

Gender and sexulaity

People



Jackie Pappas Professor Winchock ENWR 106-AN March 5, 2013 Paper #2 - Middle Draft Gender & Sexuality Our everyday lives are greatly affected by ones gender and sexuality. They shape who we are and define our identities. Society expects a certain gender to behave in a specific way and if this does not happen, one is seen as shameful and wrong, leaving the individual to feel defeated and out of place. In society only a few decades ago, women were meant to be silent and restricted. Men were the superior ones who had a voice. They freely got to do whatever they pleased.

In Julia Alvarez' " Daughter of Invention and Judith Ortiz Cofer's poem " The Changeling," women were restricted of their true identities and their voices were silenced by the Ppallogocentric order. As a female in society, one was not permitted to speak freely of her opinions because of men. She must remain silent. It is evident that the narrator, often referred to as Cukita, in " Daughter of Invention" cannot speak what she wants. She reads poems from a book her father bought her written by Walt Whitman. She reads his free words; words he can openly speak. These are words of " a flesh and blood man" (Alvarez 14).

Because Walt Whitman was a man, he could speak and write what he so choose. However, when Cukita " plagiarizes" his words, because she was a woman, she was not " permitted" to read her work at the assembly for which she was writing. When she read her speech to her mother, her mother beamed with pride. It was quite the opposite when she read this speech to her father. He was shocked that his wife would let their daughter read the speech she wrote. " You will permit her to read that? " (Alvarez 15) Cukita's father said as if she needed permission to speak what she believes. As your

father, I forbid you to say that eh-speech! ” (Alvarez 15). Since he was a man, he had the final say in what his daughter said. He could say whatever he liked but his daughter, because she was a woman, could not. Women were expected to be silent and could only speak in the male voice. We see the silence of a girl in Cofer’s “ The Changeling. ” In this poem, the speaker recalls a memory of when she was a young girl. She dressed in her brother’s military clothes which “[molded her] into boy shape” (Cofer 725). Her father found it very amusing. He would listen with a smile” (Cofer 725). She loved dressing up as a boy and pleasing her father because it was the only time he noticed her. The speaker pretended to tell stories of her times in the war as a man and this was the time that her father would pay attention to her. The only time he would listen to her words was when she was speaking in his voice - in a man’s voice. All other times, her words were not important to her father; they did not matter to him because she was not his son, she was his daughter. Females were restricted in what they could say and do.

Women were not allowed to do as they pleased. They were limited not only in what they said but what they could do. In “ Daughter of Invention,” Cukita’s mother liked to work on her inventions. “ She always invented at night, after settling her house down” (Alvarez 10). The mother could only work on her projects after she had completed her obligations as a woman. It was a woman’s responsibility to take care of the house and keep her husband and family happy; putting her wants and wishes aside until these are taken care of first. Even her inventions were restricted.

She would not invent things that would help the world as a whole but come up with ideas that would only help with your everyday life, particularly for

the typical American woman. When discussing her inventions and why they did not help the greater good, “ she would have said that was for men to do” (Alvarez 10). This shows that she was not allowed to create what she really wanted to invent. American women were not the only women who were restricted. It was common for women to be restricted all over the world. The narrator, Cukita, talked about the fact that her mother did not want to return home. She did not want to go back to the old country where she was only a wife and a mother” (Alvarez 14). In the Dominican Republic under Trujillo’s rule, women were only expected to be two things: a wife and a mother. They were restricted to being anything but. They did not have permission to explore their interests such as inventing. Women were expected to take care of the house and the family and if they did anything else, saying they’d be in trouble is an understatement. Women were not allowed to be free to be who they are. Women were expected to only take care of the family and the house even if they wanted to do something else.

It is still joked about today all over the Internet that women belong in the kitchen. While it is meant as a harmless joke, it is a reality for others. For example, it was a reality for the speaker in “ The Changeling. ” While her father was very amused with his daughter dressing as a man, her mother was not. When it was time for the family to sit down for dinner, the mother “[forbad her] from sitting down with them as a man” (Cofer 725). The mother felt that when her daughter dressed in her brother’s clothes, it was distracting her from being a girl.

She is forced to go back into the closet to change back into her expected outfit. The speaker, who once saw a closet full of adventure, then saw the

same closet as a dark space (Cofer 725). When she emerged from the closet, back into reality, she walked back into “ the real world of her [mother’s] kitchen” (Cofer 725). For the speaker, a woman belonging in the kitchen was no laughing matter; it was her reality. She longed to be able to do the things a man did but she could not because she was a restricted woman. She wished to have the same power that a man did.

After explaining about how powerless a woman was, it is clear that men were the superior ones. In “ Daughter of Invention” after the father disapproved of his daughter’s speech, the mother and daughter felt the need to “ rebel” and “ join forces” (Alvarez 16) against the father. They knew that he was the man in charge. They could not simply tell him what he was doing was wrong and they certainly could not do it alone. It took two women to stand up to one man and they still lost, the father tearing his daughter’s speech to shreds, tearing her to shreds in turn. As the father, he had the final say on what happened.

After calling her father the hated nickname of their former dictator Trujillo, the narrator ran to her room. Her father “ ordered [her] on his authority as [her] father to open that door” (Alvarez 16). Because he was a man, he held the power in the house. He got free reign to tell his daughters and wife what to do and they must obey. In Dominican Republic, men were so superior that giving birth to a daughter was not as great as giving birth to a son. A mother was seen as a failure if she did not give birth to a son. When Cukita and her mother went into the father’s room, “ his face rightened as if at long last his wife had delivered a son” (Alvarez 15). Fathers were happier when their wives bore them a son. There were fathers who did not pay attention to their

children if they were not a boy. In "The Changeling," the speaker must "[vie] for [her] father's attention" (Cofer 725). Because she was not a man, the only way she could get her father to notice her was to dress, speak, and act like the son he always wanted her to be. After her mother made her change back into the girl she was supposed to be, she "return[ed] invisible" (Cofer 725).

Since she was no longer dressed as the superior man her father so wanted her to be, he did not pay any mind to her and she felt as if she was no one; as if she was invisible. It is because of her gender that she did not fit into society. Gender plays a major role in our everyday lives. Men and women were expected to act in a specific manner or otherwise they end up defeated. Women were meant to keep their thoughts and opinions silent. They were also not allowed to act as freely as they would like. Women were restricted in what they said and did.

Because women were so repressed, it was evident that men were the superior ones. In modern society, women have earned the right to be treated as equally and as fairly as men. However, there are still some areas in society where women are more oppressed than men are. Works Cited Alvarez, Julia. "Daughter of Invention." *Approaching Literature*. Eds. Peter Schakel and Jack Ridl. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012. 10-19. Cofer, Judith Ortiz. "The Changeling." *Approaching Literature*. Eds. Peter Schakel and Jack Ridl. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012. 725.