



A Study of Sensitive Adoptions in Willa Cather's A Wagner Matinee and O. Henry's A Retrieved Reformation

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Abstract: The paper tries to explore the emotions and choices of different gender (male and female) in decision-making for their future. Choices decide destiny and it differs from person to person based on their culture, gender, and background. But the Emotional part is very peculiar while decision-making in life. Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence theory helps to explore the literary characters and their decisions in life, based on their culture and gender. This paper particularizes on the gender difference in emotional choice in the personal life of individuals. For the study, two different writers and their works from American Literature are included. They are Willa Cather's A Wagner Matinee and O. Henry's A Retrieved Reformation. These two stories deal with the concept of marriage, but the end is different from each other. In the above stories, the theory of Emotional Intelligence was applied to understand the reason for their differing ends.

Index Terms - Gender, Marriage, Emotion, Choices, Awareness of self, Emotional Intelligence..

I. INTRODUCTION

A study of the literature on emotions and EI reveals that men and women differ significantly in areas of the emotional world. The feminine gender, in particular, has long been associated with the emotional dimension of human beings to a larger extent than the male gender, which experiences positive and negative emotions more intensely than the male gender (Grossman & Wood, 1993). This "feminist vision of emotions" has explained using both biological and social elements (Nolen-Hoeksema & Jackson, 2001). Women's biochemistry is better prepared to view one's own and others' emotions as crucial elements in survival, according to the biological explanation. Certain parts of the brain dedicated to emotional processing can be larger in women than in men (Baron-Cohen, 2002; Gunning-Dixon, Bilker, & Gur, 2002). In addition, women spend more time socially in contact with the emotional world and are more concerned with maintaining the positive tone of their and others' emotions to avoid interpersonal relations deteriorating and to build satisfying social networks (Nolen-Hoeksema & Jackson, 2001). "Acts of Love (and Work): Gender Imbalance in Emotional Work and Women's Psychological Distress," by Strazdins, Lyndall, and Dorothy H. Broom, was published in the journal "Acts of Love (and Work): Gender Imbalance in Emotional Work and Women's Psychological Distress," and it discussed gender imbalance. The gender imbalance created a health risk to women and helped explain gender variations in psychological anguish as a result of the breakdown of the marriage.

II. Emotional Intelligence

Lisa Eklund (2013) described the concept of ecology and partner in his work “Marriage squeeze and mate selection: The ecology of choice and implications for social policy in China.” The notion of the ecology of choice in mate selection is used in this work to show how different social processes and practices affect who can marry, with whom they can marry, and under what conditions. Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to effectively identify, appraise, express, and monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, as well as the ability to use such information to guide one's thinking and behavior. The study looks at Daniel Goleman's concept of Emotional Intelligence to demonstrate how emotional decisions affect gender-based character and differences. Emotional decisions are influenced by emotional intelligence. It depicts the stark contrasts between men and women when it comes to making emotional decisions in their lives. Emotional intelligence is defined as the capacity to recognize, control, and evaluate emotions. In his Emotional Intelligence theory, Daniel Goleman defined five dimensions to understand people's emotional intelligence. The fundamental notion is self-awareness, which serves as the foundation for all other domains. Self-awareness is considered the mother of all life skills. It includes emotional awareness, accurate self-evaluation, and self-assurance. All three principles are important for a better understanding of oneself and can be used together. The second step in achieving emotional intelligence is self-regulation. Self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, and originality are some of the levels used to assess emotion management. It is not necessary to understand all of the key concepts to understand self-regulation. Three or four notions are needed to recognize that the person is struggling with self-control. Motivation is a term that is well-known and expected in the outside world. That can be defined as an external factor, as well as our goal and objective. The notion is linked to motivation, commitment, initiative, and optimism. This is where society can gain an understanding of oneself. Personal competency encompasses all three of these factors.

Empathy and social skills are both included in the category of social abilities. Empathy is the ability to relate the outside world to one's self. It is also known as empathy, development, and service orientation. Emotion is the idea of balancing one's feelings with those of others. Influence, communication, leadership, collaboration, and cooperation are some of the primary phrases used to describe social abilities.

Gender plays a significant impact in making emotional decisions. “A Wagner Matinee” and “A Retrieved Reformation” are the titles of the two stories that follow. Marriage is a central subject in both books, and it has the power to change one's life forever. However, the options differ depending on gender. Two women of different genders make life-changing decisions in different ways that lead to distinct outcomes. In the first story, “A Wagner Matinee”, a woman named Aunt Georgiana makes an emotional decision to marry Howard Carpenter, who is unemployed and without hope. The writer correctly observed, “Inexplicable infatuation was that she eloped with him, that their love is like infatuation” (02).

“A Wagner Matinee” is a story written by Willa Sibert Cather. The story revolves around a character called Georgiana. The story opens with the letter received by Mr. Clark, the nephew of Aunt Georgiana. The letter tells him that his aunt is coming to Boston. When he reads the letter, he begins to recollect the experience that

he had with his aunt. Clark remembers the past and tells the readers that Aunt Georgiana was a music teacher in Boston before she got married. Mr. Howard carpenter falls in love with Georgiana. They both elope and get settled in Nebraska Frontier. Life in Nebraska Frontier was all the more difficult. Georgiana starts working on the fields, taking care of the children, cattle, and doing the household things. For thirty years, she has accustomed herself to this kind of life in Nebraska Frontier. One day it has become necessary for Georgiana to visit Boston after thirty years. Clark, knowing the past of Georgiana, has arranged a surprise matinee show for her aunt. Aunt Georgiana is not able to accept the fact that she is in Boston. Clark takes her to the symphony orchestra. In the beginning, Georgiana feels ashamed of her attire in the crowd. As there is progress in the orchestra, Aunt Georgiana begins to recollect her past being a music teacher in Boston. At the end of the orchestra, she bursts into tears. The story ends with the sad note that she does not want to go back. "A Retrieved Reformation" is a story written by O. Henry. At the beginning of the story, a character called Jimmy Valentine is imprisoned because of robbing a bank in Springfield. Jimmy Valentine is a professional safecracker. Having spent ten months in the prison, he now walks out of prison. He meets Mike Dolan, who helped him to come out of prison. He then goes to his room and checks whether his burglary tools are safe. After that, he resumes his robbing business in different parts of the city. The series of burglaries triggers the police investigation. Ben Price, the detective investigates this case and finds out that Jimmy Valentine is the one who has robbed all these banks. Therefore, Ben Price starts to look for him. On the other hand, Jimmy Valentine goes to Elmore to rob a bank. Accidently, he meets a girl called Annabel Adams with whom he falls in love. He changes his name to Ralph Spencer in order to hide his previous identity.

Later, he starts up the shoe business and becomes rich. He also wins the love of Annabel Adams. They are about to get married in two weeks. Jimmy Valentine decides to quit his robbing business and so he writes a letter to his friends. He wants to give his burglary tools to his friends as he is starting a new life in weeks. Mr. Adams, the father of Annabel Adams wants to show everyone about the vault that has been newly installed in Elmore Bank. Ralph Spencer on his way to give the tools to his friends, is also invited for the inspection. Annabel's married sister also comes to the spot with her two children May and Agatha. Mr. Adams takes pride in explaining the different features of the new safe. After some time, May playfully closes the door of the safe with Agatha inside but she is not able to open it. Mr. Adams understands that time lock has been enabled. Thus, saving Agatha is an impossible task. Annabel Adams implores the help of Ralph Spencer. Ralph without any hesitance saves Agatha with the help of tools that he is supposed to deliver to his friends. Ben Price who has also come to Elmore watches Jimmy Valentine opens the safe. At the end of the story, Ben Price acts rather strange that he does not know Jimmy Valentine.

In the story "A Retrieved Reformation", Jimmy Valentine is very well aware of his internal states and intuitions. Self-awareness also includes emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence. Jimmy Valentine, when arrested for the Springfield bank robbery case, he is very confident that he will be released soon from prison. He believes in his self-worth and capabilities.

It was a complete set, made of specially tempered steel, the latest designs in drills, punches, braces and bits, jimmys, clamps, and augers, with two or three novelties, invented by Jimmy himself, in which he took pride (140).

This statement gives a clear picture that Jimmy Valentine believes in himself in his potential and strength. It is self-confidence that drives him to rob a series of banks in the city even after his release from prison. When he goes to Elmore to rob a bank, he falls in love with Annable Adams. He recognizes his own emotions and effects. He also decides to change his name and to quit his old business. Apart from robbing a bank, he has learned to stitch shoes in prison. Therefore, he decides to open up a shoe store.

In the story, *A Wagner Matinee*, Georgiana recognizes her emotions when she meets Howard. But, she fails to recognize the effects of her emotions. Georgiana, being a music school teacher elopes with Howard. She does not think about the consequences in the future. Georgiana suffers in Nebraska Frontier leaving behind the comfortable life in Boston. They both suffer a lot.

They built a dugout in the red hillside, one of those that cave-dwellings inmates usually reverted to the conditions of primitive savagery. The water they got from the lagoons where the buffalo drank, and their slender stock of provisions was always at the mercy of bands of roving Indians (5).

The second component, self-Regulation is about managing one's own internal states, impulses, and resources. Self-Regulation also includes self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, Adaptability, and innovation. Jimmy Valentine in *"A Retrieved Reformation"*, regulates his internal states when he sees Annable Adams. Jimmy Valentine changes his name to Ralph Spencer. He can adapt himself to a new place, Elmore. His flexibility in handling things is very remarkable. Being a stranger to Elmore, he enquires about the business. He said he had come to Elmore to look for a location to go into business, "How was the shoe business, now, in the town? He had thought of the shoe business. Was there an opening?" (142). Jimmy can think about his strengths and what he knows apart from robbing. He is also comfortable with new ideas and approaches as he comes to Elmore.

Georgiana in *"A Wagner Matinee"* is also adapting to the new place, Nebraska Frontier. The transition from city life to village life is not easy. But, Georgiana being a stranger to all kinds of fieldwork, adapts herself to this new kind of life. On the contrary, she is not able to regulate her internal states and impulses. At one point she says, "Don't love it so well, Clark, or it may be taken from you. Oh! Dear boy, pray that whatever your sacrifice be it is not that" (6). This statement gives a thought that she is into an internal conflict that sparks her past life. She regrets the fact that she is not able to play music at present. The music also connects the way she lived in Boston.

The third component, motivation is about the way of achieving the goal. Jimmy Valentine in *"A Retrieved Reformation"*, finds the purpose of his life when he comes to Elmore. Until he meets Annable Adams, his purpose remains in robbing banks. It is Annable Adams who drives him to achieve something in his life. Jimmy's commitment to winning the love of Annable Adams is interesting. He takes an initiative to change his name to Ralph Spencer and he knows the challenges that he has to face while setting up the shoe store in Elmore. After a few days, his business flourishes like a palm tree. He has earned the respect of the community and has won the love of Annable Adams. "I want to make you a present of my kit of tools... say, Billy, I've quit the old business a year ago... I am going to get married in two weeks... I tell you, Billy, she is an angel (144)". Surrounded by positive vibes, he decided to quit his old ways. He explains in a letter that he is about to get married and he wants to change his way of living. He also acknowledges that Annable Adams is the

reason behind all this sudden change. On the other hand, in the story of “A Wagner Matinee”, Georgiana is not able to reach her goal. It is a drastic change for her to move from Boston to Nebraska Frontier. But, in terms of achieving her goal, this is a complete deterioration. She is completely blinded about her future when they decide to elope together. There was no motivating factor in her life. She does all other household work because she has made her choice. Life in Nebraska is monotonous for her.

The fourth component is empathy. It is being aware of others’ feelings, needs, and concerns. Jimmy Valentine in “A Retrieved Reformation”, understand the need of others. Though he was a safecracker before he met Annable Adams, he is also filled with empathy. Toward the end of the story, May, a little girl playfully shuts the safe door with Agatha inside it. Mr. Adams knows that it can never be opened because the time lock has been enabled. The mother of Agatha cries for help. That is when Annable Adams asks Ralph Spencer to save her. Ralph Spencer knows for sure the effects of saving her. He is also carrying a suitcase which is full of burglary tools. He is about to give it to his friends. He is aware that if he saves the child, he might have to lose Annable Adams and the people around him will name him a professional safecracker. But, despite all these, he goes to the safe and carefully opens it, and saves Agatha. He truly understands the feelings of others. On the other hand, Georgiana, being immersed in her internal conflict has failed to show empathy.

The fifth component is social skills which are proficient at inducing desirable responses in others. Change catalyst is one of the components of social skills. Jimmy Valentine initiates the change after coming to Elmore. From the very beginning, he has a good taste for society. The following sentences speak about Jimmy.

Ben Price knew Jimmy’s habits. He had learned them while working on the Springfield case. Long jumps, quick get-always, no confederate and a taste for a good society—these ways had helped Mr. Jimmy Valentine to become noted as a successful dodger of retribution. (141)

Even after going to Elmore, without hesitation, he approaches a boy who was loafing on the steps of the Elmore Bank. He learns more about Annable Adams from that boy. In Planter’s hotel, he enquires about the business that he can start. Jimmy once committed to Annable Adams, he even goes to the extreme of doing anything for her. Georgiana, in “A Wagner Matinee”, fails to handle relationships. Her internal conflict is reflected when she comes to Boston. She feels timid to venture into the world that was shut for thirty years. While attending the orchestra along with Clark, she tends to remember her past. She is also becoming aware of her surroundings. “From the time we entered the concert hall, however, she was a trifle less passive and inert and seemed to begin to perceive her surroundings” (7).

Dr. Peter Sifneos, psychiatrist coined the term ‘alexithymia’, which means the result of emotional intelligence imbalance. He rightly defines the problem, “They give the impression of being different, alien beings, having come from an entirely different world, living in the midst of a society which is dominated by feelings” (75). Here, Aunt Georgiana, feels left out from the luxurious world in Boston. She feels inferior in the music hall and feels not belonging to the crowd. This is the place, where readers can find and understand the emotional intelligence imbalance of Aunt Georgiana. She burst out into tears by saying, “I don’t want to go, Clark, I don’t want to go!” (12). Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions. Jimmy Valentine in “A Retrieved Reformation” can channel his emotions and make rational decisions. He perceives his emotion of love for Annable Adams and takes a rational decision of reforming his life by getting

involved in the shoe business. On the other hand, in “A Wagner Matinee”, Georgiana submits to her emotion of infatuation and take impulsive decisions. Daniel, in his theory Emotional Intelligence, discusses two different mental state to become competent in both personal and professional life. They are rational state of mind and emotional state of mind. In professional life, all the people are able to balance both mental states to achieve in their career. But, in personal life, some characters failed to balance the both, as a result, could not take right decision at the right time. In the above discussed two characters, are best example to understand the emotional intelligence imbalance and the consequences? Jimmy Valentine is the character, who balances his emotional intelligence in his personal life, which leads him to become successful business man. In the other hand, Aunt Georgiana, who fails to balance her rational mental state and emotional mental state? Her emotions dominate the decision to elope with Howard.

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