



# Psychology of a girl child in *Through The Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll

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**Abstract**— In this paper, the psychology behind the character Alice a seven year old girl who is living in Victorian Era is discussed. This paper will help to understand the mind set of this character in a deeper level. The things she went through lead to her imagination process and her way of dealing with things. It could be that the interaction she had with the other characters throughout her journey in this novel made her develop new tendencies as well but also shaped her old personality along with addition of new aspects within it.

**Keywords**— *Imagination, loneliness, mind, psychology, restrictions.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Through The Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll, published in 1871 talks about a journey of Alice, young girl child in the Victorian Era. She is seven and a half years old. In this paper we will look into the struggles and anxieties she felt in the dream world when she entered through the looking glass. The incidents she went through and what a girl during the Victorian Era goes through while growing up. Alice's struggle with alienation, loneliness; restrictions controlled her behaviour and her life. Psychology of a girl child during the Victorian Era could be easily interpreted through her actions. Alice had to grow up in a very isolated environment and her nature somehow got framed by the ways and customs or stigmas that the society have put on a girl. The suffering of being a girl is not which she experiences after she grows up but from the moment she starts to walk or talk her life was under vigilance; with male dominated and conservative mind set.

This paper of mine will primarily deal with the psychology of a girl i.e. Alice in *Through The Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll during Victorian Era and how she grows up to be a woman with developing her nature, character or personality from being a naive girl under the restricted household and society to becoming a grown up mentally;

at least with some harsh but external interactions with different people i.e. characters in the imaginary world.

## 1 EMOTIONS FELT BY A GIRL IN VICTORIAN ERA

### 1.1 LONELINESS

It seems that loneliness is one of the strong feelings felt by Alice in this book. As she is a girl who has been isolated in her household by her family because she has to follow all the instructions given to her by the elders due to the 'customs' of the society during the Victorian Era "Throughout her adventures, Alice feels an inescapable sense of loneliness from which she can find no relief. Before she enters Looking-Glass World, her only companions are her cats, to whom she attributes human qualities to keep her company. Alice believes that loneliness is an inherent part of growing up, even in her dreams she must face the transition into womanhood alone."

(2022 SparkNotes LLC)

This loneliness comes with anxiety. This anxiety that Alice must have felt while being all alone and it pushed her mind to start making imagination of her being able to converse with her pets, kitten. The anxiety that her mind and body feels, psychologically speaking it is said that when a body

is so exhausted with everything, the mind also starts getting delusions and she is such an example of this. She is coped up in her room all day with no one to talk to, that loneliness and anxiety would have been so frustrating for her. Although she tries her best to stay sane with everything in order. It seems like her mind could not take it anymore and she started to imagine herself in the looking glass world, in which her imaginations put forward so many incidents and experiences for her so that be, it a dream but she would not feel lonely.

## 1.2 RESTRICTED

Alice as a person had no control over her life. She has been always following the her family's orders so she had no liberty of making her own choices. She has always been a pushover for her family or per se as a 'girl' for the whole society of Victorian Era. When she enters the Looking – Glass World, she found herself making choices based on her own sensibility but according to all the rigid rules of that world for becoming the Queen. This world itself made her push her limits for becoming more mature. This depicts the harsh reality of the world that even as a kid, a girl, has to grow up quickly in order to adjust herself and compromise her freedom in order to have some status or position in the world she grows up in, just like the society of Victorian Era. Alice did all the work for the chess game she got into when she entered the looking glass world. "Within the framework of the chess game, Alice has little control over the trajectory of her life, and outside forces influence her choices and actions. Just as Alice exerts little control of her movement toward becoming a queen, she has no power over her inevitable maturation and acceptance of womanhood." (2022 SparkNotes LLC)

Nobody wants to be restricted by anyone though to Alice it was taught that it was for her benefit because she is a girl of Victorian Era, where girls are needed to be restricted in order to teach them on how they can grow up to be a mature, sensible, perfect, proper, well mannered women.

## 1.3 POWERLESS

Alice as a girl and also because she is just a kid, had not so much power in her hands. Her actions or behaviour were all a reflection of being powerless over the outer force or external influences on her life like people of society and in the looking glass world all the other characters made her feel weak in comparison to them. Even the power she had was very limited. "Carroll suggest that a larger force guides individuals through life and that all events are preordained. In this deterministic concept of life, free will is an illusion and individual choices are bound by rigidly

determined rules and guided by an overarching, unseen force." But as the novel progresses she becomes bold with her choices and decision making. (2022 SparkNotes LLC)

As a girl even though she is just a kid she has been learning various things to become perfect in the eyes of people but the person who has been learning all this hardly has any chance to voice her own opinions on things and she is not even given permission to make choices for herself. Though Alice still a kid, but it does not really matter to people because her fate somehow is already decided by the society the moment she was born into the world.

## 2.0 Behaviour or Actions

Alice's actions were always an answer to her surroundings. As a girl growing up in Victorian Era she had to be very considerate towards her surroundings and perspective of other people. She had to be quite observant of the external forces that act upon her life. Every girl is always taught to be determined to act with the thought of pleasing other people especially the males of the society. Alice was no exception. So it is not wrong to say, that her actions or behaviour were solely based on these ideologies put in her mind through her family and the the way the living of girl works in Victorian Era. Just like, in the chess game of the looking glass world Alice's every actions are to achieve her goal (becoming a queen) so she had a motive behind her actions. It's very common for girls to act a certain way in the society. Their goal or motive behind those actions can vary. For example, a girl could aim for a settled family i.e. marriage or a good status in the society through her marriage, becoming a 'good' mother, daughter, wife or a 'pure' 'sensible' girl. But unfortunately all these goals of a girl are not just solely for her secure future or life but for her to live without any criticism or judgement made on her character by the people of the society she lives in. As it is commonly said 'A girl's life is not just hers'. She has to live up to the expectations of being an embodiment of decency, perfect, etc. "constructing different situations and encounters that push her along toward her goal." (2022 SparkNotes LLC) She goes through very dynamic situations in her life but she tries her best to overcome them and becoming who she really wants but truthfully if we look at it in a certain way it's not what she really wants to become but what her life or her situations are forcing her to become and she accepts them as her fate and tries her hardest to be that though her actions taken for this can be called as a 'weakness' but it is not it. It just shows her motivation to give her best in her life no matter however it is. So in her mind she is only going through the process of her life. As a girl, her mind is telling her to move forward

with courage and sometimes ignorance of her own feelings. This is why, a girl's mind is so unique and somehow moulded by her circumstances that it is interesting to look into. She can relate to "taking on the manner of a good-natured mother figure who behaves with solicitude and deference despite her authority." (2022 SparkNotes LLC)

### 3.0 Inner voice

Alice is a girl who is devoid of herself. Her mind is jumbled with so many voices. Her psychologically speaking, her thoughts sometimes can be so irrational because she somehow is always expected to be proper and uptight. Her thought process are under the influence of her own wishes and the external expectations of the people. She can be also called mad because a girl sometimes is so abide by the rules that if she wishes something for herself she is often called 'mad'. Just like when she enters the looking glass world

"But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.

"Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."

"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.

"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here." (*Alice's Adventures in The Wonderland*, [Chapter 2](#))

A girl's mind is full of imaginations and wishes, when a certain time comes a girl as a kid thinks highly of the world she lives in. Sometimes she is not fully aware of the harsh reality of the society she lives in because she is often sometimes made to think that the life she is living or going to live is 'normal'. So, Alice as a character in this book, is somehow aware but also not of the later sufferings of her life that she would be facing while she was in her isolated real life but as she went through the looking glass and got herself into the looking glass world her fascination with the characters in there started to take control of her mind. This shows that she usually used to be limited in her imagination when she was in the real world but as much exposure she got from her interactions with those characters which were not bided by the society's predetermined notions of women, she was able to think in wide horizon and gain confidence in herself but of course she was still bounded to follow some rules there as well but she did feel more like herself there especially 'mentally' in there as compared to the real world as there are people who are going to judge her more harshly, back at her 'home'.

**"relationship between something and nothing, fantasy and reality."** (2022 Shmoop University Inc) "I could tell

you my adventures—beginning from this morning,' said Alice a little timidly: 'but it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then.'" (*Alice's Adventure in the Wonderland*, chapter 6)

### 4.0 Conflicting mind

Alice is certainly is a kid but she has been through some things even as a kid because of being a girl, living during Victorian Era. So, she somehow because of that is good at adapting or changing herself according to the places or situations she is put into. As a girl, this really effects one's psychology because she cannot make up her mind with a concrete decision of 'who is she, really?' This leads to existential crisis as human being which is really disheartening to even the other people who would get to know about that person nowadays but during that time for a girl to feel like this was 'common.' 'What is her true personality?' 'What is she really like?' "She's also extremely concerned with figuring out who she is." (*LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC) These types of question comes to my mind when think of her but I think that sometimes when she is stuck in her life she might be asking herself these same kinds of questions to herself. Later when she being asked about herself it was such a reply that we probably could not expect a kid to say but her answer was put in such appropriate words that we could relate and form a sense of catharsis for her as human being, moreover a girl of that Era.

"Who are YOU?" said the Caterpillar. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I—I hardly know, sir, just at present— at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then." (*Alice's adventure in the Wonderland*, chapter 10) Because of this, her behaviour and actions also changes drastically. It is not entirely a bad thing to adapt or change yourself according to the situations instead it is quite a hard or difficult thing to do but due to this it is not right to forget yourself completely and make yourself into someone who you do not wish for. Alice is trying her best to overcome her problems in the imaginary world as well as in the real world but her not knowing who is real her or who exactly is she could be so tough on her.

Her mind is not aware of this about herself because she was never given that time to herself to think of such things. She is a kid so it is even more quite impossible her to think of such deep question but as a girl of Victorian Era, I think it could be possible for even a kid like herself to think about such questions because their life somehow revolves around them expected to be someone and taught to be someone even if they do not wish to be like that.

'Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise. Said the Duchess"(Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, [Chapter 9](#))

### 5.0 Escape from reality

Alice's mind is the key to escape from her reality. She is in her home, in her room at the beginning of the book and as she has no outer exposure or interaction with other people she is used to have imaginative conversation with her kittens. She craves for connection and interaction with others but as she is not able to do that in reality her mind's thought process provides her with an imaginative communication with her kittens. The psychology behind this is that she has such lack of interaction with other human beings other than people of her household that she makes up her own little interaction with her pets. This shows her hope and dream of being able to explore the outer world. She is in her house ever since her birth and now she craves for human interaction but as she could not her mind gives her power over her circumstances to hold a bond with other being, be it, even an animal. She is even content with that but in between these moments she does wonder of the other world behind the looking glass. She even wishes that she could see what is behind that looking glass but little did she know, she stumbles and enters into the mirror. "Carroll blurs the boundaries between being awake and being asleep so that it becomes difficult to tell where reality ends and dreaming begins"(2022 SparkNotes LLC) She gets into the looking glass world in her dreams but she is only half asleep. "Alice's experiences combine elements from the waking world and her dreams." (2022 SparkNotes LLC) It is also commonly seen that when the person is lacking the first hand experience of the reality then their imagination power is much stronger to compensate them for being devoid of such exposure. Alice has some kind of control over her imagination. "Imagination is the only weapon in the war against reality."(Alice-in-Wonderland.net)

### 6.0 Desires

Alice has many desires but she cannot always get what she wants, its something she sometimes realizes but she tries her best to achieve that. Her mentality tells her to give it all which means that she is not the type of a person to give up. No matter what circumstances she is put into her ability to adapt to them and making up the mind to set a goal for herself shows she wants to grow up to be someone reliable and ambitious. Although it is ambitious of her to desire for something as we look into her mindset it specifies some

details about her which could be that she has been moulded in a way that just basic thing like desiring something or wishing something like going outside the house is a big achievement or a dream for her to fulfil.

But if we observe her thinking in the looking glass world, it shows that she is becoming more bold in making choices for herself. She just does not want to remain a 'pawn' in the chess game but sets her goal for more. "Alice's goal as she travels through Looking-glass World is to transform from a pawn into a queen once she reaches the Eighth Square. This represents Alice's desire to grow up and become an adult." ("Through Looking-Glass Characters: Alice." LitCharts LLC)

But as she is a kid, she is clumsy too and she is a hard worker though it is quite hard for her to interpret what and how the things should be done even after telling the rules. This reminds us that she is still a kid but sometimes we forget that because our expectations for her are set quite high as she is a 'well trained' girl and her actions and behaviour becomes more and more mature as we continue to read about her journey in the looking glass world, in the novel. "When she tries to answer riddles, she often answers incorrectly or is teased, and if she starts an argument she inevitably loses." ("Through the Looking-Glass Characters: Alice." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC)

### 7.0 Unaccepting flaws

During the time of Victorian Era the girls were expected to be uptight and proper there was no way that they could be accepted for being just themselves and not conforming to the social decorum of the society. The rules or the 'right' path for the girls to follow were set out but as a human it is impossible not to make a mistake or mess up sometimes but for Alice mistakes were not to be taken lightly even though she was just a kid her conditioned mind of 'always being correct' was so strong that she was hard on herself. We could say that mentally she was cared to make a mistake because of other people's criticism. "Alice didn't like being criticised." (Through The Looking Glass, chapter 2)

"Her petals are done up close, almost like a dahlia,' the Tiger-lily interrupted: 'not tumbled about anyhow, like yours.'

'But that's not *your* fault,' the Rose added kindly: 'you're beginning to fade, you know -- and then one can't help one's petals getting a little untidy.

Alice didn't like this idea at all."

(Through The Looking Glass, chapter 2)

This whole passage describes her personality, she is not someone who likes to be with flaws. She wishes and likes to be 'perfect' maybe the reason for her to be thinking or acting this way is because of the teachings that she would have been taught ever since her initial childhood so there is a sort of complex of being 'perfect' in her mind which is not that wrong wanting to be great in every aspects but not able to accept your own flaws which are sometimes not even due to your own actions is not a healthy thought process for anyone, be it, a child.

She would do everything in her hands, for being able to be called 'perfect' or civil. So she even does things she does not really wish to do which is common for her to usually do.

"Have a biscuit?"

Alice thought it would not be civil to say "No," though it wasn't at all what she wanted. So she took it, and ate it as well as she could: and it was *very* dry: and she thought she had never been so nearly choked in all her life."

This incident from the book, *Through The Looking Glass*, is clearly showing her trait of being all about a typical decent, full of etiquette girl as per she is expected to be by the people of that Era. (*LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC)

### 8.0 Subconsciously real

Alice is thinking about her being in the looking glass world in her dreams. She is dreaming all this but even in her dreams she is thinking about the elements of reality of her life. Some characters she comes across represents, her reality in a way. The character like Tweedledum and Tweedledee because they "embody proper social behaviour and norms" (1999 - 2022 GradeSaver LLC) She is still subconsciously aware of her realities shows that how deeply her mind is effected by it. The mind of a person is generally effected since it has started to understand things around him so for her being so surrounded by those social norms has been deeply rooted in her mind so psychologically she cannot escape from it , yet , maybe if we could know more about her future as a grown up maybe there maybe chances for her to not overbear those belief if she wanted to leave them behind as she has a precocious personality and she could be able to do that if she want to and become more curious about things around her and herself and also become more fearless. The other character Humpty Dumpty, is not liked by Alice seems like the reason behind it is that he is someone who always interrupts her while she talks and corrects her vocabulary and language. So , that character somehow seems like a split image of Alice's day to day life of always taught to be proper and perfect in speaking

as it shows a girl's manners and it is just another way of getting their parents dreams come true to marry off to a rich , reputed man. This character and Alice's dislike towards that character signifies her tiredness with always being trained and not being laid even for just a moment. This could be so haunting for her that her mind is so wrapped up by the interference that she cannot be like a clumsy little girl and just feel free from every rules and expectations , and so that she can just feel like herself with no limitations, Limitations put on her dreams , wishes , desires is heart wrenching.

### 9.0 Heart's calling

Alice is a kid but she is still a girl, who wishes to have someone being nice to her and not just someone but someone of an opposite sex because we cannot overlook the fact that she has not much experience with human interaction and even a nice or kind one. So in her mind she could at least imagine that to happen which is what exactly happens when she encounters White Knight in the looking glass world, he protects her from Red Knight and also treats her with true chivalry and like a gentleman, which she has never been felt like before in her reality. "Instead of capturing her, he treats her as an equal and allows her to roam free...have a kind heart" (1999 - 2022 GradeSaver LLC) He maybe is an illusion which she made up for satisfying herself with some good memories with other person of an opposite sex or it can be that she just wants someone to treat as someone who has some fear and needs to be protected , when she does not want to pretend to be able to overcome anything and it can also mean that she wants someone to protect or save her from being restricted or captured by the pressure she has been under , pressure of following every rule, norms, customs, etc that is piled upon a girl ever since her birth. This character shows a lot of significance of Alice's true self and desire to just let go of everything for once and expect someone to save or protect her from her own life of suffering, restriction, anxiety of isolation, loneliness, fear of being criticised or judged , troubled mind , etc. Her heart is connected with her mind. She is a strong and motivated girl, even as a kid, but she also would want to unleash her other side of being delicate, wanting to be protected and being kind and treated as an equal to others especially a 'man'. The moment of being treated as an equal by the White Knight could be a very special moment for her because the Era she lived in, the women be it a child too were never treated as an equal to men or boys. So her being able to feel like that even as a dream could be very memorable for her, which she would never forget even as a grown up too. Only if dreams and that incident that she encountered and the

feelings she felt could be real then she would be, over the moon, for a long time. The feeling of being secured is very important for a person and she has never felt like that till then, and it is not certain that she would ever feel like that because during the Victorian Era, women were just treated as a commodity and they can be just married off by their family and that person can also just sent her back or 'throw' her away for a mistake or anything her fault might or might not be and the people then will look down upon that women who got treated this way, instead of standing up for her, for being treated in such a manner. So, her subconscious mind is aware of all her reality.

### CONCLUSION

In this paper, we talked a lot about Alice's thought process, her feelings which were conveyed through her actions or behavior which were lead by her mind, all the way. It was interesting to look into her character development and also her as not just a girl, but as a kid like any other irrespective of being boy or girl, which was quite not a 'common' thing to point out during Victorian Era. Her mind is filled with uniqueness, curiosity, determination, imaginative power enabling her to experience things in the looking glass world, which she could not do in the real world like interacting with others, exposure to outer world i.e. getting out of the house. Her mind helped her to make her feel like she has lived those moments in reality. Her mind is the core element of this book, 'Through The Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll' and of Alice's character. The matter of digging into her psychology could happen because of her mind's dynamic functioning. She is just a seven and a half year old, girl, but she is a person full of love, well mannered, curious about things but she is also highly influenced by power and authority existing around her in reality as well as in the looking glass world. The questions that were raised in this paper were about 'her true personality' 'what causes her actions or behaviors' 'what does she truly desire'

'Is she suffering a lot because of her isolation.' Her feelings of anxiety, loneliness that she felt, the fears she had, all these emotions were key factors to look into her psychology and the reasons behind her thoughts were probably her life's situations, her training to be a well brought up girl of Victorian Era, is what it seems. Her being a kid to be going through maturation or adulthood process or journey in the looking glass world also showed a lot about her mind, as it showed that how does she process things in her mind and put them into action.

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