
Effect Or Cause?

It's hard to know whether or not Curley's wife is the victim or the cause for how she's treated. On the one hand, she is discriminated against by the men on the farm. On the other hand, what she's doing is unfair to the men and could cost them their jobs. The combination of typical stereotypes, commonplace patriarchy, and the context of the dust bowl make this question a difficult one. In John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Curley's wife is unfairly discriminated against and stereotyped by the men, but is also at fault for the choices that she makes. In the 1920's, sexism, patriarchy, and negative stereotypes of women are extremely common throughout society.

Although in this time women were starting to get new rights, like the right to vote, there wasn't that big of a change. For example, one stereotype that is seen throughout history is that men are stronger than women. This means that men are seen as more physically able and entitled to do "manly labor". This leads to the complimentary thought that women can't do things, and therefore shouldn't be in such an environment. Meaning that they're better off staying at home, probably cooking or cleaning. In Steinbeck's book, when Curley's wife walks around trying to find Curley and in doing so would talk to the men, Carlson gets annoyed and says to Curley, "Why'n't you tell her to stay the hell home where she belongs?" (62). This quote shows that A) Carlson doesn't think she belongs in this kind of environment and B) that she, like any other woman, belongs in a home. This is regardless of the wife's actions, Curley would have probably said that even if she was just standing there.

There's nothing she could do to make him think any other way. Another stereotype that is represented in *Of Mice and Men* is that women are more soft and sensitive, get more easily offended than men, or get defensive. This leads the men to think women are emotionally weak. When Curley's wife comes in "looking" for Lennie, she questions Carlson about how he got his hand injured. She starts going on a rant about how she never gets to do anything. At one point she says, "—Sat'iday night. Ever'body out doin' som'pin'. Ever'body! An' what am I doin'? Standin' here talkin' to a bunch of bindle stiffs—a nigger an' a dum-dum and a lousy ol' sheep—an' likin' it because they ain't nobody else. " (78). Her needing to put down other people and give them insulting names, makes her a bully, who in reality is emotionally weak. It's as if she's overcompensating her own weakness by giving insults to others. Although Curley's wife is portrayed through multiple stereotypes, she is also the cause for a lot of worry at the Ranch which causes the men to lash out on her. The Dust Bowl was a difficult time for America. Dangerous winds and dust swept from Texas to Nebraska.

Due to these winds, the crop life quickly died leaving lots of Americans hungry and poor. Not to mention that this was also smack in the middle of the Great Depression. America was in deep financial struggle and many people were getting poorer by the day. People were incredibly lucky if they had a job, and were able to keep that job. In this book, Curley's wife could've had all these men fired in an instant due to her actions. Whenever Curley's wife would start to "play" with the other men on the ranch, they would always try to avoid her because they just had to keep their job. There was no other choice. Once again, in another one of Curley's wife's "search for Curley" she tries to engage in conversation with the men.

After she tries Crooks says “Maybe you better go along to your own house now. We don’t want no trouble.” (77). Clearly, Crooks and the other men recognize that whenever they talk to Curley’s Wife, they realize that actions she chooses, can easily cost them their jobs and in some cases their lives. An example of how that would be so is when Crooks tries to stand up against Curley’s wife. She shoots right back at him and says “. . . I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain’t even funny.” What Curley’s wife is saying is that if she were to say anything whether it be true or not, she could have Crooks fired and maybe even lynched. There’s a reason that this book portrays Curley’s wife as the victim of these Stereotypes and also makes her responsible for her own actions is because one feeds into the other. The fact that she walks around looking for someone to talk to and trying to get the other boys to talk to her, makes the boys think that she’s nothing but trouble. Because of that, the book portrays Curley’s wife through stereotypes to make it seem as though her actions are the reason for the other men stereotyping her. Throughout the book, Curley’s wife is portrayed like the villain and the victim multiple times.

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