

"So I Ain't No Good Girl" Essay

Sharon Flake, in her short story, "So I Ain't No Good Girl", elucidates the endless cycle produced by a dark environment's impact on an individual. A girl who has no choice but to follow in the footsteps made by the adult figures in her community inevitably endures both physical and emotional abuse from her boyfriend. The effects of her surroundings heavily influence her actions and her thoughts; she submits herself to him, seeing herself as a subordinate object for him to play with. She endlessly compares herself to her mother and soaks in the criticism she gives her like a sponge. This girl allows the distressing 'give and take' relationship with her boyfriend to control her life and completely obliterates her own personal priorities. Although she feels it as wrong, from the environment provided, the abuse is all she really knows in life; from her parents, to other adults in the area, most relationships are full of pain and hurt and one sided victory for the dominant. She allows this to continuously orbit around her. This perfectly illustrates an infinite cycle that one's surrounding atmosphere creates out of habit.

An example of the cycle of abuse occurs when the main character sees Raheem cheating on her as the bus pulls away from the stop. She feels hideously angry, yet decides to continue to subdue to the emotional torture. She feels betrayed, objectified, and used, the tears streaming down her face the same way this boy stains her self worth. She turns furious, but convinces herself that she will still accept her if she goes along with the leash he keeps around her soul, dragging her around like a lost kitten. As

she says, "I wanna kill 'em both. But then my momma's words come back to me. You ain't no beauty prize." The environment her mother sets up leads her to believe she is completely undeserving, hence her decision to endure him. "And when you got a man like that you can't be expecting to keep him all to yourself, not all the time anyhow." Is the blind train of thought she clings to desperately, trying to find happiness. She follows what she knows- a cycle of pain caused by having no self worth.

The main character's refusal to change her ways does not budge throughout the story, even when she catches Raheem with another girl; the impression left behind by the previous generation has impacted her decisions and choices. For instance, she wants Raheem to go to school with her, even when he specifically told her to go without him because he's "got things to do", and they get into a fight over the matter. After she willingly gives in to his dominant ways, he starts looking hungrily at another girl at the bus stop, making her jealous. Raheem starts getting enraged again, yet this time she submits herself to the cycle. She apologizes and gives in to him, winning back what she perceives to be affection from him. "I apologize just like my momma does when my daddy slaps her" (Flake 1). The environment that envelops her is full of the same situations she deals with internally; the one way street to anguish and mental exhaustion. Even when in doubt about herself, she feels a touch of certainty in knowing that "Raheem likes it" which is "all that counts" in her simplistic world. How she says that Raheem's opinion is the only thing that counts, and how her father shows a higher dominance to the mother, both show a major impression in relationship from one generation to the next. What was pressed into the minds of the next generation from the prior was the everlasting cycle of low self esteem and male dominance.

Sharon Flake nourished this short story with the main character's inner monologue as well as her peer interactions. This specific fragment of the story illuminates how her environment impinges her

subconscious outlook on herself and her peers. While describing and reviewing her relationship with Raheem in her mind, she specifies this subliminal limit. "I mean, like my mother says, I won't never win no beauty contest. But my body, well that's something else. It's the Mona Lisa. The sun and moon, Raheem wrote in a poem once" (Flake 1, 2). These are the spiteful thoughts the main character has pertaining to her looks. The environment surrounding her has made her perceive how her face "won't never win no beauty contest", and how a man like Raheem is better than the main character deserves as far as she is concerned. The monologue illustrated here exhibits the dimmer, more dismal opinions that remain, all-consuming, inside her mind. Some of the opinions she consistently clenches onto are exceedingly self-destructive, so the monologue placed here depicts in all honesty what this forlorn and manipulated girl feels. The emotions that press on inside of her derisible psyche were placed there by her mother, who bombards her with the idea that she is not beautiful in any way, and should take what little forms of "affection" she can get. The motivation behind this seemingly witless conduct is that she wants above all else to maintain some form of superiority over the other girls. Being the person Raheem chooses to remain with on most occasions gives her a small feeling of vindication. She is able to smirk and snigger at the other girls even when he pushes her around, as their dialogue shows at the bus stop when Raheem takes money out of her purse. "'Don't be going in my...' 'What's yours is mine, ain't it?' The good girls watch him kiss my neck and whisper in my ear. 'Yeah, he mine.' I say..." She is enabled to feign a pompous behavioral pattern for an instant, giving her a vague sensation of satisfaction. The author tactfully placed both of these excerpts to portray the true emotions of the main character through inner ideas as well as outer expressions.

The main character undergoes great anguish through a series of events that are predetermined by her milieu and it's lack of progression. She refuses to change the old habits and ways of living that they have

all unfortunately become accustomed to, repeating a pattern that is subconsciously embedded into her mind by the environment which encloses this girl. Her thoughts of being unfit and undeserving are brought about by the influence of the other relationships in the surrounding area. The entire system of society is molding people into it throughout their lives. These painful habits are not healthy for any of the people trapped inside, and this girl is a prime example of the pain generated by this cycle.