Gender Essay, Research Paper

English 112 section 096

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An in Depth Analysis of Gender Relationships

Throughout history and in all cultures the roles of males and females vary. Relating to the piece of literature “Girl” written by Jamaica Kincaid for the time, when women’s roles were to work in the home. By examining gender roles, then one may better understand how women and men interact and how better to build relationships at home and in the world of business. At the time that this work was written, women mainly stayed at home and did housework while few of the very poorest households required the woman to work in an industrial job. Kincaid wrote of the specific roles and responsibilities that a mother would tell her daughter. By what she wrote, one can fully understand what was expected of a woman at that time and in that particular culture.

The object of examining gender roles is to answer the question why should women and men be equal and “Are there populations in which men and women are absolutely equal? Are there societies in which women dominate men?” (Gender 238) By understanding the culture in which this piece of literature is written, the gender roles and the rules of behavior for a woman, then the relationships between genders can be realized.

The general myth about women and their gender role in the American society is that the mother works in the home and supports her man in every way. For each relationship, the people in that relationship must decide the particular roles that they will play.

In the literary work “Girl”, Kincaid shows clearly that the woman’s role in this work was to serve the family and to work mainly in the house. The mother writing this story tells her daughter that “this is how you iron your father’s khaki shirt so that it doesn’t have a crease” (Kincaid 489). In this marriage, it is understood that the wife is to do the laundry for the husband. Today’s society does not always provide these clear roles since many women work a full time job and the house chores are a responsibility for both to handle. Though the woman is still mainly held responsible for the home. There should be a constant search for equality in gender roles. Kincaid explains how the man is working to bring home the money and the wife supports his work. By her ironing his khaki shirt, he is better prepared for work to support his family. Though men and women are supposedly equal, the roles they must play in a particular relationship may be unequal.

Even though this work does not show a conflict, the girl to whom the mother is speaking may have a conflict with her husband by the time she is married. This mother also may have an internal conflict that is not revealed in the work. Meaning that she may hold in problems that she has with the relationship because women were not supposed to reveal their feelings. Women are usually the ones who are more open in a relationship, but at this time in history women were to keep quiet in relationships (Gender 238).

The conflict that will be revealed in the future is the desire to have the status that is already gained by men. One can understand that men already have a status since the world of business is geared for typical male roles. That is apparent by how many of the mainstream blue-collar jobs and management positions are held by men. The girl to whom this mother is speaking must make sure that she seeks to make a name for herself and to help other women gain status. This is stated in “Humanity: Gender”:

If so, then modern feminists will need to work to alter this key factor, and in the long term our societies will develop greater equality between the sexes (Gender 238).

Since the purpose of examining gender roles is to create equality, then the conflict is that both sexes are trying to make their particular roles closer to equal than they were before.

In this piece of literature, the mother speaks directly to her daughter telling her what she is to do in order to become a lady. There are many allusions in the literary work citing how the daughter should act in society. Examples are “this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming;” and “this is how you sweep a yard” (Kincaid 489). Each culture has specific ways in which people of a specific gender should act. This culture teaches women to make themselves pure and to work diligently for the family. Particularly in the American society, women are taught to make themselves look feminine and to act in a way that keeps them from appearing as a whore or slut. If a father in this culture were to use the same format as this piece then he would write of how to mow the yard and how to take care of the family. This way of teaching children is very essential for a child to fully grow and become an as effective person as their parents or even better. After all, for a mother and father their most important value to teach their children is to become a better person. In becoming a better person, children should grow up to better understand the opposite sex and work to have better working relationships.

Culture reveals the aspects of gender roles and the reasons for why these roles are the way they are and how they are shaped to be this way. In this work, the mother speaking to her daughter relates how she is subordinate to her husband and how the daughter is expected to support her husband. Even though the woman does the housework, women and men together caused this cultural norm. In order for women to gain more independence, then women must take action. This action that will be taken will cause conflict in the future for this daughter. Men will not be able to accept those changes easily but must be taken for there to be equality or at least a better understanding among the sexes. Finally, gender roles are directly related to how a parent teaches his son or her daughter how to follow or change the gender roles.

“Humanity: Gender” Coursepack. Ed. Amy Gantt. Raleigh: NCSU, 1999.

Kincaid, Jamaica. “Girl”. Literature for Composition. 4th Ed. Sylvan Barnet, et al New York: Harper Collins, 1996