

Compare and contrast the roles of gender in the yellow wallpaper essay



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The gender roles in *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *The Bluest Eye* both have an expected norms which are to be followed, albeit ones that are dependent upon the time and social placement of those involved, they also portray a deviation from these norms. In *The Yellow Wallpaper* it is shown that there are norms and values which must be kept to for a woman to be accepted in society. To gain this social acceptance they need to be compliant to their husband's biddings and be meek and untoward in the public eye.

The repetitive use of the expression " Personally, I" by Jane is a direct contrast to the female stereotype; it expresses a confidence in her own opinions and intelligence when she must rely upon her husbands. It portrays Jane's resentment of the fact that her opinion is of no or little importance in true society.

Although Jane feels hard done by she still holds to the social view that she must conform to her husbands will and wholly disregard her own views, no matter how much she wishes to be forthright the doubt is there, " But what is one to do? Jane's inability to conform to the normal ways of behave for someone of her gender and social standing result in her having to be involuntary, for it is the will of her husband, rest cure where she is allowed to do nothing, which leads to a socially unsolicited outcome. "" I've got out at last," said I " in spite of you and Jane. "" Here it advocates that Jane has formed a separate individuality that has been inhibited, by social stereotypes, from coming to light but is now given the chance to be free.

This freedom is also presented with the use of imagery of animalistic characteristics, " I kept on creeping just the same", where Jane has become

imprisoned. Jane is trying to conform to society's ideals and values but wants to be freer. In comparison to this the women in *The Bluest Eye* strive momentarily to imitate the accepted social status, to deem that they are as worthy as any man and more importantly as any white person. The young girl Percola holds in reverence the portrayal of the perfect female and will do anything that allows her to feel more able to obtain that perfection and be accepted in society as an equal.

We knew she was fond of the Shirley Temple cup and took every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley's face. " Percola is constantly trying to become ' perfect' and reaching a celestial place of social standing no matter the cost even though it isn't possible for someone of her race and current status to achieve such a thing. It is due to this that she starts to lose her grip on reality but unlike Jane who wants to break away from the norms, all she wants is to submit.

Percola also creates a separate identity, one that she interacts with, which gives her the acceptance she has always yearned for. "" You are my best friend. Why didn't I know you before? " " You didn't need me before"" There are not only the norms and values for women to be accepted in to society, but they are also put upon the men. In *The Yellow Wallpaper* John conforms to the male role of being the provider, spending all day at work, in a reflection of ideal masculinity. John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious. "

Being a man of practicality as society decrees is acceptable he is also a practical physician believing that Jane is suffering from no more than a "

slight hysterical tendency” and for this he prescribed her the rest cure, confining her to the nursery and preventing her from exercising her mind in way that could be deemed creative, whilst also treating her in the same manner as he would a juvenile by.

He continually refers to her as his “ little girl” and “ blessed little goose” and refuses to listen to Jane when she attempts to discuss her unhappiness with the current situation, denying her any acceptance as an equal, as is demanded by society, and instead merely carries her off to bed for more rest. Although John is fixed in his social position of authority as a husband and doctor he has the inability to adapt on a personal level with the conflict that Jane is experiencing, he still clearly loves and cares for his wife and is doing what he has been taught is best for her. Yet it is this very reason that is pushing Jane over the edge.

In *The Bluest Eye* there is also a socially accepted role for men as being a provider, yet not the sole one, and going off to work. However Cholly the father of Percola doesn't live up to these social expectations and instead is seen as a social outcast and a man of a degrading nature, no longer able to provide for his family. “ but that old Dog Breedlove had burned up his house, gone upside his wife's head, and everybody, as a result, was outdoors”. This inability to live up the social ideals stems from his previous experiences of suffering, from having been abandoned in a junk heap as a baby and humiliation suffered at the hands of white men.

He is a man easily capable of violence but he is also vulnerable as described when he soils himself after meeting his father. He falls apart when this

freedom becomes a complete lack of interest in life, and he reaches for his daughter to remind himself that he is alive. It is this need for some form of comfort that Cholly can't seem to get from a socially accepted way that helps push Percola to the brink. In both pieces of writing the female and male gender stereotypes are portrayed in different ways, however both revolve around social acceptance and the contest to live up to.