

# Gender inequality in "to kill a mockingbird"

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



A world where women didn't receive equal pay for the same work, couldn't apply to the same colleges, or have equal job opportunities as a man, or even serve in the military (except in nursing positions) is an idea completely unthinkable to many citizens of the United States today. Although a society where these restrictions are customary is immoral and oppressive, before the 1930s, it was widely accepted. In the late 1920s and early 1930s many women began to make a strong effort to gain rights in The United States of America.

Because of the efforts of these women, during the 1930s women began to receive more rights. This trend continued as women's roles in society became greater and more important over time and up to this day. The women who stood up for their rights in the 1930s have significantly affected the rights and responsibilities that women have in modern times in the United States. The rights that women had in the 1930s are shown in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* by the prejudices and expectations of women in Maycomb, Alabama.

In the 1930s and early 1940s, women were mostly only housewives and mothers, but this changed as women began to demand more rights. Their role at home and in society was mainly to take care of their home and children and take direction from men, especially their husbands. If a woman did work, she was often a teacher, secretary, nurse or worked in domestic service. In and before the early 1930s women began to fight for their rights and other beliefs by forming committees and organizations.

In 1930 women in the Women's Committee of the Council for Interracial Cooperation took a strong stand against lynching and in 1931 the Women's

<https://assignbuster.com/gender-inequality-in-to-kill-a-mockingbird/>

International League for Peace and Freedom lead a caravan protest across the country to support the World Disarmament Conference. In 1935, Mary McLeod Bethune organized the National Council of Negro Women, a coalition of 14 groups of African-american women. As women showed the affect that they could have on America, they gained respect around the world.

In 1931 Jane Addams was the first women to ever receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Women also became more influential in politics; in 1933 the first female speaker in a state legislature was elected, and in 1936 women finally gained equal representation on the Platform Committee for the Democratic Party. In As World War Two started in 1939, many working American men went off to the war, leaving many jobs open for other workers. These jobs included working in clothing and other factories and driving buses or street cars.

Women filled these positions in the 1930s and 1940s, and began to establish themselves as beneficial members of the work-force. The women would work among men, for many long and hard hours, but still make only two dollars a day (less than the men in the same positions). Many married women were discouraged from working because people believed that a married mother's place was in her home with her children. Black women often could find work as domestic servants, clerks and textile workers. Women were expected to act, dress, and behave themselves in a certain way.

Women were expected to be polite, good hostesses, cooks, look nice and put together, and excellent, devoted mothers and wives. This idea of what women were supposed to be and how they needed to act to be accepted in society was challenged and changed during the 1930s and early 1940s until

<https://assignbuster.com/gender-inequality-in-to-kill-a-mockingbird/>

women were accepted as important parts of politics, the work-force, society and the United States of America. Maycomb County, Alabama also had many unfair expectations and restrictions when it came to women in Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Scout, Jem, and Aunt Alexandra come across gender expectations and stereotypes throughout this novel. Many times, Scout makes comments about what "being a lady" is, or how she was expected to act as a girl and young woman. She explains how she is expected to wear a dress, play with other girls, act polite and quiet around adults and stay out of fights and messy play. Scout is a Tom-boy and doesn't want to act like "a lady" because in her society women are expected to be quiet, un-opinionated, polite, and perfect quiet housewives and hostesses who can cook and clean well.

When she learns that one of Calpurnia's jobs is actually difficult, she says "by watching her I began to think there was some skill involved in being a girl" (116). Like Scout, many Americans in the 1930s (especially men) viewed women as unskilled and uneducated people whose sole purpose was to be a polite wife, mother, and home-maker. In Maycomb during the 1930s, like in the rest of America, women had many restrictions put upon them by male citizens. In the 1930s, in many states women couldn't work on juries because they were considered to be too innocent to be exposed to court cases. In *To Kill A Mockingbird* when Scout asks her father why women can't serve on juries, he says "I guess it's to protect our frail ladies from sordid cases like Tom's. Besides," Atticus grinned, "I doubt if we'd ever get a complete case tried - the ladies'd be interrupting to ask questions." The assumptions made

by characters in To Kill a Mockingbird were made all around America, that women were inferior to men, innocent, and of little value besides in the home.