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Challenging Patriarchy through Feminist Praxis in Cisneros's *Only Daughter*

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Abstract

Sandra Cisneros's Only Daughter presents a Mexican-American woman's negotiation of identity and creative activities within patriarchal and culturally conservative - indigenous social structures. This research addresses the issues of marginalization, silencing, and identity loss experienced by women within patriarchal societies particularly through the lens of Chicana and intersectional feminism, as well as other feminist theorists. This study analyzes how Cisneros transforms personal experience and memory into feminist praxis. The narrative becomes a weapon of resistance against patriarchy reclaiming voice and subjectivity. The primary objectives of this research are to specifically focus on how intersecting identities affect the formation and expression of women's identities and voicelessness within patriarchal systems. Using qualitative textual analysis with descriptive research design, the study explores how Cisneros disrupts patriarchal language aligning with Écriture féminine and the concepts of other feminist theorists. The findings reveal that Only Daughter operates as a feminist and decolonial intervention. This study holds significant value both in its practical application and scholarly contribution to feminist literary discourse. Academically, this research contributes to the evolving field of feminist literary studies by offering an original interpretation that blends theory with textual analysis.

Keywords: *feminist praxis, decolonial resistance, narrative healing, indigenous survival*

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Introduction

Born into a traditional working-class Mexican-American family in 1954, Sandra Cisneros experienced a childhood shaped by the tensions of cultural duality, moving between Chicago and Mexico City. In her autobiographical essay *Only Daughter*, she reflects on issues of gender, identity, and cultural expectations within a patriarchal framework. The narrative illuminates the struggles of women—particularly daughters—who seek intellectual and creative autonomy in male-dominated environments that marginalize female voices. This study positions *Only Daughter* as both cultural critique and feminist praxis. Cisneros's writing resists patriarchal values by reclaiming storytelling as an act of defiance and empowerment. Drawing on Chicana feminism and intersectional feminist theory, the article examines how intersecting dimensions of gender, ethnicity, class, and cultural identity shape women's marginalization and silence, while also highlighting strategies of resistance.

Although previous scholarship has explored themes of female marginalization in Cisneros's work, less attention has been paid to how *Only Daughter* embodies feminist praxis in subverting patriarchal structures. The central research problem, therefore, lies in understanding how intersecting cultural, familial, and gendered expectations shape female identity and how these identities resist systemic silencing.

Accordingly, this article pursues three guiding questions: (1) How does *Only Daughter* portray the negotiation of female identity under intersecting pressures of family and culture? (2) In what ways does Cisneros represent women's resistance to patriarchal oppression? (3) How are women's silences constructed within patriarchal systems, and how does the narrative subvert them? By addressing these questions, the study aims to show that *Only Daughter* not only critiques the constraints imposed on women but also demonstrates the power of feminist expression to reimagine narratives of gender, identity, and cultural belonging.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical or conceptual framework refers to the practice of identifying and articulating the theories that guide a research study. It provides the lens through which the researcher interprets and analyzes the subject matter. According to Calabrese (2009), the choice of a theoretical framework reflects the researcher's understanding and theoretical stance toward the inquiry. The framework not only outlines the key concepts and theoretical assumptions underpinning the study but also connects the research with previous scholarly work and empirical findings (Long et al., 1985; Bryant, 2004; Calabrese, 2009). This section outlines the theoretical bases employed

in this study, which are drawn from feminist thought—particularly Chicana feminism, intersectional feminism, and contributions from other key feminist theorists.

Chicana Feminism

This research adopts the framework of Chicana feminism, which emerged during the 1960s and 1970s as a response to the dual marginalization experienced by Mexican-American women. While the broader Chicano Movement aimed at securing civil rights for Mexican-Americans, it often sidelined women's voices, just as mainstream (predominantly white) feminist movements failed to address the specific cultural and racial contexts of Chicanas. Chicana feminism highlights the intersection of race, gender, class, and cultural identity, critiquing both the machismo within Chicano communities and the racial exclusions within mainstream feminist discourse. It emphasizes cultural heritage, familial responsibility, and community, while advocating for autonomy and gender equity. Notable Chicana feminist thinkers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Ana Castillo inform this study, especially in the analysis of Sandra Cisneros's *Only Daughter*, which is explored through their theoretical insights.

Intersectional Feminism

The study also incorporates intersectional feminism, a theoretical framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to explain how overlapping identities—such as race, gender, class, and sexuality—shape individuals' experiences of privilege and oppression. Intersectional feminism critiques traditional feminist and anti-racist movements for overlooking the complex realities faced by women of color and other marginalized groups. This framework is crucial in analyzing the layered and interconnected systems of oppression reflected in literature and in the lived experiences of characters. It enables a holistic understanding of identity that is central to feminist literary criticism, particularly when examining texts that reflect the experiences of women of color.

Other Feminist Perspectives

In addition to Chicana and intersectional feminism, this research draws upon the ideas of several prominent feminist theorists. Concepts from **Simone de Beauvoir**, particularly her exploration of women as the "Other," contribute to the discussion of gendered identity. **Julia Kristeva** and her work on language, semiotics, and the maternal body, **Elaine Showalter**'s theory of gynocriticism, and Écriture féminine theorists who emphasize women's writing as a form of resistance, and **Gyatri Spivak**'s concept of 'subaltern' are also applied. These frameworks assist in exploring

the deeper psychological, linguistic, and cultural layers embedded in the text and in the broader questions posed by this study.

Delimitations and limitation

This study is confined to Sandra Cisneros's essay *Only Daughter*, focusing on the construction of female identity and women's resistance to patriarchal oppression. The analysis is restricted to selected feminist frameworks (Chicana and Intersectional feminists, Beauvoir, Kristeva, Showalter, écriture féminine, and Spivak) and does not extend to Cisneros's wider works or broader cultural contexts. As a single-text, qualitative interpretation, the findings cannot be generalized to all Chicana literature. The analysis is also shaped by the researcher's interpretive lens and the selective application of feminist theories, which may exclude alternative perspectives.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value both in its practical application and scholarly contribution to feminist literary discourse. At its core, it seeks to challenge patriarchal structures through a critical feminist reading of Sandra Cisneros's *Only Daughter*, a text that, despite its shortness, is rich in thematic depth and critical potential. Practically, this research provides an important lens for exploring how feminist praxis can be used to dissect and confront the gendered expectations embedded within familial and cultural structures. It offers a concrete example of how literary analysis can be a tool for resistance and social critique. In a literary landscape where Cisneros's shorter works are often overshadowed by her more extended narratives, this study foregrounds *Only Daughter* as a powerful site for feminist engagement. By highlighting the struggles of a Latina daughter negotiating identity in a patriarchal environment, the study not only enriches the limited body of scholarship on the text but also invites future research applying feminist and intersectional frameworks to similarly under-explored works.

Academically, this research contributes to the evolving field of feminist literary studies by offering an original interpretation that blends theory with textual analysis. It encourages scholars to revisit minimalist texts through expansive critical lenses. Furthermore, this study paves the way for interdisciplinary dialogue, intersecting literature, gender studies, and cultural criticism to deepen our understanding of how narrative can function as a form of feminist resistance. By doing so, it affirms the continuing relevance of feminist theory in literary scholarship and calls attention to voices, like Cisneros's, that critique and reimagine the roles imposed on women in both public and private spheres.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to examine feminist praxis in Sandra Cisneros's *Only Daughter* and its challenge to patriarchal norms. A qualitative approach is most appropriate because it enables interpretive and critical engagement with a single literary text, allowing the researcher to explore issues of identity, gender, and cultural expectation from a feminist perspective. This method facilitates a nuanced analysis of how Cisneros critiques patriarchal structures and foregrounds women's agency through narrative strategies.

In terms of data collection, the study will rely on secondary data sources. The researcher will analyze library resources, scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles (both published and unpublished), theses, and other academic materials related to feminist theory, literary criticism, and postcolonial gender studies. This secondary data will provide a strong theoretical foundation for interpreting Cisneros's text and situating it within broader feminist discourse.

Thus, this methodology enables the researcher to conduct a textual study and contextual analysis of *Only Daughter*, exploring how Cisneros's work challenges patriarchal norms and enacts feminist praxis through narrative form, character development, and thematic emphasis.

Applying Chicana Feminist Perspectives to Cisneros's *Only Daughter*

Gloria Anzaldúa was a Chicana feminist, scholar, and writer whose work has significantly influenced feminist theory, queer theory, and postcolonial studies. Her feminist perspectives are rooted in intersectionality, hybridity, and a deep challenge to the binaries of identity (such as male/female, white/non-white, straight/queer). Below is an overview of her feminist perspectives, with references to her most influential works:

Borderlands and Hybrid Identity

Anzaldúa's most influential work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), presents the idea of the "borderland" not only as a geographical space but also as a metaphor for hybrid identities, especially those of women of color. She develops the concept of the "new mestiza consciousness", which arises from navigating multiple cultural worlds. She states that,

> "The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the

> lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture... A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (p. 57).

This powerful quote from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* explores the U.S.-Mexico border not just as a physical divide, but as a metaphorical and emotional landscape—a "herida abierta" (open wound) where conflicting identities, cultures, and histories clash and converge. Anzaldúa describes this borderland as a place of constant transition, pain, and transformation—a hybrid space where something new, a "third country," is formed from the merging of two worlds. The inhabitants of this borderland often occupy marginal, liminal spaces and exist in defiance of imposed boundaries and binaries.

Cisneros's essay *Only Daughter* reflects this concept of the "borderland" in emotional, cultural, and identity-based terms. Though she doesn't explicitly mention a physical border, her experience as a Mexican-American woman growing up in a patriarchal family and trying to gain her father's approval mirrors the "emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" that Anzaldúa describes. Cisneros lives in the in-between of American and Mexican identities. Her father wants her to embrace traditional Mexican values (like marriage and domesticity), while she seeks independence and validation through education and writing—a more American ideal. This creates a tension similar to what Anzaldúa calls a borderland—a space where two cultures clashes against each other.

As a gendered borderlands, Cisneros navigates the border between being a daughter (expected to fulfill traditional female roles) and being a writer (a role not traditionally valued for women in her cultural context). She's inhabiting a "prohibited" space by asserting her voice as a woman and artist. Cisneros says,

> Being only a daughter for my father meant my destiny would lead me to become someone's wife. That's what he believed. But when I was in the fifth grade and shared my plans for college with him, I was sure he understood. I remember my father saying, "Que bueno, mi'ja, that's good." That meant a lot to me, especially since my brothers thought the idea hilarious. What I didn't realize was that my father thought college was good for girls — good for finding a husband. After four years in college and two more in graduate school, and still no husband, my father shakes his head even now and says I wasted all that education. (p. 110)

This statement reflects the cultural and gender expectations in a male-dominated society. Cisneros's father reduces her destiny to merely becoming "someone's wife," embodying patriarchal values and norms that define a woman's worth by her marital status. As per the patriarchal cultural logic, education for girls is not valued for personal growth or empowerment but is seen as a means to secure a suitable husband. In such a society, daughters are not expected to achieve or aspire as sons; instead, they are confined to domestic roles. Women are often seen as incapable of intellectual or leadership accomplishments. Reading, writing, or holding positions of power are considered the domain of men. Women are considered as child-bearers rather than thinkers or leaders. When Cisneros does not marry, her father laments that he "wasted all that education," revealing that her schooling was viewed not as a right or investment in her future, but as a failed attempt to increase her marriageability. In contrast, a son's education is seen as a true investment — one expected to yield tangible returns.

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* articulates a feminist vision through the concept of "new mestiza consciousness," which challenges patriarchal, colonial, and binary systems by embracing hybridity, contradiction, and transformation. This consciousness is deeply rooted in feminist thought, particularly in its rejection of rigid gender roles and its embrace of intersectional identities. (Anzaldúa, 1987). In *Only Daughter*, Cisneros critiques traditional gender roles, particularly the idea that a woman's worth lies in her ability to marry, and instead claims space for her identity as a Latina writer. She also embraces intersectionality, recognizing how her gender, ethnicity, and class background shaped her struggles and successes.

According to Cisneros (2009) ,"Being only a daughter for my father meant my destiny would lead me to become someone's wife", (P 110) reflects the traditional gender role expectation Cisneros faced that her value was seen in terms of marriage, not individuality or a career. However, her pursuit of higher education and writing shows her resistance to that norm. Similarly, she says, "What I didn't realize was that my father thought college was good for girls—good because you could meet and marry a husband." (Cisneros, 2009, p 110) Here, Cisneros highlights how education was seen not as a means to intellectual or personal development for women, but as a tool for fulfilling traditional gender roles. Her actual use of education—to become a writer—subverts this expectation and challenged the patriarchal norms. Cisneros (2009) states the fact that "I am the only daughter in a family of six sons. That explains everything."(p 109) Cisneros opens by situating herself within multiple identities: daughter (gender), only girl (family dynamic), Mexican-American (cultural context).

This sets up an intersectional framework—her experience isn't just shaped by being a woman, but by her position in a Latino family and her role within that. We can also discuss the issue that how patriarchy was subverted and compelled to surrender against feminist praxis is:

> I'm not sure if it was because my story was translated into Spanish, or because it was published in Mexico, or perhaps because the story dealt with Tepeyac, the colonia my father was raised in and the house he grew up in, but at any rate, my father punched the mute button on his remote control and read my story. I sat on the bed next to my father and waited. He read it very slowly. As if he were reading each line over and over. He laughed at all the right places and read lines he liked out loud. He pointed and asked questions: "Is this So-and-so?" "Yes," I said. He kept reading. When he was finally finished, after what seemed like hours, my father looked up and asked: "Where can we get more copies of this for the relatives?" (Cisneros, 2009, p 110- 111)

The acceptance from her father, after reading her story in Spanish, underscores her ability to bridge cultural and linguistic divides—embracing her bicultural and bilingual identity as a strength rather than a source of division. It shows that ultimately, patriarchy was subverted and surrendered. People, holding with patriarchal values and norms, are compelled to accept the issue of feminism. Feminists speak on behalf of gender equality, women's rights and freedom.

According to Chicana feminism, the pain and longing of women is especially their desire for male's recognition are deeply tied to the idea of living in a liminal, undefined identity space. They don't fully belong to either culture's expectations, and that emotional friction is very much in line with the "constant state of transition." Cisneros writes, " I am the only daughter in a family of six sons. *That* explains everything." (Cisneros, 2009, p 109) In the phrase "That explains everything," Sandra Cisneros refers to her identity as the only daughter in a Mexican family with six sons. This is the literal reality of her situation. However, the second part— "That explains everything"—is especially significant because it reflects a socially constructed reality. The word *that* refers to her being a daughter, and in a male-dominated society, this fact alone is often used to justify discrimination. Daughters are seen as less valuable, treated as the "other," and are deprived from equal rights. They are often viewed as emotional rather than rational, reinforcing gender stereotypes that marginalize them.

bell hooks' Feminist Praxis and Patriarchy

In works like *Feminism is for Everybody and Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks argue that:

Feminism must be a lived, political commitment, not just a theory. Education and writing are tools of liberation—especially for women of color. Challenging patriarchy requires disrupting internalized oppression and reconstructing self-worth. In *Feminism is for Everybody*, hooks define feminism as: "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." (hooks, 2000, p. 1) She elaborates that this definition clarifies the movement's focus on ending sexism, rather than being anti-male, and emphasizes that both women and men can perpetuate sexist thinking. Cisneros (2009) reflects,

> In retrospect, I'm lucky my father believed daughters were meant for husbands. It meant it didn't matter if I majored in something silly like English. After all, I'd find a nice professional eventually, right? This allowed me the liberty to putter about embroidering my little poems and stories without my father interrupting with so much as a "What's that you're writing?" But the truth is, I wanted him to interrupt. I wanted my father to understand what it was I was scribbling, to introduce me as "My only daughter, the writer." Not as "This is only my daughter. She teaches." Es Maestra — teacher. Not even profesora. (p 109)

Cisneros expresses the patriarchal constraints placed upon her by her father, who believed that a daughter's education was primarily a means to find a suitable husband. He dismissed her academic and creative pursuits, never taking interest in her writing. Despite this lack of encouragement, Cisneros used that silence as space to freely develop her voice as a writer. Cisneros's choice to write becomes a powerful act of resistance—what feminist scholar bell hooks would describe as a form of cultural critique and a tool for liberation. Similarly, In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks discuss the role of education in liberation: "To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn." (hooks, 1994, p. 13) bell hooks emphasizes that education should empower individuals to find their voice and define their identity. This idea is reflected in Sandra Cisneros' *Only Daughter*, where education becomes a liberating force for her. Despite being undervalued by her father Cisneros pursued her college education, which not only led her to become a renowned writer but also enabled her to assert her worth. Ultimately, her father's approval of her writing symbolizes a personal and cultural breakthrough. Education allowed her to transcend limiting roles and claim her identity through authorship.

Hooks articulates the connection between theory and personal healing:

> "I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing." (p. 59)

Cisneros' hurt stems from her father's lack of recognition. When her father finally reads her work and says, "Where can we get more copies of this for the relatives?", Cisneros experiences a moment of healing. The act of writing, like theory for hooks, becomes a space where personal pain is transformed into empowerment.

Judith Butler's feminist praxis to subvert patriarchy: through *"repetition with a difference."*

Judith Butler's feminist theory challenges the idea of a fixed, natural gender identity and instead understands gender as a social construct produced through performative acts. Patriarchal power operates by enforcing rigid gender norms, but those norms can be subverted through altered performances that expose their instability. Her feminism is deeply critical of exclusionary politics and emphasizes the fluidity of identity, making space for multiple forms of resistance. Butler's work has had a profound influence on feminist theory, particularly in deconstructing gender and revealing how patriarchal power operates through norms. Butler (1990) argues that, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." (p. 25) This statement proves that gender is not something we are born with or that flows from our biological sex. Instead, it is constructed through repeated actions, behaviors, and norms over time.

Because gender is sustained through repetition of norms, it can be challenged or re-signified through *"repetition with a difference."* This is where **resistance** occurs: by performing gender in ways that defy norms, *re-performing* them in unexpected ways. As we apply Butler's theory in Cisneros's *Only Daughter*, we find the following cases as an example of subverting patriarchy doing unexpectedly: Instead of following domesticity, obedience, and reproductive roles in Mexican patriarchy, Cisneros performs the role of a daughter differently—not through marriage, but through education and writing. Similarly, her act of writing becomes a *feminist performative act*—a re-signification of what it means to be a daughter. this act of re-performing the daughter role with different meaning challenges the fixed patriarchal expectation.

Applying Intersectional Feminist Perspectives to Cisneros's *Only Daughter*

Cherríe Moraga is a Chicana lesbian feminist writer, activist, and theorist whose work has significantly contributed to intersectional feminist thought. Her feminist theory and praxis are deeply rooted in lived experience, particularly the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class. Moraga challenges patriarchy not through abstract theory alone, but through a lived, embodied feminist praxis grounded in community, culture, and resistance. Moraga states that "The danger in attempting to isolate oppressions as separate entities within our lives is that it fragments our experiences, our realities. The danger lies in ranking the oppressions." (Moraga, 1981, p. 28) Her idea is really applicable in Cisneros's text. If we analyze *only* on the gender aspect in *Only Daughter*, the layered impact of race, ethnicity, class, and language are missed. This is what Moraga warns against—ranking oppressions or treating them as isolated. In *Only Daughter*, Cisneros's struggle extends beyond resistance to patriarchal authority; it encompasses a critique of a familial and social structure shaped by economic hardship, migration, and the complexities of cultural assimilation within a male-dominated society. Women are systematically oppressed, exploited, and marginalized, rendered subordinate across all levels of social organization. The hegemony of masculinity cannot be examined in isolation within a single domain, as it permeates every facet of societal life.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectional feminist, argues that systems of oppression like racism, sexism, classism, and others intersect, particularly for women of color. As a traditional feminist, she often centers the experiences of white, middle-class women, failing to account for the multiple axes of identity that shape oppression for women. Thus, any meaningful feminist praxis must recognize these intersections to dismantle patriarchy effectively is by addressing not only gender-based oppression but also how it interacts with race, ethnicity, language, and family structure.

Crenshaw says, "Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated." (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140) Applying this concept to Sandra Cisneros's *Only Daughter*, the moment when her father reads her work in Spanish and expresses pride becomes a powerful subversion of patriarchy—an intersectional convergence of language, ethnicity, gender, and emotional recognition. Her father values sons more, reflecting both patriarchal and cultural norms. This shows how gender oppression is shaped by cultural heritage — she's not just a woman but a Mexican-American daughter, bound by specific familial and cultural expectations. Sisneros writes: "Being

an only daughter for my father meant my destiny would lead me to become someone's wife." Her feminist praxis isn't loud protest but personal empowerment through writing, asserting her voice in a male-dominated cultural space.

In "Intersectionality" (2020) Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge propose feminist praxis as a way of linking theory to action through critical analysis and resistance to oppression. heir praxis focuses on: Intersectionality, Power, Relationality, Social Justice, Reflexivity. They write:

> "Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways."(p. 2)

Sandra Cisneros experiences compounded marginalization, not merely as a woman, but as a woman within a Latino family governed by traditional gender values and norms. The power dynamics embedded in patriarchal family structures—particularly her father's preference for sons—profoundly impact her sense of self-worth and professional trajectory. Her identity as a daughter, writer, and cultural subject is relationally constructed, shaped by her interactions with and the expectations of others, especially her father. In this context, writing functions as a mode of resistance, enabling Cisneros to assert her voice and reclaim her value both as a woman and as an artist. Her article, thus, transcends the personal; it becomes a political act, challenging dominant social norms and illuminating the urgent need for transformation in cultural and gendered expectations. Her narrative can be seen as advocating for recognition of marginalized voices in both the family and literary world.

Applying feminist praxis factors contributing to women's silence or marginalization within patriarchal structures to Cisneros's *Only Daughter*

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, argues that woman has been historically positioned as "the Other" in a male-dominated society. Man is the Subject (Self), and woman is the Object (Other). Beauvoir says, "Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute, she is the Other" (Simone de Beauvoir, as cited in Adams & Searle, 2005, p. 1002). In patriarchal societies, man is regarded as the main, the essential being, the Self or Subject while woman is defined in opposition, as the Other. This hierarchical binary position shows that women as dependent, secondary, and derivative of men.

Some expressions form Cisneros's *Only Daughter*: “Being only a daughter for my father meant my destiny would lead me to become someone's wife.” This line highlights how her identity and worth are defined by her gender and her role in relation to men, not as an individual. Her father’s expectations "other" her by denying her personal ambitions and individuality. " I have Seven Sons." The structure of this sentence isolates the speaker from her brothers. She is not included in the collective identity of “children” but is an afterthought—an outsider among the valued male siblings. Like the concept of "other", we can see in Cisneros's life that from an early age, she is not seen as an autonomous individual. Her father introduces her as “my only daughter,” but the emphasis is not on her uniqueness or individuality, it’s a role defined by absence and lack: she is not a son. Even her pursuit of education is accepted by father because of finding good husband. Her aspiration towards education is also related to man. This reflects Beauvoir’s critique of how women are denied subjectivity (main, self) and are instead confined to immanence: passive, domestic, and reproductive roles. Yet, her act of writing—and her eventual partial recognition from her father—marks a tentative step toward becoming a Subject in Beauvoir's sense: someone who asserts her own identity through creation, thought, and agency.

Julia Kristeva divides language into two realms: *The symbolic*: associated with structure, law, order, and patriarchal authority (often linked to the father) and the *semiotic*: linked with rhythm, pre-Oedipal drives, the maternal body, and emotional expression (linked to the mother). Regarding this matter, Kristeva writes:

> “To break with the symbolic order is not to reject meaning but to refigure it, to allow for the heterogeneous—particularly the semiotic, the maternal, the feminine—to erupt into language and disturb its phallic economy. This eruption does not occur outside of language but works within it, disrupting its syntactic, semantic, and logical structures. Thus, the poetic function becomes a privileged space for this subversive activity, where meaning is not abolished but multiplied, displaced, and made unstable. Such practices are not merely aesthetic; they are political insofar as they contest the hierarchical separation of mind and body, subject and other, masculine and feminine” (p.165).

Cisneros’ narrative blends both symbolic (traditional narrative, linear time) and semiotic (emotive tone, subjective memory, bodily imagery) modes. Her attempt to write herself into legitimacy, despite being overlooked by her father, can be seen as reclaiming the semiotic realm within a symbolic structure. Her voice, shaped by the marginalization as the "only daughter" in a patriarchal family, resists and reclaims meaning from within the symbolic, echoing Kristeva’s call to disrupt patriarchal

language from the inside. Cisneros engages in a feminist praxis by using language to express a vivid experience that resists patriarchal silencing. Her act of writing aligns with Kristeva's notion of disrupting symbolic law through poetic, emotive, and embodied expression. Elaine Showalter, in her foundational work on feminist literary criticism, outlines a model of women's literary development in three distinct phases: the feminine, the feminist, and the female. She writes:

> "In the feminist phase, the central theme of writing was the criticism of the role of women in society and the oppression of women; in the female phase, women reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to the female experience as the source of an autonomous art" (p. 13).

In the feminine phase, women writers internalized patriarchal literary norms and attempted to write as men did, often under male pseudonyms. The feminist phase marked a period of protest, where women began to critique the constraints placed upon them and assert their own voices. Finally, in the female phase, women moved toward a literature rooted in female experience, focused on identity, body, language, and community. This framework is particularly useful in analyzing Sandra Cisneros' *Only Daughter*, which moves beyond mere protest to assert a deeply personal, culturally situated female identity. Cisneros writes from the margins—both as a daughter in a patriarchal Mexican-American family and as a woman writer in a male-dominated literary tradition—yet her narrative is not dependent on imitation or resistance alone. It becomes a declaration of selfhood, aligning with Showalter's female phase as an act of feminist praxis.

Gayatri Spivak's Feminist Praxis offers a significant lens for analyzing the text with feminist themes, particularly in the context of postcolonial theory, subaltern voices, and the deconstruction of patriarchal narratives. Spivak examines how women, especially those in postcolonial societies, are often rendered voiceless within dominant historical, cultural, and political frameworks. In her seminal essay *"Can the Subaltern Speak?"*, she argues that women's voices are not merely ignored but are actively silenced by the intersecting power structures of colonialism and patriarchy. She states, "The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in the silence of the oppressed. Silence is not a 'spontaneous' production of the subaltern but is produced by the operations of power" (p. 271).

In *Only Daughter*, Cisneros confronts the patriarchal expectations that silence the desires, ambitions, and voices of women, particularly daughters. Growing up in a Mexican-American family, Cisneros is rendered "subaltern"—her worth and identity

reduced to the traditional role. This mirrors Spivak's assertion that the subaltern (the oppressed, marginalized) cannot speak within dominant structures because their voices are silenced by the operations of power. In this case, the "operations of power" are patriarchal and cultural norms that suppress women's autonomy by denying them space in the public sphere of writing and intellectual discourse. This silence is not a voluntary case. However, Cisneros challenges this silence through the act of writing. Despite her father's disregard for her literary ambitions, she uses writing as a tool to speak back, thereby transforming the "silence of the oppressed" into a "powerful act of resistance." She refuses to remain silent about her aspirations and, in doing so, critiques the patriarchal silencing of women's voices.

Écriture féminine is a literary theory that emerged from French feminism in the 1970s, particularly associated with theorists like Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. It translates to "women's writing" and proposes that women should write in a way that breaks away from the phallocentric (male-centered) structures of traditional language and narrative. They focused on writing the Body (écrire le corps)**:** Women should write from the body, embracing sensuality, emotion, and intuition. and the female body becomes a source of knowledge, creativity, and subversion. They suggest for the disruption patriarchal language because patriarchal language is seen as linear, logical, and rigid whereas ecriture féminine is fluid, poetic, nonlinear, and resists categorization. Female subjectivity is multiple and shifting, not fixed or singular. Writing reflects fragmented identity, breaking binaries (e.g., male/female, rational/emotional). For that case, ecriture feminists often challenged traditional narrative forms by using experimental styles, fragmented structures, and poetic language are preferred. Helene Cixous states:

> "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement." (p. 875)

Cixous calls on women to take control of the narrative. For centuries, men have defined women in literature, philosophy, religion, and law. Cixous insists women should write from their own experiences, voices, and bodies — not from the roles imposed on them. Women have been underrepresented and misrepresented in literature. Cixous is encouraging women not only to write themselves but also to create space for other women in the world of writing. Patriarchal society has often controlled women's bodies through norms, laws, and taboos — just as it has silenced

their voices in literature and history. Cixous's concept is exactly followed by Cisneros. Cisneors also writes her own life, her experience as a Mexican-American daughter, and the emotional struggle for recognition and identity. Her identity was in vulnerable position in patriarchal society. Cisneros inserts herself into the text as an act of resistance and healing, bringing female subjectivity into a world where it's often ignored or dismissed.

Conclusion

This research found three key conclusions from the study. First, this study investigated the potential role of intersecting cultural, familial, and gendered expectations that shape the construction and negotiation of female identity. Cisneros captures the emotional complexity of a daughter's struggle for validation within a patriarchal Mexican-American family structure, where traditional gender roles diminish the value of a woman's intellectual and creative ambitions. The text reveals how women's identities are often confined by inherited cultural scripts that prioritize male success and silence female expression. Yet, within this oppressive environment, Cisneros portrays subtle but powerful forms of resistance—her persistent pursuit of education and authorship becomes an act of defiance and self-assertion.

Second, based on the second finding of the issue, women's resistance to patriarchal oppression within a male-dominated familial and cultural setting, the conclusion is that Cisneros offers a emotional and personal exploration of a daughter's struggle for recognition within a patriarchal family structure. Cisneros reveals how gendered expectations within both family and culture can marginalize women's ambitions. Yet, it is precisely through this marginalization that resistance emerges. Her pursuit of education and writing serves as a quiet but firm act of defiance against traditional roles assigned to women.

Lastly, based on the third key findings for the issued what factors contribute to women's silence or marginalization within patriarchal structures, and how are these silences challenged or subverted, that in patriarchal societies, man is regarded as the main, the essential being, the Self or Subject while woman is defined in opposition, as the Other. This hierarchical binary position shows that women as dependent, secondary, and derivative of men.

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