

# Analysis of the gender roles in the poem barbie doll and the short story girl

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



## **Societal Woes**

Since the beginning of humankind, women had a universal reputation of being the inferior gender because of the difference in physical abilities and appearances. This resulted in many forms of mental, physical and emotional abuse from people ranging from religious figures to commoners who condemned this mentality. Since culture, society and religion mostly centered around a world in which a man thrived, and a woman was merely an accessory in this story, the development of crude, horrendous and self-destructive mechanisms is and was inevitable. *Barbie Doll* by Marge Piercy and *Girl* by Jamaica Kincaid criticises the narcissistic and self-centred culture by highlighting a plethora of issues including; preconceived gender roles, misogynistic limitations and a society in which the value of appearance is ostracized.

Beginning from Adam and Eve, scholars and commoners alike, all agreed upon a universal thought that women were brought to earth to be a man's helper, or to live under the shadow of man. To support this agenda, which clearly undermines women, biblical scholars translated the Hebrew word "ezer kenegdo," to helpmate or little women (Coats, 2011). In the short story, *Girl*, these gender roles are highlighted and defined through a series of quotes said to a woman; presumably, these are words every woman can identify with, since they were almost defined since the beginning of time. "This is how you iron your father's khaki pants so it doesn't have a crease... this is how you grow okra... this is how you sweep a whole house." Ironically,

she was teaching the girl; how to clean for a man, how to cook food to feed a family, and how to clean the home.

The preconceived gender role, that she is conveying, is that women are to be in the home and must know all these things, as a woman should. This also subliminally tells the reader that the man is everything else; capable of independence, work outside the home and is to be catered to in such a way, that he feels all pleasure. Gender roles were so important, that it was oftentimes, seen in the form of propaganda, like a poster in the 1950's which read " keep her where she belongs." The author highlights these issues, which is extremely important, as we try to unravel those roles in today's society, but she does not offer a way to act against them. This offers more importance, as it shows the struggle to speak up against those unintelligible remarks and conveys the receivers inability to change the circumstances.

Misogyny and gender roles often times go hand in hand. In order to possess misogynistic values, one must wholeheartedly believe that women were made inferior and their purpose is to cater to men. "... on Sundays, try to walk like a lady and not the slut you are so bent on becoming... this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down so to prevent yourself from the slut I know you are so bent on becoming." To suggest that a woman's walk, or a mere tear on a skirt can convey that a woman is a slut or whore is the most limiting thought one could possibly inhibit. It continues to suggest that women are not anything more than their bodies. The thought that they have nothing more to offer dehumanizes someone, and allows for hypersexualization and rape culture. Women are many things, but because

of the limitations put on them by society, does not allow for a sufficient environment for one to fully prosper. It also acts as a predisposition to mental disorders such as anorexia/bulimia and exhibit a self-loathing, that can continue onto a personality disorder.

In the poem, Barbie Doll by Piercy, a healthy child who grows into an intelligent prosperous lady who has many attributes to offer was minimized to her insecurities. Although she possessed all the ability to become a successful individual, the only factor that stood out was her physical appearance, specifically her “ fat nose and thick legs.” The poem expressed the immoral importance placed on appearance, which seems to overtake every other counterpart, including personality, developed skills and even good health. The author then goes on to explain, how these insecurities, which also took life externally, contributed to her decision to undergo cosmetically enhancing surgery. In the end, in her casket, only her appearance was recognized and all other successes were ignored. This is extremely powerful and contributes to the misogynistic limitations. This is a real life issue; no matter the status of a woman regarding intelligence and ability to succeed in life, in the end, what matters is only her appearance. Women’s rights and advocates strive to change these minimizing societal stigmas; this particular subject is even the part of the argument basis, that women are more than just their physicalities.

Literature is used in all parts of the world and to use a specific piece of writing, like Girl or Barbie Doll to lionize the societal stigmas and narcissistic values to convey a message of importance, makes all the difference in the

world. To be able to read the piece and comprehend it in a way, that the obvious gender roles and misogyny is an ongoing problem within our culture, and even the world, perhaps, allows for further enlightenment and a possible beginning of change; firstly starting with the unraveling of physical satisfaction and the gender standards put forth by society.

### **Works Cited:**

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2. Saatchi, Charles. " 1950s And 60s Posters Show the Sexist and Racist Campaigns Once Seen as Acceptable." Daily Mail Online, Associated Newspapers, 14 Nov. 2015, [www. dailymail. co. uk/news/article-3318841/Shocking-posters-1950s-60s-sexist-racist-campaigns-seen-acceptable. html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3318841/Shocking-posters-1950s-60s-sexist-racist-campaigns-seen-acceptable.html)