

Dysfunctional relationships between sonny's blues and shiloh

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Jeremy Raymond Professor Gazzara ENG 102-109 April 6th, 2013 It Takes Two To Tango What makes a relationship dysfunctional? Is it the changes one sees in another whether they be physical, emotional, or financial? Is it a change in their own personality that is now changing their views on their family member or significant other? Tina B. Tessina defines a dysfunctional relationship as this:

Dysfunctional Relationships are relationships that do not perform their appropriate function; that is, they do not emotionally support the participants, foster communication among them, appropriately challenge them, or prepare or fortify them for life in the larger world. (Tessina 1) In "Sonny's Blues" and "Shiloh", we see two different types of dysfunctional relationships. In "Shiloh" we see a marriage relationship between Norma Jean and Leroy Moffit. In "Sonny's Blues", we see a brotherhood relationship between Sonny and his brother.

These relationships are considered dysfunctional based on the actions and lack of actions based on those involved. In Mason's "Shiloh", the relationship between Leroy and Norma Jean was off to a good start. They have been married sixteen years and had a kid named Randy. Randy passed away from sudden infant death syndrome at a very young age. We can infer through the text that both Norma Jean and Leroy were left traumatized by this. The death of a child can leave a person traumatized and shook-up for the rest of their lives. The couple's relationship takes a turn south due to numerous reasons.

One reason being Norma Jeans newfound lifestyle. Ever since Leroy suffered his accident, She has morphed into the manly figure of the household. She's starting to lift weights to strengthen herself up. Leroy is now observing changes in Norma Jean he has never seen before. In addition to lifting weights at home, she is now attending a body building class which puzzles Leroy. Through Leroy's eyes, she is already a changed woman. Besides for Norma Jeans' newfound physical changes in herself, she is also attending night classes.

Norma Jean is also developing sleep patterns that concern not only Leroy but also Mabel, her mother. Mabel in a conversation with Leroy states " She used to go to bed with the chickens. Now you say she's up all hours. " (73). The quote shows how both Leroy, her husband who's loved her for the past sixteen years and Mabel, her own mother are worried and confused by her new patterns in life. In addition to changes in Norma Jean, Leroy has undergone changes as well. Since he had his accident, he is unable to drive tractor trailers across the country anymore.

He is now cooped up inside of the house because of his injury. He has developed a hobby for building crafts and has turned that into a plan with blueprints to build a full scale log cabin. The thought of the cabin disgusts Norma Jean, where in a conversation between Leroy, Norma Jean, and Mabel, Leroy states, " I'm aiming to build us a log house" (70). Norma Jean quickly responds to Leroy with " Like heck you are" (70). She clearly shows her disapproval with his plan. We as readers can interpret that Leroy is a man stuck in the past and Norma Jean has evolved into a new woman.

We see an attempt at resolving the dysfunctional couples relationship when they take a trip to Shiloh. Leroy is trying to hold onto the love of his life while Norma Jean is trying to free herself and move on to bigger and better things in life. She has changed her life, physically and mentally and Leroy has done nothing with his life which is why she is leaving him. The attempt at reconciliation fails terribly and Norma Jean and Leroy split paths and go on with their separate lives. In "Sonny's Blues" we see another dysfunctional relationship, this time between brothers. The narrator of the story, is the brother of Sonny.

A schoolteacher in Harlem, he has grown up around men and women who have suffered from alcoholism, drug addictions and many more problems. Similar to Leroy from "Shiloh", he is a family man also reeling from the loss of their youngest child, Grace. The death of their child spurred the brother into writing to his troubled brother Sonny. Sonny was the younger brother of the two who has been through many difficult life lessons throughout his short life so far. Sonny has suffered from a heroin addiction which landed him in a local jail which further weakened the bond between the two brothers.

Sonny's brother has lived in Harlem and has seen heroin addicts and victims of alcoholism and has showed no remorse for them. We see Sonny's brother's intolerance for the men around Harlem who suffer from an addiction when he is talking to an old friend of Sonny's after he leaves the school one day. "Look. Don't tell me your sad story, if it was up to me, I'd give you one." (294). This shows how Sonny's brother is indifferent regarding people who have suffered from an addiction. While Sonny was in jail, the relationship

continued to dwindle. After Sonny's release from prison, their relationship began to heal.

In addition to his drug addiction, Sonny's inability to decide on a career in life irritates his brother. Sonny's aspirations spread as far as India, a military job stationed throughout the world, and/or landing a job as a musician in his hometown of Harlem. This inconsistency of Sonny enrages his older brother, who has made a promise with their mother to look after him and make sure he grows up to be a proper man. In contrast to the relationship between Norma Jean and Leroy, Sonny and his brother's relationship is able to rebuild after a time of hardship between the two.

Sonny is able to recover fully from his heroin addiction and begin to get his life back on track. In addition to cutting his heroin addiction, he makes a life decision regarding his future and chooses to become a musician in Harlem. The theme of dysfunctional relationships is present in both stories with very different endings. In "Shiloh", we see a relationship between two married people end abruptly. Leroy, the man stuck in the past and holding on to what he knows and Norma Jean, the woman who has changed everything about herself.

Opposites do not attract and the marriage ceased to continue after their visit to the Shiloh battlefield. In "Sonny's Blues", the brotherhood relationship between Sonny and his brother is able to recover and progress due to the changes Sonny has made with himself. Works Cited Tessina, Tina. "What Is A Dysfunctional Relationship?" "What Is A Dysfunctional Relationship?" N. p. , n. d. Web. 09 Apr. 2013 Mason, Bobbie Ann. Shiloh. N. p. : Flamingo, 1988.

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