

Womens role in 1939 research paper

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



In 1939, the film "Gone with the Wind" was released and became one of the top-grossing films of all times. The producers did not only try their best to satisfy the white Southerners and the Black slaves, but challenged the public point of view on gender roles, which were relatively unchanged since the Civil War. This duality of intentions made the film both interesting and controversial in its nature. The rhetorical question in the article by Naomi Wolf "A generation on, do women feel free?" is of particular for this paper (Wolf 487). This question might be a mystery for some women, since there are women who think they have achieved their freedom. In "Gone with the wind" the main character Scarlett considers herself being free because she reacts and behaves differently than any woman of the society contemporary to her. Scarlett's freedom is the main point of the film. She represented a different point of view on gender roles in the society that gave women no freedom. In the times of the Civil War and 1939, when the film was released, society expected women to talk, dress, think, feel, and act in a socially-accepted, common manner. Scarlett was an example of a different type of woman, who dressed, talked, and behaved in a way women were not allowed to. This character was as an example of the future woman, the emancipated and self-reliant woman of today. In the modern world, society looks at gender roles described in the movie very differently than when it was released. Nowadays, people give Scarlett credit for being independent and strong woman under all circumstances. Gender role was twisted in the film, showing the inconsistency of individual struggle for self-estimation and public desire of unification.

First of all, Scarlett's features of character, behavior and main traits should

be compared to the gender roles imposed by the society contemporary to her. In this context, the presence of masculine traits in her character is of specific interest for this paper. Secondly, the differences between Scarlett's personal feelings to her husband and a traditional socially accepted mode of spouses' behavior should be outlined. Finally, the inconsistency between Scarlett emotions toward her child and traditional female gender roles in society should be mentioned. In this context, the research is devoted to the exploration of the interpersonal relationship, while specific attention is paid to the essence of gender roles and Scarlett's rebel against society as means of survival and self-preservation.

The main characteristic feature of Scarlett is her attitude to marriage and subsequent relationship with her husband and children was far from traditional female attitude. In 1939 women were supposed to be emotional lover to their spouses, meaning they were supposed to fulfill any sexual desire of their spouses and be of full psychological comfort for them. In the film the character of Melanie represented the traditional female role. She was a loving and comforting partner to her husband, loving mother to her child, and supporting and companionate person to other people as well. On the other hand, Scarlett was shown as a cold-hearted woman who showed no feelings or love to her husband, child, or to any other people. The article by Solomon Jack shows how society thinks of women: "Hence, it is popularly believed that the social position of females is biologically mandated to be intertwined with the care of children and a "natural" dependency on men for the maintenance of mother-child units" (Solomon 568-69). In public perception women should be exactly as the character of Melanie. She is a

great example of how a woman should act in the times when movie was released. This emphasis makes the character of Scarlett vaguer for the audience's appreciation. Melanie always depends on Ashley and she's always showed love to her boy. On the other hand, Scarlett was a disgraceful character to every woman of 1939. Society viewed Scarlett from negative perspective because of her masculine characteristic of being cold-hearted or rather in control of her feelings.

On the other hand, Scarlett wasn't only less emotional but she was independent like any man of her era. In the movie, it was shown that Scarlett counted only on herself to survive at war, since she had no support from family, no money from any male protector or even food from good people. She had to dependent on herself in order become rich by all possible means. Although in the end of the movie, Scarlett lost both her child and husband Rhett Butler, she returned to Tara with self reliance and desire to gain more strength and fight for her happiness ones again. On the website The Movie Critique Scarlett situation was characterized as follows, " The story follows the independent Scarlett on her quest through life, dealing in her own unique way with the troubles life throws at her" (Carissima). This is a proof of Scarlett self-reliance irrespective of the circumstances. She always manages to find her unique way of problem resolution. Scarlett is an example of a stubborn woman that never gives up on herself. Therefore, her independence gives her personality the power to be fearless in front of existential problems. Scarlett's independence represents a masculine trait which was condemned by the society contemporary to her.

Furthermore, Scarlett's self-reliance made her a brave and responsible person. In the film, Scarlet is brave and strong, she waits behind with Melanie until she gives birth to her baby while everyone else was leaving the city. Scarlett was not scared to attack Northern soldiers when no man was there to save them. Also, Scarlett took the responsibility of the family house after her mother's death and her father's sickness. She is brave enough to go to Rhett Butler in prison to ask him for money. All of these things are masculine traits that make today society give Scarlett credit for her bravery, strength, and female power. Jack Solomon explains how society in the film era looks at women of Scarlett personality. He argued that men were more valued for these traits, " Men are measured by their intellects, personal wealth, power; women are valued for their bodies, which are even on display to the gaze of the male eye" (Solomon, 562). We can see that men are measured in society by their power and personal wealth. Women are valued by their good looks and body complexion. In the film, Scarlett was criticized and even condemned by her own gender just because she had these masculine traits of being brave, strong, and intelligent. Even though Scarlett was a beautiful woman, society only looked on her personality through the masculine traits she was not supposed to possess. Scarlett lost respect of her gender and society, but she was brave and strong enough not to care.

Last but not the least, Scarlett is careless for important things like people's emotions, her behavior in front of men, and her action toward the society. Scarlett did not care how her sister felt when she married her sister's fiancé. This type of carelessness is usually a masculine trait, women usually do not feel careless about a man they marry, especially if this man belongs to

another woman and that woman is one's own sister. Moreover, Scarlett didn't feel bad for her first spouse's death, but she felt bad for being widow in such an early age. Society considered women who felt careless about their spouse's death as being of low quality women. Also Scarlett was careless in her actions and words in front of men. She set with men talking about war and laughed about regular jokes. All of these actions were disapproved from the female gender and from society as a whole at the film era, but Scarlett did not care for public approval. According to John Wiley, Scarlett's carelessness is the main reason for the conflict between her and cultural era of 1939: "As the political climate in Atlanta worsens, Scarlett's careless behavior turns the people even more solidly against her" (Wiley). He argued that Scarlett's carelessness caused the hate and discourtesy from her society. This proves that being careless is not just a masculine trait but a cultural disgrace to any woman that shares this trait. Scarlett was very careless about people's feelings and she did things without considering implications of her actions on other people no matter whether they were family members or strangers.

Although from all mentioned above, it can be concluded that Scarlett was condemned by the society contemporary to her and by the public opinion of the time the movie was released, her character can be also appreciated as the model of the modern emancipated woman. In this context, some of her masculine traits should be analyzed from a wider perspective of personal self-estimation, individualism and one's responsibility for the destiny of the whole family. In this context, her way of goals achievement was of particular importance. Many women of her time were also placing targets and achieved

them through female means, both approved by society and not. Women “ managed to manipulate men in order to achieve desired goals, but had to give up their freedom and actual self-expression and evaluation of their intelligence” (Fox-Genovese 406). Scarlett was an intelligent woman who knew which role to play and when. She was a proper daughter for her mother and an elder son for her father. In the context of goal achievement, she was entirely pragmatic as any men of her or contemporary society – she was using both male and female means in her goals achievement. If in order to survive, she had to dig the ground, she did. If she had to shot the man in order to safe herself and Melanie, she did that. If she had to look wealthy and desired in order to seduce Rhett, she looked as if she had not suffered starvation or hard work (Prakoso and Riyandari 150). In this context, irrespective of all her strength, Scarlett followed the pattern of “ beauty myth”. She acted as one of the women who “ must to embody it [beauty] and men must want to possess women who embody it” (Wolf 488). She would not feel embarrassed in front of any men nor woman, but she would keep her stubbornness and higher self-esteem in front of the fallen women selling themselves. She had her own ways in goal achievement and her own moral code, just as any full-blooded warrior or man of honor did. On the other hand, women of her society were obliged to follow socially-imposed norms of behavior and even goals they could have achieved were imposed by society. Scarlett was an outsider of that society. Like modern women, she was approaching her individual goals in her own way.

In this context, she was quite fast to realize that the most universal means of goals achievement and power gaining was money. In this regard, unlike the

ideal woman of her time, who was supposed to be self-sacrificing and self-measuring, Scarlett was quite pragmatic and selfish in sense of money gaining and spending (Fox-Genovese 401). It does not mean that she was gaining and spending money only on herself, but that she was not altruistic about throwing money on charity and common benefits of society. Usually “women of huge wealth were expected to donate substantial sums of money in order to prove their status and confirm public femininity” (Prakoso and Riyandari 151). Scarlett, on the other hand, like many men had experienced the true meaning of money value – she knew the value of the bread for the starving family; therefore, she would have not given money to someone else. She would keep it for herself and her relatives but not give a penny to a stranger. From a certain point, it can be argued that she was acting entirely feminine and followed her gender role when she was spending money on expensive garments (Fox-Genovese 404). On the other hand, women were expected to be more modest and spend only the amount they were given by their husbands and think about household and children first and only after about their own garments. In fact, it was men’s and unmarried girls’ privilege to dress according to the last fashion. On the other hand, married women were expected to be more modest, but that was not enough for Scarlett, just as it is not enough for any woman of contemporary world.

As many women of today Scarlett was a survivor and not a victim as most of the traditional women were taught to be by their society and families. In this context, she was not keeping her feelings to herself, showing no mercy to both genders, rebelling against social norms and gender roles just because she wanted to do so or decided that it would be another trend in the fashion.

She was herself, independent, willful and strong person because of her nature of a fighter (Fox-Genovese 406). In this regard, she could not pretend to be a weak and stupid creature and accept the role of the doll shown to the friends in the living room. Scarlett could not submit her will to any man mainly because none of them were worth of it and could not see what was inside of her. In this context, men were reluctant to accept that an individual of another gender was capable of the same things as them or even more. “Scarlett behaved as the eldest son of an honorable family” in the society contemporary to her and 1939 (Prakoso and Riyandari 153). First of all, she felt not only responsibility for her family and its survival, which was shown in her marriages and business activity; she felt responsible for her land and family estate - Tara. The connection between family blood and land ownership is traditional burden and duty of the eldest son in the family. In this context, Scarlett, as the eldest child, felt that responsibility and took the burden eagerly, not thinking about anything else. She married her sister's beloved one not simply because of the money, but power and control she needed to return prosperity for her family and keep her family alive and enduring (Fox-Genovese 401).

However, it can be argued that Scarlett could have achieved the same target in a more feminine way. She could have stayed just a married woman taking care of her children and husband; thus, her family would have endured to the next generations (Fox-Genovese 409). Although theoretically, this might be a sound suggestion, in the reality of the Civil War, without having a universal or, as it was viewed by the society of 1939 time, male survival instinct, she would have not survived those times, nor would have her sister

and her children, just as Melanie and Ashley. The essence of her will to survive and live was in the phrase when she promised to herself and her land that she would never starve again no matter what would take (Fox-Genovese 406). These were the words of the fighter, who moved forward no matter what the obstacles could be. Viewing her behavior from the survival goal achievement, all of her “ publicly-despised and criticized actions” would have been accepted by society if they were conducted by a male individual (Prakoso and Riyandari 149). It would have not surprised anyone if a man was marrying someone in order to increase his profits or gain a favorable estate or land ownership from the union. It would have not been strange for a man to gain additional profits from the acquaintances among both legal and illegal members of the society. It definitely would not be wrong for a man to be a shark in the business and destroy opponents in order to succeed (Burnham 893).

In this regard, Scarlett was not eliminating her opponents like Melanie, for instance. This is conditioned by another aspect of her personality - responsibility for other women, children and even men, which brings another masculine trait to her character. The ordinary women of times contemporary to 1939 were likely to protect children as their maternal duty and support husbands in case of need. They were also expected to be protected by men or to be victimized in case men were not around, since they were considered to be weaker than men (Prakoso and Riyandari 151). Scarlett rejected this perception by her feeling of responsibility for others. It does not mean that she was unselfish, humanistic and all-loving creature like nuns or women of her time. Being a fighter and survivor in a masculine meaning of the words,

she felt responsibility for the weaker people around her. No matter how ruthless and immoral her actions might have been considered at her times, she would not be blamed for them if she was a man. Because then she would be considered a protector of the weak and old members of society. In fact, she stayed with Melanie when she was giving birth to her child; she killed the man who tried to rape another woman. She was using money as means of family business revival and her fathers' recovery. Even more important was that she was doing it subconsciously; she denied her noble and honorable nature even to herself (Fox-Genovese 396). She preferred to view herself as rebel rather than a hero of her era and family.

Scarlett rebelled against her own nature, meaning her gender. In the last two millennia, the most common women perception of female gender was misfortune of birth and complexity of life burden - "maternity and lifelong imprisonment in man-ruled society" (Burnham 889). In this regard, wise women knew that their daughters were either doomed to lack knowledge or would have to suppress themselves in order not to show their intelligence to men. In this regard, Scarlett has no respect for her gender, because all what she saw was just weakness and denial of the true potential of female gender - ability to accomplish more than men could have ever thought about - both to give life and to protect it (Fox-Genovese 397). On the other hand, unlike wise women of today, Scarlett was shown to judge her gender strictly in terms of male perception. Giving birth was of no joy for her and she considered it being a weakness of her gender and even a burden (Fox-Genovese 409). She could not realize that the female strength was in the ability to give life, develop it and protect when the case required it. This

perception of the female gender can be viewed as part of her masculine survival instinct and also reluctance to accept the fact that she was capable of other feelings except of her affection to Ashley, whom she believed to adore. Again this was another attempt to discourage the audience from her character.

However, Scarlett also behaved in her love relationship as a man - denying the existence of the true feeling by substituting it with an ideal of something non-existent and unreachable. In this regard, she was strengthening her self-esteem and the role of the fighter and protector through her idealistic belief that she was in love with a man weaker than her - Ashley (Prakoso and Riyandari 152). In this case, she was acting like a man falling for the weaker woman in order to submit to his will. It does not mean that she wanted to submit him, but intuitively she was viewing him as a proper party because of all his mildness opposed to her strength to push forward (Burnham 892). From the elemental point of view, it can be argued that Ashley was water, while Scarlett was fire. Unlike women of her society, Scarlett was not accepting even the common female path of love realization. She did not accept her feelings immediately, nor developed them for the right man. She did not let herself feel the true love and passion for Rhett, because that would have simply given her out and made her entirely feminine. In this context, the quest for Ashley's love was depriving her of her complete femininity and opportunity to be complete with Rhett (Burnham 893). In this context, she entirely follows the male pattern of denying the very existence of feelings and an opportunity for a man to fall in love and be happy in marriage with his wife. Vicki Eaklor argued that " while Scarlett is a

masculine woman, he [Ashley] is a feminine man" (Eaklor 352). In the end, Scarlett changes her perception of the reality and regains the fullness of her femininity expressed in love for Rhett. In this context, Anne Jones wrote that "there is another side to Scarlett, the "feminine" side that does not simply endure but enjoys dependence, the sense that an outer force provides stability" (Jones, 109). Unlike many men and women of her time, she realized that her strength was in the complexity of female and male features of her character and that both could be gain or loss for her. In this context, she proved the wholeness of human nature and complexity of female individuality of today.

Overall, it can be concluded that Scarlett is an example of the future women that shares a masculine traits. Gender role was twisted in the film. Scarlett was shown a cold-hearted, independent, brave, and careless. All of these traits are masculine, but in the contemporary world, most of women share those traits until certain extent. On the other hand, under the conditions of the Civil War, her masculine traits proved to be essential for the survival of her family and herself. No matter how critical and ruthless, her character was shown in the movie, her features of survivability, ability to achieve goals irrespective of the circumstances, materialistic and selfish attitude to the reality contributed to the endurance of her personality and her relatives. Unlike traditional gender role of women like Melanie, Scarlett is fated to live, while others are doomed to die, because the reality is not as comforting as it used to be. In her article, Ann Jones explains "caught in America's powerful masculine/feminine gender myth, she also exposes its fallacies by violating it

throughout" (Jones 112). Scarlett violated all gender roles of her era, which made her an example of the future woman.

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