

"gender macbeth's
statement is
highlighted as
something ironic

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“ Gender roles are a social construct. When we attempt to assign strengths and weaknesses to either gender, we literally cut our potential as the human race in half.” This quotation, spoken by an anonymous person, perfectly exemplifies the issues that are caused by gender stereotyping. In society, different gender roles and stereotypes may seem harmless, but they can easily become a boundary and burden on the decision-making process of both genders. Macbeth’s plot helps identify these ongoing issues. For instance, female characters in the play such as Lady Macbeth and the three witches mock the stereotypical female traits by acting oppositely. Furthermore, male characters such as Macbeth and Macduff also surprise readers by not following the traditional expectations of ‘ manhood.

‘ William Shakespeare’s tragic play, Macbeth, explores and challenges different stereotypes and gender expectations that are seen throughout society by making the characters act in contrast to their stereotypical gender; this suggests that gender roles are not ingrained, but are a choice. Macbeth questions how both genders should be represented within society, specifically women. In the Shakespearean era and even now, women are depicted as people who are kind, soft-hearted, and caring. Despite these stereotypes, William Shakespeare challenges gender expectations by making the women in the play appear more powerful than the men. Through the ECD of character, it is evident that the main female characters, like Lady Macbeth, do not act like their stereotypical gender. Women in the Shakespearean era are expected to act motherly and nurturing, but the character of Lady Macbeth acts contrastingly. In Act I, Scene vii of the play, Lady Macbeth strongly emphasises her points on how Macbeth is a coward

and weak-minded by implying that she would prefer to do something violent rather than go back on her word:" I have given suck, and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me. I would, while it was smiling in my face, Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums and dashed the brains out.

" ()Lady Macbeth's statement is highlighted as something ironic because women's prime role in the Shakespearean era and even the current era is to be a loving and kind-hearted mother. However, Lady Macbeth is shown to be quite vicious and cruel. Since there is a social norm regarding both genders and how each gender should act, Lady Macbeth and possibly other women are characterised as abnormal if they are assertive and display an aggressive attitude. When men state their opinions, they are considered to be influential and portray traits of a role model, but women who state their opinions are considered to be spiteful and overbearing. Women face this issue constantly when it comes to jobs and politics as they are judged through different criteria based upon stereotypes. Furthermore, through the development of plot and ECD of character, it is evident that the women in Shakespeare's time are expected to be more passive and submissive towards men. However, the women in Macbeth are depicted as more dominant than the men.

In Act III, Scene v, the witches discuss their plan for Macbeth's downfall:" He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear his hopes above wisdom, grace, and fear. And you all know, security is mortals' chiefest enemy." ()The witches are shown to be the active agents of the entire play, which is ironic since men have always been expected by society to take on the active role of

leadership. Women, in contrast, are expected to be more submissive and passive towards the men in their lives. But, the witches actively seek to make Macbeth overconfident and in this way, they gleefully plan for his destruction. Because of what the witches have demonstrated in the play regarding power, they signify that women do have the potential to be powerful people. The play suggests that the ideal of a passive and submissive woman is just a stereotype. However, this particular stereotype still plays a major role in current society.

There have been many doubts regarding the strength that females possess, and many women in society are disregarded from many job opportunities and leadership roles. Discriminatory practices hold back a lot of women from being the successful persons they desire to be. Through limitations on their education and income, women are prevented from demonstrating their true selves without criticism and repercussion, which eventually leads to a loss of power through lack of self-esteem and willpower. In *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare also decides to depict the roles of men differently as he makes them appear more feminine than the female characters in the play.

As seen through the aspects of character, it is evident that the main male characters in the play do not act like their stereotypical gender. Specifically, men at this time would have been expected to be brave, ruthless, and vicious, but characters like Macbeth act contrastingly. In Act I, Scene vii, Macbeth refuses to play the role of the ambitious warrior who will do anything to get what he wants: "We will proceed no further in this business.

He hath honored me of late, and I have bought Golden opinions from all sorts of people, Which would be worn now in their newest gloss, Not cast aside so soon."()Macbeth does not represent the stereotypical masculine ideal in society. He firmly decides not to play into the stereotype of being the ruthless and vicious male character he is expected to be. Instead, he puts his foot down and decides to be respectful towards Duncan. This is ironic, considering that women are expected to be the kind and passive ones within society. Men are expected to be tough, independent, and competitive.

According to the American Psychological Association, because of the challenges and judgement men face when dealing with masculinity, there has been many links to mental health issues such as substance abuse and depression (APA, 2016). Furthermore, based upon studies made by many psychologists, men and boys are afraid to share their true thoughts and problems with other people as they are expected by society " to put on a brave face" or to just simply keep every thought to themselves. Because of this, males live with stigma for the rest of their lives and different mental health problems eventually lead to their death (OneWorldEducation, 2012). Masculine expectations create a barrier which prevents men from expressing their true selves: they are made to feel vulnerable because of the fear they have of being seen as weak and delicate. It is also evident throughout Macbeth that other male characters, such as Macduff, do not act like their stereotypical gender. Apart from being ambitious, men during Shakespeare's time were also expected to show no emotion and to be hard-hearted. However, Macduff willingly shows emotion. In Act IV, Scene iii,

Macduff is distraught at the news of his family's death and reacts very emotionally:" Merciful heaven! What, man! Ne'er pull your hat upon your brows.

Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speakWhispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break."()Macduff firmly proclaims that men should not hide their grief. He also urges them to express their emotions and does so himself.

This is ironic because men were expected to remain in control of their emotions, despite what they have experienced. Macduff refuses to obey what is expected of him as a man. Society has a major issue with men crying as that is portrayed to be weak and unmanly. Because of this particular idea, a lot of men face a problem as they are identified as not a man or less of a man if too much emotion is displayed. Women, in contrast, face no issue if they show any sort of emotion, besides wrath.

As showing emotion has become taboo for men, the biggest problem they can face is criticism from society. As seen through different social trends and studies made by doctors, men critically think about how they should portray themselves to other people. They fear that if they show a more sentimental side of themselves to society, their masculine traits will be overridden (Huffington Post, 2014). However, by not showing the emotional side of their personality, everything starts becoming more difficult on men as they surpass the age of twenty-one.

Mental health issues start to form, social roles and expectations start becoming more of an issue and it becomes difficult for men to show their grief to others considering that they have been forced to hide their emotions for a long period of time. Since society expects men to be absolutely brave and not show any grief, a lot of males face an issue regarding their true identity and health because of the fear of being criticized by others. In conclusion, Shakespeare was able to show that gender roles are choices that people make and not something that has been permanently established in someone's life. By making the female and male characters in the play act oppositely to their stereotypical gender, William Shakespeare was able to emphasize on the point that there is nothing wrong with a person taking on the expected roles of the other gender.

He highlighted the female characters as more masculine by making Lady Macbeth appear like a cruel person and also by allowing the three witches to take on the active role of leadership. Furthermore, the male characters are highlighted as more feminine by making Macbeth seem like a coward and also by making Macduff express his emotions. Women that show an aggressive attitude and women that want to take on an active leadership role are highlighted as overbearing and spiteful. Many females eventually miss out on a lot of chances to be the successful person they desire because they are held back by society's discriminatory practices. Likewise, men who show emotion and men that don't live up to their expectations are highlighted as a coward and weak-minded. A lot of men eventually come to a point in their life in which they have to deal with mental health issues

because of the stigma that has been stuck with them for the majority of their life, all happening because of the fear of not being called a ' man'.

The simple saying of " put on a brave face" or " keep it to yourself" has lead many men down a pathway they did not ask to be in; death. As gender expectations are evident throughout society, a lot of men and women continuously struggle with expressing themselves and miss out on many opportunities to make a drastic change in their life because they are not identified as the ideal person they are expected to be.