

Feminism, civil rights,
sexual freedom in
"where are you going,
where have you be...



The short story *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been* by Joyce Carol Oates highlights the female stereotypes of the era through the protagonist Connie. The story is set in the 1960s, which was a time of great change in America. Topics like feminism, civil rights, sexual freedom, etc.

were only just starting to gain momentum in what was still a deeply conservative society. Connie was a naive teenager trying to navigate her way to adulthood in a time when women were expected to behave in a certain way. She began to rebel in her own way, essentially living a double life. Everything about her had two sides to it, one for home and one for anywhere that was not home. (Oates, 1966).

Connie lacks any type of male guidance in her life. Her father was away at work most of the time, and when he came home he wanted supper and he read the newspaper and he went to bed. He didn't bother talking to them much. (Oates, 1966.) Connie wants her father's love and attention, and because of the patriarchal society in which she was raised, craved that male attention and dominance. She looked for male attention and affirmation wherever she could get it. Who they were didn't matter to her. But all the boys fell back and dissolved into a single face that was not even a face, but an idea, a feeling . (Oates, 1966)

In an attempt to gain some sort of independence, Connie begins leading a double life. When she was home she was an innocent 15 year old, when she went out with her friends it was a different story. She wore a pull-over jersey blouse that looked one way at home and another way when she was away from home (Oates, 1966). Connie's attempts to act like a mature woman in

order to attract male attention outside the home are a direct result of the lack of attention shown to her by her own father.

Lack of attention from fathers is a main theme of the story, not only from Connie's father, but from the other fathers who drive them to and from the mall. They all fail to provide any type of interest or involvement in their daughters lives (Oates, 1966). This causes these young girls to then seek attention from other male figures, making it easy for them to fall prey to a predator like Arnold Friend. On the surface he has all of the qualities that Connie is attracted to in a young male the clothes, the hair, the car, the music. Arnold is described as familiar and similarly dressed like all the rest of them (Oates, 1966). Arnold's bad intentions are not immediately evident to Connie, who was never taught about such things by her parents.

As the conversation with Arnold progresses, Connie begins to see things a little clearer, and realizes there is something off about him. When it finally becomes clear that Arnold is much older than he lets on, she understands that the situation is much more dangerous than she thought. It is then that Arnold begins his psychological attack on Connie.

He begins by telling her things about her family he shouldn't know, like where they are, and what they are eating. He calls himself her lover' and begins describing his sexual intentions towards her, throwing her into a panic. He threatens to hurt her family if she doesn't come with him. Arnold's friend Ellie even offers to cut the phone line. She attempts to phone the police, but has a panic attack. Arnold continues to threaten her family until he convinces her to come outside to him. Thinking she has no choice but to

obey, Connie disassociates herself from her body and mind as she walks toward the end of everything she has ever known. (Oates, 1966)

American society has long placed men above women, giving men the ultimate authority. Connie, like most teenage girls, is taught from the beginning the importance of obedience to patriarchy. With a detached father, and lack of any other father type figures, Connie finds herself forced into giving herself over to a rapist and possible killer all because of her struggle to gain attention from an older male figure. As Arnold Friend asks Connie, what else is there for a girl like you but to be sweet and pretty and give in? (Oates, 1966)