

**Sylvia Plath'in 'Sırça Fanus' Eserinde Sosyal Beklentiler ve Kimlik Krizi
Analizi****The Analysis of Social Expectations and Identity Crisis in Sylvia Plath's the Bell Jar**Dilek ARSLAN¹⁾. (*)**ÖZET**

Sosyal beklentiler bireylerin insanlar ve toplum için yapmaları gereken kabul edilmiş toplumsal normlar olarak tanımlanır. Başka bir deyişle, sosyal beklentiler bireylerin ne yapmaları gerektiği hakkında toplumsal olarak kabul görmüş fikirlere dir. Buna bağlı olarak, toplumsal cinsiyetle de alakalıdır. Yani, toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı sosyal beklentiler bir kişinin gerçekleştirmesi umulan davranışıyla ilgilidir. Ayrıca, kimlik, sosyal statü ve ilişki ağlarının yanı sıra bir dizi fiziksel, zihinsel ve sosyal özellikleri olarak tanımlanan, kişinin öz imajıdır. Kimlik krizi ise bireyin genellikle benlik yokluğu hissi ve sosyal rolüyle alakalı kişisel çatışmadır. Sosyal beklentiler ve kimlik krizi birbiriyle alakalıdır. Birey sosyal beklentileri karşılayamadığında ve bu sebeple bunalıma girdiğinde, kimlik krizi yaşayabilir. Aynı şekilde, Sylvia Plath'in Sırça Fanus romanında sosyal beklentiler görülür ve özellikle ana karakter, Esther, beklentileri karşılamakta zorlanır ve bu sebeple kimlik krizi yaşar. Yazar olmak istemesine rağmen, toplum ve ailesi geleneksel beceriler öğrenmesini, bakire kalmasını, evlenmesini, çocuk doğurmasını ve kocasıyla ilgilenmesini bekler; bunların hepsi Esther'e baskıya sebep olur. Toplumsal cinsiyeti doğrultusundaki bu beklentilerin aksine, beklentilerle baş edemez ve bunalmış hisseder. Sırça fanusun içinde nefessiz, bu yüzden de krizde hisseder. Pek çok tedaviden sonra biraz rahatlar ama hala bir gün bir yerde sırça fanusun tekrar üzerine inip inmeyeceğinden emin değildir. Nihayetinde, Esther'in toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı sosyal beklentiler nedeniyle kimlik krizi yaşadığı için bu çalışmada feminist eleştiri yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışmanın amacı Sylvia Plath'in Sırça Fanus romanında ana karakter Esther'in toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı sosyal beklentiler sebebiyle yaşadığı kimlik krizini yansıtmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Beklentiler, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Kimlik Krizi, Sylvia Plath, Sırça Fanus

ABSTRACT

Social expectation is described as an accepted societal norm about what an individual needs to do for people and the community. In other words, social expectation is the accepted opinion of the community about what individuals need to do. Accordingly, it is related to gender, as well. That is, gender-based social expectations relate to the anticipated behavior of an individual. Besides, identity is a person's self-image, which is defined by a set of distinct physical, mental, and social characteristics, as well as a network of relationships and social positions. An identity crisis is a personal conflict about one's social role, and generally, a sense of the absence of one's personality. Social expectations and identity crises are related to each other. When someone cannot meet the social expectations, and is therefore depressed, he or she may have an identity crisis. Likewise, social expectations are seen in *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, and especially the protagonist Esther has difficulty in meeting the expectations; therefore, she lives an identity crisis. Although she wants to be a writer, the community and her family expect her to learn conventional skills, stay virgin, get married, bear children, and care for a husband, all of which cause oppression for Esther. Contrary to these expectations in line with her gender, she feels depressed and cannot cope with the expectations. She feels breathless in a bell jar; therefore, in a crisis. After several treatments, she feels some relief; however, she still is not sure someday or anywhere if the bell jar will descend again. Ultimately, the feminist criticism method is used in this study since Esther experiences identity crisis because of the gender-based social expectations. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to explore the identity crisis that the main character Esther experiences because of the gender-based social expectations in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*.

Keywords: Social Expectations, Gender, Identity Crisis, Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

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INTRODUCTION

Social norms are the unwritten rules of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that are considered acceptable in a particular social group or culture. Norms provide us with an expected idea of how to behave, and function to provide order and predictability in society (McLeod, 2008). There can be several social norms in society in terms of public behavior, such as using the telephone, dining out, classroom and school rules, elevators, the workplace, and gender roles. As an example, people expect their neighbors to be quiet at night, or women who have children are expected to take care of their children. Also, social norms are accepted ideas by the society, which are related to gender, as well. Moreover, there have been many things that affect people's behaviors; we care about what our close relatives, friends, or others think of us. Relatives, friends, religious organizations, the media, and socioeconomic status are examples of social institutions, all of which can have an impact on how we behave, believe, and feel. Accordingly, social expectations are described as unspoken norms that guide one's behaviors and opinions in a socially acceptable manner, social expectations are influenced by a variety of factors, including the individual's race, gender, faith, age group, social status, and geographic area (Social Expectations, 2015). Moreover, the phrase, social expectations, refers to how group members are expected to behave; a social role is a set of anticipated activities for an individual who takes on a certain position (Kamberaj, 2021). In this aspect, social expectations affect our behaviors. All in all, when anyone is present, expectations are set up. People don't expect individuals to act arbitrarily, but rather to act in certain ways in specific situations (McLeod, 2018). For example, when we are in a cinema, we are expected to be quiet; however, someone may not meet the expectations by talking loudly. Some social expectations are suitable to lead a harmonious life concerning their gender; however, sometimes when people cannot meet the expectations and feel depressed, the expectations may be a burden to the people, which may result in an identity crisis.

Accordingly, there are a few definitions for identity and identity crisis. Identity generally means questioning one's place in the world and who he or she is. Identity refers to a human's or group's characteristics, values, behavioral traits, looks, or expressions (Wikipedia Contributors, 2024). Also, identity tells us who we are and lets people know who and what we are (Burke, 2020). Moreover, in psychology, a crisis is defined as extreme emotional discomfort brought on by the belief that a change is coming and that you don't have the tools to deal with it (Gillette, 2022). "Identity crisis is a personal psychosocial conflict, especially in adolescence, which involves confusion about one's social role and often a sense of loss of continuity to one's personality" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). Furthermore, identity crisis, the word coined by a psychologist specializing in psychosocial development, Erik Erikson, is a sense of unease and ambiguity about who you are and what you want to do with your life; according to Erikson, there are eight different psychological phases in life, each of which necessitates the resolution of a crisis (Josh, 2022). Thus, when your sense of self is challenged, you may have an identity crisis at any point in your adult life; furthermore, some adolescents may not experience an identity crisis at all, preferring instead to embrace the roles and beliefs that their parents or society have instilled in them; some others remain in a condition of crisis all of the time (Whitbourne, 2012). Additionally, some of the most prevalent symptoms of an identity crisis are having doubts about your character, examining personality factors that affect your self-perception, having doubts about your life's purpose or enthusiasm, experiencing uneasiness or discomfort, changing your views or inclinations on a regular basis to fit your surroundings or relationships, having difficulty answering questions about oneself, and having doubts about your decision-making capacity (Skedel, 2021).

When it comes to *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, gender-based social expectations can apparently be seen and as a result of these expectations, there is an identity crisis, especially with the main character Esther. Being successful, she cannot meet the expectations of the society such as being beautiful, happy, staying virgin, having a boyfriend, getting married, taking care of the house, or having children; all of which are the expectations related to her gender. All these kinds of gender-based expectations cause gender-based inequality, discrimination, and oppression for Esther. As a result, she feels depressed. Her feelings and behaviors do not match with the expected ones; therefore, she finds it difficult to go on living and decides to kill herself. As a result of electroconvulsive therapy and some medical treatments, she decides to go on living; however, she is still not sure if she will feel in the bell jar again. Also, the bell jar is a kind of symbol for Esther's depression,

oppression, discrimination, or gender inequality, as a result of which she is trapped and lives the identity crisis.

As the study is a qualitative research, firstly, social expectations, identity, and identity crisis are explained. After that, gender is mentioned briefly, as the social expectations in the novel are related to the main character Esther's gender. All in all, the feminist criticism method is applied in the study as the main character experiences problems because of her gender. In the social expectations and identity crisis in *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath section, biographical information about the author and her works is briefly mentioned to analyze the novel better. Then, the relationship between gender-based social expectations and identity crises are presented in accordance with Esther's life in *The Bell Jar*. Critical thinking is applied, and literary work is discussed in terms of gender-based social expectations and identity crises. Lastly, the study is concluded.

In light of the statements above, the purpose of this study is to scrutinize the identity crisis that the main character Esther experiences because of the social expectations in accordance with her gender in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. The society oppresses Esther and expects her to behave according to her gender, which Esther cannot accomplish, and as a result, she lives identity crisis. Hence, the feminist criticism method is used in this study as the social expectations that Esther experiences are related to her gender, which causes identity crisis in the end.

1.SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

There have been plenty of social expectations in society, and individuals feel severe pressure to meet the expectations, whoever he or she is. The social pressure on human beings sometimes organizes the society; however, sometimes causes them to be in depression and live crises in life.

Correspondingly, social expectation is described as an accepted societal norm about what people need to do for people and institutions, and hence for the community overall; the spirit of the period is the consensus opinion of society regarding what individuals need to do: social expectation. The basic normative expectations that a person needs to accept as the way to live one's life are related to the concept of social expectation; Habermas' (1989) concept of the public sphere is also linked to social expectation; it is the place or medium where public perception and social consensus are formed via collective conversation; as a result, social expectation is a set of fresh hopes formed through the practice of public discourse and collective action, and it is effective (Hasegawa et al., 2007). Also, societal expectations have been founded on objective ideas about how people should treat each other; everyone may think that taking anything that belongs to others without permission is wrong (Clay et al., 2016). Additionally, a collection of expected actions for an individual who takes a certain role is known as a social role; the term social expectation refers to how members of a group are expected to behave (Kamberaj, 2021). Besides, social expectations are defined as unspoken norms that guide one's behaviors and opinions in a socially acceptable manner; social expectations are influenced by a variety of factors, including the people's culture, gender, faith, age category, position in society, and geographic area (Kamberaj, 2021).

Moreover, social expectations for acts that are difficult to categorize as positive or negative might be more complicated; for example, generosity (providing goods to others without expecting anything in return) is a great thing to do, but it comes at a cost to the provider, who sacrifices a resource without receiving anything in return (APA, 2016). Also, women are supposed to act altruistically in this scenario due to gender preconceptions about social duties, but males are not; in a scenario in which individuals divide actual money between themselves and an anonymous recipient, these gender variations in social expectations about altruism appear to impact altruistic behavior; women are expected to behave more self-sacrificingly (APA, 2016).

Apart from these, each societal circumstance comes with several norms on how to act properly; expectations differ from one community to the other. When we consider the roles that individuals perform in society, we can see how these expectations appear; the part that people perform as members of a social group is referred to as their social role; your attitude shifts when you take on new social roles to meet the expectations you and others have for that role (McLeod, 2008).

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) says about social roles:

All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players:

They have their exits, and their entrances;

And one man in his time plays many parts.

(As You Like It, Act II, Scene VII) (Shakespeare, n.d.)

The roots of social roles can be seen in the lines above. That is to say, people take on several roles every day, such as mother, sister, and daughter. Hence, each role brings expectations to the people.

Additionally, falling behind on anticipated maturity milestones or expected behaviors is connected with despair and nervousness, based on the life cycle. Sometimes people are stressed because of the expectations and unaware of the reason as the social expectations are unconscious; however, no matter whether people are aware or not, they are depressed if they fall behind the expectations (College of Allied Educators, 2018; Brennan, 2021).

2.IDENTITY CRISIS

To begin with identity in this section, it refers to a person's self-image, which is characterized by a collection of bodily, mental, and social qualities that are unique to them, as well as a variety of connections and social positions. Moreover, a sense of continuity, or the belief that one is the same person now as one was before, is essential to one's identity despite physical or other changes. Also, the feeling that one's recollections, objectives, values, hopes, and beliefs belong to the self is derived from one's bodily sensations, one's body image; and the feeling that one's memories, goals, values, expectations, and beliefs belong to the self; personal identity is another name for it (APA, n.d.). Furthermore, the experiences, interactions, ideas, principles, and experiences, those make up a person's subjective sense of self, are all parts of identity. This aids in the development of a consistent self-image that remains relatively constant throughout the time when new components of the self are established or enhanced (Cherry, 2022). On the other hand, people are in a crisis when they encounter an impediment to achieving major objectives, an impediment that is, for the time being, unsolvable using traditional problem-solving procedures (Caplan, 1961). Also, the perception or experience of an incident or circumstance as an unacceptable hardship that transcends the person's present resources and coping skills is referred to as a crisis (James & Gilliland, 2001). When the two are combined, identity crises are times of conflict in which a person's self-perception is questioned and he or she experiences role confusion. Apart from this, Erik H. Erikson, a German psychoanalytical theorist, invented the phrase "identity crisis," which is a key component of his identity development paradigm.

Additionally, identity crises occur at all stages of life and are typically seen as important events in healthy psychological functioning. In this respect, Cherry (2022), the writer of the article, namely What is an Identity Crisis? states that people are prone to having an identity crisis at various stages in their lives, particularly at times of significant change, such as beginning a new relationship, putting an end to a relationship or marriage, living a horrific thing, having a baby, being informed on a medical problem, the death of a loved one, changing jobs or finding a different one, or moving. Also, Cherry (2022) adds that having a mental health problem like depression, bipolar illness, or borderline personality disorder might make you more likely to have an identity crisis. Moreover, a period of life characterized by experimentation, fluctuating, contradictory, or newly developing values, and a lack of conviction in one's regular positions in society is known as an identity crisis, especially in work and family relationships (APA, n.d.). According to Erik Erikson, it is normal and acceptable for teenagers to go through a phase of an identity crisis, and this experience leads to higher maturity; adult midlife crises and other phases marked by transformation or doubt about one's self have been added to the theory. Furthermore, anger, feeling trapped, or a lack of real growth can all be symptoms of an identity crisis; in addition, an identity crisis can increase melancholy or anxiety by making people unhappy with themselves and their situations; because the experience is more ambiguous than the symptoms of other mental diseases, this sort of psychological crisis may be more difficult to recognize in one's self (Skedel, 2021).

3.GENDER

As the identity crisis, caused by the social expectations, that Esther lives in the novel, The Bell Jar, is related to her gender, it is necessary to mention it. Then, gender addresses how a person is

behaved and how he or she behaves in a society. However, the norms may change in different societies, as well. Also, gender emphasizes societal distinctions rather than biological distinctions. Although it is related to sex, it is different from biological sex. In this aspect, it is made clear by the Council of Europe (2022) that multiple terms can be used to differentiate between sex and gender; for example, sex might be referred to as biological sex, while gender can be referred to as cultural and social sex. Furthermore, a person's gender determines their status everywhere. Furthermore, the World Health Organization [WHO] (2022) states that sociologists define gender as the socially constructed characteristics of women, men, girls, or boys, and these characteristics include the norms, behaviors, and attitudes associated with being a particular gender, as well as interpersonal interactions. Additionally, gender is the way a person is treated in a society, and it is different in every culture and can change and evolve over time. All in all, it refers to the fact that how someone is expected to behave. Correspondingly, females mostly experience oppression and discrimination in societies because of their gender. When it comes to Esther's condition in *The Bell Jar*; likewise, Esther experiences discrimination, gender inequality, and oppression because of her gender. People expect her to act in accordance with her gender; however, she cannot meet the expectations, which results in Esther's identity crisis.

4.SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE BELL JAR BY SYLVIA PLATH

Sylvia Plath (1932–1963), born in Boston-Massachusetts, was an American poet, short-story writer, and novelist. She is especially famous for her works such as *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960) and *Ariel* (1965), and the semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* (1963), which was published under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas (Britannica the Editors of Encyclopedia, 2022). She won the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry in 1982. Married to Ted Hughes in 1956, she had two children. She was severely depressed most of her life and was treated with electroconvulsive therapy several times; however, she could not recover, and killed herself in 1963.

The only novel by Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, is a semi-autobiographical novel published in 1963 before her death; there are reflections of her life in the novel such as there is an identity crisis because of social expectations, especially with the character Esther (Marsh, 2019). Novel protagonists suffer from a variety of mental and social problems as a result of the shortage of identity, and they lack a sense of purpose in life (Ağır, 2015, p. 4). It can be seen in the novel that Esther struggles to have an identity. That is to say, Esther notices a contradiction between what the society says she should feel and what she really does, and this mismatch exacerbates her crazyness. Also, the title of the book "The Bell Jar" itself symbolizes the burden, depression, and crisis because of the social expectations. Esther feels like being in a bell jar when she is suffering from mental illness. She describes her feelings with the words, "Wherever I sat...I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air" (Plath, 2020, p. 236). Accordingly, no matter what she is doing or where she is or who she is, she feels alienated from the environment in the bell jar. The entire gap between her own expectations and the society's expectations causes her to feel in a crisis and alienated in a bell jar. After the electroshock and several medical treatments, "I felt surprisingly at peace. The bell jar hung, suspended, a few feet above my head. I was open to the circulating air" (Plath, 2020, p. 274). Then, it is apparent that she feels the bell jar was lifted up and she can feel the air.

In the beginning pages, we see the crisis from the words Esther says, "I didn't know what I was doing in New York" (Plath, 2020, p. 4). Esther is successful and has won a scholarship in New York, which other university girls are crazy about if they have the same opportunity. "I was supposed to be having the time of my life" (Plath, 2020, p. 5). Ultimately, she is expected to be happy; however, she is not sure about her feelings; "everybody would think I must be having a real whirl" (Plath, 2020, p. 6). Although she is an ambitious and bright student and has the opportunity to live in luxury at a fashion magazine in New York, she is not happy; on the contrary, she is upset. It may be understood from her words that "I felt very still and very empty" (Plath, 2020, p. 6). All in all, she is expected to be excited, as opposed to her sincere feelings.

Furthermore, there are expectations of beauty standards and women's bodies, which cause gender inequality in the novel. At the start of the novel, when they are in the car, a boy named Lenny gets closer to them, expects them to join him, and go to a bar. Esther and one of the beautiful girls, Doreen, take apart from the other girls and go with Lenny; however, he wants to get rid of Esther as

Doreen is more beautiful. However, Esther wants to see other places in the city; she does not give importance to Lenny's expectation that Esther leave them. Still, she feels psychological oppression and discrimination to be the only one except for Doreen and Lenny. Hence, she feels unwanted. Additionally, we see Esther's ugliness in her words, "I was appalled to see how wrinkled and used-up I looked" (Plath, 2020, p. 25). Here, a Chinese woman looks at Esther, and she feels that the woman looks at her ugliness. Also, when they are telling their names, Esther introduces herself as Elly, which means that she hides her identity. She wishes to learn about new places and the culture there instead of establishing sincere relationships by introducing her real identity.

Moreover, Esther believes she must behave according to her gender and suppress her innate sadness, pessimism, and dark humor since society expects ladies her age and label to seem cheery, flexible, and confident. She believes she is unable to talk about or consider the dark aspects of her life that trouble her: individual inability, suffering, and death. She understands that the world of fashion in New York should make her feel gorgeous and joyful; "I felt very still and very empty" (Plath, 2020, p. 6), but she finds it to be full of poison, excessive drinking, and hostility. Her male relationships are intended to be passionate and profound, yet they are full of miscommunication, mistrust, and aggression. Esther is nearly constantly convinced that her emotions are incorrect or that she is the only one who sees the world the way she does, and she finally develops a sense of unreality. This sensation of disbelief builds until it is overwhelming, leading to attempted suicide and insanity. Also, as a young woman, she is expected to get married and have children; however, she is interested in literature and wants to write. That is to say, she experiences gender inequality, discrimination, and oppression. Although she is hard-working, other girls respect her only when she starts dating Buddy. Her friends give more importance to her having a handsome boyfriend than to being academically successful. Although Esther does not enjoy dating Buddy, the date provides her with respect and relationships among peers. Here is gender inequality, as well. Her friends, family, and everyone expect her to marry, care for a husband and children, and give up trying to be a poet. Even when Esther and Buddy are talking, he says "a piece of dust" (Plath, 2020, p. 69) about poems. Let alone respecting Esther's wishes, he humiliates poems. Esther, even herself, cannot accept being a mother, a wife, and a writer at the same time.

Also, at a time when Esther gets in a taxi and gives the driver a tip, the driver gets angry with Esther, which she cannot give meaning to. She expresses that "I hate handing over money to people for doing what I could just as easily do myself, it makes me nervous" (Plath, 2020, p. 66). She does not give a tip in fact; however, she has to give as it is a conventional behavior in society. Giving a portion of tips to the driver is an expected social behavior that distresses Esther, as she does not know how to balance the tip.

Also, society and her boyfriend Buddy expect her to stay a virgin and not lose her virginity until marriage: "When I was nineteen, pureness was the great issue. I saw the world divided into people who had slept with somebody and people who hadn't, and this seemed the only really significant difference between one person and another" (Plath, 2020, p. 100). She means virginity with pureness, and it is the most important issue among people. However, she is shocked by the fact that Buddy is not a virgin, as he had a sexual relationship with a girl. Here, gender inequality is apparent in the novel's society. They behave toward Buddy and Esther in a different way. Esther feels the discrimination. She gets angry with the fact that society needs a girl's virginity to accept her purity; on the other hand, a boy may not be virgin, but he has freedom, which is accepted as normal. She expresses that "All I'd heard about, really, was how fine and clean Buddy was and how he was the kind of person a girl should stay fine and clean for" (Plath, 2020, p. 84). She feels uneasy about this double standard, inequality, and discrimination in relation to their gender. Esther even cannot accept this; she thinks of this as inequality in her relationship with Buddy; therefore, she does not have a sexual relationship with him. Moreover, virginity pressure stresses her. Esther decides to lose her virginity for her independence, to relieve the pressure that she should be a virgin. Thus, she decides to have sex with Irwin to get rid of the virginity pressure.

Over all, Esther cannot accept society's expectations about getting married and having children. When she is in the hospital, she cannot understand the feelings between a mother and her children. The men in her life are devastating (Bonds, 1990, p. 59). In this aspect, Esther thinks it is an injustice to have such an oppressive society. They expect virginity and childbearing to be experienced by women. As a result, she herself goes to a hospital and gets fitted for a diaphragm. She expresses

her feelings with the words such as "I was my own woman" (Plath, 2020, p. 284). After getting fitted, she is sure not to be pregnant and decides to have a sexual relationship to relieve the virginity and child burden. The society's unequal expectations about a child from a woman stress Esther. When Buddy shows her a woman giving birth at the hospital, Esther feels anxiety. The woman gives an extremely difficult birth, feels terrible pain, and groans. Buddy says to Esther that the woman will forget the pain after bearing the child. Nevertheless, Esther cannot understand this; she is not sure if the pain compensates for having a child. Also, she thinks that the pills for the pregnant woman to forget the pain must be a man's invention, which is a trick in a way. The man expects the woman not to remember the pain at the moment of birth and become pregnant, and give birth again and again. Here, she feels the gender inequality, as both of the couples do not suffer equally. Moreover, society expects each woman to be pregnant and give birth again and again, no matter how severe the pain is. They oppress women, not men, which is unequal.

Furthermore, Esther's mother suggests her to learn conventional skills for females, which are socially expected careers for women; however, Esther wishes to be having a mother like Jay Cee who is not conventional. "I wished I had a mother like Jay Cee" (Plath, 2020, p. 49). She wants to follow the unconventional, successful, and ambitious Jay Cee; however, her close relatives such as her mother, constantly recommend that she have conventional jobs, which is a constant pressure for Esther. Her mother wants her to act according to her gender, which oppresses and depresses Esther. Esther seeks her own identity by connecting negatively with women other than her mother, including Doreen, Betsy, Dodo, and Mrs. Willard; as a result, she develops a fractured sense of self since she can neither conform to nor refuse people's expectations (Sakane, 1998, p. 43). Therefore, as she cannot conform to or refuse gender-based social expectations, she feels in crisis.

Additionally, when Buddy is ill in the hospital, Buddy's father wants Esther to go together to visit Buddy. When Buddy's father talks about his approval and gratitude for their relationship, Esther cries, and Buddy's father thinks that she cries because of happiness. "Mr. Willard must have thought I was crying because I was so glad he wanted to be a father to me" (Plath, 2020, p. 108). However, Esther's real feeling is not joy but sadness. Buddy's father, in conformity with society's thoughts, expects that Esther is grateful for the relationship; however, her wish does not match the expectations as opposed to her gender.

Also, after returning home from New York, Esther watches Dodo Conway from the window. She has abandoned her career and has six children, which meet the social expectations. She has acted according to the gender-based social expectations, which surprises Esther.

Moreover, when Esther is in the hospital, she does not change clothes or have a bath; she smells bad; therefore, everyone in the hospital feels annoyed at her. She thinks "I hadn't washed my clothes or my hair was because it seemed so silly" (Plath, 2020, p. 161). She does not meet the expectations in terms of body hygiene. Therefore, she experiences oppression and discrimination as she behaves as opposed to the expectations.

In addition to these, at a time at Belsize, Esther witnesses DeeDee and Joan's relationship mistakenly. DeeDee and Joan have a lesbian affair at Belsize, which is not suitable according to the common social expectations in terms of sexuality, purity, and virginity. Moreover, Joan tells Esther that she loves her, which Esther cannot give meaning.

Besides, at the hospital, the doctors ask Esther how she is. She expresses her feelings with the words such as "I also hate people to ask cheerfully how you are when they know you're feeling like hell and expect you to say 'Fine'" (Plath, 2020, p. 226). She does not feel well and says, "I feel lousy" (Plath, 2020, p. 226). However, it can be seen from her thoughts that she feels pressure to feel well. People oppress her. Esther seems to feel that people, as well as doctors, ask how you are; however, the question is not a sincere one, they are not curious about your condition sincerely; they only ask and expect you to reply positively.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, social expectations and identity crises are related to each other in relation to gender. Social expectation is an accepted societal norm about what people need to do for people and the community. Thus, it is the consensus opinion of society regarding what individuals need to do, which is a matter of gender. Also, an identity crisis is a personal conflict about one's social role and

generally a sense of the absence of one's personality. Hence, when someone cannot cope with social expectations and is therefore depressed, oppressed, or discriminated, he or she may have an identity crisis. Likewise, if someone ever has doubts about his or her beliefs, his or her life path, or the answer to the question, "Who am I?" it's possible that she or he is having an identity crisis (Skedel, 2021). Similarly, according to Elmer (2019), although an identity crisis does not have typical symptoms such as cold or flu, someone may conclude having an identity crisis when he or she is unsure of who he or she is, either in general or in reference to a specific part of his or her life, such as relationships, age, or profession, and when someone is having a lot of internal struggle because he or she is not sure who he or she is or what his or her place in society is. Moreover, Elmer (2019) adds that significant life changes, that recently happened, may have impacted his/her sense of self, his or her values, faith, beliefs, interests, or professional choice, all of which have a significant influence on how he or she views himself or herself; as a result, he or she may be looking for a deeper sense of purpose, cause, or passion in his or her life.

When it comes to *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, it is concluded that there can be seen social expectations and identity crises, especially with the protagonist Esther in *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath. The society expects her to behave according to her gender, such as by learning conventional skills, staying pure, getting married, and having children, all of which cause a crisis for Esther. Accordingly, in other words, social expectations in the novel, *The Bell Jar*, are seen in line with gender. However, it is apparent that contrary to the expectations that she be happy as a brilliant student and intern at a magazine in New York, she feels depressed and cannot cope with the expectations in her society. Esther feels depression, oppression, and discrimination because of her gender. Hence, it may be said that to be in the bell jar is to be in a crisis. In the novel, Esther presents her feeling by saying, "To the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is the bad dream" (Plath, 2020, p. 302). After all, it is evident that Esther cannot meet the expectations. After several treatments, she recovers; however, she still is not sure about the future, "I wasn't sure at all. How did I know that someday... anywhere, the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn't descend again" (Plath, 2020, p. 307)? Then, she feels some relief about the expectations; however, she is worried to live in the same bell jar again.

All in all, it is found that Esther in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* experiences identity crisis because of the social expectations in accordance with her gender. Society expects her to behave in tandem with her gender. As a result, Esther feels oppression, discrimination, inequality, and depression. Esther cannot meet the expectations; hence, she lives identity crisis.

Consequently, it can be suggested that if the society in *The Bell Jar* were more relaxed in terms of social expectations in relation to Esther's gender, she would be stronger, more comfortable, and more relaxed. At least, even if her close relatives, such as her mother, supported her and oppressed Esther less, Esther would not have felt such in depth and live identity crisis. If Esther's family was free of social expectations in relation to her gender, Esther would not experience oppression, discrimination, and depression. Furthermore, she would not live identity crisis. Hence, for women to be stronger, healthier, and away from crises related to identity, they should support but not oppress each other. They should not discriminate against and oppress one another because of societal norms in relation to their gender.

ETHICAL INFORMATION REGARDING RESEARCH

Since this study does not include quantitative or qualitative field research, it does not require ethics committee approval. Document analysis was used in this study.

CONFLICT DECLARATION

This study has no conflict of interest with any institution or person.

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