

Gender identity of a woman in the yellow wallpaper, the story of an hour, hills l...

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Women and Gender Identity

Throughout human history, women have been depicted as the weaker gender, evidence being in the literary communication left by those who gave themselves the opportunity to record such depictions. Since women are the weaker ones, then by definition (there being only two genders), men have been put in a position of control and power. This position of power is one that has often been abused and more than often been left unchecked. Because of these facts women have been bound and confined by men although not always necessarily physically. The stories "The Story of An Hour", "The Yellow Wallpaper", "A Sorrowful Woman", and "Hills Like White Elephants" are ones with examples of how women have been confined, they share similarities and provide variety with their differences.

In "The Story of An Hour", Mrs. Mallard is the main character and she has let her husband confine her subconsciously to a boring life, and has blamed her confinement on her illness and tiredness. When she is brought the news that her husband has died she consciously secludes herself in her room, alone, avoiding everyone because of her weakness. Mrs. Mallard's true situation is obvious when, after her brief grieving period she has an epiphany, she's free. "She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will- as powerless as her two white slender hand would have been. When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: 'free, free, free!'", Mrs. Mallard has been ruled by a

man for so long that not having freedom of choice and personal authority are second nature for her. This woman is overwhelmed by freedom so much in fact that she considers freedom as being free from the traditional freedom. however overwhelmed she may have been when she finally comes to terms with her new freedom, she does so by imagining how much of a good time her future may be entitled to without her husband, just a small rebellion all set in her mind. Too bad the man did not die and when she sees him she's surprised to death, maybe she felt guilty for having been optimistic of his absence, dying bound to him.

Opposite from in "The Story of An Hour" in "A Sorrowful Woman" the protagonist has the mind to admit to feeling confined and bound to a monotonous life and takes drastic measures to change this. Initially and throughout the story she ends up secluding herself from her family in order to rediscover herself and experience a type of freedom. It seems ironic that she would do this because she is essentially prescribing herself imprisonment which is the literal opposite of freedom. However this woman is going against the norm and expressing her self authority with her actions. Her main conflict is that she is not content with her life and when she changes it she shows to feel guilt when she tries to make up her absence to her family by cooking a feast, her family consists of a boy and a man. Her husband perhaps did not intentionally bind her to the housewife life but under the circumstances that is what happened. The husband actually is in a way a tool that can be antagonizing the woman because he is so comprehensive and nice, unknowing of course, of the damage he may or

may not be causing his wife. Unfortunately all of his efforts proved useless for the wife's benefit, since even after it seemed she had found the freedom she so dearly searched for, she was still subconsciously feeling inferior towards her man and could not deny her built in need to be submissive to him. The woman then all of a sudden is dead at the end of the story like in "The Story of An Hour" bound to a man and on top of that a guilty conscious that a modern woman would frown upon.

Postpartum depression is something today society accepts as a real thing and even though not everyone can relate to the experience, usually people are not apathetic towards a woman passing through that experience. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" the protagonist has a different feeling towards being locked up than that of the woman in "A Sorrowful Woman", to her being locked up is hell, but it must be noted that the reason for this is that being closed up was not her decision but her husband's. Her conflict is that no one especially the most important person that should understand what she is going through, there are no true sympathizers. Her husband is a doctor and his character pretty much defies the purpose of one because he is not listening to his patient. Since this man in charge of his woman's life happens to be a doctor he is a clear illustration of power in the hands of men, he believes he is superior to his wife so never even second guesses his decisions on how to treat her, and ultimately just treats her as a spoiled child that is being a pain and is probably going crazy. Meanwhile she really is losing her precious mind, however when this happens it is like she has suddenly been cured in a way because at least she is no longer bored and is

entertained with something, in this case the pattern on her wallpaper which leads her to describe her time in this way: " Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be." When she said this she had totally lost it. The woman in this work never feels guilty for her behavior even when she is caught by her husband and he faints. She is actually freed from being bound despite the fact that she is physically not, she never lets her husband have her mind and by losing her " sanity" she has actually freed herself from his imprisonment, her mind is all she has left healthy or not he cannot get into it, he can no longer do her any harm.

No boys like taking the responsibilities of getting it in, and as " Hills Like White Elephants" suggests, this fact has always or for at least a very long time been true. Jig the girl that may be pregnant is at a train station with the American boyfriend who is exerting control over her through his persuasion for her to have an abortion when he says things like, " It's really an awfully simple operation Jig", and " That's the only thing that bothers us. It's the only thing that's made us unhappy". So here we have an unsympathetic controlling male who most likely does not have too much experience with the ladies, not taking responsibility for his failing relationship, and on top of this he's cornering his girlfriend into an abortion. The " man" tells the girl that she does not have to have an abortion but he keeps making it sound good every time she leans towards a decision to go against it, Dr. Phil would tell this boy to shut up and let the lady speak his sentences are jumping her brain and thats when this happens: " I'll scream", the girl said. Fortunately this woman is trying to take control and realizes that if she is not alone with

her thoughts she will break, she is unlike the woman in “ The Yellow Wallpaper” because she does not let what she does not like creep up to her and then just accept it, no she’s being a big girl and sticking up for what she does want, even if maybe she doesn’t know.

Women are forever trying to free themselves from being pushed to the side as mens’ inferior. Since all women are different they all have different ways of coming about their freedom. These four stories have done a literal job of describing very possible scenarios for this common quest of freedom.