Father saying he was through: he wanted to return to town. “Just like that?” Mother was saying, with sarcasm. She had been silent since the animal ran away, but now all the bitterness came out.”

This emphasizes the sad state of the female character who has to keep to herself any ill feeling for decisions made but has to go through the ordeal as a show of support to the husband.

One significant finding this study has is also on the gender given to animals. In the narrative, the *carabao* used to help in the farm, is named *Pandora*, and is given a female gender representation. Like the mother in the story, her experience as a character is confined to the farm work as a support to the farm life of the family.

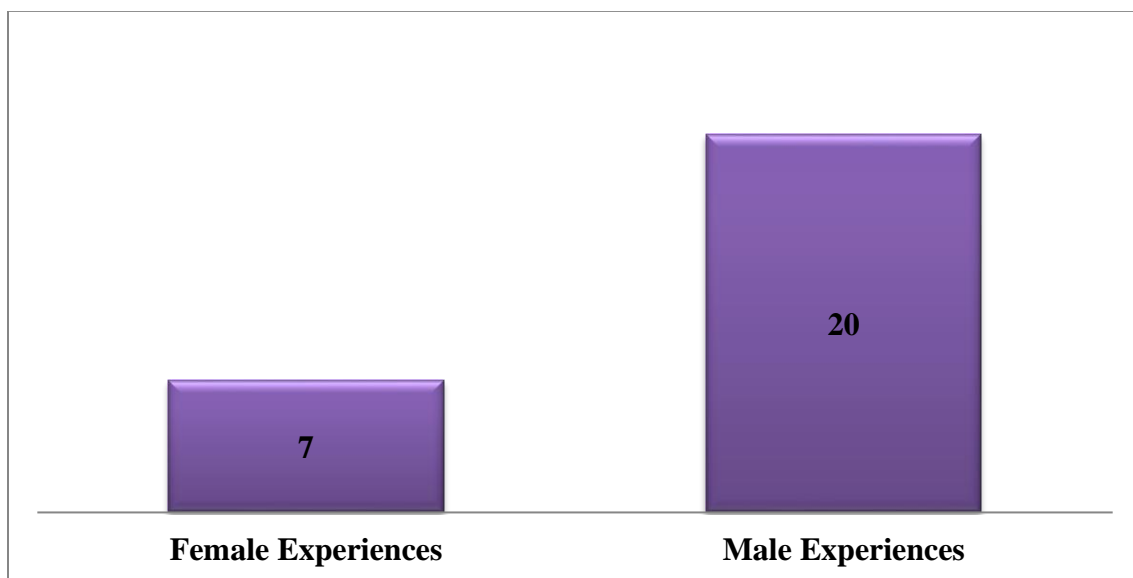


Figure 2. Focus of experiences in *The Home of Sierra Madre* narrative.

Focus of Experiences in Zoetrope Narrative

The *Zoetrope* narrative covering the timeframe 2013 to present revolves around the life of a family. It pictures a broken family not because of issues on adultery nor financial matters but just because one is no longer attached to the idea of marriage.

The focus of experience as reflected in Figure 3 tells another story as compared to the first two stories in which male experiences dominate. In the narrative, it is interesting to note that female covered more experiences with seventeen (17) than that of the male with fourteen (14). This could be in effect to having more female characters in the story than those of male characters.

The figure implies that there is a slight change of paradigm in assigning experiences to men and women in narratives. It also gives positive implication as regards promotion of gender equality in the country. The fact that women are put forward in the last story would mean that there could be an effect of the advocacy of the government in promoting women as active members of the society.

Looking into the details, the story involves five (5) male characters; *Joaquin, Clay, Buddy, Dr. Yu, and the oncologist* who is unnamed.

Joaquin in the story plays the character as a husband to Fran, a father to Clay and a best friend of Fran. He is an escort-cum-pornographer; he was also the man whom Fran did Do It. When Fran told him that she was pregnant, he had second thought of accepting the fact that he is already a father. He was also called vanished lover by Fran since he just left whenever he wanted to.

Clay is the son of Fran and Joaquin. He is also a student and a cancer patient. He has an imaginary brother named Buddy who serves as his outlet of ideas and emotion.

Dr. Yu is the head of the pediatric neurosurgery and a male oncologist is part of the team who look after the Clay while he is in the hospital.

The experiences given to the male characters show that men still dominate the work that involves science as projected in the experiences of Dr. Yu and the oncologist. However, the experiences assigned to Joaquin show another side of men. This may suggest that nowadays, men are no longer confined to the dignified kind of work but are also now engaged in arts appreciation.

In comparison, the narrative has seven (7) female characters: *Fran*, the wife of Joaquin and the mother of Clay. She is a teacher and a content-editor in the college journal of the university where she teaches. Fran shared in the story that she lost her virginity an hour shy of her twenty-sixth birthday with a man she was not committed with physically and emotionally. At first, though the man she did Do It, refused to accept the responsibility of being a father to the baby in her tummy, she was brave enough to embrace being a single mother. But not too long she suddenly felt uneasiness about motherhood thus she planned to abort her child. When in the abortion clinic, she vomited and ran out of the clinic. She also considered herself a bad mother for wanting her singlehood back.

Mrs. Gonzalo is Clay's teacher; she is the one who arranged a meeting with Clay's parents to report about his cases of having vivid imagination and creating tales and fibs. It was also through her that Fran got to know about Clay's health condition. Another character was Clay's teacher who also reported about a slightly disturbing incident that happened in her mixed aged class where Clay told her classmate, Lea, that she might be carrying Jesus in her tummy.

One mother in the hospital whose daughter, the bald girl, is also a cancer patient gives advice to the couple that what they are experiencing is just a normal thing for parents of a cancer patient. Two other unnamed characters are the receptionist in the abortion clinic and the pharmaceutically calm woman, as described by Fran in the story, who received the call from her.

Based on the discussion of female experiences, it is evident that women nowadays could be so much more than they were in past. Such is shown in the excerpt “*Buddy thinks it sucks that there’s no divorce here, in the Philippines.*” told by Fran to Joaquin when the latter asked what could have probably affected Clay’s behavior.

However, with the representation of Fran who gave her virginity to the man whom she was not committed with, put women in the bad light.

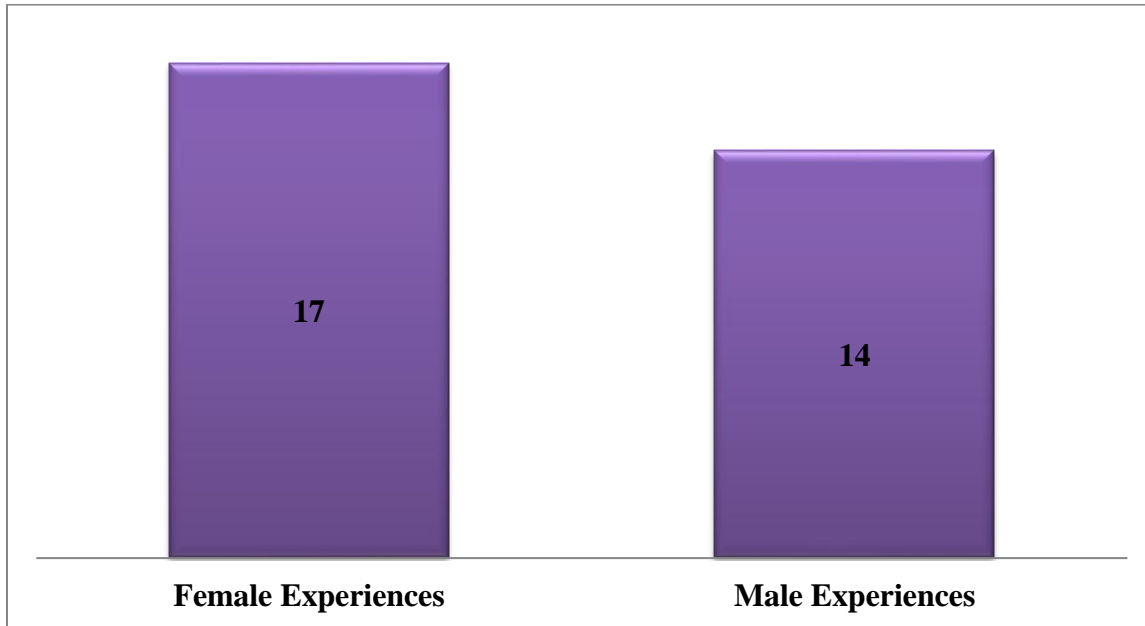


Figure 3.Focus of experiences in *Zoetrope* narrative.

Summary of Focus of Experiences in the Three Narratives

As discussed in each of the narratives, it is noted that male experiences dominate in the two stories *Turtle Season* (2001) and *The Home of Sierra Madre* (2009). However, there was a change in representation of experiences in the last story *Zoetrope* (2016) in which the female characters are given more number of experiences as compared to male.

The big difference in number of experiences assigned in both genders could be a result of the imbalance in the appearance of females and males in the narratives; and it was observed that it favors males making this representation female-biased (Gooden and Gooden, 2001; Lee, 2011; Mustapha, 2012).

Despite the recorded difference in the third story, still female characters in the 21st Century Philippine Literature are downplayed or relegated to the background while male experiences dominate. Table 1 illustrates this general observation.

Table 1. Focus of experiences of female and male in the three (3) narratives.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	27	34.18
Male	52	65.82
TOTAL	79	100

IV. CONCLUSION

In the light of the findings of the study, it is concluded that gender representation in narratives of 21st century Philippine literature portrays women across all timeframes still struggle for their position in the society and their battle against gender inequality continues even until at present. The focus remains on males as more experiences are given them making them more favorable characters in the narratives. As gender bias subsists against women assigned with minor experiences, males continue as time progresses, however slowly diminishing in focus, to be having more direct and indirect speeches, and initiate and give responses more often than the females. It must be noted, however, that the GAD advocacy is now reaching its audience through the developmental changes traced in the narratives most specifically of the recent times. This has significant implications both to the teaching profession and to the academic community as it is believed that schools are where gender equality is best projected, specifically carried out in its literature instruction.

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