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## **PARENTS' STEREOTYPICAL GENDER ROLES IN “FRIENDS FOREVER” BY DANIELLE STEEL**

Stereotypical gender roles are perceived as social norms which are prescribed to men and women as certain behavioral patterns [1, p.335]. Such stereotypes are present in literary works that reflect values and beliefs of ordinary people.

The aim of this paper is to outline stereotypical gender roles of main protagonists' parents depicted in the novel “Friends Forever” by D. Steel [2]. The novel tells life stories of five children from the moment they meet at school till their later years at university and first years at work. The five friends face a lot of challenges and go through tragic events and their parents appear to be important figures at such moments.

Sketching parents' portraits, Danielle Steel mostly sticks to conventional gender roles of mothers and fathers in the novel. All children start their stories growing in families with both parents taking care of them.

The following table presents families' outlines in the text.

Protagonist	Mother	Father	Sibling
Izzie Wallace	Katherine (lawyer)	Jeff (lawyer)	-----
Gabby Thomas	Judy (housewife)	Adam (a car seller)	Michelle (a younger sister)
Billy Norton	Marilyn (housewife)	Larry (sports insurance agent)	Brian (a younger brother)

Sean O’Hara	Connie (housewife)	Mike (owner of construction company)	Kevin (an elder brother)
Andy Weston	Helen (doctor)	Robert (doctor)	-----

Table 1. Families’ sketches

Speaking about fathers, they fully correspond to images of successful breadwinners, being handsome and strong, having well-paid jobs, providing their families with financially comfortable lives, bringing up ambitious children. In general, all five fathers seem to be loving parents, doing their best to take care of their children.

Thus, Larry Norton has traditional patriarchal views on the family and men’s success in society. His elder son Billy precisely corresponds to these expectations; though the younger son, Brian, is a disappointment for his father as the boy is not as sportive as his father would like him to be, and even being the best student in class does not compensate his father’s frustration: *The big disappointment to Larry, his father, was that Brian had no interest in anything athletic — he didn’t even like to throw a ball* [2, p.15]; *If Brian wasn’t going to be an athlete, Larry had no use for him, and barely spoke to the child* [2, p. 15]. As a result, Larry ignores his younger son, supporting only Billy, who is a promising footballer.

Izzie’s father, Jeff, takes more care of his daughter compared to his wife, who is completely absorbed into her work and sees her family duties as a burden. Even after divorce Izzie stays with her father as her mother is either busy or away on business trips. In this way Jeff represents a slight deviation from the stereotypical gender norm, as he is depicted as a person who is more interested in his daughter than in his own career.

The families in the novel cultivate traditional gender models for boys and girls. The Nortons family serves as an example of many families’ views upon the stereotypical image of boys in the same way as the Thomases family presents

stereotypical beliefs about girls: their daughter looks *like an ad for the perfect little girl* [2, p. 8].

Mothers' images in the novel are outlined according to social gender beliefs about good mothers, with one exception — Izzie's mother. Judy Thomas, Marilyn Norton and Connie O'Hara are traditional representatives of what is considered to be lucky in marriage in a traditional patriarchal society — having to a prosperous husband, living in a huge house, growing up children, devoting time to them but at the same time being a gorgeous woman, which is brightly mirrored in the following examples about Marilyn: *Every woman in the place thought he (Larry Norton) was gorgeous and wanted to go out with him. Marilyn was the lucky winner, and they were married when she was twenty-four* [2, p. 5]; *They had bought a very handsome house in Pacific Heights, and Marilyn had never worked again* [2, p. 6]; *she was looking great at thirty-three* [2, p.16].

Katherine Wallace is depicted as a woman who blames her husband for having a daughter; she is rarely at home and prefers Jeff to look after Izzie: *Izzie thought all of the moms in the group were nice, except sometimes her own, because she was so busy, had so much work to do, and she came home so tired from the office that she sometimes forgot to give Izzie a hug* [2, p. 19]; *Izzie had been starved all her life for a mother's love.* [2, p. 34]. It is necessary to mention that Katherine gets more interested in her daughter when she is a grown up personality. She supports her in difficult times: *You've already seen the sad side of life. Too much of it, at your age. Now you need to go throw some good stuff in the other side of the scale* [2, p. 158].

Another working mother in the novel is Andy's, Helen Weston, who works as a doctor and spends long hours in the hospital, but despite her work she manages to demonstrate her love to her son as Andy feels neither lack of love or care and is very proud of his mother fulfilling such an important job: *"My mom delivers babies," he explained. "Someone's having triplets. That's why she couldn't stay* [2, p. 11].

In the novel the parents greatly contribute to the development of their children's characters being gender role models for them, bringing the children up according to generally accepted gender social norms and in most cases helping them to achieve their life ambitions. Danielle Steel creates her characters mostly according to conventional gender pictures, which fully corresponds to the genre of Chick Lit.

#### REFERENCES

1. Blackstone, A. M. (2003). Gender Roles and Society. In: J. R. Miller, R. M. Lerner, L. B. Schiamberg (Eds.) *An Encyclopedia of Children, Families, Communities, and Environments*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO. 335-338.
2. Steel, D. (2012) *Friends Forever*. N.Y.: Delacorte Press.