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Non-Conformist conformity

Have you conformed to society? It’s so easy to get wrapped into acting how everyone else acts or thinking the way everyone else does. We want to feel normal in the world so we conform to society's view of how we should behave. People conform into acting how others act in there social class. Whether one is old, young, poor, or rich people act as everyone else does at their social status. When something happens you realize how influenced you are into acting normal and not like yourself all the time. We conform into behaving a certain way but don’t believe that we are conforming. We refuse to accept that we act normal like everyone else. We want to believe that we have a unique personality but in reality we are exactly like the others. In his story, “A&P”, John Updike uses setting, narrator's point of view, writing style, and tone to convey his themes to the reader.

Sammy works in a normal grocery store where people normally go about their everyday lives. From his eyes, everyone does the same thing and acts the same way everyday they come into the grocery store to buy something. The setting described seems boring, the same thing happens everyday with everyone acting the exact same way. Sammy explains, “The store's pretty empty, as a Thursday afternoon, so there was nothing much to do except lean on the register”(Updike). His obviously extremely boring job establishes to the reader that he hates working there. He describes the customers,"The sheep pushing their carts down the aisle – the girls were walking against the usual traffic (not that we have one-way signs or anything) – were pretty hilarious" (Updike 5). Describing customers as sheep shows how people conform to the normal way people should act. They act how society has influenced them to act, not having independence or having individuality. The sheep in the store show society influences people to act. Using the title “A&P”, Updike uses a normal setting that is familiar to all to tell his story. He shows that an everyday place does not have everyday stories. This analysis of the story states, “Updike is known for this kind of thing – taking ordinary aspects of American life and showing us how they are actually extraordinary”(Shmoop).The grocery store seems more like a place for adults, the store has neat aisles and is filled with older people who all act how society wants them to act. When the teenage girls come into this world of conformity, the adults look like they are way too serious and materialistic.

The writing style Updike uses makes this story unique. He purposely puts many grammar and tense issues throughout his story. The story’s starts off as, "In walks these three girls in nothing but bathing suits"(Updike). Normally we would change “walks” to “walk” but using this creates a sense of casuality. He uses grammar issues to help the reader get into his mind. Halfway through the story sammy thinks,"Now here comes the sad part of the story, at least my family says it's sad, but I don't think it's so sad myself"(Updike). This line tells us for the first time that he is retelling this story. Finally, The writing style used shows him as a rebel, not giving in to the normal sense of what seems acceptable to society. Overall, his abstract style of writing gives a sense of knowing who told this story through his mind.

Sammy describes what he sees, "She was the queen. She kind of led them, the other two peeking around and making their shoulders round. She did not look around, not this queen, she just walked straight on slowly, on these long white prima donna legs"(Updike 2). Much of the first part of the story was Sammy explaining how these girls looked and how they acted. They represented individuality and do not conform to the social norm of how to act in the grocery store. Sammy uses brutal honesty with the description of everyone in the store making things easy to know what he really thinks. After he gets done checking someone out, sammy says, “If she'd been born at the right time they would have burned her over in Salem”(Updike). He was not afraid to voice his opinion of people, his thoughts showed the opposite of what a conformed person would think. Hearing his thoughts tells the reader how he truly feels and what he thinks about people. Knowing his thoughts lets the reader assume a certain biased coming from a teenage boy.

The overall tone changed as the story progressed. At the beginning, the story was humorous hearing his thoughts about people. Although, in the end, Sammy was left in Isolation. Sammy describes his customer, “She's one of these cash-register-watchers, a witch about fifty with rouge on her cheekbones and no eyebrows, and I know it made her day to trip me up”(Updike). We all have seen people who act exactly like this. Stuck up and narrowly minded, wanting everything perfect. Sammy gets fed up with Lengel, "I said I quit”(Updike). Frustrated with his anger of not being able to stand up for the girls who were embarrassed he does the only thing he can do and quits. He tried to be their hero but ended up failing miserably. He made a rash decision to quit and not stick with his job just because he didn’t agree with what his manager was saying. This was a life changing moment for him because this gave him the realization to get his butt into gear and make something out of his life. Once in most people’s lives they have their own defining moment that changes their way of thinking and living. The story ends with, “My stomach kind of fell as I felt how hard the world was going to be to me hereafter”(Updike). He has no idea what the adult world has in store for him but he does know the rest of his life will be difficult. An analysis states,“Sammy's narrative voice is full of humor, sarcasm, wit, and, later, disappointment”(Enotes). The amount of tones for the reader to feel makes the story have a unique aspect. The tones used add a gateway into Sammy’s thoughts and his true feelings.

One of the themes conveyed in this story is how people conform to how society wants them to act depending on your social class. People at a higher social class conform to the normal ways of society, while lower class like the girls in bikinis have completely different standards. In real life, the higher social status or the more money people have, people act more mature than someone in a lower class socially. Lower class people for the most part act like themselves and do not really care what others think. Another theme is the struggle for power. Lengel, the store manager, comes over to the girls and says, "Girls, this isn't the beach"(Updike). Lengel who comes off as being stuck up has a position of power over everyone else in the store. He asserts his dominance when he tells the girls they can not come in dressed like that. If he did not say something he would be approving their behavior and loose his perceived in charge status. Sammy, obviously disagreeing with what Lengel has to say, feels fed up with his abuse of power. Sammy seems to be treated as a low life cashier, not as another equal person. He can not have a say in the matter because his opinions do not matter to Lengel. The three girls try to stand up against Lengel but seem to lose in the end. Also, Sammy naturally takes the girls sides and naturally hates his authoritative boss who has power over him. He relates more to the girls on his social class

Overall, Updike did a great job getting his point across and made a powerful story out of a normal place that we find familiar. He showed the conformity of people in an everyday situation that we can all relate to. Most people have conformed to society, but choose not to admit that they have. These people believe the opposite of the truth, in reality they are just like everyone else. Updike showed this with his abstract writing techniques through the thoughts of Sammy. Next time you go to the grocery store ask yourself, are you just another sheep who’s conformed to society’s influences? We feel the need to hide our emotions because as a society we don't really accept negative feelings. Hiding your emotions is a lot easier than trusting someone enough to be yourself around them.

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