

Double standards
and stereotyping in
the wife of bath by
geoffrey chaucer



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Geoffrey Chaucer's story *The Wife of Bath* gives a detailed insight into how the society perceived women in the 14th century. This is a period when the society viewed women's role as mainly reproduction. In the entire story, Chaucer discusses about life of women in the 14th century and some of the challenges they faced that nobody cared about.

Defying the societal norm, Chaucer narrates how Alison married five husbands and was even willing to marry more. She goes ahead to defend this biblically, using King Solomon as an example. In his entire story, written in the first person narrative, Chaucer elucidates about the marital affair of Alison and deceitful nature of women to point out how they are experiencing double standards and stereotypes respectively.

Contents

To begin, Chaucer opens his essay by an insight into the issue of double standards. In the first few sentences of his prologue, she gives a preliminary insight into what his entire story is all about. She supports the facts that people are at liberty to marry as many times as they can, as long as they are feel and are able to do so.

Despite the common perception in the society that only men can marry more than once while women doing so are viewed as being unfaithful and adulterous, Chaucer details how Alison is at liberty to marry as many men as possible and that anybody with a contrary opinion should keep it for himself or herself. She supports her argument biblically, arguing that the Bible is not specific on the number of husbands women are supposed to have. She alludes to King Solomon who married hundreds of wives including

<https://assignbuster.com/double-standards-and-stereotyping-in-the-wife-of-bath-by-geoffrey-chaucer/>

concubines so as to be satisfied, (Chaucer 260). Within this illustration, Alison believes she should not only be in position to marry many husbands but also be satisfied physically by each of them.

By referring to King Solomon's many wives in the bible in order to explain about her marital life, Chaucer seems to be standing out against public opinion that only men can marry any time they feel like as well as have as many wives as possible. This is a common double standard in the society because many people, including some married women, tend to mildly disapprove widow's quick decision to remarry as well as women's decision to marry more than one husband. This perception is still common in many countries today. In countries like Pakistan, while divorcees are free to marry again after three months, women's waiting period is four months. Men are viewed as a strong and capable of overcoming emotions of losing a wife easily and moving into another married, (Monger 21). Actually, many believe that unlike women, remarrying for men is the best way to help them overcome the emotions quickly.

Another issue that Chaucer elucidates in his essay *The Wife of Bath* is stereotypes. The first example of stereotypes that she discusses about is the essentially deceitful nature of all women. There are diverse examples of this nature of women in her. First is when she boasts that she is able to deceive her husband most of the time without him noticing. She argues that although some men can lie, none can do so so boldly as a woman can (Chaucer 228).

Besides supporting Alison's stereotypes, it also shows how women in the 14th century were dishonest and unfaithful especially in their families.

Another illustration of how women are deceitful in nature is evident when <https://assignbuster.com/double-standards-and-stereotyping-in-the-wife-of-bath-by-geoffrey-chaucer/>

she narrates what one of her husband's believes of her. Her husband believes that; . wives will hid our vices until we are safely married, and then we will show them (Chaucer 282-283).

The belief of Alison's husband is a perfect illustration of how most men perceive women. Many believe that women will lie and hide even some of the grievous mistakes they committed in order to land in a super marriage. Ironically, Chaucer supports women's deceitful nature, arguing that it is God who gives women this ability. She argues that God has given women by nature deceit, weeping, and spinning, as long as they live (Chaucer 401). She adds that it is this deceitful nature that enabled her to win her fifth husband. She lied to him that she had dreamt of a good marriage between them and they were enjoying a lot of money and wealth. She further says it is her mother who taught her all the tricks of luring a man into marriage as well as overcoming other life challenges; my mother taught me that trick I was just following my mother's lore, (Chaucer 576-584). This is a clear illustration of how women want to ensure their daughters, the future generations, continue with this deceitful act.

Through various illustrations presented by Alison in the book, especially by learning about deceit from her mother, Chaucer argues that men viewed women as deceitful being who lied purposely for their gain. According to Chaucer, most men believe that this stereotype is common to all women including their young daughters whom they have influenced. In this century too, this deceitful nature of women is a common stereotype in the society.

Some family wrangles are caused by men realizing that their wives lied about some key issues few years behind, (Brems & Alexandra 21). He adds <https://assignbuster.com/double-standards-and-stereotyping-in-the-wife-of-bath-by-geoffrey-chaucer/>

that this has continued to be a major problem because women pass it to their daughters while they are still very young.

To sum up, Chaucer's elucidation of Alison's marital life and women's deceitful nature are examples of issues women face in regards to double standards and their common stereotypes respectively. Chaucer begins the story by detailing about double standards. Alison's act of marrying five wives is a common double standard in the society because many people, including some married women, tend to mildly disapprove widow's quick decision to remarry as well as women's decision to marry many wives. Also, women's deceitful nature in this tale is a stereotype that is still common even in this 21st century. Although today many people would view Alison as a disgrace and defiant, I believe she is right. Her intent is to have a good destiny.