



Representation of Inequality and Patriarchal Power in *My Brilliant Friend*

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-05-04 Revised: 2026-05-14 Accepted: 2026-06-02 Keywords: Betty Friedan; feminism; inequality; My Brilliant Friend; patriarchy DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.10418 Corresponding Author: Nikita Priskila Tamara Siagian nikitasiagian3@students.unnes.ac.id English Literature, Faculty of Language and Art, Semarang State University	<i>This article analyzes how gender inequality and patriarchy are portrayed in the novel My Brilliant Friend by Elena Ferrante. The writer especially focuses on the main character's experience, but also involves other characters in the novel. For the method, we will use a qualitative descriptive approach through a feminist lens, drawing on Betty Friedan's work. The writer finds that the novel My Brilliant Friend not only centers on an intimate and complex friendship between two girls but also reveals a deeper layer of social critique regarding the pervasive, embedded patriarchal issues and gender inequality in their daily lives. Through the experiences of Elena Greco (Lenu) and Raffaella Cerullo (Lina or Elena called her Lila), the narrative vividly depicts how societal expectations, limited female education, domestic oppression, and male dominance systematically shape and often limit women's autonomy. By employing Betty Friedan's feminist perspective, this article concludes how the character's struggles reflect broader issues of women's oppression, identity formation, and resistance within a patriarchal society. Thus, the novel becomes not only a story of personal growth and friendship but also a powerful representation of the silent yet persistent injustices faced by women, illustrating that acts of resilience and self-awareness are crucial forms of resistance against deeply rooted gender inequality.</i>

1. Introduction

Women often do not receive justice, which limits their abilities, and they also do not get equal opportunities and protection in various aspects of social, economic, and political life. Wood (2019) states that stereotypes against women can lead to them being perceived as inferior or having limited roles in society. As a result, women often experience discrimination and injustice, so that their opportunities and human rights are hampered or not fulfilled equally. Johri (2023) also said that patriarchy is a social construct that endorses the superiority of men over women. It has been defined differently by sociologists and has

been employed extensively by feminists as a tool for analyzing gender relations. Being a supremacist ideology, patriarchy promotes male supremacy in the spiritual and physical realms as well as in social and personal spheres (Wood, 2019).

In recent years, the issue of gender equality has increasingly become a central topic of discussion across various domains, including economics, politics, social life, and religion (Murwanti, 2025). The behavior of women towards men, or men towards women, or the imbalance of rights that women or men have is a sensitive matter in this era. We need to gain a better understanding of this gender issue. It is not only related to the differences between men and women, but also to the social constructs that determine their prescribed roles and responsibilities in society (Sarjawan et al, 2025).

This article is based on a novel, *My Brilliant Friend*, by Elena Ferrante, published in 2011 and translated from Italian to English by Ann Goldstein in 2012. In *My Brilliant Friend*, silence and ellipses are used as tools for the representation of the unspeakable in women's experiences. The novel's use of silence and ellipses is about representing the unspeakable aspects of women's trauma that derive from gendered violence and sexual threat (Basha & Azardeen, 2025). It is a novel about the lives of two women, Elena Greco and Raffaella Cerullo, on the outskirts of Naples, Italy. In the story, the characters Elena Greco, called Lenu, and Raffaella Cerullo, called Lina or Lila by Elena, recount their lives from the 1950s through their twilight years in the 2000s. Not only talking about their friendship from childhood through adulthood, but also the struggles of being a woman that they faced from their closest people and environment.

The idea of Elena's narrative is not that, as her life progresses, her consciousness moves towards integration and develops into a stable identity, but that traumatic events continue to have the capacity to intervene in her understanding of herself and to cause her to change. In this way, it is proposed that for women subjected to the experience of patriarchal violence, psychological development may have to take a different form, which may not necessarily follow the usual expectations of growth (Basha & Azardeen, 2025). As the protagonist Elena seeks to emulate the courage of her strong-willed friend Lila, she realizes that she can only leave her Neapolitan neighborhood by gaining access to education and learning standard Italian from her teacher (Dempsey, 2025). The characters experience it, they struggle against it, and the younger generation wants to be free from the fears and ways of the older generation.

We must stop that destructive tide and tell the world once again that women are more than just "mattress dressing." (Kensicki, 2018). As Tanja (2024) states, tracing the development of feminism reveals a complex journey, filled with achievements, obstacles, and ongoing struggles. This reflects the ongoing effort to achieve gender equality in society. The topic of feminist inequality is crucial because it allows us to examine this world of patriarchal and male-dominated civilizations in depth (Suhag, 2023; Surtinawati, 2025). This article uses a feminist approach through the lens of Betty Friedan, drawing on the writer's reading of the novel, as feminism aims for equal rights and opportunities for all genders. It is about honoring the many identities, experiences, skills, and talents of women and working to enable all of them to achieve their full potential.

Betty Friedan is one of the most influential feminist figures in United States history, best known for her monumental work, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). This book is often considered the catalyst for the second wave of feminism in America, a movement that focused on women's rights outside the traditional sphere of the home and domestic roles (Erlangga, 2024). Friedan's central focus was that women suffered under a pervasive system of delusions and false values under which they were urged to find personal fulfillment, even identity, vicariously through the husbands and children to whom they were expected cheerfully to devote their lives (Pal, 2021). The thinker concept aligns with

the writer's article, as the novel also discusses women's inequality in making decisions about their lives, speaking, patriarchy, and domestic work.

Although previous research has discussed trauma, silence, and women's struggles in the novel, there is still limited analysis focusing specifically on gender inequality and patriarchal oppression through the feminist perspective of Betty Friedan. Friedan, through her influential work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), criticized the social expectations that confined women to domestic roles and denied them opportunities for self-fulfillment outside the household. Her feminist perspective is relevant to the experiences of Lina and Lenu, who struggle against restrictive gender norms imposed by their families and society.

So, the purpose of this article is to portray how the inequality and patriarchal issues experienced by the characters in the novel, but mostly from the main character named Elena Greco and Raffaella Cerullo, stemmed from their family and environment in their daily life inside the novel *My Brilliant Friend* by Elena Ferrante, which was analyzed using feminist theory with the thinker Betty Friedan. In addition, this analysis also shows how the two figures try to face and respond to various forms of oppression, so that it can provide an overview of women's struggle to seek freedom, equality, and fairer opportunities in society. However, feminist scholars have long argued that silence is not merely a sign of oppression but can also be an intentional and strategic form of resistance (Rorintul, S. A., & Lontaan, 2025).

Review of Literature

The writer's topic of inequality and patriarchy uses the theory of feminism with the thinker Betty Friedan. That's why, in analyzing this article, the writer focuses primarily on Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). The book focuses on gender and the women's movement. Thus, I began to hunt down the origins of the feminine mystique and its effect on women who lived by it or grew up under it (Friedan, 1963, p. 7).

Previous studies have explored Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend* through feminist and patriarchal perspectives. Maria Clara Calheiros, in her article entitled *Elena Ferrante and Patriarchy: Lessons from L'Amica Geniale (My Brilliant Friend)*, studied how patriarchal systems shape the lives and identities of women in the novel. Drawing on feminist theory and the law-and-literature approach, she argues that Ferrante portrays women's experiences as deeply influenced by social oppression, gender inequality, and male domination within both family and society. Her study highlights that the friendship between Elena and Lila reflects women's struggle to gain autonomy and self-expression in a patriarchal environment. Furthermore, Calheiros emphasizes that the novel presents a complex representation of womanhood, showing how female characters negotiate power, violence, education, and social expectations throughout their lives.

Several scholars also discussed *My Brilliant Friend* by applying different literary and theoretical perspectives. Novi Dwi Lestari and Devi Pratiwy, through their article entitled *Female Rivalry in Elena Ferrante's My Brilliant Friend: A Sociological Approach*, explore the competitive relationship between Elena Greco and Lila Cerullo within the context of society and gender expectations. By employing a sociological approach, they reveal that rivalry between women is influenced by social class, education, beauty standards, and patriarchal values that pressure women to compete with one another. Their findings suggest that friendship in the novel is deeply intertwined with social ambition and personal insecurity.

In addition, Ali Hamada and Ahmad Jasim Mohammed investigate the novel through a psychoanalytic lens in their study *Envy and Jealousy in Elena Ferrante's My Brilliant Friend: A Psychoanalytic Study*. They explain that feelings of jealousy and envy become central emotional forces that shape the relationship between the two female protagonists. The study highlights how admiration gradually transforms into emotional tension and rivalry,

reflecting the psychological struggles experienced by women in a restrictive social environment.

2. Method

The writer used the qualitative descriptive research method for this article. Ratna (2000) and Nisa et al. (2025) state that this method uses interpretive methods, presenting them as descriptions. The technique that the writer used for this article is focused entirely on a close reading technique that will include textual analysis of the novel. As the meaning of close reading, Ohrvik (2024) said, it is a physical practice that involves the optical or tactile and cognitive act of reading texts attentively.

Data is collected entirely from textual sources, and analytical-qualitative methods extract and understand unique content (Creswell, 2009, 2016; Darmawan, 2023). The research uses two types of data sources: primary and secondary data. The primary data source is Elena Ferrante's novel, *My Brilliant Friend*. In contrast, the secondary data sources include articles, journals, books, and other relevant literature on gender inequality, domestic labor, patriarchy, and feminist theory.

While collecting the data, the writer carefully read and comprehended the entire novel to gain a thorough understanding of the story and its characters. After understanding the narrative, the writer identified narrations, sentences, and dialogues that portray the experiences of inequality and patriarchal oppression faced by the main characters, Lina and Lenu. The selected excerpts were then categorized into silencing women, education inequality, and domestic oppression.

Furthermore, this article applies Betty Friedan's theory of second-wave feminism as the main analytical framework to examine women's rights issues represented in the novel. Friedan's theory is used to analyze how patriarchal structures limit women's opportunities, confine them to domestic roles, and create gender-based inequalities in education, social status, and personal freedom. Through this framework, the writer explores the struggles of Lina and Lenu in resisting traditional expectations imposed on women and in seeking independence, self-development, and equality within a patriarchal society.

3. Result

In the results and discussion section, the writer will present the results of the data analysis collected. Focusing the analysis with feminist theory through Betty Friedan's lens in the novel *My Brilliant Friend* by Elena Ferrante, published by Europa Editions. The result will be explaining the issues of inequality and patriarchy that occurred in the novel's story to the characters, especially the main characters, Lenu and Lina.

Representation of Inequality and Patriarchy

In the novel *My Brilliant Friend*, some parts portray the feminist issue in the main character's life, which will be analyzed with Betty Friedan's feminist theory book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). The story demonstrates how women, from a young age, are confronted with restrictive social expectations, such as the obligation to submit to male authority, whether that be a father, brother, or husband. This situation aligns with Friedan's critique of the "problem that has no name," the feelings of dissatisfaction and confinement experienced by women despite outwardly being perceived as fulfilling society's ideal roles, through depictions of inner conflict, social pressures, and unequal power relations. Here are some narratives, sentences, or dialogues that describe inequality and patriarchy.

Silencing Women

They were more severely infected than the men, because while men always got furious, they calmed down in the end; women, who appeared silent and acquiescent, when angry, flew into a rage that had no end. (Ferrante, 2012, p. 5)

The dialogue states that women appear silent and compliant, but when they become angry, their anger “has no end.” In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963, p. 16), Friedan’s theory explains that this pressure created an accumulation of inner frustration. Because women lacked a healthy space for self-expression, their anger became repressed and, when it finally surfaced, felt more intense and prolonged. Since the root of the problem is unnamed and unacknowledged, the emotion remains unresolved, making the anger seem endless. The social construction of the ideal woman is as gentle, submissive, and solely oriented toward domestic life.

When women deviate from this image by expressing anger, they are often seen as excessive or irrational. However, this anger can be understood as a response to the social limitations that restrict their personal growth and self-fulfillment. In relation to the dialogue, women’s endless anger reflects a deeper identity crisis. It is not just a temporary emotion, but a sign of their need for recognition and a meaningful life beyond domestic roles.

A creature half male and half female who hides in the sewers and comes out of the grates like the rats. (Ferrante, 2012, p. 79)

The creature’s presence in the sewers reflects a hidden and marginalized social position. Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963, p. 89) explains that, for centuries, women were confined to isolated spaces, far from the centre of social and intellectual life. Like a being that lives underground, women do not get full access to appear or exist in the public sphere, so their existence is undervalued or living in the shadow of men. The image of the creature emerging from the grates like a rat symbolizes moments when women begin to “emerge” into public life, entering the world that was before dominated by men. However, this emergence is often perceived as strange or disruptive. This aligns with Friedan’s idea that when women began to demand broader roles, they faced resistance because they were breaking norms that had long confined them.

Pasquale came over and said somberly that we had to go. "Let us wait till Lila finishes her dance." "No, right now," he said in a tone that would not admit a response, hard, rude. (Ferrante, 2012, p. 120)

The dialogue shows tension arising from dominant male authority, as Pasquale forces a decision without giving space to Lina’s desire to finish her dance. This reflects the “conventional truths” in the Betty Friedan theory, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963, p. 26), where women often live within structures that limit their voices and choices, as if only men’s voice is needed and has to be listened to. Lina, who is dancing, can be seen as a symbol of self-expression threatened by external pressure. Pasquale’s attitude, which “does not allow for a response,” illustrates how women’s voices are often silenced before they can even be articulated. In Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963, p. 26), the question of how women can trust their inner voice becomes relevant because the social reality they face actually rejects or ignores that voice, as happens to Lina in this situation.

Education Inequality

Then why should your sister, who is a girl, go to school? (Ferrante, 2012, p. 48)

As Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963, p. 65) theory highlights the phenomenon of "feminine conformity," the social pressure that causes girls, even those with talent and potential, to stop pursuing education. The dialogue, "Then why should your sister, who is a girl, go to school?" reflects a concrete form of this pressure. The question assumes that education is not a primary need for girls, thus reinforcing social norms that limit them.

This can be understood through dialogue that demonstrates the existence of discriminatory mindsets within families or communities. If family members themselves question the importance of education for girls, the decision to stop school becomes easier and is considered normal. Friedan's (1963, p. 65) theory reveals that girls who were initially "full of promise and talent" lose their way due to social expectations. This dialogue is one of the triggers for loss of motivation, because girls feel their education is not valued or considered unimportant. As a result, they become less confident and ultimately give in to social demands.

That year, Rino compelled her to enroll in school again, but she rarely went and failed again. Her mother asked her to help in the house, and her father asked her to be in the shop. (Ferrante, 2012, p. 74)

The dialogue shows that the female character is forced to return to school, yet she fails because she is not truly given the space to focus on her education. Her mother asks her to help at home, and her father asks her to assist in the shop. This aligns with Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963, pp. 22) argument that many women quit high school or college due to strong social expectations and social pressures, especially when education is not considered a primary priority for women compared to domestic roles.

Many women were directed to prioritize traditional roles as future wives and mothers, causing academic or career ambitions to become limited or even neglected. The educational failure and limited social role described in the dialogue may mark the beginning of the emptiness Friedan discusses. When women are not allowed to build their identity through education or personal interests, they risk experiencing an identity crisis later in life.

"Do not even mention it, you have to go on studying." "I can't, my parents won't let me." (Ferrante, 2012, p. 94)

The dialogue reveals the limited access to education for the female character, as evidenced by her confusion regarding terms like "high school" and "university." This suggests that education is neither common nor expected for her. This aligns with Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963, p. 19) theory that suggests an imbalance in educational priorities between men and women. The statement, "My parents wouldn't let me," suggests that the barriers stem not only from within the individual but also from family and social norms.

In theory, this reflects how education for women is considered less important because domestic roles or doing the household chores are prioritized. Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963, p. 19) theory also posits that during the educational crisis (college crisis), men were prioritized because they were considered to "need" education more to face the demands of the modern era (the atomic age). The dialogue demonstrates the impact of being denied the opportunity to understand or attain higher education.

Domestic Oppression

She had work to do, her siblings, the housework, her mother, her father, and she didn't stop to talk much. Now, as she had been since New Year's Eve, she was occupied only with domestic things. (Ferrante, 2012, p. 153)

In the theory *The Feminine Mystique* (1963, p. 22) by Friedan, the woman describes her days as “busy and dull,” filled with endless housework that lacks personal meaning. The dialogue presents a similar situation in which the female character is constantly occupied with her siblings, household chores, and her parents’ needs. Both texts emphasize how repetitive domestic activities make women’s lives exhausting and monotonous. The theory shows that the woman’s entire day revolves around cooking, washing dishes, cleaning, and taking care of children. Also, the dialogue states that since New Year’s Eve, she has been “occupied only with domestic things”. Caregiving and service become the centre of her existence, reinforcing the social expectation that women must devote themselves entirely to their families. This reflects how women's identities are reduced to those of domestic workers, with no room for self-development or personal aspirations.

"My daughter is a girl," Fernando explained, embarrassed, "and Rino hasn't yet learned the job well." Stefano shook his head in a friendly way. "Leave Lina out of it. You'll have to take on some workers." (Ferrante, 2012, p. 206)

The dialogue reflects the limitations of gender roles emphasized in Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963, p. 43), namely that women cannot pursue careers or leave the house. Fernando's statement, "My daughter is a girl," demonstrates the underlying assumption that Lina's identity as a woman automatically excludes her from the workforce. This aligns with Friedan's theory that social structures actively prevented women from participating in public spaces. Fernando's feelings of embarrassment indicate the strong social pressure of gender norms. He seems to need to justify his decision to exclude Lina from the workforce, not because of her abilities, but because of her gender.

Also, Stefano's response, "Leave Lina out of it," reinforces the normalization of women's exclusion from the workforce. Rather than challenging Fernando's assumption about his kids, Stefano reinforces it by suggesting another solution: hiring additional workers. As in Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* theory (1963, p. 177), many people do not believe in women's ability to do work and can easily be replaced by a man who can improve their image.

The beauty of mind that Cerullo had from childhood didn't find an outlet, Greco, and it has all ended up in her face, in her breasts, in her thighs, in her ass, places where it soon fades and it will be as if she had never had it. (Ferrante, 2012, p. 238)

The dialogue suggests that Lina’s “beauty of mind” lacked an outlet and therefore found expression through her physical body. This aligns with Friedan's (1963, p. 24) critique of a society that failed to provide women with opportunities to develop their intellectual capacities in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). When mental potential is not valued, women are often reduced to their physical appearance and sexual attractiveness. Feminine fulfillment is defined as having children; it is not surprising that many women willingly embraced motherhood as their primary role.

The dialogue emphasizes how a woman’s value is centred on her face, breasts, thighs, and body features associated with beauty and reproduction. This reflects an ideology that positions the female body and reproductive function as the core of women’s identity. This

echoes Friedan's (1963) concept of "the problem that has no name," a feeling of emptiness and invisibility. When women's intelligence and potential are denied expression, their identities are diminished, and they may feel as though their true selves have disappeared.

In summary, from all this, the writer finds excerpts that can serve as evidence of the representation of inequality and patriarchy issues that Lina and Lenu experienced in the *My Brilliant Friend* novel. From a young age, both characters were raised in an environment where men held greater power, and women were expected to adhere to certain roles related to obedience, beauty, and marriage. Lina tends to confront this system more directly, particularly through violence, economic constraints, and her duty of domestic work.

In contrast, Lenu's journey highlights a more subtle but equally powerful pressure to conform to intellectual and social expectations imposed on women. Furthermore, the right to education in a novel story is not entirely free from gender bias. Male characters are generally given more encouragement and opportunities, while female characters must struggle harder to access the same chances.

The social environment in the neighborhood also plays an important role in maintaining these inequalities, as it normalizes male dominance and reinforces the idea that women should be subordinate. Because of this, Lina and Lenu respond differently: Lina by defiance and becomes more independent, and Lenu by pursuing her academic achievement and trying to move beyond her social mobility. This reveals broader systemic issues of patriarchy that profoundly impact women's lives. The findings demonstrate that inequality is embedded in social, cultural, and economic structures, making resistance complex. Through Lina and Lenu's experiences, this narrative emphasizes the enduring impact of gender-based oppression and the ongoing efforts required to get out of the situation.

4. Discussion

The research of this article reveals that Betty Friedan's feminist theory provides a deeper understanding of the systemic oppression experienced by women in *My Brilliant Friend*, written by Elena Ferrante. By applying Friedan's perspective, this article not only identifies explicit forms of patriarchy and gender inequality experienced by the female characters, especially Lina and Lenu, but also uncovers subtle attitudes and behaviors of male characters that contribute to women's oppression throughout the storyline. These oppressive attitudes are frequently normalized within society, making them difficult to recognize at first glance. Through this analysis, the writer demonstrates how patriarchal culture restricts women's freedom, education, self-development, and social position within both private and public spheres.

Friedan's theory explains that women's oppression is not solely caused by individual male dominance, but also by a broader social system that positions women as inferior to men. In *My Brilliant Friend*, Lina and Lenu continuously encounter expectations that women should prioritize domestic responsibilities, obedience, and dependence on male authority. The male characters often exercise control over women's decisions, both directly and indirectly, reflecting the patriarchal structure described by Friedan. This finding indicates that the inequality experienced by female characters is systemic because it is reinforced through family traditions, cultural values, and social norms that legitimize male dominance. Therefore, women experience difficulties in achieving autonomy, recognition, and equal opportunities within society.

The findings also reveal the existence of silencing women as a significant form of oppression in the novel. Female characters are frequently discouraged from expressing opinions, emotions, or personal ambitions because women's voices are considered less

important than those of men. Lina and Lenu repeatedly experience situations in which their thoughts and desires are ignored or undervalued by male authority figures and by the surrounding community.

This silencing mechanism reflects Friedan's argument that patriarchal societies suppress women's individuality and intellectual agency in order to maintain existing power structures. The inability of women to speak freely ultimately limits their participation in social and personal decision-making processes. In many places, women's silence is accepted, and many are unaware of it. Staying silent, which refers to being submissive, weak, and powerless, is understood as a characteristic that women should possess in general (Hetami & Darmawan, 2024).

In addition, the writer also identifies educational inequality as another important issue represented in the novel. Although Lenu demonstrates intellectual capability and academic potential, her educational journey remains constrained by economic conditions and patriarchal expectations regarding women's social roles. Lina, despite her intelligence and creativity, is denied equal educational opportunities because her family prioritizes traditional expectations over female intellectual development. This condition illustrates how education functions as a site of gender discrimination in patriarchal societies. Friedan's theory supports this interpretation by emphasizing that women are systematically denied opportunities for self-actualization through restrictions imposed on their intellectual and professional advancement.

Furthermore, domestic oppression emerges as a central form of patriarchal control within the narrative. Women in the novel are expected to fulfill domestic responsibilities while simultaneously remaining submissive to male authority. Home is portrayed not as an environment of protection, but as a site where women experience emotional pressure, restriction, and unequal treatment. Lina's experiences particularly demonstrate how patriarchal marriage and household expectations confine women's independence and reinforce male dominance over women's lives. This finding strengthens Friedan's argument that domesticity is often constructed as a mechanism that limits women's freedom and reduces their social identity to traditional gender roles.

This article expands previous research that primarily focused on the friendship between Lina and Lenu as the central theme of the novel. Earlier studies generally emphasized female solidarity, emotional development, and social mobility between the two protagonists. In contrast, the present research highlights how interactions between male and female characters significantly shape women's experiences of oppression and resistance. Therefore, this article agrees with previous scholars that friendship functions as a source of emotional support for women; however, it differs in its emphasis on the hidden patriarchal attitudes embedded within gender relations throughout the narrative. This broader analytical perspective contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of gender inequality in Ferrante's work.

The contribution of this research lies in its attempt to reveal implicit patriarchal practices through the attitudes, behaviors, and interactions of male characters. These aspects are often overlooked in previous studies of *My Brilliant Friend*. By integrating the analysis of feminism, silencing women, educational inequality, domestic oppression, patriarchy, and gender inequality through Betty Friedan's feminist theory, this research contributes to feminist literary criticism by offering a deeper interpretation of how systemic oppression operates within everyday social interactions.

Furthermore, this article broadens scholarly discussion of Ferrante's work by demonstrating that feminism in the novel extends beyond female friendship and encompasses the complex power relations between men and women that shape the characters' social experiences and personal identities.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, this article examines Elena Ferrante's novel *My Brilliant Friend* through the lens of Betty Friedan's feminist theory. From this, I found some narrative, dialogue, and sentences from the character story, especially Lina and Le, to be analyzed. The novel can be understood as a novel that serves a story that not only highlights the dynamics of female friendship but also presents a sharp picture of how the patriarchal system works in everyday life. Limited access to education, pressure to fulfill domestic roles, and male domination are factors that consistently limit women's development and freedom. Education gives a generalized commitment to the promotion of equality.

Social and market imperfections that created women's exclusion needed to be addressed (Jaysawal & Saha, 2023). By using Betty Friedan's feminist perspective in this analysis, it shows that the characters' experiences reflect the broader reality of women's oppression, especially in their search for identity and desire for autonomy over their own lives. The inner conflicts, life choices, and forms of resistance presented show that women are not entirely passive, but have a growing awareness of the conditions they experience. Resistance is a response to actual or perceived challenges to existing hierarchies of power (Pease, Dragiewicz & Flood, 2021).

However, through the process of self-reflection and relationships between characters, especially within the bonds of friendship, the strength to understand and challenge this reality emerges. As Raina (2020) said, feminist theory exists as an equal alternative to enrich perspectives in literature. It is not only about challenges and critiques, but also about building on, complementing, and balancing literary discourse to make it more just and inclusive for women.

This means that women are no longer viewed solely through a male perspective but also through their own perspectives, both in social life and in literary works. Contributes to feminist literary criticism by demonstrating how Friedan's feminist ideas can be applied to contemporary literary analysis, particularly in examining the intersection between gender oppression, education, and identity formation. The findings broaden and deepen the understanding from previous research about how patriarchal values are reflected and challenged through characterization and interpersonal relationships in literature.

The writer's research in this article has several limitations. Focuses only on Betty Friedan's feminist perspective and primarily discusses the characters of Lina and Lenu. Therefore, other theoretical approaches and supporting characters have not been examined in depth. Furthermore, the discussion in this article is limited to the representation of patriarchy and forms of female resistance in the selected novels, which may result in different interpretations if analyzed using other literary theories or a broader social context.

This research may encourage readers, educators, and students to raise awareness of gender inequality and the importance of women's empowerment through education and critical thinking. And, the writer also hopes this article can serve as a reference for future researchers who want to explore further the study of feminist approaches, female representation, and social criticism, while analyzing with other novel or literary works that address the same problem without women. Also, future research can analyze this *My Brilliant Friend* novel with theories like social class, self-identity, and psychoanalysis.

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