
Gender Roles In Girl By Jamaica Kincaid

Gender roles in America don't exist so much so as a standard but as an idea, the idea of a woman to be submissive and for a man to be dominant, the idea that masculinity equates to dominance and strength while femininity equates to weak and fragileness. The idea that "behind every great man is a woman" because her only place must be behind the man and not next to him or in front of him. Throughout history, women have been depicted as nurturing and dependent on men while men have always been seen as the breadwinner and the protector. In Jamaica Kincaid's story "Girl", The author uses hostile language to explore the relationship between a young girl and her mother. Through the use of her mother's sexist rhetoric and the commands given to her daughter, Kincaid attacks traditional gender roles.

The rhetoric utilized throughout the story towards the girl is sexist and demeaning. The language the mother uses with her daughter furthers push the gender roles placed in society and the expectation of women. Language is used to communicate, it is used to label and classify things and it is used to bring people together. However, In Jamaica Kincaid's story "Girl," the mother does the exact opposite. Instead of connecting with her daughter and forming a relationship with her she pushes her daughter away and creates distance between the two. The name of the story is called "Girl" and throughout the story, the mother never referred to her daughter by her name. By calling the story girl and not giving the girl a name it takes away her identity and reduces her to a thing. In the story, the mother tells the girl to "walk like a lady and not like a slut". It is impossible to walk like a slut because there is no right or wrong way to walk. Everybody walks in their own way. In society words like "slut" and "hoe" are used to belittle women. These words seem to only apply to women, a man doesn't get called a slut for sleeping with women. For a man having sex is expected and glorified, while for a woman it is judged and criticized. For women, it is a walk of shame and for men, it's a rite of passage. Young girls are taught to be ashamed about how they grow into their bodies. They are taught to hide it from men. In schools, they are taught that the clothes they wear can be a 'distraction' for boys, and showing something as simple as a shoulder can be a violation. Girls are getting sent home from school because of sexist dress code rules meanwhile boys are still in class with their pants sagging. Dress codes are more lenient towards boys and more restricting on girls. In Kentucky, a girl was sent home for wearing a shirt with a sweater on top that showed her collarbones for it violated dress code and teachers felt it would be "too distracting" for boys to learn(Zeiling, 2019). Sending a girl home from school for showing her shoulders or collarbone because it can "distract boys from learning" is holding the girl responsible for how boys might view her and act towards her based on her clothes. It is prioritizing the boy's "distraction-free" learning environment more than the girl's education. It promotes the objectification and sexualization of a girl's body which is why some men grow up thinking that if a girl wears a certain outfit means she is giving consent. Nevertheless, girls are not the only ones to fall a victim to these impossible gender roles and expectations. Toxic masculinity tells boys that showing emotions is weak, it tells boys that they should grow up and take no for an answer. Toxic masculinity defines manhood as violence, sex, status, and aggression(Clemens 2017). Little boys grow up thinking these ideas define them as a man so when they grow up and become men, they become men who can't process their emotions, take rejection and do acts of violence. For example, In Connecticut, a 16-year-old girl named Maren Sanchez was brutally stabbed by 16-year-old Christopher Plaskon for saying no to his prom proposal(Sit & Siemaszko 2014).

Young boys are told that they are entitled to a girl's eyes but a girl isn't entitled to say yes. Boys who aren't taught about rejection become grown men who don't know the meaning of no. Toxic masculinity also tells boys that having emotions and being vulnerable is a feminine trait, and to be a man is to carry yourself strong and unbreakable. Little boys grow up in a society where if they show emotion they will be deemed as weak and get bullied by their peers. We cannot blame the little girls and boys who were taught to feel ashamed at a young age, It is not the fault of young girls who had their innocence sexualized by grown men or the fault of young boys who grow into men thinking that vulnerability is soft. In "Girl", the mother is giving her daughter sexist instructions and demands for how to "behave in the presence of men" and how to live in a world where her place has already been decided. The mother is loving her and preparing her daughter the best way she knows how. The problem is we raise kids to be pretty girls and strong boys when we should just raise them to be good humans. We should teach young girls that she is the only person who can define her existence and she can take up space if she wants to. We should teach young boys that masculinity isn't just being stoic, and there is bravery in vulnerability. Young boys need to know that while rejection may hurt, it will fade over time, it's okay to act with your heart and not first. Throughout time a white woman's cry has always been heard louder than anybody else. America has a selective hearing in which it hears what it wants to hear and it has a way of silencing another person's pain. Even if a white woman crying about a little girl selling water (CBS News 2018) is seen as more important than a black woman being put in a headlock and arrested by a police officer that she called for help because a white man was threatening her with a shotgun (Miller 2019). A White women's pain has always been publicized and considered more important than women of color's pain we have heard countless stories of a white woman being in pain. However, this leaves little room for a woman of color to tell her story and if she is given the chance to tell her story it will become whitewashed. Me too movement was founded by an African American woman named Tarna Burke. Her purpose was to shed light on those sexually abused and give them a chance to tell their story especially women of color. Burke has been saying me too since 2006 but it wasn't until white actress Alyssa Milano used it in a tweet #me too in 2017 that people really started to care. A white woman will get praised for telling a black woman's story. Women of color are more likely to get raped than white women. There is a 29.1% chance that a black woman would get assaulted, approximately 60% of black women get sexually assaulted by the age of 18, In 2010 US attorney declined to go after 67% of sexual abuse and other violent crimes against native women(Survivor of color prevalence rates). The stories of women of color are not being heard enough, it is not being taken seriously enough, and it is being overshadowed by white women.

A criticism that Tarana Burke faced after coming out was that she "being too ugly to get raped" instead of supporting a survivor she was condemned because she wasn't seen as "beautiful enough to get raped". However, when Olympian Aly Raisman came out everybody offered her support and called her strong. Nobody said she was too ugly or too muscular to get raped. Rape and trauma do not discriminate against people it can happen to anyone despite physical appearance, race, gender, or age. There are no set criteria to get raped you don't have to look a certain way or do a certain thing, nobody is too ugly or too beautiful to get raped. Rape is about control and power from men who were told as little boys not to take no for an answer from women. Rape is about humiliation and fear from women who do it to boys who grow up to be men who are ashamed to say #metoo. Feminism has never intersectional, it has always been for the benefit and uplifting of white women. By definition, feminism is "the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes"(Merriam-Webster). During the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 white women demanded the right to vote. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and

Susan B. Anthony would be called a feminist today because they challenged the norms of society and encouraged white women to vote. On August 18, 1920, the 19th amendment was passed granting women the right to vote. However due to the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, Chinese women weren't considered a citizen until 1843, In 1952 the McCarran-Walter act changed the immigration rules for Asian Americans. The Voting Act of 1965 allowed black people to vote without racial discrimination. Asian Americans and Black women had to be considered human and then citizens are given the right to vote. White women were already considered citizens they were fighting in a race they already won. Feminism has a skin requirement and if you're not the right skin complexion your pain, your story, and your existence isn't good enough for their movement. When 50 black girls went missing in DC in over 24 hours in 2014(Press 2017) there was no uproar from the feminist movement, no white women were marching in the streets with signs saying "bring our girls back" Their story was a trending topic on social media but it died down after a while however it's 2019 and those girls are still missing. The feminist movement isn't helping support Muslim women in this current political era with the rising of Islamophobia and hate crimes towards Muslim people. Between 2013-2015, 87% of transgender women murdered were women of color, the rate of black transgendered women being murdered is increasing at a scary level (Holter) and nobody is saying anything. There is no reaction or uproar from the feminist movement. Women of color never get the platform to speak because a white woman is always stealing the mic. Feminism should not be like this, feminist are suppose to create room for everybody not to take it up. Women's rights are not dependent on one skin complexion it is dependent on Black women, Asian women, Muslim women, Queer black Muslim women, Hispanic women, Queer Hispanic women, and Transgendered women. In Jon Katz's "How boys become men," he tells the reader that little boys are still growing up the same and nothing has changed since he was a little boy. He says that "Boys live in a world with its own Code of Conduct, a set of values of ruthless, unspoken, and unyielding rules" and these rules have been the same since the beginning of time. Similar to fight club the first rule of masculinity is not to talk about masculinity, the second rule of masculinity is to not talk about masculinity, even if your crushing under the weight and expectations of what it means to be a man, even if you're suffering from depression and loneliness. On February 14, 2018, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz went to Parkland school and shot 17 people and injured 14 with a semi-automatic rifle and was arrested. Nikolas Cruz's mother died in November and he is known to suffer from depression and was bullied in school(McLaughlin & Park 2018). On December 14, 2012, 20-year-old Adam Lanza went up to Sandy Hook elementary school and killed 20 kids between the ages of six and seven. He also killed his mother and then himself at the end.

Adam Lanza suffers from Depression, Anxiety, Asperger syndrome, and OCD. People all over the world were saying we need to have stricter gun laws and Yes while we do need stricter gun laws we need to provide mental health programs for boys and girls. In almost every mass shooting done by a man in America you can trace depression and loneliness back to them or they were bullied as a kid and never knew how to cope with it. We don't teach boys how to speak and properly handle their feelings, we just tell them to "suck it up" and tell them it's a part of life. So as boys grow up they carry their feelings on their back, then they become teenagers and get into drugs to try to numb the pain away and when they become adults they become ticking timebombs waiting to explode and because society shows them no positive way to release their emotions they will release it in the only way they know how violence. It wasn't a coincidence that Nikolas Cruz exploded on Valentine's day which is symbolically a day of love. The one day where love is expressed to others and by others was the one day where Nikolas Cruz felt the most lonely. Black boys do drugs or act out as a form of self-medicating, black

boys go to jail and come out like grown men and we celebrate it. According to the sentencing project, Black Juveniles are 4 times more likely to be committed, Hispanic Juveniles are 61 percent more likely to be committed and American Indian are 3 times more likely to go to a juvenile detention center than White teenagers (Rovner 2016). When a little boy goes to a detention center or jail their innocence gets stripped away, they are forced to endure unspeakable and inhumane punishment from an authority, and their life changes forever. The prison system eats boys of color and spits them out like a broken man and we celebrate it. When a man comes home from jail we throw a party and say welcome home, the family gets together and cook and plays music. Everybody is excited that the boy is finally home.

However, he might be physically home but his mind and spirit were broken a long time ago. In the Black community, we treat going to jail as a rite of passage for young boys and once they get out we celebrate the broken man. Instead of letting jails raise our children we need to raise them. We need to stop celebrating black and Hispanic boys coming home and prevent them from going to jail, we need to speak and not speak just to speak but to understand.

Overall as a society, we have a lot of work to do, we have to redefine what it means to be masculine and feminine. We have to redefine our meaning of weak and stop equating it to being a feminine trait but as a human trait. Instead of raising little girls to 'behave in the presence of men' we need to teach girls that their value isn't to be determined because of another man's presence or comment. Boys need to know that having emotions and going through rejection is a part of being human and there positive ways to self-medicate without causing damage to others or oneself. It has to be done at a young age so that way when they grow up they grow to be good humans capable of showing empathy, sympathy, sadness, pain, happiness, and having a real understanding of self-love.