

Prompt: Identify any male/female conflict in the play. Then, in one paragraph, see if you can make the case that this conflict doesn't have to be seen in terms of gender. Show us how this conflict may be seen in another light and in other terms.

Conflict in "Trifles"

When Mr. Henderson, the county attorney, and Mrs. Hale are talking during the beginning of the play, a quiet disagreement occurs in regards to how Mrs. Wright keeps her house. During his questioning, Mr. Henderson comments on the dirty towels in the kitchen, to which Mrs. Hale replies, "There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm" (812). He makes another comment about how the house should be in better order, and again Mrs. Hale responds by pointing out that "Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be" (812). Finally, Mr. Henderson quips, "Ah, loyal to your sex, I see" (812).

While it is certainly possible to view this brief exchange as an example of typical male/female conflict, I saw something more than this: Mrs. Hale simply does not like this person's character and disagrees with his professional conduct. He is there on business yet he feels the need to make critical remarks about Mrs. Wright's housekeeping, which suggests that he is forming a bias when he has no reason to do so. It is made clear by the end that he is not very effective at his job, and so instead he is looking for other things to form his opinion, like the unwashed towel and the messy kitchen.

Gender roles and boundaries are apparent all throughout the play, but in this era women were still allowed to make their own decisions on a person's worth, and this is what Mrs. Hale is doing. Men were also allowed to treat women fairly within the confines of these customs, respecting the unique qualities which are attributed to each sex. Mr. Henderson is a character who is self-involved and overly concerned with the greatness of his duties. However, when you strip him of his job title, he may in fact have very little business being in that house and conducting the investigation. Mrs. Hale could have simply pegged him as a charlatan.

Re: Beyond Gender (by Terra Jones)

In the play, Trifles, by Susan Glaspell, an example of a male/female conflict would be when the Sheriff was talking to Mrs. Peters regarding the "sticky mess" in the pantry. He said, "Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worrying about her preserves!" In this case the Sheriff, well known for his "awful sarcastic speech," degrades Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale for simply not automatically assuming Mrs. Wright murdered her husband.

For my response I chose to focus on a similar event in the play, where the county attorney was essentially forming an understanding of the events that occurred and determining the character of Mrs. Wright through the dirty towel and the messy kitchen he saw before him. Interestingly, both the sheriff and the county attorney don't really seem to know what they are doing. Mr. Hale is there providing answers to questions, but does not have a professional capacity. As a whole, the men are just fumbling through their duties.

It could be that Mrs. Hale noticed this and felt quite strongly about it. Also, given that Mrs. Peters is the wife of the sheriff, perhaps she makes her decision to assist Mrs. Wright partly because she knows how her husband conducts his work. This is a small and buried little potential detail, but it still fits with the events.

Re:

Quote

Response