DISCUSS THE IDEA(S) DEVELOPED BY THE TEXT CREATOR IN YOUR CHOSEN TEXT ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AN INDIVIDUAL’S ATTEMPT TO LIVE UNCONSTRAINED BY CONVENTION OR CIRCUMSTANCE.

**She’s Only A Girl**

“Could [have] fooled me,” said the salesman. “I thought it was only a girl.” (Alice Munro). This quote conveys the belief of deep-rooted gender stereotypes and roles expected of women in a male-dominated society. In the short story *Boys and Girls*, Alice Munro expresses the inevitable influence of societal norms on a girl that is in contrast with what society perceives to be what a proper lady is. Through the unnamed female narrator, who is the protagonist of the story, her self-perception is ultimately tested on account of her gender through her coming of age in the midst of societal pressures. In the short story, the author presents the protagonist conflicts in a constraining sexist environment, to convey the difficulties of desiring to escape from societal norms and expressing oneself freely.

Initially, the narrator is presented to be a contrast to what a proper lady is or the role of women via her mother. She perceives herself to be capable of executing jobs that are intended for male-only, “...[helping] [her] father when he cut the long grass, and the lamb’s quarter and flowering the money-musk.” The labors that she can perform mirror her father's task that solidifies her perception of herself, one who is capable. Similarly, she perceives her father, an authority figure, to be an ally who accepts her beyond her gender. Through the “manly” chores, she challenges the status quo and rebels against deep-rooted societal norms that influence the time and sensibilities of other characters. The narrator’s mother tries to influence and restrict the narrator to express herself freely by insisting that the narrator does house-related work, which is an appropriate task for a woman. The mother even complains to the father about the narrator’s rebellious attitude towards jobs that strictly follows the role of a woman and that “...it’s not like [she] had a girl in the family at all..” emphasizing the disconnection between the narrator’s role in society and her gender. Because her mother attempts to restrict her to a women’s job, the narrator sees her mother as an enemy, constricting and forcing her to step into a woman’s role instead of recognizing her beyond gender stereotypes. She still proudly continues to execute manly jobs even after she is criticized by her mother and grandmother. In a constrained and sexist environment, the narrator expresses herself confidently through her daydreaming and taking pride for the performances she is able to achieve that is perceived as a “man’s job”. Her perception of herself as more than her gender, refusing to be influenced by society even though she takes criticism from her family, marks her initial characterization.

However, the narrator wrestles internally and externally with her coming of age and the societal norms that unknowingly slowly influence her . The narrator’s dreams of being a hero and having attributes that correlate to a man “...took place in a world that was recognizably [hers], yet one that presented opportunities for courage, boldness, and self-sacrifice, as [hers] never did…” emphasized her disconnection with societal norm, portraying the narrator to be who she really and wanted to be. Inevitable though, coming of age shows that her perception of herself has somewhat changed; she slowly adapts to societal norms that are against what she desired at first. In comparison to what her dreams used to be, the narrator’s dreams are now changed to her being a damsel in distress and “...instead somebody would be rescuing [her].” The change of her dreams is a result of the inevitable influence of societal norms and deep-rooted gender roles that although she tries to rebel against it, slowly and unknowingly influences her, demonstrating the difficulties to escape it. When the narrator tries to get Laird, her brother, into trouble by influencing him to go on top of a beam, an attempt to influence her parents to scold her brother, it backfires on her being scolded instead. The narrator’s mischief causes her to come to an understanding of a male-dominated society where men are perceived to be more favored and the difficulty of escape from the societal norms is crucially solidified.

Consequently, the narrator realizes that although she challenges and rebels against the status quo, she comes to understand that she cannot escape the influence of societal norms and express herself freely. Even with all the odds against her and societal pressure slowly influencing her, she makes a last attempt to “free” herself through Flora, the horse waiting to be slaughtered. The narrator lives vicariously through Flora as it mirrors the energy and the drive of the narrator. Flora symbolizes the narrator’s drive to be free and wild; their situations are paralleled as both are constrained in an environment dominated by men. When the narrator sets Flora free at the last minute, it is to convey her wanting to be free from the constraints of societal norms and to express herself freely without the influence of gender roles. However, in the end, she realizes the futility of setting Flora free, as Flora is eventually caught and slaughtered - a reality check for the narrator that eventually the influence of societal norms and gender inequality will catch on and that her freedom and dream to be free will end. She cannot avoid this and will later accept what she tries to escape from, the role of a woman.

Finally, the narrator reluctantly accepts her fate and the role that is bestowed upon her. After the events of Flora, Laird tells the family that she was the cause of the horse's escape and this led to her father confronting her about the situation and saying “she’s only a girl”. Because of this statement, the narrator who views her father throughout the story as an ally and viewing herself beyond her gender, changes irrevocably. When the father says this statement, it defeats her heart, and she comes to an understanding that there is no escaping the defeating influence of societal norms and gender roles. She knows the reality that deep-rooted societal norms are difficult to escape because it influences everyone unknowingly, to an extent that it oppresses the narrator from expressing herself through relating and doing tasks that are meant for males only. She reluctantly accepts her role in society emphasizing the idea of the oppression of women and the resentment towards their freedom of expression through gender roles and the inevitable influence of societal norms.

In *Boys and Girls*, Alice Munro emphasizes the toxicity and hardships of escaping from societal norms in a constrained environment that results from oppression towards genders and expressing oneself freely. The narrator is characterized to contradict and a contrast to what a typical lady is and sees herself as capable of performing tasks that are related to men. She is met with the reality, coming of age, and struggles of the inevitable influence of deep-rooted norms and an environment that is a male-dominated society. Conforming to the pressure of society shows the difficulty of escaping it, the narrator is faced and forced to accept that “she’s only a girl”.