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Expectations of Society

In the story, “Boys and Girls” by Alice Munro, the main character has no name. This signifies that the narrator is all young girls, the narrator is not just one person but many people. The narrator realizes that expectations are inevitable. The author illustrates the impact of the expectations of society and how people should live their lives based on their gender. It does not matter which seriocomic society that people belong too, there are certain expectations that are expected of them because of their gender. People reach those expectations because society has put pressure on them. Without realizing it, people are living their lives conforming to the status quo, what society assumes to be acceptable, instead of living the lives that people choose.

The narrator has a shaky relationship with her parents throughout the story. Her father needs the her help on their fox farm for now, but once her brother gets older and realizes his expectations from society he will help. “My father did not talk to me unless it was about the job we were doing” (Munro 155). Her father will not talk to her unless explaining what she needs to do next. Her father does not believe that he could have an intellectual conversation because she is a girl. Her father does not pay much attention to women or the work that the women do every day. She sees that her father does not get into conversations with women. “At any rate, I did not expect my father to pay attention to what she said” (Munro 157). When the narrator’s mother talks to her father, she sees that her father is not interested. The father believes, like everyone in society at this time, that women have no business talking about a man’s work and that the women should stay in the kitchen. The narrator talks about how she tricked her brother into climbing up to the top of the beams, she was hoping he would get into trouble. Her parents came and got him down and said, “why weren’t you watching him” (Munro 159). Her parents saw that her brother could have done no wrong and that it had to be her fault. At the end of the story, the narrator is crying at the dinner table because Laird told their parents that she let the horse out of the gate. “She’s only a girl” (Munro 162). Her father says that she is only a girl as though it excuses her behavior. He uses it as an insult, saying that because she is a girl she did not know better.

Throughout the story, the narrator’s mother is trying to get her to stay in the kitchen. The narrator would help her mother peel peaches for her mother to make into jam. “As soon as I was done I ran out of the house, trying to get out of earshot before my mother thought of what she wanted me to do next” (Munro 156). The narrator would run away before her mother would realize that she was gone. Her mother wanted her to stay in the kitchen because society says that is where women belong. Her mother is trying to get her used to what the rest of the narrator’s life is going to be. Her mother talks to her father about how when Laird is older he will be able to help and that means that the narrator will help her mother in the kitchen (Munro156). Her mother knows that being outside is no place for a woman and cannot wait for Laird to be older. Her mother barely comes out of the house unless it is to hand out the wash or dig in the garden (Munro 156). She does not come outside because she knows that working outside is a man’s job. There is more work for the mother to do inside the house than outside, clean the house and making jam out of peaches. Her mother conformed to society’s stereotypical idea of a woman.

The narrator is rebellious in the beginning of the story, she does not want to conform to society’s expectations. She wants to choose her own path and be her own person. Her grandmother would tell her how a girl should act and what she should not do because she is a girl. Girls are seen as these gentle, soft creatures that do not do certain things or they will break. “I continued to slam the doors and sit as awkwardly as possible, thinking that by such measures I kept myself free” (Munro 158). By doing these tiny rebellious acts, the narrator was not conforming to society. She was still being herself, even though everyone around her was telling to conform to the expectations of society. The word girl meant innocent and unburdened, but the narrator soon found out that the word girl was something that she needed to become (Munro 157). “It was a definition, always touched with emphasis, with reproach and disappointment” (Munro 157). Becoming a woman will be filled with disappointment for the narrator. She will be trapped into her cage, the house. She will not be able to do the things she once enjoyed. The narrator let Flora out of her cage, even though she knew that the horse would be caught. She was giving the horse on last chance to escape. The narrator wanted to be set free, but society has put pressure on her to become a girl. When her father class her a girl, she did not argue, “maybe it was true” (Munro 162). Since everyone has put pressure on her to conform into society’s idea of a woman, she finally conformed. She realized that she has fallen into the trap that she was trying to escape from.

Throughout the story, the narrator wants to be her own person. She does not listen to her mother or grandmother when they are explaining how a woman should act. The narrator realizes that the expectation that society has based on gender is inescapable. The narrator tries to run from the stereotypical woman, but ultimately conforms. “Boys and Girls” teach people that society makes people who they are, either by pressure or because people strive to become that person. For men, society says that they are the stronger gender and they have more responsibility. Women are told that they are fragile and should do house work because it is not real work. Many women try to escape society’s expectations but fail because women are repressed by society. Society crushes people’s own idea of themselves until they are nothing but what society has made them.

Work Cited

Munro, Alice. *Boys and Girls.* 12th ed., The Norton Introduction to Literature, 2016.