

Sophia Weller

Mrs. Rutan

AP Literature and Composition

17 has November 2017

Gender Stereotypes: A Learned Behavior

Jamaica Kincaid's short story, "Girl", helps show that the idea of gender roles are largely taught from generation to generation as opposed to solely natural instinct. The entire passage, is literally, what is assumed to be a mother, teaching her daughter how to become the perfect woman. It is hinted that the mother figure believes there *is* a wrong way to grow that isn't acceptable as she warns the girl to avoid being "...the slut you are [she is] so bent on becoming..." (line 10), and the young girl feels the nagging feeling from her mother is shown through the constant repetition of "this is".

Even in societies where "...you grow okra..." (line 20) and make "doukona" (line 36), ideas of what makes a boy or girl are forced upon children. It goes to show that everyone, no matter their situation or background, all people go through the pressures of what they're expected to be. Kincaid pushes the idea that children are not born with a preconceived notion that they need to act or be a certain way. If this was the case, these ideas would not have to be forced in the girl's head, which is made clear through the constant stream of consciousness that the piece emits with its one long and intense paragraph. While the daughter is "dehumanized"

and isolated by her mother --who represents society-- the author unites people, especially girls, a brutally relatable short story.

I am fascinated by the idea of this idea of “nature versus nurture” when it comes to gender roles. The most interesting and effective way to do this is to ask people of different ages and genders if toys could be played with by boys, girls, or both.

The youngest interviewee was my three year old cousin, Gunner, who doesn't attend a preschool and hasn't been exposed to many other children besides his four brothers. He didn't care very much about the colors or “genders” of the toys, he just wanted to play with all of them. His six year old brother, Braxton, who is in kindergarten was able to separate the toys into separate piles for genders based on colors and what he called, “girliness”. As I interviewed my 16 year old sister, and my parents, they were even more harsh in deciding what toys went to which gender. It even came down to mobility of knickknacks. Their answers were more reminiscent of the theme in Kincaid's “Girl”.

At the end of my research, I my hypothesis was proven correct. As a person grows up in society, their views on what is for males and females and the roles they play are molded into an idea that is unauthentic; it gets tarnished and pushed upon the next generation. It's a never ending cycle. “Girl” critiques society and the way that it pushes people to fit the “character” the World has assigned to them.