

# Short Story Comparison

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Authors Alice Munro and Joyce Carol Oates and their stories "The Children Stay" and "Life after High School" both portray the standard social norms and the effect it has on people, delivering both positives and negatives of the controversy. There are a vast number of theoretical reasons as to why people follow these boundaries as well as symbolic and meaningful representations of those ideas through the text of these two passages. Within the text, the foundation of the stories revolve around an underlying statement that explicitly implies that we as people obey the unwritten rule which states that we must abide by the limitations and conventions that society writes out for us with an ink physically invisible to the eye, yet mentally carved within our subconsciousness.

If we choose to ignore the two stories, the question can be answered with less of a biased opinion than it would be answered if we depended upon the stories. Generally, we obey the social norms and accept its boundaries for three reasons. The first reason is fear. We are scared of being categorized as "different" and looked down upon. We fear to step out of line and be exposed in our natural state, whatever that state may be. We are scared to draw unguided attention towards ourselves. We resist and avoid being seen as anything different than how we want others to perceive us. In this day and age, it is easy for others to form a perspective of us solely based on one little thing. It could be our sexuality, hobby, sense of humor, and so on. The second reason is the risk factor. We do not want to risk anything if the consequence can possibly extend out of our control. To explain further, if someone wished to divorce their spouse but did not want to risk their future, their reputation, and the sudden change of others' opinion of them, they would have to risk being judged for doing such a thing because the expectation for marriage is that they "live happily ever after". Risk is hyped up to be such a big thing in one's life nowadays even though in order to go on living our life to the best we can live it is by taking risks itself. We avoid risks with the mindset that risks will jeopardize our future and we will not be able to grow into what we aspire to be. Ironic is it not? Because a life without risk, is a life without growth. The third reason for our abiding, is that we choose to play it safe. Not only do we evade risks and surrender to our fears, but we go beyond that and do things with the purpose to avoid any misconceptions that we deem different. We are just afraid of people thinking we are different. It has come to a point where we are so afraid being judged and seen as something we may refrain from being that we forget to realize that everyone has their own opinions, and that no one knows you better than you know yourself.

Now, taking Joyce Carol Oates's story "Life after High School" into consideration, it not only answers the question as to why we abide by these norms, but as well as what the consequences come to be when we either oppress or circumvent these limitations. These expectations affected the protagonist, Zachary Graff the most. He was burdened by the social norm that stated he had to have a certain fixed sexuality. He spent his life struggling to reform into the boundaries in which society would accept him in. He forced himself into doing things with the determination of not only convincing others he was "normal", but convincing himself as well. Behaviors such as, pressuring himself into loving the prettiest girl in high school, driving a car that is a symbol of masculinity itself, and begging the girl to marry him; all so that he can rid himself of any part that tethered him to his indifference from the rest. Although Zachary was being oppressed by this standard, He pursued to try find a way around it, in his own way. But, the scheme was not without its consequences. However, doing those things to mask his true self, were things against his preference. He begged Sunny to marry him with the hope that the title of marriage would cast sunlight over the "sinful" side of him.

ENGL 1100  
Into to University Writing  
Produce grammatically-correct academic writing that asserts and defends a clear thesis

SOCI 2255  
Sociology for Everyday Life and Interaction  
Analyze the ways everyday practices and images socially construct reality, knowledge, and identities; and how they reflect, reproduce or transform the social order

ARTS 1100  
Experiencing the Arts  
Discuss selected cultural, literary and educational texts and their contemporary relevance

ENGL 1100  
Into to University Writing  
Respond critically to, analyse, and interpret selected works through close reading

PSYC 3343  
Psychology of Prejudice  
Critically evaluate the personal and global consequences of prejudice

CRWR 1100  
Introduction to Creative Writing  
Identify and explore conflict in a short story

## Continued:

Due to his religion forbidding such a way of life, Zachary was religiously ashamed of himself, as explained in the text. "Zachary confided in Tobias that he prayed every morning of his life - immediately upon waking up he scrambled out of bed, knelt, hid his face in his hands, and prayed for his sinful soul, sinful thoughts, deeds, and desires". In the quoted text, Zachary shows that his conscious is conflicted; conflicted not just with his beliefs and actions, but precisely, the difference between them. Yet unfortunately, his efforts to circumvent the predicament was not enough. He soon became overwhelmed by society's expectation and once again, became oppressed. After Sunny rejected him, Zachary felt as if the only doorway out had been slammed shut before his hopeful eyes. He then resorted to open another doorway when he asked Tobias to go away with him. After being rejected by Tobias as well, Zachary's mind took shelter in a place where he believed that if no one else could accept him for who he was or was trying to be, neither could he. Zachary surrendered and admitted defeat to the arrogance of conventions in the social world.

Similarly to the first story, author Alice Munro's "The Children Stay" explains a protagonist, Pauline, who deals with her own dilemma of reforming to external expectations. Although married, raising two kids, Pauline was not entirely content with her life. She felt restricted from pursuing her dreams and herself as an independent woman. Provoking this constraint, were her kids, husband, responsibilities, and most importantly, social standards. Pauline was very excited for the play she was yet to perform in. Although she was not getting paid for it, it was the idea that she was doing something she loved for once, that gave her happiness. She wanted something more for her life but would not speak of it due to social expectations beating down on her. She was burdened by the expectation that married couples are supposed to "live happily ever after". While being subdued, she kept her kids happy, her husband happy, but had to trade with her own happiness. There's always consequences to oppression. If she stayed oppressed the entire time, she would have spent her whole life miserable. On the other hand, when she choose to do something about it and not be suppressed, there were still consequences to follow. Subconsciously, Pauline was looking for an escape from the burdening, and later on she had found it, she had found Jeffrey. Jeffrey enabled Pauline to escape her burden and evade the limitations that had held her down for most of her life. However, when Pauline left her husband and kids for Jeffrey and her new life, she had hurt her husband and abandoned her kids at a time they probably needed her most. In cases like this, it all comes down to someone's sense of values and how they to choose to weigh them.

Ultimately, we all abide by and live within certain limitations and conventions. But it is up to us to decide whether or not we want to break away from the restraints holding us down with chains that thieve us of our free will. We need to learn to accept ourselves and each other for who we are and what we do. In the world today we are so caught up in the fear of being judged or perceived as different from the rest of us, that we forget to judge ourselves, to live our own life, full of risks. When we choose not to take risks and abide by certain conventions, we are choosing to stay put and play it safe, but if we take risks, and move forward, we grow. Therefore, we can either choose to live our lives entirely in fear, or take a risk, and make fear your friend. For what is life, if not lived without a little risk?

