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An Actor's Approach to the Role of Trisha in Five Women Wearing the Same Dress Written by Alan Ball

Caroline Denning

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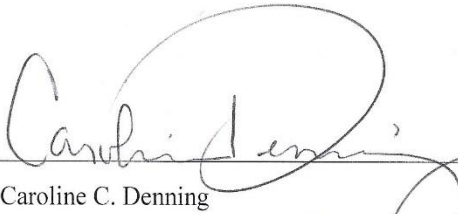
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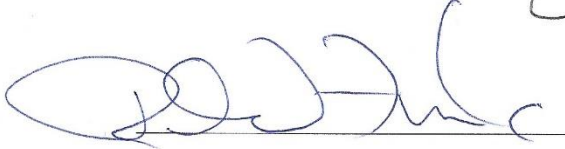
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An Actor's Approach to the Role of Trisha in *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* Written by
Alan Ball


By
Caroline Clare Denning

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Fine and Performing Arts Scholars Program
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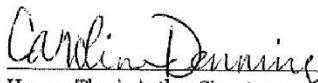
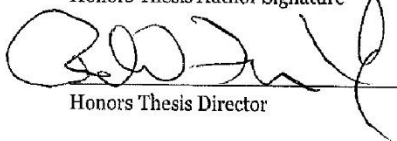
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Table of Contents

Chapter I: Research.....	4
Chapter II: Documentation	16
Chapter III: Reflection	24
Bibliography	29

Chapter I: Research

Five Women Wearing the Same Dress is a contemporary comedy written by Alan Ball that is set in 1993 in Knoxville, Tennessee. The play first premiered on February 13, 1993 at the Manhattan Class Company (Ball). The play takes place during the wedding reception of a very wealthy-old money bride and groom. The five bridesmaids, those of whom wear all the same dress, convene in the sister of the bride, Meredith's, bedroom of their parents' wealthy, southern home. Many of the characters in this show agreed to be a part of the bridal party out of obligation to the pretentious bride, Tracy. The show consists of a series of conversations and events that range in seriousness but flow along by the growing comradery of the five bridesmaids. These conversations are aided by large intakes of alcohol and recreational marijuana. The use of substances in this show is a controversial topic and area of discomfort within the show because of the ranging belief systems of the women portrayed in this piece.

Ball tackles topics of adultery, abortion, rape, homosexual discrimination, sex education, religious values, etc. and manages to do so while still remaining in the genre of comedy. This play is quick and is a fine representation of Alan Ball's works. He is primarily known as a screen writer and producer and often is known for including topics of homosexuality ("Alan"). This is reflected in *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* through the character Mindy, the groom's lesbian sister, as she is openly homosexual and addresses adversity she has faced and as many have faced in the homosexual community. In the early 90s, homosexuality was not widely accepted in the United States and especially so in the southern rural area of Knoxville, Tennessee. Mindy, the bride's now sister-in-law, speaks on how she battled the societal conflict for this wedding when she says, "Tracy, who requested that I not bring Deb who is my lover of *nine years* to the rehearsal dinner because they wanted to keep it just *family*. And I acquiesced

because I didn't want another big scene" (Ball p.53). Mindy is troubled by her loyalty to Deb and her expected loyalty and cooperation with her family. Ultimately, she boils it down to this day or event is not about her or her partner, but about her brother, Scott, who is very dear to her. This conflict that Mindy speaks about, however, is a representation of the types of conflicts that have to lay dormant because they are displeasing to the Southern society. Southern weddings are often described as classy and elegant and within southern culture—there is a certain standard that these ceremonies must uphold or exceed, especially amongst the wealthier upper class of the South.

It was not uncommon to see outdoor weddings of wealthy southern estate owners in the early 90s. Many wedding ceremonies were held on extravagant plantations and manors all across the south ("Simple"). These types of weddings were very common amongst the higher class of the South and were not only a ceremony of union but also a societal gathering. According to journalist, Claire Valenty, of *Etiquette Guide*, "Southern wedding etiquette is all about tradition. The venue most likely will be chosen for its family ties (either a family home or where someone else in the family was married) and if the wedding dress is not passed down from the bride's mother, than the bride will definitely be decked out in all of the jewelry and accessories of her mother, grandmother and/or great grandmother." This particular wedding in *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* was more than likely modeled after a stereotypical early 90s afternoon wedding design. Because of the elaborate architecture, scenery, and natural décor many southerners partook in outside wedding ceremonies and receptions. The heat of the south brought a certain charm to the event and it allotted for some notable fashion choices because of it. Brides would often wear hats and to protect the bridal party from the sun and to prevent sweating and ruining their hair and makeup ("Simple"). During the time that this wedding took place, it was common for a bride to have all of her bridesmaids to essentially look uniform. They often would

have the exact same dress, shoes, hairstyles, jewelry, and extravagant bouquets. A very common aspect of southern weddings is the size of the bridal party. Southern women tend to have many friends and family members included in the bridal party, therefore, the groom had to equal the same amount of groomsmen. Southerners are a bit A-typical in that sense and want everything even and symmetrical. It is almost considered custom to have female family members or future members a part of the bride's big day. Tracy Marlow-McClure, the bride of *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress*, was unique in this area because she only had a mere five bridesmaids. This is explained in the play when the characters discuss her lack of friends. Everything is bigger in the South so most of the gowns were quite elaborate in the amount of fabric that was used in making gowns. Typical southern outdoor weddings happened during the warmer months of the year from late spring until early fall. Southern brides tended to mirror that warmth of the season with warm and bright colors in her wedding design ("Simple"). A few staple colors were chosen and consistently used throughout all of the wedding décor including table settings, seating ribbons, pocket squares and ties for the groomsmen, and the gowns, shoes, and hats for the bridesmaids. The designs of the 90s often included tulle material, a fine mesh/net fabric, in order to enlarge the skirt portions of the dress to make them appear more traditional and give them a sense of a Southern Belle. The famous 'poofy sleeves' were a staple in formal female attire of the 80s and 90s and this was most certainly reflected in ETSU's costuming design for these particular dresses. The costume designer for *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* was Elisabeth Bell.

Below are two (2) photos to provide visual reference of 90s bridal parties:



The photo above is from a family friend's wedding in the early 1990s.



This photo is from ETSU's production of *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* in 2017.

Cast Pictured: Audrey Hammonds, Courtney Spencer, Reagan James, Angel Thacker, and Caroline Denning

The costuming for this show was historically accurate and held true to many of the audience members who had participated in southern weddings in the 90s. All of the characters in ETSU's production were uniformly in the same dress, hat, jewelry, shoes, and bouquets. The

uniformity in southern weddings really reflected their traditional and conservative outlooks on southern weddings. The bride was intended to be the focus of the ceremony and festivities whereas the bridal party were quite literally intended to be the handmaidens of the bride, and their appearances most often reflected that. Although they were all the same, southern weddings often visually represented the wealth or face value of which the families came from. The weddings served as a platform to showcase those qualities of wealthy southern families in a social setting. This was exhibited through the entertainment, venue, décor, catering, theme, etc. The seating during wedding receptions was almost always strategically assigned by the bride and groom. Seating arrangements were made in order to prevent certain guests from interacting with others, but also, to force other guests to interact throughout the event for social reasons. As I mentioned, many of these wealthy southern weddings were influenced by the old money that was funding them and that required a certain 'status quo' to be met regardless of the couple's desires or visions for their wedding day. The Marlow's and McClure's, families of the bride and groom, of *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* followed many of these Southern traditions. Although the wedding and reception are never physically seen within the show, the costuming, dialogue, and décor of the wedding give a vivid representation of what this afternoon wedding in 1993 was like. Ball was able to provide this imagery because of the descriptive dialogue he had written for the show.

Throughout the script of *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress*, there is a multitude of 90s referenced dialogue that resonates with audience members who grew up during that time or were in their adulthood around the time of 1993. References include Malcom X, Queen Latifah, Leona Helmsley, *Mission: Impossible*, Ilya Kuryachin on *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, and Wilt Chamberlain. Malcom X is mentioned between Meredith and Mindy when Mindy knocks

Meredith off of her pedestal when she points out that her obsession with Malcom X is hypocritical considering her white privilege and entitlement that she carries coming from a wealthy, Caucasian southern home. Queen Latifah is also mentioned by Mindy in her rant to Meredith when she is comparing Meredith's lack of backbone to that of Queen Latifah's. This is an important piece of dialogue in the script because of Queen Latifah's role in the 90s spotlight of entertainment. Latifah was represented as a wildly successful rap star in the early 90s and she later embarked on an acting career later on into the 90s and early 2000s. The Queen represented a strong African-American female role model to many young people of that generation. Mindy's argument to Meredith in this scene is that she is falsely representing people like Queen Latifah in her life because she is contradictory in all of her actions and motives in the way that she handles events at her sister's wedding ceremony and reception.

In a different beat of the show, Mindy makes a reference to Leona Helmsley, referred to as a 1980s villain gaining the title of Queen of Mean, as she flaunts her horrendous bridesmaid's dress and marches around with power and strength. Helmsley was quite the spectacle during the 80s and 90s due to her extreme measures in the way she treated employees in her hotel empire, felony tax evasion, and overall evil, egotistical demeanor (Schulman). This is an incredibly humorous bit of the play as the women are loosening up and bonding with each other as they reflect on extreme societal figures.

Towards the end of the second Act, a majority of the women are convened in Meredith's bedroom when Tripp, Trisha's love interest of the show, joins them in hopes of getting more time to get to know Trisha. During this scene, the characters are speaking about lost time that they will never get back and what they aspired to be whenever they were younger. Trisha mentions the woman from *Mission: Impossible* who double-crossed as a mistress and a spy. This

reflects on who Trisha is presently in the show because she is a fierce woman figure who is independently driven and defines her own success. Tripp then reflects on who he wanted to be when he was grown and that is where Ilya Kuryachin comes in. He was a character on the hit television show *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* He was fantasized over by young female audiences because of his striking good looks, mysterious demeanor, and edgy appeal.

The character I portrayed, Trisha, referenced Wilt Chamberlain in a very saucy conversation with her high school best friend, Georgeanne, who also was a part of the bridal party. In the scene, Trisha and Georgeanne are having quick and light-hearted back-and-forth dialogue centered on Trisha's 'promiscuous' sex life and her experiences with multiple men over the years. This beat is used to reflect and reconnect between the two characters and it is presented through a rollercoaster of emotions between the two women. Trisha uses Wilt Chamberlain as a parallel to Tommy Valentine, a man at the wedding whom all the women shared a crush on during their time growing up, and his impressive number of women he has shared the same bed with numerous times throughout his life. Trisha mentions Chamberlain as an example of a sort of a lothario because in his novel, *A View from Above*, he claimed to have slept with 20,000 different men and women in his life (Chamberlain 93). All these mentions hold an integral part to the show's comedy and punch lines. Art often reflects the society of the time and having such societal highlighted figures included in the dialogue really strengthens the piece in making it relatable and transparent.

Many of these well-known people and television series were made famous through pop culture of the decade, however, many were known for headlining the news with outrageous acts or speaking out against societal norms. These references were iconic to these women and to the generation that grew up during the 90s. Having decade specific mentions offers a window to the

past for younger audiences. These references to the past sometimes go over the head of younger audience members and the comedy is lost. The use of certain reflections of the past place the play in a particular time period. Most of these references are written for a more liberal-minded audience and the humor has the potential to be lost on conservatives. All of the characters, aside from Frances, openly identify with a more liberal school of thought which provides an interesting antithesis to the play's southern location. So often in this show, contradictions are represented, I feel, to break the stigma or stereotype of the location these women have grown up in and are living in as young female adults.

As I have mentioned before, Alan Ball purposely includes plotlines and characters that address homosexuality. Some of his most notable works include *American Beauty*, later turned into a film that won an Oscar in 2000, and also HBO's hit television series *True Blood*. I often feel that writers should produce work that reflects what they know and what they have experienced so there is a genuine sense of authenticity in their work. Alan Ball is an openly gay director, producer, playwright and screenwriter and a strong voice for LGBTQ activism in today's society. Because of this, Ball has been able to offer insight into the topics of the LGBTQ community and shed a light through his very real and engaging works that have been produced from the early 90s through today. In an interview with *On Top Magazine*, Ball speaks about the HBO series, *True Blood's*, premiere in 2008 and gives insight into what is happening in the film industry by stating, "So many movies are not about anything, they're just about profit- you know, they have no soul... [computer generated movies] have nothing to do with being human." In just a simple statement, I believe that Ball expresses his mantra for creating and producing films and plays. He wants to mount works that are humanistic. Since his earliest writings, he has wanted to be known for pieces that resonate within the soul and heart of each audience member.

He wrote these women to be genuine and for all of them to be driven by their own individual motives. The characters created by Ball in this play are driven by their individual needs. Those needs come out of each character's given circumstances. As a result, the story is woven together by honest character relationships that make the situations presented real to both the actors and audience alike.

All of this research that I have included thus far is part of the process that I take as an actor in order to further my character development. Generally, when I approach a role I tend to use methods taught by Konstantine Stanislavski. Some of the methods that I pull from his works are *Given Circumstances* and the *Magic If*. Given circumstances are all the environmental and situational conditions that affect a character's choices, actions, movements, and dialogue. In my mind, there are two types of given circumstances, especially in this show, characteristic circumstances and situational. The characteristic circumstances are what is said about a specific character in stage directions, other character's dialogue, and one's own dialogue. Everything we know about a character makes up the given circumstances. The first place to look for this information is in the script. Many of the characteristic circumstances I have found in the script of *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* for the role of *Trisha* are found in the dialogue of the other characters where they describe Trisha's past actions and characteristics. In the play, the other characters describe Trisha as being very sexually confident, independent, and a liberal thinker. Situational dialogue is all of the factors that have brought the character to the point they are at in each beat of the show. One example of situational dialogue in *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* is that all of the action of the play takes place in an upstairs bedroom after the wedding ceremony before they make their appearances at the reception in the backyard of the southern home. As a woman who has been in multiple weddings, I have experienced the

exhaustion that comes with all of the action, emotion, and stress of the day to just get that bride down the aisle and married. I remember the physical discomfort from painful shoes and awkward dresses where you are constantly having to adjust and freshen up to look as you are expected to during such an event. I resonate with the disgust of having to be around people from your past or childhood that you were so willingly ready to flee from when you finally were given the freedom to. Now having to revisit them is never a joyous occasion. Situational and characteristic dialogue generally coexist and work together to provide structure and guidance for the actors. Both of which provide a base for actors to expand upon in their own artistic approach. Characteristic dialogue is represented in a scene between Georgeanne and Trisha as they talk about Trisha's romantic life post high school when their friendship dissolved.

On page 22 of the script, the dialogue reads as follows:

Georgeanne: Are they all like that?

Trisha: Who?

Georgeanne: You know. Lesbians.

Trisha: What, clumsy?

Georgeanne: She's just so, I don't know. Blunt. Are they all like that?

Trisha: Why are you asking me?

Georgeanne: (*Evasively*) Well, you know...

Trisha: No, what?

Georgeanne: Well, haven't... I mean, I just remember hearing something about you and... oh, forget it.

Trisha: (*Smiling.*) All the lesbians I have known have not been clumsy. As a matter of fact, Mindy is the first.

In this bit of dialogue between the two women, we are able to grasp a sense of Trisha's past and of her experimentation with women during her college years. The scene later progresses into conversation centered around Trisha's thoughts on love and marriage and her own sexuality. Throughout all of this dialogue, we are constantly given the dynamics that make up Trisha and what she represents to the other women in this show. Because of the differences I have personally with the character of Trisha, I rely on acting techniques of Stanislavski such as the *Magic If* to motivate my actions in the way that would be natural for that character.

The *Magic If* is simply defined in a question such as: What if I were this character in this situation, how would I act? I used this technique in *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* in multiple situations throughout the script. One instance is during the scene I described above. Georgeanne goes on to peg Trisha with very personal questions that to some, may come across as an attack—however, I felt that if I was Trisha, I would act confidently in my sexuality and beliefs and not waver to someone else's judgement or negative opinion of me. We learn from the dialogue that Trisha is represented as a strong, independent, and confident woman. She doesn't ever blatantly state her confidence or other attributes—we just learn of these traits by the way she handles each situation. Pairing *Given Circumstances* and the *Magic If* truly helped me to develop a strong,

interesting, truthful, and realistic character. They also helped me to document my rehearsal process and track my growth and discovery. All of this research provided thus far is necessary when following the teachings of Stanislavski. In order to appropriately represent the role of Trisha, I had to research many aspects of the show to gain a better understanding of the piece.

Another essential aspect of Stanislavski's system is keeping up with your homework. In his book, *An Actor's Handbook: An Alphabetical Arrangement of Concise Statements on Aspects of Acting*, Stanislavski states, "The great majority of actors are convinced that they need to work only at rehearsals and at home they can enjoy their leisure. But this is not so. At rehearsals an actor merely clarifies the work he should be doing at home. At home an actor should do work on himself to correct shortcomings which have been pointed out to him by his instructor" (Stanislavski 72). Many acting teachers and great actors keep a journal as part of their homework in order to grow as the character throughout the rehearsal processes. Robert DeNiro, for example, is well known for keeping journals. I have always clung to this technique because it provides structure and something to always look back on to reflect on change and new development at different times during the run of a show. In chapter 2: Documentation, I will dive into specifics of my journal and notes from rehearsals of *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* which helped to lift my character off the pages of the script and come to life.

Chapter II: Documentation

Often times an actor will keep a journal or notebook of sorts for multiple reasons whether it be blocking notes given by the director, character development questionnaire for self-reflection, new discoveries in motivation in each beat of a script, or simply for tweaking the choices that have already been made. In a unique way, your journaling becomes your own personal textbook or point of reference when working on your technique as an actor. It helps you to re-read old mistakes and successes to consciously improve upon them and motivate you to try new things. The rehearsal process is a classroom and is never-ending. You not only learn from yourself, but your directors, fellow cast members, production designers, stage managers, and technical crew. As an actor, the learning process is never ending. Through our notes taken at each rehearsal and our consistent journaling, we continue to learn and grow as a performer.

At the very first table reading of *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress*, my journaling began. It is my opinion that every great actor should strive to have even better research than their respective directors by the time the show has mounted. At our table reading, my director, Bobby Funk, came in and cracked open an entire binder full of research to our cast of six and we all shared similar feelings and nonverbal glances of knowing that we had a massive amount of homework that we needed to start tending to. Bobby presented us with research fairly like that I have documented above, but also provided us with stories of all the people talked about in our show to give us a more

personal connection to these individuals we were making a point to mention and the importance of their place in our dialogue. The research that went into this show varied from character to character and through our own personal discoveries we often taught each other as well.

In the middle of our rehearsal process, the props master began to supply the actresses the actual props that would be used in the show. One of these props was a lighter to be used in the scene where the women smoke marijuana. The actor in our show, who portrayed the role of Meredith, had never used a lighter before. The actor in this role, Reagan James, had to handle the prop as if it was something she did all the time. I distinctly remember giving her a ten minute or so lesson on how to spark a lighter properly. I found myself dumbfounded that a millennial of my age had no knowledge of how to actually use a lighter and it was a bonding moment that I and the rest of the women in the cast had because of the laughter we shared during the trials and triumphs she had in learning this interesting new trick. Through this simple demonstration, I wrote in my journal that night, "never assume that people you come across in life have your same knowledge nor you theirs. There is always a place for learning whether it be simple or extravagant, it is always worthy of your time and others." Similarly, another learning took place when we started to include the stage business of the women smoking marijuana on stage in Meredith's bedroom. Disclaimer: We did not smoke actual Marijuana on stage, it was crushed up Oregano. Spoiler Alert! Anyway, I never thought that me growing up in a drug-influenced household of some of my family members would be put to positive use. This happened when teaching another actress the proper technique of how you take your first hit of a bowl, the correct inhale and exhale, and the

immediate effects that the drug has on the lungs and throat. With aid from our director, Bobby, we all became well-versed (enough) to accurately portray this recreational activity to an audience. I remember feeling a heaviness inside me during the first rehearsal of adding that stage business because I have never actually touched a drug even though I have often fallen victim to them and have been surrounded by them since my early childhood. I was hit with an emotional setback when I first had my mouth on the top of the pipe because for a moment, I was myself and not my character and that realization filled me with emotion. Through Stanislavski's method of the *Magic If*, I was able to sit down that night with my journal and reflect on how if I were Trisha in real life, how would I react to the situation, given the information already known about Trisha and how I have created her as a character. An excerpt from my journal that evening read as follows:

February 7, 2017

"Tonight, we started using the props for weed and it surprisingly made me quite emotional. There was something about visualizing myself smoking versus Trisha that struck a chord with me that I couldn't shake. I also realized in that moment, that I was getting comfortable with these women and the woman that I was portraying. I had started to relate to her a lot, up until this moment. I learned two things tonight: 1. There is a beauty of character and personal study. You take the similarities and cling to those and build upon the differences in order to strengthen that person you are wishing to represent. 2. There is a difference between habitual and recreational use of drugs—specifically marijuana. This is something I already am fully aware of but it is important to be reminded frequently. * Don't let your personal FEELINGS affect the antithesis feeling

your character has towards a situation or activity! Separate and integrate accordingly and healthily!

With this personal and character discovery, I was able to blend the two experiences in order to make these moments with Trisha believable and real. She is a woman who has recreationally used drugs in her later teen and adult life and it has become a source of fun, relaxation, and release for her. I decided that my parallel to getting high and getting that euphoric high and calmness was a couple of glasses of Cabernet and a warm bath. So, in beats of the script where I was partaking in smoking, I personally took myself to my own place of release and relaxation that similarly read the same in Trisha in how she was experiencing the moment and activity with the other women.

Not all my journal entries were as reflective as the one I shared above, many of them are just documentations of what I mentioned previously whether it be blocking, prop notes, lighting cues, or tweaking certain inflection, diction, or projection on chunks of dialogue and why. For instance, some of my props that I carried on with me from the top of the show were essential to be checked and preset in my purse because there is dialogue and action that is associated with these props after they are discovered in my bag. Two of these props were a long roll of condoms and a lighter. There is a dialogue exchange between Meredith and Trisha regarding the number of condoms she has in her purse and Meredith then uses the lighter found in Trisha's purse to light her bowl of weed when she starts smoking. A note in my journal that I commonly took during different rehearsals was: Check your presets (condom and lighter- inner pocket of purse)!

A difficulty that I faced with working on the rape scene in this show is my own personal feelings towards the writing of it. Not only does it bother me personally, but also, I feel that my character would have been radically shaken by the news of this and would have acted accordingly. In the script, I don't believe that is well represented. This scene is the biggest frustration that I have within this show. I don't understand how someone can write in a deeply heavy scene about sexual assault and rape and then pass by it so quickly with little to no resolve to it other than jumping into another beat of the script. Rehearsal notes and reflection are included below:

February 12, 2017

Act II, pg. 50:

-Make sure to find moments to comfort Meredith during the time where she is confiding in Trisha about Tommy Valentine.

-Show an arc of character emotion from the first you hear of the rape and how it affects you as more information is revealed and after Meredith leaves.

-Don't fear emotion that may naturally come in reaction to this news. Embrace it and utilize it within the next scene with Mindy.

Pg. 52:

-Allow yourself enough time to zip up Meredith's dress completely before completing the line to cue her exit.

-On "Well, I just want to tell you, if you ever need me, I'm here" (Ball 53), don't rush this line. Make sure that you find a sincere moment with Meredith. Don't get too caught up in the pacing—it will come naturally. This moment allows for a pause.

Towards the end of the play, Tripp and Trisha finally have time alone together after he has been a topic of conversation amongst the women in regards to how Trisha feels about him. I found difficulty in working on this scene because the dialogue feels very flirtatious but not in the way I would find to be appropriate for the ages of Tripp and Trisha. Also, with this being in a black box setting, I found it challenging to explore physical interactions with my Francisco Rodriguez, Tripp, because everyone that had attended rehearsals were in the same intimate space as me. As an actor, I had to block everyone else out and focus solely on my scene partner which made my work in the scene much more organic. Notes from a Tripp/Trisha scene are below:

February 15, 2017

Act II, pg. 58:

-The scene between Tripp and Trisha should be playful but try to bring it with a tone that fits the age of the characters.

-Play with the dialogue as being sarcastic with the nervous and timid beats of the dialogue in the next rehearsal—see if you can play that the two are making fun of the silly conversations that people have when first trying to flirt or progress to something physical.

Pg. 60

-On line, Tripp: "I hate tattoos on women" Trisha: "Oh, but you love them on men? Is there something you need to tell me, Tripp?" (Ball 60) -- Make sure to turn over Tripp's forearm to notice his tattoo and react accordingly. *Think of him placing a double standard on women regarding tattoos.

As my partner, Francisco Rodriguez, and I continued working on the scene between Tripp and Trisha with our director, Bobby, we started to notice a switch in motivation throughout the scene. The nature of the language started to elevate to more adult conversation and it really showcased part of Trisha's personality in her dialogue with Tripp. On this night specifically, I was trying to navigate the action behind everything that the characters were saying. This scene requires the actors to be transparent with each other because they are seeking the absolute truth of what the other person wants from them and why. These conversations aren't always the easiest to have because they require you to be completely honest and vulnerable. Some notes from the rehearsal are recorded below:

February 16, 2017

Act II, pg.64-65

-Pay attention to the switch in conversation in this beat.

-Figure out the root of Tripp's intentions and act upon them—let that drive how you handle the rest of the scene. Let the battle between Tripp/Trisha's intentions fuel your responses.

-Bobby said, "during times when Trisha is angry or if a small argument is occurring— think of it as Trisha testing Tripp to see if he can really handle her and all that she is"-- Play with this idea in nonverbal communication and body language.

Making a habit out of journaling during the rehearsal process of productions that I am a part of has allowed me to keep documentation of my growth as an actor and student of my craft. Through this analysis of my approach as an actor, I have been able to track my progress in the homework that I have done to see my strengths and weaknesses, my discoveries as a character and as an artisan, and my part of the collaboration amongst the entire production team. The journaling process is an essential form of documentation when you reach the post show reflection portion of an individual actor's approach. The homework that I was diligent in doing for this piece, alongside the research, and my overall experiences from the beginning to the end of the production have allowed me to delve deeper into the work I did in order to propel me forward into better study, technique, and presentation of new work that I may be a part of in the future.

Chapter III: Reflection

I would argue that reflection is one of the most crucial elements of an actor's process after finishing work on a production. Through reflection one is allowing her/his self to study further into the craft in constant pursuits of mastery. I would compare reflection to an actor as game footage to an athlete. An actor is not only looking at their personal successes and mistakes, but also those of the rest of the cast, directors, playwrights, and production team members. All this analysis is then used to better prepare the artist for the work that comes next. If we do not question ourselves and the motivation behind what we do, then we are not growing in the craft we claim to have passion in. Through my work on *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress*, I was able to reflect on my feelings and experiences of the script, my work, and the overall production.

When first introduced to the script of *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress*, I was intrigued that it was a dialogue-heavy comedy amongst mostly women for the entirety of the play. However, the more I studied the writing of the script the more displeased I became with the conversations that these women were sharing because I felt they were not realistic representations of any sort of female dialogue. There are very vulnerable topics spoken about ranging from drugs, religion, politics, adultery, rape, sexual promiscuity, sexual orientation, and the oppression found in all of these. Women tend to be subtle and strategic in the way they approach conversations amongst others especially if it is containing sensitive material. I remember working a scene with a fellow actor, who was playing the role of Georgeanne, and I had asked, "Do you feel we have conversations like this? Has your mom spoken to her girlfriends in this way?" Her response was similar to my motivation for asking the question. We both agreed the conversation felt foreign. In some ways, the dialogue seems adolescent

compared to the ages these women were supposed to be. The dialogue in the script appears at times to be inappropriate for women who are at this age.

One of the biggest issues I have with the script and the playwright's design of the scene is the beat where Meredith's case of sexual assault and rape is revealed. The scene uncovers that Meredith was sexually abused by Tommy Valentine when she was around the age of 12. The women then proceed to hit Meredith with questions like a round of bullets that eventually cause her to snap and breakdown. Although the initial reactions are believable, there is no solution or resolve found for this heavy plot point before the characters are engaged in completely different conversations and emotions. As an actor, this was the most challenging part of the process for me from the start of rehearsing that scene to performing it each night during the run of the production. I felt that I had a responsibility to be completely genuine in the scene by fully embodying the dialogue I was given to work with and to portray the appropriate response to such horrific news. The following scene is between my character, Trisha, and Mindy and the characters and audience alike are driven in a completely different emotional direction. Whiplash is the best way to describe how I believe my fellow cast, audience members, and I personally felt in the transitions of these two beats in the show. This situation only encourages the stigma within modern society that nothing can be done about sexual assault and there is no point in pursuing justice for the victims individually and universally.

Given this experience and the reflection I have had on it, I have a stronger desire to challenge the works of playwrights and not simply follow what has been spelled out for me if I feel that the appropriate justice is not shown within a certain situation. I have gained the confidence to speak boldly and truthfully on issues that must be heard and understood clearly. I question the playwright's reasoning for not providing a resolve. I question whether the outcome

would be different if the playwright had been a female or a personal victim of sexual assault. All of these notions thought in pondering have propelled me to become a more aware, present performer.

An element of the script that I have truly benefited from is that it is an ensemble-driven piece. An ensemble production requires an enormous amount of trust and accountability from all that are involved within it. I feel that ensemble work truly embodies what theatre is and has been from its birth. Theatre is a collaborative, abstract, and on-going process with multiple moving parts, positions, roles, and responsibilities that all join to seek after a shared goal. I remember after the first two weeks of rehearsal, a few of us would get to the studio about an hour before rehearsal to work through lines and trouble spots. Over the course of the next few weeks, the entire cast had devoted over an hour of their time, outside of scheduled rehearsals, to gather collectively to push ourselves further and stronger within our process. I then realized that work such as this was what I wanted to be a part of for the rest of my career.

Because of the accountability required in ensemble work, the quality of the production is elevated by the work being produced by all that are involved. I felt that my cast-mates, my director, the design team, and the running crew's contributions all influenced the work I put forth within the production of *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress*. I found through this process that one of my strengths is my ability to command power within a character. I naturally have a presence and voice that captures attention and therefore, I have a responsibility to utilize that intelligently. A weakness of mine is that I tend to lose energy towards the ends of my sentences, so I must be consciously aware to deliver the full line. In times of diligent focus, I tend to anticipate the next action rather than acting naturally as the scene progresses. Because of my occasional lack of focus at times, this is a struggle that I constantly try to overcome. I found that

I had a deep desire to remain a student to my craft and all the lessons it has to provide me as long as I am open to its teachings.

Through my study of this show, I gained further knowledge on techniques of comedy to elevate the overall acting experience. Techniques such as 'louder, faster, funnier' and crisp diction are essential in delivering comedy correctly. An audience will not stay engaged if they cannot understand the words that one is trying to say. One of the most important skills I learned was to feel the flow of a written line, especially if it is a punch line. The line must be delivered perfectly and enunciated clearly in order to resonate properly in the way that the playwright intended. I gained immense appreciation for the designers and technicians for the stunning and imaginative work that they created for this production and how all of the elements blended harmoniously through the dedication put forth by all that were a part. The production team of *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* include: James Maines, Erin Teaster, Claire Johnston, Evin McQuiston, Ryan Stapleton, Keith Maultbay, Grace Arrowood, Elisabeth Bell, Mary Katherine Smith, Melissa Shafer, Zach Olsen, and Beth Skinner, Delbert Hall, and Karen Brewster. This production would have never mounted successfully without the talent, dedication, collaboration, and passion of all of these individuals.

I have come to learn and slowly accept that failure is one of the most beautiful parts of life. It is from failure that we grow and define our own successes. Our successes have to become reliant on each other in order to build atop one another to reach our greater goals and future achievements. The work artisans do is not for the individual alone, but rather for the greater community. One of theatre's earliest influences, Aristotle, states, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts," and I could not agree with that notion more. A mantra that I choose to live and pursue my career by was written by George Bernard Shaw. In "A Splendid Torch" he wrote:

"This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one, the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no "brief candle" to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."

I have been taught by masters, innovators, historians, and creators in many aspects of my craft. I boldly state that I will never fully grasp a concrete approach to the technique of being an actor because the work itself is vast and abstract and an eternal process. I must remain fluid and flexible to stretch and expand my execution of my craft and to never stop working to be better than I am. I seek to teach, inspire, learn, challenge, move, and change those that I have the honor of sharing my work with, and in turn, I long to receive all the same as a token of shared passion and responsibility to binding the community together and progressing forward to new, and thrilling discoveries and endeavors.

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