

Paper 4 uses at least two quotations from a secondary source found in the literat...



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PAGE Mother and Daughter Relationships: self identity Paper

4 Outline Thesis ment: Although this story has to do with motherhood and mother and daughter relationships, it focuses more on the struggle and necessity for determining one’s own self, in terms of identity and freedom of choice.

I. Mother and daughter striving to find their ‘ self’

A. The mother’s journey

B. The daughter’s journey

II. Story told from mother’s viewpoint (narrator)

A. Past narrative with present interruptions

B. Constraints/responsibilities of motherhood

III Hardships of raising a child single handed in depression

A. Lack of adequate child care

B. Own failures

IV Emily’s lack of confidence

A. Appearance

V Emily’s development

A. Negatives

B. Positives

VI Finding self and making choices

A. Emily

B. Mother

Mother and daughter relationships: self identity

In any family, a child needs to develop independence and self, and in most families the parent or parents already possess such traits. In “ I Stand Here

Ironing,” written by Tillie Olsen, we find a daughter wanting to lose her
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anonymity and gain importance, and a mother who is also trying to find herself. Although the story has to do with motherhood, and mother and daughter relationships, it focuses more on the struggle and necessity for determining one's own self, in terms of identity and freedom of choice. Olsen's characters, mother and daughter, depict two people desperately striving to find their 'self', independent of each other, and within the realms of a society that continually places expectations on its people, especially women. The narrator embarks on a valuation of her role as a mother, which includes " her own responsibility, her own failure, and finally her need to reaffirm her own autonomy as a separate human being who cannot be defined solely through her parental role." (Frye p. 130) Emily, the daughter grows from a small sickly, innocuous child and teenager, lacking in self confidence, to a nineteen year old who realizes her 'self' through comedy and is finally happy in her ability to make her own choices.

The entire story is seen from the narrator's - the mother's perspective, wherein she provides a sequential accounting of her past; this past life description is often interrupted by reference to present needs, " Ronnie is calling. He is wet and I change him," (611) which helps to illustrate the never ending work and her responsibilities involved in being a mother and the lack of time for her to even gather her thoughts for a moment, "...and there will be an interruption and I will have to gather it all together again." (608)

The narrator provides an insight into the hardships of motherhood and her plight in having to raise her daughter on her own during the depression, " I was nineteen. It was pre-relief, pre-WPA world of the depression," (609) and the inadequacies of child care, " when she [her daughter] was eight months old I had to leave her ... with the woman downstairs," (609) and " the only <https://assignbuster.com/paper-4-uses-at-least-two-quotations-from-a-secondary-source-found-in-the-literature-resource-center-database/>

way" she " could hold a job" (609) was by placing her daughter in an inadequate nursery, but " it was the only place there was." (609) Thus she repeatedly makes reference to society and its inability to provide for her and yet in some way control and set boundaries on choice but at the same time she is recognizing her own failures, she " knew that the teacher was evil because all these years it had curdled into my memory." (609) Later, in reference to leaving her daughter again, " when we left her alone at nights, telling ourselves she was old enough," (609) we feel her sense of failure as a mother.

Emily's lack of ' self' is illustrated by her continual need for self assurance in terms of appearance. She would make her mother " tell her over and over how beautiful she had been" (608) as a baby; " she fretted about her appearance," (610) and she " tormented herself" for not " looking like the others." (611)

Emily " was not glib or quick," (611) and she was " an overconscientious ' slow learner'" (612) but she had " a rare gift for comedy on the stage." (609) When she won " first prize" (612) in a " school amateur show," (612) " suddenly she was Somebody." (612) Like the societal or cultural constraints placed on her mother however, Emily too had limited freedom of choice. Although she had now found herself to some extent, she was still " as imprisoned in her difference as she had been in anonymity," (612) she still had limited choice, as evidenced in her inability to leave the stage, " they clapped and clapped and wouldn't let me go." (612)

Happy with her new found ' self,' Emily tells her mother not to wake her the next morning even though she had school exams, stating that " in a couple of years when we'll all be atom-dead they won't matter." (612) At this point, <https://assignbuster.com/paper-4-uses-at-least-two-quotations-from-a-secondary-source-found-in-the-literature-resource-center-database/>

Emily “ is asserting her own right to choice as she lightly claims her wish to sleep late in the morning.” (Frye, p. 132)

Finding one’s identity is thus pivotal in this story but although Emily was able find some sort of happiness with her talents and ability to make choices, there is no evidence that her mother was successful in determining an identity other than ‘ mother.’

Works cited

Frye, Joanne S. “ I Stand Here Ironing”: Motherhood as Experience and Metaphor” *The Critical Response to Tillie Olsen*. Kay Nelson and Nancy Huse, Editors. Greenwood Press: Westport, CT. 1994. 128-133.

Olsen, Tillie. “ I Stand Here Ironing” *Heat and Other Stories*. New York: Dutton, 1991. 608-613.