GENDER ROLES OF MAIN CHARACTERS
IN DANIELLE STEEL'S "FRIENDS FOREVER"

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The research is devoted to the study of protagonists' gender roles created by Danielle Steel in her book about five best friends. The corpus and discourse analyses have been applied to examine verbal characterization of main characters. Appearance, traits of character, relationships with others, moral values as well as communication styles have been studied.

Gender roles have been perceived mostly as prescribed stereotypical norms of social behavior. Gender roles presented in literary works reflect social male and female portrayals but concurrently main characters' gender portraits shape readers' images and concepts about gender.

Danielle Steel assigns traditional gender roles to her characters sketching their vivid images from childhood till later years. The female characters Izzie and Gabby correspond to traditional gender expectations about girls but still Gabby turns out to have bossy nature that is reflected in her behavior and speech. Three male protagonists, Andy, Billy and Sean, in general possessing quite traditional gender roles, are depicted as completely different personalities with some deviation from gender expectations about men.

The main characters' fathers in general represent an established social image of successful professionals, family providers, most of them being loving and supporting fathers, while the protagonists' mothers form two contrastive groups of staying at home and working women. The portraits of two working mothers differ greatly, depicting one woman as devoting all her time to work and ignoring her daughter's needs, and the other despite being busy at work still being able to take care of her son. Other three women are ideal pictures of affectionate mothers and wives.

Key words: *gender, gender roles, corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, "Friends Forever".*

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Гендерні ролі головних героїв в романі Даніели Стіл «Друзі назавжди»

Статтю присвячено вивченню гендерних ролей головних героїв Д. Стіл у романі «Друзі назавжди». Корпусний і дискурсивний аналізи застосовано для дослідження вербальних портретів головних героїв, а саме їхньої зовнішності, рис характеру, відносин з іншими героями, моральних цінностей та комунікативних стилів. Гендерні ролі розглядаються як стереотипні норми соціальної поведінки. Даніела Стіл створює героїв з традиційними гендерними ролями. Героїні Іззі та Габбі відповідають традиційним гендерним уявленням про дівчат, але при цьому Іззі виявляє чоловічі риси характеру щодо вирішення проблем. Чоловічі персонажі, Енді, Біллі та Шон, маючи різні характери й представляючи в основному традиційні гендерні ролі в романі, іноді відхиляються від очікуваних гендерних стереотипів. Гендерні ролі серед батьків головних героїв майже не відрізняються. Всі чоловіки зображені успішними професіоналами, що підтримують свої родини, в той час як образи матерів є відмінні за соціальними ролями.

Ключові слова: *гендер, гендерні ролі, корпусна лінгвістика, дискурсивний аналіз, «Друзі назавжди».*

Introduction

The research concentrates on the literary work by Danielle Fernandes Dominique Schuelein-Steel (born August 14, 1947), an American writer, who is world-known for her romance novels. The writer proves to be the bestselling author alive and the fourth bestselling fiction author of all time, with over 800 million copies sold. She has written 179 books, including over 146 novels [8].

Daniele Steel's book "Friends Forever", being a bright example of a Chick Lit genre, gives readers direct portrayals of all five main characters — two

girls Izzie Wallace and Gabby Thomas and three boys Billy Norton, Andy Weston and Sean O'Hara — starting from their first meeting at the Atwood School, when they were five, to their twenties describing their appearances, traits of characters, life ambitions and relationships within their group of close friends as well as with other characters in the novel.

Literary works create images of male and female characters, describing how they interact in everyday situations reflecting their social gender roles, on the one hand, but on the other, shaping readers' views on gender concepts in society.

The aim of the study is to analyze how verbal portraits of the main characters have been created focusing on their social roles in the novel.

Theoretical background

Society shapes gender roles according to its values and beliefs about individuals' roles, which are mostly based on their sex and society's expectations about differences between the sexes [3, 335]. Gender stereotypes, in the first place, deal with different types of men's/women's behavior and their self-presentation in society [2, 192]. General beliefs picture men as more active members of society and women, on the contrary, being more passive:Men are generally thought to be agentic — that is, competent, assertive, independent, masterful, and achievement oriented, while women are perceived as inferior to men in agentic qualities [10, 2].

Gender roles have been under constant considerable changes for over a century. These changes have been happening with different pace and different intensity touching upon various aspects of men and women's social life. Nowadays more men and women are entering spheres which have been considered to be prior to the other sex, thus, representatives of both sexes may be frowned upon if they do not correspond to an "appropriate" social gender image but still women are less welcome to purely male fields and women are more reproached for not fulfilling their roles as mothers or wives.

The labour market experiences the stable growth of working women nowadays but still women's position is different as they have to choose between two totally opposite options: "work AND family" or "work OR family" [15, 71–72]. Another problem that women might face is that while choosing a career they do not have the same range of job choices as men because women may still feel uncomfortable when they do not fit into gender expected work positions [9, 15–16]. However, the fashion area is mainly women's prerogative. Fashion is meant to underline social roles [1, 6]. Not only clothes and footware but also hairstyle, jewelry, accessories outline specific gender looks, which in a way controls society's perception of men's/women's ways of dressing.

Society binds not only women but men as well within some specific social boundaries, restricting their personal choices, self-manifestation, self-realization and forcing them to correspond to established images of masculinity and femininity. These images transfer into stereotypic behavior, which in its turn is related to the way how certain social gender models are transmitted from one generation to another, how boys and girls go through the process of socialization [5, 2] and which gender roles their parents perform in the family and society.

Social roles are mirrored in literary works and readers weigh whether or not the created characters coincide with their gender expectations. Writers creating their protagonists make them alive in a fiction world, the world that may completely or partially reflect the real world. Both theoretical [6; 7] and empirical studies [13, 104] prove that literary characters are constructs which emerge from synergy of both: a literary text and readers' competence and experience. Wille van Peer writesCharacter, it can hardly be denied, is what readers infer from words, sentences, paragraphs and textual composition depicting, describing or suggesting actions, thoughts, utterances or feelings of a protagonist [14, 9].

Male and female fictional characters are created by writers of both sexes. Writers' own position concerning different gender aspects may influence how they depict their protagonists' gender stereotypes though female writers tend to ascribe more diverse social roles to their female characters [4]. It is the reader who decides how true to life the created images are or whether they belong to the fictional world.

Methods

To study protagonists' social roles in Danielle Steel's "Friends Forever" a set of methods has been used. First, *the contextual-interpretative analysis* is aimed at singling out text passages devoted to the main characters' description of appearance, personal traits, social roles and relationships with each other. The interpretation of these descriptions forms the basis of protagonists' verbal portraits.

Second, the further analysis of the obtained results presupposes the use of *comparative analysis*, which helps to contrast both male and female images and to compare portrayals within the same gender group.

Third, a corpus-assisted analysis can demonstrate "the role that lexical units and lexical relations play in the organization … of discourse" [11, 12] and contribute to interpretations of results [12], so Sketch engine has been used as a corpus tool to carry out linguistic queries about usage frequency of different lexemes and collocations which build up main characters' portrayals in the novel.

Combining all methods enables to individualize and differentiate main characters' verbal portraits as well as their social roles depicted in Danielle Steel's literary work.

Results and Discussion

Danielle Steel's narration is not clandestine which might leave some room for suspense, on the contrary, readers get to know the main characters from the author through her explicit characterization of them in all stages of their lives. Daniel Steel presents a clear picture of social gender roles, most of which are traditional. The only exception here is Izzie's mother, Katherine, who prefers her job career to her child or staying in the family, the mother who is always on business trips and does not see her teenage daughter much especially when the girl misses her and needs her:

Izzie thought all of the moms in the group were nice, except sometimes her own, because she was so busy, had so much work to do, and she came home so tired from the office that she sometimes forgot to give Izzie a hug (p. 19);
Izzie had been starved all her life for a mother's love. And now she was leaving.
For a job (p. 34).

But in some cases even Katherine worries about her daughter's psychological state so Katherine offers Izzie to think about self-treatment — *You've already seen the sad side of life. Too much of it, at your age. Now you need to go throw some good stuff in the other side of the scale* (p. 158) — and helps her daughter financially to get away in order to recover over the personal drama connected with losing her close friends.

Another working mother is Andy's, Helen Weston, who works as a doctor and spends long hours in the hospital. Still the author does not show that Andy lacks love or care but shows a child who understands the importance of his mother's work:

"My mom delivers babies," he explained. "Someone's having triplets. That's why she couldn't stay (p. 11).

Later on in his life, when he becomes a doctor, Andy follows his mother's profound professionalism, attitude to patients and devotedness to work.

Mentioning other characters' parents is essential as the parents greatly contribute to the development of their children's characters being gender role models for them, bringing children up according to generally accepted gender social norms and in most cases helping them to achieve their life ambitions.

For instance, Marilyn Norton is described as a successful woman in terms of traditional gender stereotypes, married to a prosperous man, having a big house and bringing up two children, devoting all her time to them but at the same time looking after herself and being a gorgeous woman:

Every woman in the place thought he (Larry Norton) *was gorgeous and wanted to go out with him. Marilyn was the lucky winner, and they were married when she was twenty-four* (p. 5);
They had bought a very handsome house in Pacific Heights, and Marilyn had never worked again (p. 6);
she was looking great at thirty-three (p.16).

Larry Norton is a representative of traditional patriarchal views on the family and men's success in society. His elder son Billy meets these expectations while the younger, Brian, is not as sportive as his father would like him to be and Larry humiliates Brian every time he speaks to him, and most time ignores him altogether:

The big disappointment to Larry, his father, was that Brian had no interest in anything athletic — he didn't even like to throw a ball (p.15);
If Brian wasn't going to be an athlete, Larry had no use for him, and barely spoke to the child (p. 15).

The Thomas family presents stereotypical beliefs about girls, as their daughter looks *like an ad for the perfect little girl* (p. 8); in the same way the Norton family serves as an example of many traditional families' views upon the stereotypical image of boys.

The word frequency results obtained with the help of Sketch Engine demonstrate how often the main characters are mentioned under their names in the novel in this way revealing their roles in the group of friends and also showing their significance to the plot development. Izzie is the most often referred to in the text occupying position 28 with 575 cases, the next character is Billy with position 39 and 364 cases, Sean follows him — 44 and 333, then goes Gabby — 54 and 259, and the last position belongs to Andy — 80 and 179.

Actually, if we compare the frequency list with characters' life stories in the novel, discrepancy can be easily noticed between how often the character is mentioned by his/her name and how long he/she is in the novel. For example, Andy is least mentioned while his life story goes almost till the end of the novel. Sean is the third frequently often mentioned character while Izzie and Sean survive till the last lines and they are the only ones who remain alive among all friends. It is not surprising that Izzie appears most often in the text of the novel as she is the key pillar for all other friends. She unites them all inspiring for better and giving them much of support while they all go through difficult times: *Izzie had a strong urge to nurture everyone* (p.18). She represents a feminine image of a caretaker, treasurer or curator who can be associated with a picture of an ideal mother.

Gender stereotypes in the novel cover all usual social aspects. Traditional gender roles, first of all, are connected with generally accepted stereotypes about appearance, which gives the following pictures of two sexes: girls must be pretty, have long hair, light complexion, be slim and fit and in general look sexy and feminine, while boys must be strong, sportive, with assertive features, which gives them a distinct masculine image.

All five characters correspond to stereotypical gender beauty of both sexes. The author stays loyal in giving the traditionally stereotypical images of good-looking boys and girls starting from their first childish pictures till grown up portraits. Thus,

the reader meets Billy Norton for the first time and sees *a big boy, both tall and strong* (p. 7) holding a football, the boy who takes after his mother and has *thick manes of curly red hair* (p. 5) and a wide smile. Sean O'Hara is *a dark-haired boy with big blue eyes, shorter than Billy and wiry* (p. 7). Andy Weston is depicted as *a tall thin boy* with *straight blond hair, … wearing a white button-down shirt and perfectly pressed khaki pants* (p. 11), looking older and smarter than other kids in the group. Gabby Thomas looks perfect with *long beautiful blond hair with ringlets, and big blue eyes, wearing a pretty pink dress, white ankle socks, and pink shoes that glittered* (p. 8). Izzie Wallace has *a sweet face and … brown hair in two neat braids* (p. 10). Gabby's parents take much effort to underline her perfect appearance dressing her up as a Barbie doll: *Practically everything Gabby owned had sparkles on it, and she had two pink jackets trimmed in real white fur, and a pink fur coat her mom had gotten for her in Paris* (p. 17). Danielle Steel depicting the main characters coming from the well-off families sketches them as flawless male and female portrayals, which is quite expectable for this literature genre.

Speaking about five friends' traits of character, it is noticeable that boys are shown as nice guys, independent, reliable, strong-willed, reasonable: Billy — *an adorable kid and … easy* (p. 5); *a gentle, loving child. … never aggressive with other kids* (p. 7); Andy — *looked serious*; *He had … good manners* (p. 11); Sean — *He wanted to keep law and order in his life and among his friends. He rarely broke the rules at home or at school* (p.15). The girls' characters are not less remarkable as both Izzie and Gabby looking gentle and sweet can easily achieve their aims. Gabby is called an *angel/demon* (p. 9) from the first meeting at the Atwood school as she does not hesitate to take things she needs from others showing her dominating position:

> *And she gave them both a look that warned them not to mess with her, and proceeded to help herself to more blocks while the boys stared at her in amazement* (p. 9).

Gabby actually does not demonstrate her superior attitude to others in the group of friends but she is completely unbearable with her sister Michelle:

> *Gabby said she hated her sister, and blamed her for everything whenever she could* (p. 18).

Even though Gabby's younger sister does much better at school, their parents, Judy and Adam, are proud of Gabby more as she is more talented in music and ballet and models from an early age:

> *Judy always said about her older daughter that she was born to succeed at everything she did, and it seemed to be true. Gabby had modeled a few times for ads for children's clothing, and one national campaign for GapKids by the time she was in third grade. No one ever doubted that Gabby would be a star one day* (p. 18).

Gabby wants to play first fiddle and does everything to be the only star in the family demanding her parents' attention all the time.

Izzie appears to be the centre of the groups of friends thanks to her character:

> *Izzie was supportive and comforting as she always was* (p. 43);
> *Izzie was there for each of them when things got tough for them* (p. 43).

She is the one who supports everybody separately and all together, showing her ability to do it from their first meeting at school, giving four others the feeling of their unity and interdependence on each other.

The novel is devoted to the friendship of children of both sexes: *The five of them were like quintuplets, with different parents and one heart and one soul. "Friends 4Ever" above all* (p.22), still Izzie and Gabby's closeness, affection, and devotion to each other is phenomenal. The image of the girls' friendship might contradict traditional perception of women's friendship in society. Gabby fighting with her younger sister, rejecting her, proves to be the best friend to Izzie, the friend any girl can dream of. Izzie being a loving personality dedicates herself to all friends, but her bond with Gabby is special:

> *Izzie and Gabby pretended to be sisters sometimes, with new teachers or strangers* (p. 21);
> *Gabby and Izzie were still best friends in third grade. At eight, they loved each other even more than they had at five* (p. 17).
> *And Izzie loved being best friends with her, although she loved the three boys in her group too* (p. 18).

The girls are inseparable even when Gabby starts dating Billy. The female model of friendship is also traced between main characters' mothers in the novel, they help each other to look after the children and give a helpful hand whenever it is necessary. So, Gabby and Izzie follow the example of the older generation.

The following n-gram demonstrates how lemma *Izzie* is presented in different types of collocations. Izzie proves to be the most active protagonist created in the novel by Danielle Steel.
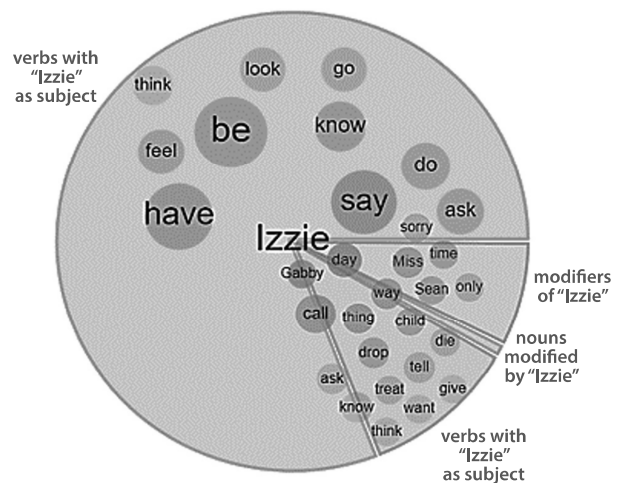

Figure 1. The n-gram presenting collocations with *Izzie*

The most frequent verb used with *Izzie* as subject is *to say* demonstrating her leading and prevailing role in the groups of friends and in the plot line as well. Izzie is given the floor by the author more often. Her ideas, hopes, fears, feelings are shown in the text of the novel more frequently than other characters'. She is the character who has "a voice" in the plot line.

Coming right up,"	Izzie	said matter-of-factly, then hande
cked her up, and	Izzie	said the same thing to her. </s>
l over the place,"	Izzie	said wisely. </s><s> They had g
e pretty scared,"	Izzie	said as they talked about it. </s>
e my best friend,"	Izzie	said uncomfortably. </s><s> "Yc
ifferent, I guess,"	Izzie	said quietly. </s><s> "Even in th
ew job?" </s><s>	Izzie	said to her mother with an angu
n the two of you,"	Izzie	said as tears sprang to her eyes
, and so do you,"	Izzie	said , and ran into her room and
keep it that way,"	Izzie	said sternly. </s><s> "Besides, s
a deserve better,"	Izzie	said as she rinsed their breakfa:
ave to help you,"	Izzie	said matter-of-factly. </s><s> Sh
<s> "That's nice,"	Izzie	said , pretending to be calmer th
> "Yeah, maybe,"	Izzie	said , but she wasn't so sure. </
><s> "Whatever,"	Izzie	said . </s><s> It was hard to wo
><s> It's official,"	Izzie	said , satisfied with the result. <
o help anything,"	Izzie	said quietly, always the voice of
away at school,"	Izzie	said simply, and he nodded. </s
: coming to L.A.,"	Izzie	said wistfully. </s><s> "I'll see y
o chance of that,"	Izzie	said , and laughed. </s><s> "I'll

Figure 2. Concordance lines with *Izzie+say*

Collocations with the characters' names and the verb *to say* present how often the friends express their ideas directly. The following figure demonstrates the results obtained with the help of Sketch Engine.

1	CQL Izzie + say • 44
	432.92 per million tokens • 0.043%
2	CQL Sean + say • 26
	255.81 per million tokens • 0.026%
3	CQL Billy + say • 13
	127.91 per million tokens • 0.013%
4	CQL Andy + say • 10
	98.39 per million tokens • 0.0098%
5	CQL Gabby + say • 9
	88.55 per million tokens • 0.0089%

Figure 3. Frequency list of "characters+say"

Izzie and Sean communicate more with other people and they are the only characters surviving in the novel. Finally, they become a boyfriend and a girlfriend. Thus, widespread gender stereotypes about girls' talkativeness is not supported by the author who creating her literary heroes outlines their personalities focusing not on the gender factor but on their personal traits of character.

Analyzing Gabby as a female character and comparing her with Izzie gives a completely different picture. Firstly, the most frequent verb used in collocations with *Gabby* as subject is the verb *to be*, which is shown in the following n-gram and the picture with concordance lines with *Gabby+to be*. In this way Danielle Steel reveals Gabby's emotional state, her desires, her relations with others. Secondly, the author presenting Gabby concentrates more on what other people say about her, giving this character a less active role compared to Izzie.
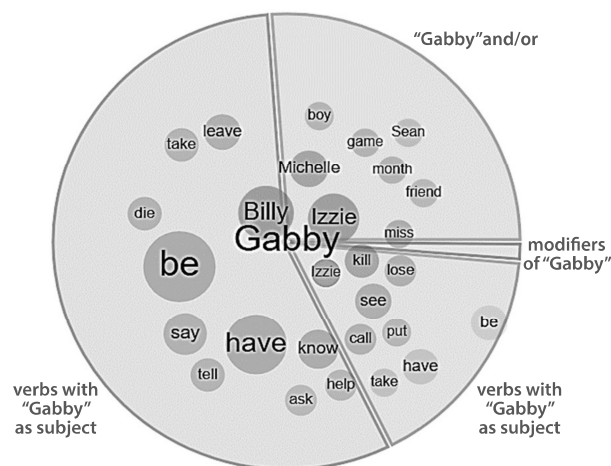
Figure 4. The n-gram presenting collocations with *Gabby*

Career prospects of all five characters are sketched almost at the beginning of the novel. The friends' choice is in the frame of traditional gender expectations about jobs which men or women usually do. The male characters are into the sphere of sports (football): Billy —

Billy was equally obsessed with sports, especially football, and had a huge collection of signed baseball and football cards (p. 22);

Billy was determined to do anything to get into a top school to play football (p. 46);

the service in the police: Sean —

he had gone from wanting to be a sheriff to wanting to be a policeman, then a fireman, and by eight back to the police again. He loved watching any kind of police show on TV (p. 15).

Sean was still obsessed with any kind of law enforcement, watched every possible crime and police show on TV, and had taken to reading books about the FBI (p. 22).;

and medical practice: Andy —

he wanted to be a doctor, like his parents. A medical doctor like his mother (p. 26);

Andy had just been accepted into Harvard Medical School (p. 140);

while the female characters choose modelling: Gabby —

Gabby, working on her acting career there and modelling (p. 56);

Her three go-sees that day went well, and she was pretty sure she'd get all three jobs (p. 120);

she could do commercials, and eventually a screen test for feature films (p. 91);

and teaching: Izzie —

Izzie was developing a strong social conscience and had done volunteer work (p. 22).

Izzie wished sometimes that her own career decisions were easier and clear. She had a deep need to help others, but still wasn't sure how to manifest it. She switched her major to English in junior year (p. 134);

Izzie told them what it was like being a kindergarten teacher at Atwood (p.147).

The main characters are as successful in their career paths as their parents are.

The three friends who stay alive successfully graduate from universities:

In June, the big day arrived. For all of them. Andy graduated from Harvard, magna cum laude. Sean graduated from George Washington, with honors in Spanish. And Izzie graduated from UCLA as an English major (p. 140).

This proves the expectations from children going to a prestigious school and after that entering a high-rank university and graduating from it with flying colours.

As any book by Daniele Steel, "Friends Forever" has an expected happy ending despite all misfortunes with protagonists during the plot line and deaths of three main characters. Izzie and Sean are going to get married, they are in love, they have been meant for each other — *They were one flame made of two people, with a love that had endured all the challenges and tragedies of life* (p.193) — in this way symbolizing the ideal stereotypical picture of joyful life usually created in a romantic novel when heroes come through burdensome and challenging situations being desperate and ready for the worst. Just after that everything changes for better and characters get what they really deserve and they will live happy ever after: *He was a happy man as he lay watching her, and she gently leaned over and kissed him, and said the words he had been waiting for: "Welcome home."* (p. 193), which is underlined with Izzie's last words in the novel.

Conclusions

Stereotypical images of protagonists created in Danielle Steel's book correspond to a traditional portrayal of male and female social roles. Mostly it is a picture of strong men and beautiful women.

Tending to shape common social portraits, the writer presents her characters in a balanced way. Though favouring long-established images of men and women as well as their so well-expected roles in the society, Danielle Steel assigns some features to her heroes, which makes them stand out from traditional gender pictures.

Thus, there are five families: the Nortons, the O'Haras, the Wallaces, the Thomases, the Westons, and as a result there are five groups of parents, who actually represent a bit diverse variety of expected mother/father roles together with different images of working or staying at home mothers.

Both working mothers Katherine Wallace and Helen Weston spend more time at work than with their children. The first is depicted as a woman who does not want to have children or devote her time to family, who is entirely concentrated on her career and does not take much care of her daughter Izzie. Whereas Helen is depicted as a loving mother, being able to give her son Andy lots of love despite her hard work as a doctor. Both women are pictured with glittering careers though they are in professional spheres which are traditionally considered to be only for men.

Other three women — Marilyn Norton, Connie O'Hara, Juddy Thomas — represent a conventional picture of wives/mothers, taking care of their husbands, children, houses, taking an active part in school life, participating in charity programs, helping and supporting each other.

All fathers are strong personalities, breadwinners, supporters of their families, in this way backing traditional gender picture of successful men. Still, Jeff Wallace represents a deviation from a usual social picture of a father as he takes care of his daughter instead of his wife and Izzie stays with him after the divorce. Larry Norton is sketched as a man who is only interested in his sons if they are excellent at sports, it is the only feature that stipulates his love to his children. Such a portrait is typical in the frame of gender expectations, which means boys are to be tall, strong and competitive.

Five main characters — Billy, Sean, Andy, Gabby and Izzie — are typical representatives of traditional gender roles ascribed to boys and girls. All children are good-looking with personal features of characters corresponding to widespread expectations about teenage boys and girls, having interests usual for their gender, choosing careers customary for men and women.

Nevertheless, there are some aspects about female main characters that contradict conventional gender beliefs. Firstly, Gabby and Izzie have a close friendship and strong partnership which is usually associated with boys but not girls. Secondly, Gabby is pictured as a bossy personality despite her tender appearance. Izzie, being the center of the group of friends, actually proves to be determined and resolute, powerful and firm so that she is always able to support everyone in the group in all difficult situations. In this way the girls are ascribed masculine features though in general their portrayals in the novel fully correspond to the expected image of femininity.

The further research may concentrate on a contrastive study of protagonists' gender roles depicted by Danielle Steel in her other books.

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