

# Self-realisation through gender biases essay example

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



There were various biases in the history of human civilisation. People were judged and differentiated on the basis of their skin colour, sex, face features, height, cultural differences, even age and accent. Although the contemporary civilisation is based on the principles of democracy and the supremacy of human rights, various biases still exist. On the other hand, unlike before, they are not based only on human differences but also on perception of these differences in diverse cultures. In this regard, the actual differences become biased by a particular historical context. In other words, issues like race tolerance and gender equality can have different attitudes and different oppression in each culture. In this regard, the novel "Yo!" by Julia Alvarez shows the cultural differences in gender roles bias in the old Dominican Republic and the United States. The aim of this essay is to compare and contrast the gender roles in these two cultures and how they were reflected in the case of the main heroine Yo, who was born in the Dominican Republic and lived in USA.

First of all, it should be outlined that two societies are characterised by different value system. The Dominican Republic is historically based on the dominance of family as a building block of any social interactions, and knowing one's role in the family was a step towards understanding one's role in the society (Martinez 186). In this regard, the fact that Yolanda was disobedient from her very childhood and lived in her own imaginary world made her different from the people surrounding her in her family and community. She was deviating from the norm of prescribed female behaviour already then. The normal model of female behaviour would have been not even in obedience but rather in understanding of the prevalence of

family's interests over personal desires or dreams (Sirias 54). In this regard, common family interests were meant to go first, and one's self-expression and uniqueness second if not to be forgotten at all.

This was particularly the case for the girl, who was meant to be protected and looked after by the senior male members of the family. This was particularly vivid on the example of Yolanda's boyfriend visiting her parents, who attempted to get into her room each night, but was walked outside the premises each time with another uncle or cousin (Suarez 135). In this regard, the division of gender roles in the Dominican family/community is quite clear. Men are to be the guardians of the most vulnerable ones in the family - women. In exchange for this protection and support, women are meant to be obedient and follow prescribed norms. In other words, like in traditional agricultural societies, men were hunters and guardians while women were the keepers of the family peace and order (Martinez 187). In this regard, each generation was meant to learn how to accommodate to the prescribed gender roles and general traditions of behaviour.

The prevalence of quite dogmatic gender roles in the Dominican Republic was due to the constant insecurity and instability in the society torn by revolutions and civil wars. Under such conditions, large families were the only means of survival. They functioned like small communities with their own interests. For such communities to survive, they required string control within which could provide unity against the unstable external environment (Sirias 69). In this regard, showing the inside problems of the family and challenging the existing gender roles was considered to be not only an insult but a betrayal of the traditional life style and family. In this context, Yolanda

has deviated from the norm even further and has caused pain to her family once again (Suarez 131).

Looking on the gender roles in the American society, it should be outlined that the initial premises of social structure and subsequent basis for gender roles were different. In this regard, instead of dominance of common interests over personal, the American society was built on the ideal of one's personal dream and subsequent dominance of individualism over a common approach (Schultermandi 5). Therefore, the role of family in general American society, although important, was not vital. This gave an opportunity for the gradual development of female emancipation and feminism (Suarez 121). On the other hand, it does not mean that gender equality was reached and that women could be allowed to approach all of their dreams. In this regard, the novel shows that although women can practically achieve more, they have to make a choice between career path and happiness in personal life, mainly because men are often afraid of strong and intelligent women (Martinez 187). In this regard, Yolanda is described as having various love affairs, being open to new experiences, but she did not manage to find the man who could correspond to her personality. In terms of the American gender stereotypes as a woman who has chosen career path, she should not be family oriented. Therefore, she should be easy-going and actually more interested in short-termed relationship (Schultermandi 8). In this regard, certain equality of genders in the described American society was actually in the reluctance to take any responsibilities in terms of family and personal life. In this regard, American men were no longer guardians of their female partners, yet they did not become their equals (Martinez 185).

In this regard, they were turning into dominant owners in the capitalist society rather than loving husbands and fathers taking care of their families. In this regard, the described American stereotype of the ideal family and subsequent gender roles were even less democratic and equal than the Dominican equivalent. Yolanda's mother summarises the differences between two societies in the following way:

**" Back on the Island we lived like a clan, not what is called here a nuclear family,**

which already the name should be a hint that you're asking for trouble  
cooping up

related tempers in the small explosive chambers of each other's attention.

The girls

used to run with their gang of cousins, supervised - if you can call it that - by  
a whole

bunch of aunts and nanny-maids who had wiped our bottoms when were  
babies and

now were wiping the drool of the old people who had hired them a half a  
century ago.

**There was never any reason to clash with anyone" (Alvarez 64).**

Taking this perspective into account, it can be argued that, due to the different perspectives of individual or common interests, the main difference in terms of gender roles between Dominican and American societies was in the degree and ways of male dominance in female life. In this regard, men

were more protective about women in Dominican culture, while the American males were more possessive in their family relationship, which were cases of Yolanda's marriages. Each of her ex-husbands wanted to dominate a certain part of her personality, which she was reluctant to give up.

On the other hand, unlike Dominican, American society created a new gender stereotype of working career woman, who put her professional achievements over family and personal happiness (Martinez 187). In this regard, female achievements were encouraged by some individuals in that society. For instance, Yolanda was encouraged by her tutor to approach her career path and achieve her dream of becoming a writer (Schultermandi 13). From one perspective, it can be argued that the whole action of support was a move towards gender equality and inter-human understanding. On the other hand, it can be also argued that, in the society, where a young woman did not belong to any traditional stereotypes, the new model of a career woman was the most achievable (Suarez 123). It can be also argued that the reason why Yolanda followed the advice was that tutor's support corresponded to the guardian role of her father and other male relatives (Sirias 26). Therefore, she followed it instinctively as she was taught by previous generations. Although such suggestions would be a speculation on psychoanalysis of her actions, they are not the topic of this essay.

Overall, the whole complexity of cultural specifics of gender roles in two described societies is that a young woman was actually left in-between two. In this regard, an individual trying to overcome the existing gender stereotypes of one society actually faces their new interpretations in the new

society of living. In the case of Yolanda, she wanted to find her own path in life. In order to achieve that, she had to fight gender stereotypes of both cultures and express herself and her experiences in her own way (Suarez 134). It can be argued that in order to gain her unique identity, Yolanda had to build her own model of behaviour and life path. In this regard, she could not be an ordinary Dominican girl following her family's orders because she was creative and had more rebellious spirit than any other child in her family (Schultermandi 12). So, she needed more freedom for self-realisation, which American society could provide. On the other hand, irrespective of her rebellious nature, she still cherished the values of her ancestors, meaning the importance of family and marriage in woman's life. The problem was that she could not find the man from American society who would understand and embrace her unique way based on her cultural traditions (Sirias 52). Yolanda understands this inconsistency when she interacts with her partners and the way she falls in love. Thus, Yolanda is in-between two societies and has to build her own success and happiness within both of them.

This conflict of gender stereotypes and search of one's unique identity was perfectly summarised by the inability of Yolanda's cousin Lucinda to understand her: " Looking at her late 30s, knocking around the world without a husband, house, or children, I think you are the haunted one who ended up living your life mostly on paper" (Alvarez 97). Through this statement, the author has summarised the gap between two cultures and the self-identification of the main heroine of the novel. Yolanda has chosen her own path outside the complexity of gendered roles imposed by two cultures she had to interact with. By doing so, she made a step closer to her own

happiness and dismantling of gender roles in both cultures. Through her self-identification, she was building new genderless roles for the new generations.

## **Works Cited**

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