

Women and gender studies: the yellow wallpaper

[Sociology](#), [Gender Studies](#)



The stories of *The Yellow Wallpaper* written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf are important to view in their historical contexts. Both novels demonstrate that there are limits placed on women that prevent them from living complete lives. This demeans women and does not give them the same rights and privileges as men. *The Yellow Wallpaper* demonstrates the attitudes during the nineteenth century that concern female mental and psychological health.

Whereas *A Room of One's Own* explores whether women are capable of writing great literature and the obstacles that they are faced. Each story demonstrates a common idea that women are viewed as unequal to men and that they must work a lot harder to achieve the respect they wish to gain. Within each of these two novels the authors place the settings with great relevance to the stories' morals. Within *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator uses the wallpaper to symbolize an interpretation of something that affects her directly.

As the story goes on, the wallpaper gains more and more significance. In the beginning it seems unpleasant, as it is ripped and is an "unclean yellow" (pg. 2). The pattern of the wallpaper fascinates the narrator due to its formless pattern, which the narrator tries to figure out how it is organized. She does so for hours and hours until she sees a ghostly pattern which one can only see in certain light. Once this pattern comes into focus she sees a desperate woman who is looking for an escape from behind the main pattern, this resembles the bars of a cage.

The narrator sees many women behind these bars trying to escape. This wallpaper represents the structure of women's lives, their families and

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tradition. Gilman uses the wallpaper to show the domestic lives of many women who are trapped in their roles. Like wise to *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf describes throughout her narrative that every women needs a room of their own, something that women are able to enjoy without any question by men. This room provides a woman with time and space to write and do things they are passionate about.

During Woolf's time, women very rarely enjoyed these types of luxuries. Women's art was unable to be shown because women did not have a safe space to express themselves. She used the room as a symbol for much larger issues such as a women's privacy, independence and the inequalities between men and women. As Woolf says within the story, until these inequalities are gone, women will remain as second-class and all of their literary achievements will go unnoticed. There are many gender inequalities presented within society even today.

Within these two stories the inequalities between men and women are significant in the authors writing. Throughout *The Yellow Wallpaper* Gilman allows her readers to view the position of women within marriage and their economic dependence on men. when this story was officially published, people took it as a tale about women not a true reality of what women faced. With the domestic functions of a female and active work of males, women are remained as second-class citizens. This story reveals that gender division keeps women from achieving their full potential.

John's assumption that he is superior leads him in the misjudgement of his wife as he tries to " help" her. The narrator has no input into her own life and the only place she can control anything is within her mind. Inequality is also

found throughout *A Room of One's Own*, women are treated unequal within the narrators society as they have produced less literature than men. The narrator creates a woman named Judith Shakespeare, who is the twin sister of William Shakespeare. She does so to show how society discriminates against women.

Judith is seen to be equally as talented as her brother William but because of her gender she is not encouraged by their family and society. As Judith writes she is secretive and feels very ashamed for writing. Men have dominance over women as shown throughout both stories, when Judith asks her father to not be married; her father beats her until she eventually commits suicide. Due to women being treated so differently, Woolf shows that even though Judith is just as talented as William she will never be as successful because she is a woman.

The Yellow Wallpaper is a type of story where the narrator writes to herself. Her descent into madness is both seen subjectively and objectively as the narrator portrays. If Gilman had told her story in a traditional first-person narration the events that are from inside the narrator's head would not be able to be told and the reader would not know what she is thinking, and the women inside the wallpaper might seem to actually exist. If told in third-person narrative then the political symbolism would not be seen.

Gilman also uses a journal to give the story intimacy and allow the narrator to put down thoughts and feelings. Whereas in *A Room of One's Own*, the author gives the narrator a place where she can write what she thinks without any input or bother from society. A place for women to put down their thoughts and express themselves. *The Yellow Wallpaper* demonstrates

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the nineteenth century attitudes concerning female physical and mental health. The narrator is confined to a room where she was driven mad. With the use of symbolism, Gilman allows the reader to see how women were treated and how unequal society may be.

A Room of One's Own explores whether women were capable of writing great literature and demonstrated obstacles that a female writer is faced with. Woolf confronts many aspects of being female and the idea of madness. According to Woolf, a woman needs a room of her own in order to express herself through literature. Both novels demonstrate that there are limits placed on women that prevent them from living complete lives. This demeans women and does not give them the same rights and privileges as men.