

The Role of Domestic Violence in Dennis Kelly's *Girls & Boys*

دور العنف الأسري في مسرحية
الفتيات والفتيان لدينيس كيلي

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze Dennis Kelly's *Girls & Boys* – a moving piece of writing that addresses many of the big social issues: domestic violence, male and female roles, and the collapse of relationships. The story is built around a working-class nameless woman who enters the film industry, gets married, and has two children. In the beginning, the main character and her husband construct a joyful and fulfilling life together. However, this happiness degenerates because the husband becomes physically abusive and eventually murders their kids.

Following her journey in the play, the playwright shows how various phases of domestic violence emerge, what happens when one takes the poison of the vengeful spirit, and how that society nurtures violence against women. In *Girls & Boys*, Kelly shows domestic violence as being covert but even more dominating and effective. He enlightens the audience about the ugliness of relationships and demonstrates that if there is no restraint in a couple, then the conflict might lead to the worst of outcomes and turn into tragedy.

By addressing such a strong message, the play serves as a powerful call to raise awareness, provide support, and foster the prevention of domestic violence.

Keywords: Dennis Kelly, physically abusive, domestic violence, male and female roles, collapse of relationships

الملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل مسرحية دينيس كيلى الفتيات والفتيان - وهي قطعة ادبية مؤثرة تتناول العديد من القضايا الاجتماعية الكبرى: العنف المنزلي، وأدوار الذكور والإناث، وانهيار العلاقات. تدور القصة حول امرأة من الطبقة العاملة تدخل صناعة السينما، وتتزوج، وتنجب طفلين. في البداية، تبني الشخصية الرئيسية وزوجها حياة سعيدة ومُرضية معًا. ومع ذلك، تتدهور هذه السعادة لأن الزوج يصبح مسيئًا لها جسديًا ويقتل أطفالهما في النهاية.

من خلال متابعة رحلتها، توضح المسرحية مراحل مختلفة من ظهور العنف المنزلي، وتأثير سم الروح، وثقافة العنف ضد المرأة. في مسرحية الفتيات والفتيان ، يُظهر كيلى العنف المنزلي على أنه أكثر خفيه ولكنه أكثر هيمنة وفعالية. كيلى يحاول ان يُنير الجمهور حول قبح العلاقات ويُظهر أنه إذا لم يكن هناك ضبط للنفس بين الزوجين، فقد يؤدي الصراع إلى أسوأ النتائج ويتحول إلى مأساة. من خلال تناول مثل هذه الرسالة القوية، تعمل المسرحية كدعوة قوية لرفع الوعي وتقديم الدعم وتعزيز منع العنف المنزلي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دينيس كيلى، الإساءة الجسدية، العنف المنزلي، الأدوار الذكورية والأنثوية، انهيار العلاقات.

1)The Hidden Epidemic: Understanding Domestic Violence

The concept of domestic violence, or family violence, could be explained as any and all acts of violence, abuse, or mistreatment that take place within a relationship. It encompasses any type of violence- physical, emotional, psychological, or even financial harm and most commonly occurs in intimate relationships including marriage or cohabitation. The result of such abuse is extremely devastating.

It is imposing effects not only on the directly mistreated victim but also on the entire family as well as the community causing continuous cyclical abuse. Recognizing domestic violence as a serious issue is the first step toward providing support, raising awareness, and preventing further harm. According to *the U.S. Department of Justice*, domestic violence is defined as “a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner” (2024). Domestic violence can also include practices like “forced marriage” and “honor crimes” (Naqvee, 2024).

A more precise concept is provided by the *United Nations*, which refer to it as “domestic abuse” or “intimate partner violence.” The UN also defines domestic violence as “a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner.” Abuse can encompass “physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person.”

According to “*Law No. 23/2004*”, “domestic violence” is “any action that causes suffering or misery in the form of physical, sexual, psychological, or neglect of a person, especially women, within the scope of the household” (Parlinggoman et al., 2024, 988). Linda Kelly criticizes this “traditional framework for neglecting female-perpetrated violence and focusing predominantly on male aggression”. She argues that “the prevailing definition arose from feminist legal theories and advocacy, which sought to address gender disparities but inadvertently minimized or ignored other dynamics of abuse, such as mutual violence or non-physical forms of control. This approach is often aligned with promoting protective policies for women while neglecting a holistic view of domestic abuse as a multifaceted issue affecting all genders” (2003, 792).

Further, Domestic violence is “the aggressive behavior of one member of the family towards other members of the family. It includes all kinds of attitudes and behaviors that force the person to act against their will (humiliation, threat, battering, forced sexual intercourse or coercion, restriction, forced marriage, etc.)” (ATEŞOĞLU, 2023, 291).

The etymology of “domestic,” is rooted in the Latin “domus” meaning “home”. This term is involved fundamentally in defining the concept of family and social relations. This term “encapsulates the essence of familial bonds, cultural practices, and social structures, shaping how individuals perceive their roles within the household and society at large” (Buchli, 2010, 503).

The understanding of domestic violence has changed a lot over time. What was once seen as a private family matter is now recognized as a serious social issue. In ancient and

medieval times, it was sadly common and accepted for men to “physically assault” women and children, as they were seen as the heads of their households (Edwards, 2023, 16). Things began to shift during the Industrial Revolution when the “feminist movement” in the 19th century highlighted “violence against women, prompting a reevaluation of domestic violence beyond mere physicality” (Naik, 2022, 13). By the early 20th century, legal reforms emerged, but the issue remained in the shadows.

A real turning point came in the 1970s when activists began openly addressing domestic violence and creating shelters to help victims. In the 1980s and 1990s, stronger laws like the “Violence Against Women Act” brought more protections, and people started to understand that abuse isn’t just physical—it can also be emotional, sexual, and economic (Martin, 2003, 427). Today, domestic violence is seen as a global human rights issue, with organizations like the “UN and WHO” advocating for change and movements like “#MeToo” giving survivors a voice. This journey reminds us how important it is to support victims and work to stop abuse in all its forms (Rihal, 2020, 751).

Domestic violence deeply affects the mental, emotional, and physical health of victims. Emotionally it brings about anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem as most of the time one is either scared or enduring emotional abuse. Most of the victims end up suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which causes them to have startling memories, nightmares, and panic attacks. Women also may experience symptoms of low self-esteem and or even post-traumatic stress disorder, and loneliness since the abusers isolate them from their communities, making them possibly seek

hopelessness or suicidal thoughts. The physical can range from blinking to faint scars, broken bones, or even death.

In the long run, the stress that comes with living in such conditions will affect one's health; they might develop life-long diseases like heart complications, digestive tract disorders, or low immunity. The victims might also present complaints of disrupted sleep, and sexual violence survivors may present with gynecological complaints such as unwanted pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease. It is important to understand these effects as a way of realizing that a person is at risk and assisting that person to move to safety and get help.

1.1 The Representation of Domestic Violence in Literature

One can describe dominant violence as typical for each period in literature as well as the related culture. Domestic violence, as portrayed in the literature, is a powerful tool through which social problems are viewed and interpreted. Different authors describe a domestic abuse issue, illustrating the relations between it and psychology, society, and economics. Such portrayal not only sensitizes but also represents overall cultural discourses on gender violence. Awareness concerning domestic violence has been created with the help of literature by sharing the stories of the victims.

Different authors have written on the issue using prose and novels, short stories, drama, and poems - showing us how it affects people from all walks of life, regardless of their economic status or culture, making it a global subject. It seems, therefore, that how we see domestic violence in literature has changed over time, as the representation of

Domestic Violence has developed through stages, following the changes in cultural awareness and societal attitudes toward the issue. In earlier periods, the earlier literary text may have tackled domestic violence marginally, whereas more recent works appear to treat it directly. Authors have used the concept of domestic violence as a lens to explore broader issues, issues including gender roles, power, culture, mental health, and human relations.

That is why literature is a unique and efficient way to study and interpret the effects that domestic violence has on people and the community. However, again, it should be stated that domestic violence is not an exclusive preserve of Western societies alone. It has been found in the works of literature of several societies across the world being often connected with the folk or indigenous cultures. Several notable literary figures have addressed domestic violence in their works, such as:

The Iliad by Homer (circa 8th century BCE), *Metamorphoses* by Ovid (-8 CE), *The Aeneid* by Virgil (29–19 BCE), *Othello* by William Shakespeare (1603), *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens (1859), *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen (1879), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy (1891), *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier (1938), *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (1979), *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (1985), *Dolores Claiborne* by Stephen King (1990), *She's Come Undone* by Wally Lamb (1996), *The Secret Keeper* by Kate Morton (2005), *This Charming Man* by Marian Keyes (2012), *My Dark Vanessa* by Kate Elizabeth Russell (2018) and *Girls & Boys* by Dennis Kelly (2018).

Thus, it can be said that in literature, the question of domestic violence narrates the cruel practice of violence affecting women in society. It becomes very effective in enhancing and giving a platform for the victim's advocacy to be heard. In addition to increasing the number of individuals who know about the problem, literature helps in making individuals appreciate the dark part of human relationships. These testimonies make readers face the reality that domestic violence is present, and it kills, and it is high time to change both perceptions of people and strategies against these actions.

2) Exploring Dennis Kelly's Theater: A Deeper Dive

Dennis Kelly is a British playwright, screenwriter, and director who made a name for himself around the year 2000. Born in North London in 1970, he comes from a working-class background and faced challenges with academics during his youth. It is clear that his upbringing and life experiences have had a big impact on his work, shaping the kinds of characters he creates and the themes he explores. He has become a major figure in contemporary theatre, and his plays often deal with tough subjects like violence, power struggles, social problems, and the messy realities of human relationships. He has a knack for showing things as they are, with a raw, almost gritty realism, but also with a dark and sometimes unsettling sense of humor.

British playwright Dennis Kelly is known for his dark, thought-provoking works that explore complex human relationships, societal ills, and psychological tension. Many themes of Kelly's narratives are complex, such as violence, community dynamics, and storytelling, and a thorough line of her narratives involves moral and political philosophy,

trauma studies, and feminist theory (Rousseau, 2024, 14). Plays like *Love and Money* (2003) and *After the End* (2005) explore the power, control, and ways in which the human reacts to crisis; he became known for them. His 2007 play *DNA* looks at the effects of bullying and group mentality, and his work on television, particularly the conspiracy thriller *Utopia* (2013–2014), shows how he can take on the complicated, and in the case of *Utopia*, critical, stories of social and political life. Kelly's impressive range includes both the successful *Matilda the Musical* (2010) and other shows and proves that whatever he writes, he will do well. His writing is filled with aggressively charged emotion, dark humor, and a sharply unforgiving view of human depravity.

Kelly's plays tend to delve into human flaws and social issues. A key thing to remember is that his characters are usually complex, and the stories often grapple with moral dilemmas and inner conflict. He is known for using unusual plot structures and playing with time in ways that challenge the audience to piece things together and figure out what is going on. His work gets people thinking about society, consumerism, the media, and what it means to be human.

Critics have offered a diverse range of opinions on Kelly Dennis's works, highlighting both his innovative approaches and the challenges they present. While some praise his unique contributions to contemporary drama, others express dissatisfaction with specific productions, particularly regarding their coherence and fidelity to source material. His play *DNA* (2008) has been praised for its compelling portrayal of adolescent cruelty and group dynamics.

A review from Ink Pellet describes it as "a compelling tale of adolescent cruelty", highlighting its engaging

narrative and character development (2012). Conversely, *After the End* (2005) received mixed reviews. *The Guardian* described it as "dated," with "all-too-familiar disgust and fear", indicating that the play's themes might not have aged well. (Gillinson, 2022). However, other critics have offered more positive assessments. A review from the *Progress Educational Trust* found *After the End* to be "a convincing, thought-provoking and unnervingly realistic portrayal of the power of teenage group mentality." (Kay, 2012). *Girls & Boys* (2018) has been recognized for its powerful monologue and the depth of its central character.

However, the play received significant attention, with Carey Mulligan's performance being widely praised. For instance, *The Guardian* described her portrayal as "a joy to watch," highlighting her expressive powers in Dennis Kelly's compelling one-hander. (Billington, 2018). Additionally, *Intermission Magazine* describes the show as "a story of deep loss, woven into a tale that is as beautifully told as it is brutal."(Watson, 2023). Overall, Dennis Kelly's works are celebrated for their exploration of complex human emotions and societal issues, though some plays have received more favorable reviews than others.

2. A Glimpse into *Girls and Boys*

Girls and Boys is a deeply emotional and powerful drama by Tony Award-winning British playwright Dennis Kelly (*Matilda The Musical*), which has made a lasting impression on audiences. First performed in 2018, this solo play explores themes of love, marriage, and the devastating impact of family violence. Through its provocative take on gender politics, the story reveals how a family unravels under the weight of hidden secrets and unsettling truths.

With its intense narrative and compelling performance, the play resonates strongly with viewers, showcasing Kelly's insightful commentary on relationships, power, and domestic violence.

In his article titled *"I couldn't face it now: Deeply shocking play even unsettles its own creator"*, Richard Jinman explores the origins of *Girls & Boys* and the motivations that led Dennis Kelly to write it. The origins of the play come from two main inspirations. First, Kelly's ex-wife, Italian actress Monica Nappo, had asked him to write a monologue for her. Second, Dennis Kelly became fixated on the phrase "family annihilator" (qt.d. in Jinman. 2022) after hearing it, and it haunted him. "It's such a horrific concept," he says. "The phrase feels so dark, it almost seems out of place in this world" (qt.d. in Jinman, 2022). For Dennis Kelly, the idea of a man killing his family became a way to dive into the darker aspects of masculinity, a theme that was just starting to gain attention as a social issue in 2016. One of the most striking moments in the play comes when the narrator says, "We didn't create society for men, we created it to stop men" (*Girls & Boys*, p.63). It's a powerful line that forces the audience to think about how society has been shaped to control and restrict certain behaviors, particularly those associated with traditional ideas of masculinity.

Kelly began writing the play more than two years earlier while waiting for a flight at Naples Airport—just like the protagonist in the story. What started as a personal reflection quickly became a deeply compelling piece Kelly felt compelled to write, addressing the causes and consequences of male violence. Kelly is pretty critical of masculinity in *Girls & Boys*.

He has even said, “The vast majority of murderers and sex offenders are men. We have to conclude that elements of masculinity are a problem for society” (qt.d. in Jinman, 2022). The play itself is super intense and realistic, exploring different facets of relationships between men and women, like ambition, desire, marriage, and, importantly, domestic abuse.

Girls and Boys is a one-woman show, just this nameless woman talking for a full ninety minutes, a completely unbroken monologue. The story's told entirely from her perspective, and she talks directly to the audience, which makes you feel connected to her like you're part of the story. Kelly uses a cool way of telling the story, mixing "chats" and "scenes." The "chats" are like when the woman talks straight to the audience, which makes it feel personal like she is confiding in us as an audience.

The "scenes" are like flashbacks to the important moments that happened to her, which makes the story more interesting and gives it more depth. By switching between what is happening now and what happened before, Kelly shows how the past and present are connected, which makes the themes of love, ambition, and especially domestic violence hit harder. The story is not told chronologically; it jumps back and forth in time. This lets the woman think about her memories and see things differently depending on what is happening to her now. It also lets her pick apart and criticize different parts of her relationship. This jumpy, non-linear way of telling the story is like how memories and especially trauma work – they are messy and do not always make sense. Because it is just one woman on stage, it focuses on her finding her voice and taking back control of

her story. Her movements and how she acts just make everything feel more real and emotional.

By sticking with her point of view, Kelly creates a really powerful and thought-provoking look at some tough social issues.

The play kicks off with the woman recounting how she met her husband, they were both stuck at the airport because of flight delays. They started chatting; things got more serious, they went on a date, and eventually started a relationship. She talks about the early days, that whole falling-in-love phase, moving in together, getting married, and having kids. At first, it seems like a pretty normal, happy love story. But as the play goes on, we find out that things took a really dark turn.

Her husband became physically abusive. It started with small complaints, then he started isolating her from friends and family, and then he became aggressive. The story becomes truly horrific when she describes a time when her husband used physical force that ended up seriously killing their kids. This is the most pathetic part of the play since it reflects the effects of domestic violence.

The final section of the play shows the woman confused, as she tries to understand how a once-loving husband becomes a man who abuses his family. Throughout her speech, her tone shifts – sometimes she is bitterly ironic, sometimes she is full of sorrow, but there is also this sense of optimism as if she is trying to find strength in this terrible situation. Basically, she thought it had a lot to say about how we deal with sadness and how we should think about society. The writer, Kelly, is trying to show us “what relationships between men and women are really like”.

Kelly reveals the play is "really disturbing," even mentioning that some people could not handle it and walked out during the performance (Harvey, 2020). Really, the play tackles heavy stuff like misogyny and violence.

3) Girls & Boys in the in the Shadow of Abuse

In *The First Chat*, the woman in the story, the author narrates her ordeal in dealing with feelings of hurt and ill-vendored relationships. She gives an example from her own life – she was an addict that engaged in self-destructive behaviour after a breakup. There were toxic relationships and self-harm at this time. She later was able to see the effects of such relationships in her life and consequently develop a new life.

The woman shares her incredible story of how she found her husband on an easyJet plane. At first when they met, she hated him and he quite possibly felt the same way about her. In the beginning, she disliked him, and he did not seem to care for her either.

However, his behavior changed when he stood up to two models trying to cut the line. His unexpected mix of humor and assertiveness revealed a different side to him, making him stand out from what she initially expected. The models attempted to use their appearance and charm to manipulate the situation, assuming they could get their way. But he interrupted them sharply, exposing their shallow intentions. He told them that behaviour makes them like “being bitches,” (*Girls & Boys*, p. 5). This bold response not only called out their behavior but also showed his willingness to set boundaries and challenge superficiality. In the scene at the airport, there is a change in relations of power between the characters. The man, who the models appeared to be

overpowering at the beginning of the scene, teaches them a lesson in manners with a loud-mouthed reaction. His words major on the formation of meaningful relationships and speaking to the heart in a relationship rather than being dominated by the brain. His words are a strong criticism of the models' superficiality and lack of genuine emotion.

This exchange highlights the importance of genuine connection and emotional depth in relationships. This moment also reflects the narrator's own journey of personal growth and self-awareness. She has moved away from a pattern of self-destructive behavior and is starting to recognize the value of healthy, respectful relationships. The contrast between her past experiences and her current relationship with her future husband suggests a positive trajectory and a hope for a future free from abuse and manipulation.

In the second scene of the play, the incident shifts from the present monologue to past memories, offering a glimpse into a domestic setting. This scene is depicting a family struggling with power struggles and anger. The scene shows a mother struggling to control her anger and frustration with her children. It starts with a simple disagreement about bringing mud into the house but quickly escalates.

The mother loses her temper and starts yelling at her daughter, Leanne. She also has derogatory words insulting her daughter with a word as "little" just to mean "fucking bitch." (*Girls & Boys*, p.10). This shows how angry she is and how she is struggling to control her emotions. Her frustration also comes out when dealing with her son, Danny, who is making a mess with his food. She yells at him

and uses strong language, such as “In your... fucking mouth!” (*Girls & Boys*, p.10).

These outbursts, coupled with her lack of self-control, create a tense and potentially harmful environment for the children. While not directly depicting physical violence against the woman, the scene illustrates how emotional and verbal abuse can manifest within a family, contributing to a toxic and damaging dynamic.

After the mother loses her temper, she tries to comfort Danny, revealing her mixed emotions as anger and impatience give way to affection and regret. She says, “No, alright, sorry. [...] shhh come on [...] I’m sorry” (*Girls & Boys*, p.10). This behavior suggests a cycle of escalating frustration followed by remorse, which, if repeated, can create an emotionally toxic environment for the children. Her interactions with her children also reveal manipulative tendencies. She tries to control them emotionally by threatening Leanne and guilt-tripping Danny by describing herself as the “worst mother in the world” (*Girls & Boys*, p.10). This cycle of emotional outbursts followed by moments of affection is characteristic of abusive relationships. At the same time, her self-recriminations reflect her internal struggles and the immense pressure she feels as a mother, highlighting the complexity of her emotions and actions.

This scene highlights the mother's struggle to control her temper as she yells at her children and says all sorts of hurtful things, to them, things that can frighten and cause pain. Such conduct may negate basically the children’s ability to feel safe and loved in the comfort of their homes.

Being stressed and angry also has a strong influence on how parents manage to treat their children. It can cause them to feel distressed, depressed, and yes, even angry. In this situation, it would probably be a good idea for the mother to get some help.

Later on, the woman talks directly to the audience, in Chat Three, revealing subtle hints of the kind of domestic abuse and manipulation that can happen in relationships, even when they start with strong love and ambition. The play explores this through her career in the creative industry and her relationship with her partner. Initially, her strong desire to create a documentary shows her determination and willingness to take risks. She describes a unique job interview where she says, "with me you won't have to worry" (*Girls & Boys*, p.14). This line, along with her reaction to the interviewer, reveals a competitive and unconventional side to her personality.

This scene shows some unhealthy patterns in the relationship, including emotional manipulation and control. The woman's words suggest that the relationship was unbalanced and that she felt controlled by her partner. She talks about being obsessed with her partner and admits that they enjoyed the "insane" parts of the relationship (*Girls & Boys*, p.16), focusing closely on his looks and behavior. This intense focus on him and his appearance shows a lack of healthy boundaries and can be a sign of an unhealthy relationship.

She also talks about how she felt so focused on him that she lost some of her own identity. For example, she mentions being "obsessed with his hands", and she adds "He was a big guy" (*Girls & Boys*, p.16). She had to make an effort not to

talk about him all the time. Actually, this shows how she was so focused on him that she lost sight of her individuality. Additionally, the woman also admits to sabotaging her partner's friendship with another woman, Emma, saying, "And for no reason. but I wasn't going to have [...] that" (*Girls & Boys*, p.1.7). This controlling behavior shows a lack of respect for his independence and can be a form of emotional manipulation. By isolating him from his important relationships, she not only controls his social life but also strengthens her power over him.

One key moment of emotional manipulation happens when the woman discovers she is pregnant. Her partner's reaction is described as an extreme and dramatic response. He is collapsing and shaking in fear, which instantly impacts her decision. His response deeply affects her emotions, leading her to reconsider her choice to have an abortion or, in this case, to get rid of the child. She begins to see the pregnancy as something more significant. The peak of emotional manipulation comes when, after she decides to have an abortion for his sake, she realizes that he is "fucking laughing" (*Girls & Boys*, p.19).

This response completely ignores her suffering and her grief and reduces the seriousness of her choice, a choice that was evidently quite heavy for her. The cycle of using emotions to attack each other goes on. In general, this chat depicts a picture of a very unhealthy relationship. It's basically built on intense passion, but it's also mixed with a lot of power dynamics. One person clearly dominates, while the other submits. This closely resembles domestic violence. The way the story unfolds really highlights how the woman's

feelings and needs are constantly being overshadowed by her partner's. It is like her voice does not really matter.

Back to the past, Scene Four highlights the dynamics of domestic violence, particularly the emotional and psychological abuse that can occur within a family. We see the mother arguing with her two kids, Danny and Leanne. The conflict begins when Danny destroys Leanne's clay creation. The parent's question, like "Why would you smash your sister's work?" (*Girls & Boys*, p.19) seems more like an interrogation than a real attempt to understand.

The tone comes across as impatient and dismissive, making it feel like Leanne's feelings do not matter. The mother also seems torn between being upset with Danny and justifying his actions, showing clear bias and an unhealthy power imbalance in the family.

This scene highlights how emotional abuse can be subtle, disguised as punishment or reasoning. The scene shows how helpless Leanne feels. She is crying because Danny broke her clay sculpture, and her parents, especially her mother, keep telling her to stop. The mother demonstrates the fact that she is helpless and finally the absence of affection from parents. Her mother attempts to make her ignore them by saying that it is only a clay chicken and tells her that it is not the end of the world; she also calls her a "baby" (*Girls and Boys*, p 21).

This is a clear example of emotional abuse. The mother is trying to minimize Leanne's feelings and make her doubt herself. She is telling Leanne that her emotions are not valid and that she should just get over it. This kind of behavior can be really damaging to a child because it teaches them to ignore their feelings and needs. Instead of trying to

understand what happened, the mother seems more focused on making Danny feel bad. She keeps asking him why he did it, almost as if she is trying to make him feel guilty.

She forces him to apologize to Leanne and promise not to break her things again. It feels less like she is trying to help them resolve the conflict and more like she is putting on a show. The principal goal is to make Danny look like a bad child and punish him for disobedience, which she achieves by telling him to be sorry to his sister and vowing not to damage any more of her belongings.

As the situation gets worse, the mother gets angrier and angrier. Her voice starts to get louder, and she even threatens Danny with “serious consequences” (*Girls & Boys*, p.22) if he does not do what she says. It feels scary for Danny, and it probably does not make him want to talk about what happened. This way of dealing with things creates an unhealthy atmosphere at home. It is like the mother is trying to control everything through fear and intimidation, and it is hard for Danny to feel safe or respected.

This scene demonstrates an unequal power dynamic and a pattern of controlling or abusive behavior. She says, “Consequences means trouble, alright?” (*Girls & Boys*, p.22). This sounds more threatening than helpful. This creates a scary atmosphere where Danny feels like he has to obey, instead of feeling understood.

This situation also highlights some favoritism and unfairness. Leanne feels like her mother favors Danny, and she even accuses her of being a "sexist" (*Girls & Boys*, p.22). The mother gets defensive and denies it, but she does not listen to Leanne's concerns. This shows a pattern of dominance and control where the mother's feelings are more

important than Leanne's. At the end of the scene, the mother starts to lose her patience with Leanne. She warns her that she is going to be sent to her "room" (*Girls & Boys*, p.22) if she does not stop. The language of the mother suggests that she is ready to resort to punishment, even physical punishment, to control Leanne. This kind of aggressive and controlling behavior creates a very unhealthy environment for the children.

To sum up, Scene Four paints a pretty bleak picture of this family. It seems like there is a lot of tension and aggression at home. The mother's behavior is concerning. She often resorts to yelling and threats, and she does not seem to listen to her children's feelings. This type of behavior can be damaging to kids, and it is important to remember that this kind of situation can have serious long-term consequences for their development. Critics argue that "aggressive parenting can hinder children's social, emotional, and cognitive growth, potentially leading to behavioral issues and impaired interpersonal skills" (Khusaifan & Samak, 2016,p. 3).

The monologue reveals the darker aspects of human nature and hidden aggression in relationships. In Chat Five, Kelly gives voice to the woman's thoughts to share her experience. He shows how domestic violence can be both overt and subtle, becoming a part of daily life. The woman questions why humans are so violent, while animals, for the most part, are not.

She wonders, "Cows don't live violent lives". She adds: "even carnivores [...] but war? Murder? Torture?" (*Girls & Boys*, p.22-3). This makes the reader realize that violence is not just about physical fights. It can be more subtle, like the

power struggles and control issues within families and relationships. At times, the woman hints at emotional and psychological abuse in her marriage. She talks about how her husband would flirt with other girls and she would say, “he had a bit of an eye for the ladies”, (*Girls & Boys*, p.25).

This shows how she is trying to act like everything is okay, even though his behavior is probably hurtful. This is a common coping mechanism for people in abusive relationships—they try to minimize the abuse to themselves and others. In the monologue, she explains that when her husband found out that she had an opinion, he would abuse her. The example she gives is watching news coverage of a mass shooting in the US. The woman and her husband get into a huge argument over a comment she made, where she observed that certain groups of men, like those from the “Islamic State, prison gangs, football hooligans, Ukrainian Nationalists, family killers, or Vikings” (*Girls & Boys*, p.26), tend to be more violent. She even suggests that there might be a general tendency toward violence in some men, a “male impulse” (*Girls & Boys*, p.26). Her husband gets offended by her comments and seems to feel personally attacked. The wife then remembers how angry he got, thinking to herself, “[fuck you] huge row, just huge. Over something” (*Girls & Boys*, p.26).

This shows how the topic of male violence is very sensitive and taboo. It seems that any discussion of this issue, even if it is just an observation, can trigger a strong defensive reaction in men. They might feel threatened or believe their masculinity is being questioned. This defensiveness can lead to arguments and even aggression.

In this scene, the woman also criticizes how society unfairly judges women. She shares the story of her colleague Veronica, who faced a lot of judgment from others. In the beginning, people criticized her for not having kids. Then, when she decided to adopt a child and leave her job, she faced even more criticism. The woman describes how Veronica is harshly judged, both when she is childless and when she becomes a mother. She criticizes the double standards and snide comments, showing how much pressure society places on women to fit certain expectations. Veronica's decision to prioritize her happiness highlights the importance of women having control over their lives. This is something that abusive relationships often try to take away.

The woman commends Veronica for her strength, but also notes that society works to keep people down and trapped in violence and abuse. Additionally, she details how her husband will, at times, put her down and not value all that she does. He addresses her achievements as "stupid things" (*Girls & Boys*, p.29) and seems unhappy with the changes she has made to the business. This underlying discontent suggests that there might be some tension and resentment brewing in their marriage.

The story also touches on the issue of male dominance and its negative impact on society. The woman describes an encounter with an "obscure academic" (*Girls & Boys*, p.30) who, despite advocating for women's rights, tried to control her and sexually harassed her. This highlights how even those who fight for equality can sometimes engage in abusive behavior, showing that the problem of abuse is deeply ingrained in society. Actually, verbal contempt erodes "emotional intimacy and fosters defensiveness,

creating a cycle of relational harm. Further, verbal contempt “undermines trust, mutual respect, and emotional safety”. (Walker et al., 2011, 42). Chat Five shows how domestic violence isn't just about physical abuse.

It can also be about mental and emotional abuse, like constant criticism, control, and making someone feel powerless. Through her story, we see how domestic violence can take many forms and how it can affect people in various ways.

The conflict between the mother and her kids becomes increasingly obvious. The narration of Scene Six reveals signs of psychological stress. The mother is depressed, she feels stressed and overwhelmed. She is constantly trying to keep things under control, but it seems the kids are continuously challenging her limits. For example, she says things like, "I'm not always tired", (*Girls & Boys*, p.32). Further, she tries to set limits on their playtime, saying, "No, not twenty minutes, ten." (*Girls & Boys*, p.32). It is clear that she is feeling overwhelmed and exhausted while managing the children's conflicting wants. As the scene goes on, things get even more chaotic when Danny starts playing violent games, imagining himself bombing his sister's "skyscraper" (*Girls & Boys*, p.35). This kind of violent play is disturbing. These situations are worrying because they show that violence might be a common part of Danny's imagination.

It makes the reader wonder if he is exposed to too much violence in his environment. The mother's desperation increases because of the extremity of Danny's ideas, as he starts including things like "the Taliban" (*Girls & Boys*, p.36) in his violent game. She is desperate to stop him but

unable to steer him toward playing a less violent game. Furthermore, she feels powerless to control his imagination.

The turning point comes when the mother reveals that her children are actually dead. She says, "I know they're not here [...] I know they're dead" (*Girls & Boys*, p.37). These words completely change everything. The chaos and the violence of the children's play now take on a tragic new meaning. It is almost like the mother is reliving the horror of losing her children, and the violent fantasies of the game are a reflection of the real-life trauma she's experienced.

Kelly successfully creates a sense of a family that was once filled with turmoil and how that turmoil continues to affect them, even after the children are gone. The play uses the children's violent games to symbolize the trauma and guilt that the mother continues to experience. The mother wonders why she keeps remembering moments of conflict "when they were being a bit naughty" with her children instead of happy memories. This shows that she is probably feeling a lot of guilt and shame, as she says, "I was not so great" (*Girls & Boys*, p.37).

Maybe she feels like she failed to protect her children or that she was not a good enough mother. These negative memories might be a way for her to cope with the overwhelming grief and guilt she's experiencing. In the scene, the playwright shows how domestic violence can have a lasting impact on someone's life.

The tension rates highest in Chat Seven, where a marriage breaks down. The play demonstrates various forms of emotional and psychological abuse by a partner. The woman's argument gradually turned to something "brutal" (*Girls & Boys*, p.37). The couple's life became much darker

The woman states that the brake has been taken off the relationship “just wanted to hurt” (*Girls & Boys*, p.37).

It is as if they are not just trying to win an argument anymore; they are trying to hurt each other on purpose. Her husband's behavior makes things even worse. He is constantly moody and dismissive, treating her with "disgust" (*Girls & Boys*, p. 38). He talks to her like she's stupid, saying things like, “etc, etc [...]blah, blah, blah” (*Girls & Boys*, p.38). This constant belittling is hurtful. It makes her feel worthless and like she does not matter. No matter what she tries to do – whether it is ignoring him or trying to lighten the mood – he always responds with the same disrespect.

It is like he's determined to make her feel bad. In fact, emotional abuse disrupts "marital satisfaction" and "personal stability". Emotional abuse is "severe and enduring, the victim may lose their complete sense of self, sometimes without any mark or scratch. While, wounds are hidden to others, concealed in the worthlessness, self-doubt, and self-contempt of the victims". Furthermore, emotional abuse highlights "degradation, isolation, and manipulation", and significantly affects wives' mental health and overall relationship satisfaction (El-Amrosy et al., 2021, 236).

The play's climax in Chat Seven reveals the full extent of the couple's marital breakdown. Their arguments have escalated into brutal exchanges, where the goal is no longer to resolve conflict but to inflict pain. The husband's behavior is particularly toxic. He is dismissive, condescending, and treats his wife with disgust. He constantly belittles her, making her feel insignificant and worthless. Actually, things get even worse when the husband's business starts to fail.

He becomes emotionally distant, focusing more on superficial improvements like dressing better and whitening his teeth than on reconnecting with his wife. He even seems to value his daughter's opinion more than his wife's. The wife observed how he would react to their daughter's criticism. It was clear that he was emotionally distancing himself from her. The children are also affected. Danny seems oblivious to the tension, while Leanne is acutely aware of the problems and tries to protect her mother from her father. This puts Leanne in a difficult position, caught between her parents' conflicts.

The final blow came when the wife discovered that her husband was having an affair. When she tried to hug him at a bar, he pushed her away, yelling, "Get your fucking hands off me," (*Girls & Boys*, p.40) shatters any hope of reconciliation. This moment of betrayal brings into sharp focus the extent of the abuse she has endured, both subtle and overt. The play masterfully illustrates how seemingly minor acts of disrespect and emotional detachment can escalate into a deeply damaging and destructive relationship.

The play demonstrates the nature of hubby-only violence is not always physical violence. It also can be emotional like when a person continuously leads his or her partner to humiliation, disregards their emotions, or self-willfully attempts to dominate them. Such abuse is similar to using physical force against the spouse, even though there are no signs of it on the spouse's body. In the play to depict the ever-fading decent behavior of the husband to his wife. He gets abusive, after making her feel as if she is a worthless human being and nobody cares for her. This form of abuse

affects her emotionally: she is alienated and her self-esteem is affected.

In scene eight, the audience comes to the knowledge that the mother's acts of panic and her temper tantrums are another form of domestic violence. The mother is overwhelmed by her responsibilities as a parent and is shown struggling to keep up with her children. She is juggling a lot, trying to find a toy in her bag while holding her son Danny's hand. Suddenly, she notices that her daughter Leanne is missing. This triggers a dramatic shift in her behavior. She transforms from being distracted to being very serious and even becoming rather threatening. She takes Danny's hand quickly; the fist is so tight that it is almost "scaring him" (*Girls & Boys*, p.44).

This sudden change in her behavior suggests that she might have a history of reacting strongly to stressful situations, which could be a sign of underlying issues within the family. The mother's rapid emotional swings – from anger towards Danny to panic over Leanne – highlight the intense pressure and stress she is constantly under. This constant pressure likely contributes to the tension within the home. The mother's panic really escalates as she searches for Leanne.

She keeps calling out, "Leanne? [...] Leanne!" (*Girls & Boys*, p. 43), and her voice gets more and more frantic with each unanswered call. She is terrified that something terrible has happened. When she finally finds Leanne, she is overwhelmed with relief. She grabs her and hugs her tightly, repeating, "oh my god, oh my god [...]" (*Girls & Boys*, p.45). However, this relief quickly turns to anger. She starts scolding Leanne, shaking her and telling her never to do that

again. This overreaction shows how scared and stressed the mother was.

When people are under a lot of stress, they can sometimes overreact. This is especially true in situations where there is a history of tension and conflict, like in some cases of domestic violence. The climax is achieved when the mother collapses to the floor. She is shocked and turns into a state of confused emotions – "anger, panic, relief, fear, relief" (*Girls & Boys*, p.46). This shot highlights the pressure she has to live under beginning with the domestic violence up to other abuses she has to go through. Later, Leanne's words of comfort, "I'm sorry [...] I will never hurt you again" (*Girls & Boys*, p. 46), convey the intricate emotions present in abusive relationships: affection, resentment, discipline, and a sense of protection.

In this scene, the woman's character – mood swings and the need to protect the children show that the character is affected by the abusive environment she is living in. Altogether this scene is a strong message of how domestic violence affects the outcomes and individuals in ways that spur constant fear and emotional distress.

In Chat Nine, the playwright presents a different kind of domestic violence – the emotional kind. The woman in the story talks about how her husband's personality gradually changed, and their relationship slowly deteriorated. The play starts by discussing how difficult it is to kill someone. It talks about how you have to detach yourself emotionally and mentally from that person. The woman says, "The real trick is that you have to put yourself outside of all this" (*Girls & Boys*, p.47).

This sets the stage for the rest of the story, which explores how emotional detachment and the breakdown of empathy can lead to violence. Later on, the wife in the play learns of her husband's infidelity and her emotion becomes something complex and fierce. She goes through feelings from momentary pleasure to anger that engulf her and leave her lethargic. This hurts her very badly and kills her trust in him and this is gradually transformed into a searing, intense, "white-hot rage" (*Girls & Boys*, p.47-8). This level of anger is a telltale of the level of betrayal and pain she feels. This is not limited to the act of infidelity, as everyone would agree to that.

It is things like how he treats her worse than an animal, how he tortures her emotionally most of the time, and degrades her. It explains how much damage such kinds of betrayal can result in despite no act of physical violence being committed. This scene focuses on the feelings a woman undergoes after finding out her man is cheating on her. It gives a psychological perspective of the effects of betrayal, claiming that trauma is not only restricted to physical abuse.

As the play progresses, the husband's behavior gradually deteriorates, becoming increasingly abusive and emotionally distant. He denies personal cleanliness to the extent of becoming a moving "dirty-puddle of a man" (*Girls & Boys*, p.48); someone unhealthy and neglectful of personal hygiene, leaves her both confused and disgusted, intensifying her emotional distress. This lack of emotion and seemingly cold nature are passive-aggressive ways of being abusive to the wife at closer quarters.

The moment she departs him, he turns furious and shouts, "These are my kids," (*Girls & Boys*, p.49). He does not accept her decision. She has no right to leave him or take their children. These and other characteristics may be considered typical signs of abuse: possessiveness and the inability to release a partner. His response is filled with aggression and threats, using language like "warfare" and "unrestrained genocide" (*Girls & Boys*, p. 49). This is called 'emotional warfare', which is an illustration of complete disrespect for her feelings and self-determination. It demonstrates how verbal abuse is just as bad as physical abuse, and maybe even worse.

Afterward, the woman confronts her husband about his affair; she realizes that her understanding of the situation was wrong. It was not just about sex; it was about his jealousy and fear that she would become more successful than him.

This realization is incredibly painful and makes her feel even more betrayed. She comes to the painful conclusion that the man she loved "never existed" (*Girls & Boys*, p. 51). This experience is deeply traumatic for her. She leaves her husband and takes the children to a hotel before finding a new apartment. She is determined to get a divorce and escape the abusive relationship. The separation has a significant impact on the children. Danny becomes more aggressive, reflecting the turmoil within the family. Leanne, on the other hand, takes on a more mature role, trying to care for her mother and brother. This shows how children can be deeply affected by their parent's problems and how they often try to cope in unexpected ways.

In the play, the woman describes how her marriage was not just physically abusive, but also emotionally and psychologically damaging. Her husband's jealousy and desire for control led to constant emotional abuse, including belittling her and making her feel worthless. This created a volatile and destructive environment for the entire family. The woman's decision to leave her husband was brave, but it did not erase the impact of the abuse.

Her children were deeply affected by their parents' problems. This speech highlights how domestic violence can have long-lasting consequences for everyone involved, not just the immediate victims.

Scene Ten of *Girls & Boys* quietly but powerfully illustrates the lasting effects of domestic violence on the family. The tension in this scene is subtle but ever-present, showing the woman's careful actions and the children's lingering emotional trauma. Her tender care for Danny, ensuring he remains undisturbed, highlights her protective nature and the fragile peace she strives to preserve. This small moment symbolizes the continued fear and insecurity that linger from their past experiences.

Leanne, the daughter, seems emotionally distant. When her mother asks if Danny is asleep and if she is okay, it is clear that the trauma has created a gap between them. The mother tries to bridge this gap by gently urging Leanne to join them, showing she wants to rebuild their family and create a safe and loving home. The mother tells her she does not worry, "A bomb wouldn't wake him" (*Girls & Boys*, p. 53). This is an exaggeration to emphasize how deeply Danny sleeps. It suggests that he has not been able to truly relax and

sleep peacefully before; highlighting the emotional and psychological stress he has been under.

This scene shows how a family is trying to heal after experiencing domestic violence. The mother is doing her best to protect her children and herself from further harm. The reader can see how strong she is as she tries to rebuild their lives and create a safe and loving environment. The dialogue between the mother and her daughter, Leanne, reveals a deep longing for comfort and connection.

They are trying to mend their relationship, which has been damaged by the trauma of the violence. It also shows how domestic violence can have a huge impact on the entire family, affecting everyone in different ways. Essentially, this scene portrays the ongoing struggle to recover from the trauma of domestic violence. It highlights the mother's resilience and the family's journey towards healing and finding a sense of normalcy again.

In Chat Eleven, the mother tells the audience the horrific night when her husband murdered their children. This monologue is incredibly powerful and disturbing, giving the audience a chilling glimpse into the devastating consequences of domestic violence. The mother reveals that the father planned the attack meticulously. He even bought a special "hunting knife" (*Girls & Boys*, p.53) for the purpose of showing a cold and calculated intent to harm his children.

These words reveal the calculated nature of the crime, as the mother describes how the father meticulously positioned the knife, using his "thumb" to guide the "blade" with precision into their son's chest (*Girls & Boys*, p. 54). This detail emphasizes the cold, calculated nature of the killings. It is clear that the father acted with a chilling disregard for

human life, showing a level of sadism that is truly shocking. This scene powerfully illustrates the devastating impact of domestic violence. It highlights the importance of recognizing the warning signs and seeking help before it is too late.

The uncertainty about whether Leanne witnessed the murders adds another layer of fear and terror to the story. The mother's painful imagination of Leanne possibly entering the room to see her brother being killed is heart-wrenching. A child who might have tried to protect her brother ended up becoming a victim herself.

The bloody handprint on the doorframe, left by Leanne as she tried to escape, is a stark symbol of the physical violence she endured. The detailed account of Leanne's injuries—stab wounds to her shoulder, neck, hand, stomach, and chest—underscores the brutal and relentless nature of the attack (*Girls & Boys*, p. 55-56).

The psychological weight of these events falls heavily on the mother. She desperately tries to make sense of the senseless violence, struggling to comprehend the motivations behind such a horrific act. Her speech reveals the profound impact of the post-traumatic event and the mother's struggle to come to terms with the unimaginable. This statement underscores the profound trauma she carries and her struggle to make sense of something so horrific and incomprehensible.

The mother describes what happened after the murders, including the father's failed suicide attempt. She highlights the chilling detail of the "twenty-three-minute [...] he was in that flat with the bodies of his kids" (*Girls & Boys*, p. 56). This emphasizes the horrific nature of the situation, leaving

the reader to imagine what transpired during that chilling period of time. This monologue effectively paints a vivid and disturbing picture of the severity of domestic violence.

It highlights the devastating impact on the victims, particularly the children, and the long-lasting psychological effects on the survivors. The graphic details of the violence and the mother's emotional response – "It was terrible, and I was so sad" (*Girls & Boys*, p. 56) – leave a profound and lasting impact on the reader, emphasizing the tragic consequences of domestic violence.

This final speech is incredibly powerful. The mother, who tragically lost her children to her husband's violence, speaks with raw emotion and a clear purpose. She shatters the illusion that family annihilation is a rare occurrence. The survivor, a mother whose children were taken by her husband's actions, highlights the shocking prevalence of child abuse. She highlights that children are vastly more likely to be killed by their parents than strangers are, with such tragedies happening approximately every ten days "every ten days" (*Girls & Boys*, p. 57).

This statistic is shocking, and it forces us to confront the harsh reality of domestic violence within families. The mother in the play directly states that the vast majority of family annihilators are "men" (*Girls & Boys*, p. 57). This statement challenges our assumptions and highlights the gendered nature of this violence. In the final monologue, Kelly classifies family annihilators into four types: "paranoid", disillusioned, self-justifying, and socially detached (*Girls & Boys*, p. 58). However, the woman reveals that the true cause of family annihilation is about control.

She emphasizes that it is rooted in power, dominance, and submission, where the perpetrator seeks to dominate and control the victim. This monologue is not just about statistics and categories. It is a desperate plea for awareness. It is a call to action. By acknowledging the reality of family annihilation, by understanding its root causes, and by challenging the societal norms that allow it to fester, we can begin to take steps to prevent these tragedies from happening.

The "End scene" in *Girls & Boys* is incredibly poignant and tragic. It starts with a beautiful image of family: Danny sleeping peacefully in his mother's arms, while Leanne lies contentedly in her lap. The mother gently plays with Leanne's hair, creating a picture of love, warmth, and the simple joys of family life. However, this idyllic scene is instantly shattered by the knowledge of what happened to these children. The mother's reassurances – "No, he's sleeping, honey. Yeah, he's sleeping" (*Girls & Boys*, p. 63) – become chilling reminders of their tragic fate. The repetition of "sleeping" is heartbreaking, as the audience realizes that Danny will never wake up again.

The scene ends abruptly with "Silence. End" (*Girls & Boys*, p. 63). This abrupt ending, along with the ellipsis, perfectly captures the emptiness and silence that now define the mother's life. It symbolizes the loss of her children, the shattering of their families, and the emotional detachment that often follows such a traumatic event. By juxtaposing this tender image of family with the horrific reality of their deaths, Kelly emphasizes the devastating impact of domestic violence.

It highlights the preciousness of life and the irreplaceable loss suffered by the victims. This powerful scene serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of recognizing the signs of abuse and taking steps to prevent these tragedies from occurring.

Conclusion

Girls & Boys is a really powerful play that tackles the serious issue of domestic violence. What makes it so impactful is the way it shows how a healthy relationship can gradually turn toxic; it does not always happen suddenly or dramatically. The play also challenges our assumptions about what domestic violence looks like. The woman in the play isn't your typical "victim," which forces us to think more deeply about the complexities of this issue and all the different ways it can manifest. Ultimately, *Girls & Boys* is a call to action. It is a wake-up call to challenge traditional gender roles and to create a society that is more supportive of victims of domestic violence.

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