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The Portrayal of Gender and a Description of Gender Roles in Selected American Modern and  
Postmodern Plays

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A dissertation  
presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and  
Policy Analysis  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

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by  
Bonny Ball Copenhaver  
May 2002

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Dr. Jack Branscomb  
Dr. Nancy Dishner  
Dr. Russell West

Keywords: Gender Roles, Feminism, Modernism, Postmodernism, American Theatre,  
Robbins, Glaspell, O'Neill, Miller, Williams, Hansbury, Kennedy, Wasserstein, Shange,  
Wilson, Mamet, Vogel

## ABSTRACT

### The Portrayal of Gender and a Description of Gender Roles in Selected American Modern and Postmodern Plays

by

Bonny Ball Copenhaver

The purpose of this study was to describe how gender was portrayed and to determine how gender roles were depicted and defined in a selection of Modern and Postmodern American plays. This study was based on the symbolic interaction theory of gender that suggests that social roles are learned over time and are subject to constant reinforcement. The significance of this study was derived from the broad topic of gender because gender issues are relevant to a variety of fields and exploring the effects of gender in one field contributes to the understanding of gender in another field.

The plays in this study were *Votes for Women*, Robins; *Trifles*, Glaspell; *Our Town*, Wilder; *Moon for the Misbegotten*, O'Neill; *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams; *Death of a Salesman*, Miller; *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry; *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Kennedy; *Uncommon Women and Others*, Wasserstein; *Fefu and Her Friends*, Fornes; *spell #7*, Shange; *Fool for Love*, Shepard; *Fences*, Wilson; *Oleanna*, Mamet; and *How I Learned to Drive*, Vogel.

Two of the study's research questions explored the types of gender roles and behaviors that the characters presented. Two questions focused on considering if the time period or the sex of the playwright were factors in the presentations of gender. Gender behaviors were divided into four categories: Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance. Using narrative analysis techniques, the plays were analyzed for the specific traits in each category.

The majority of the characters were assigned traditional gender roles and displayed traditional gender behavior traits. Based their gender roles and behavior in their roles, characters faced limitations that confined their actions and restricted their choices. Characters experienced consequences for their behaviors, and female characters received harsher punishments for deviant behaviors than male characters. Gender portrayal in Modern plays was more in keeping with traditional patterns than in Postmodern plays. Female playwrights presented more diverse roles for female characters and often explored gender as a major theme in their plays. Where applicable, race, in concert with gender, was an additional factor that governed characters' behaviors by further restricting behavior or possible actions.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the following three people with all of my love and appreciation:

To my husband, Alan, who had faith in me when I did not; who encouraged me when others did not; who never once complained about the time I devoted to this project; and whose love and strength will always sustain me.

To my mother, Mary Ball, who always wanted me to pursue this degree; who inspired me to reach for my goals; and who taught me to be the kind of woman who took pride in where I came from and to look forward to where I was going.

To my father, Bob Ball, who also always wanted me to pursue this degree; who never failed to ask about my progress; and who showed me how to have great strength and courage in times of trouble.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In Act II of Henrik Ibsen's play *Hedda Gabler* (1890/2001), Hedda is engaged in a private conversation with a friend from her past, Eilert Lovborg; they are discussing why Hedda acted as his "confessor" and listened to the tales of his youthful debaucheries. She tells him:

Do you find it so very surprising that a young girl—if there is no chance of anyone knowing—that she'd like some glimpse of a world that—that she's forbidden to know anything about? (p. 713)

As Eilert Lovborg noted, Hedda has a "thirst for life," but she can never satisfy her longing. Confined by her status as a "genteel" woman in the 1890s, Ibsen's tragic heroine finds herself married to a man she does not love. When her calculated machinations to control another person's destiny are thwarted, Hedda's world gets even smaller, and she sees that her life will have no meaningful accomplishments. Faced with a future that will include a baby, Hedda decides to "be quiet" and she takes her own life (p. 730).

On the surface, *Hedda Gabler* is merely a story about the life of an unhappy woman. She lived and died, in the theatrical sense, and that is all. However, in a broader view, *Hedda Gabler* addresses the subject of gender roles in society and how those roles affect the lives and actions of both men and women. Long before gender roles became the subject of scientific inquiry, Ibsen explored the impact of society's views about gender. It is this ability of a playwright to explore humanity and society that is the bedrock of this study.

## The Theatre and Society

Down through the ages, plays have often been interpreted as more than merely entertainment. Playwrights, through the act of composing plays, can write plays that mirror culture by reflecting a given culture's values, mores, and lifestyles and are in essence critiques of society. Playwrights can also create plays that reflect how they interpret their own culture; having been raised in a given time period, playwrights write as a product of a given set of societal rules. Yet the line, if it even exists, between strictly mirroring culture or producing work as a product of a culture is thin and blurred at best.

According to Aristotle (c. 335 B. C.), drama is the imitation of men in action. He asserted that the act of imitation was integral to man's learning, and man's capacity for self-introspection was what separated him from all other animals. He stated that "the reason why men enjoyed seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves, and in saying perhaps, 'Ah, that is he'" (cited in Dukore, 1974 p. 34). Assuming that Aristotle's insistence on the importance of imitation was correct, playwrights create worlds that imitate life. They give their characters personalities and actions that are responses to the world that the playwrights create for the characters' existence.

In addition to imbuing characters with the ability to respond to situations, another facet of drama imitation is a playwright's ability to capture the tone of the larger society. For example, a class hierarchy organized Aristotle's world, and men were the governing authority in the home and in the public domain. Therefore, plays, regardless of when they were written, leave behind glimpses of the social order. For example, just as Greek playwrights left contemporary readers a view of the world, so did the playwrights of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As conclusions are drawn about the Greek world so too will they be drawn about the mechanized world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In drawing conclusions about culture, society usually turns to the historians or to the social scientists for answers. However, the case can also be made for turning to society's writers for answers. As aptly described by Coser (1972):

Literature, though it may be many other things, is social evidence and testimony. It is a continuous commentary on manners and morals. Its great moments, even as they address themselves to the external existential problems which are at the root of the perennial tensions between men and their society, preserve for us the precious record of modes of response to peculiar social and cultural conditions. (p. xv)

While mainstream art often pointed out the dominant "voice" of the day, Plummer (1983) noted that societies were comprised of multiple voices. He concluded that "all voices need hearing: it is just that some are heard less than others" (p. 82). By combining the views of Coser and Plummer, then, plays, when used as data sources, capture the dominate attributes of society and in certain instances provide clues to how the dominant voice affects the minority voice.

One such researcher who aimed at capturing society's views was Burns (1972), and she focused on the connection between the theatre and social life. Working from the premise that sociologists have merely employed literature as a means of reconstructing "social realities of the past," Burns analyzed the "double relationship between the theatre and social life...by examining the varieties of theatrical conventions that can be observed in the development of drama in the English theatre" (p. 3). Burns incorporated theatre history and sociological theory to make connections between what is viewed on the stage and what occurs in social reality. Her study included parallel analyses of dialogue, characters, themes, and acting from both theatrical and sociological perspectives.



As evidenced by Burns' (1972) work, an exploration of the relationship between society and theatre can uncover situations, possibilities, and voices that may have been overlooked by past theorists.

### Gender Roles and Society

One striking characteristic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the women's movement, which brought women to the forefront in a variety of societal arenas. As women won the right to vote, achieved reproductive freedom through birth control and legalized abortion, and gained access to education and employment, Western culture was forced to examine its long held views about women and the roles they play in society.

The study of gender and gender roles dominated much of the scholarship in sociology, anthropology, and psychology during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The terms *gender* and *sex* are often used interchangeably, but these terms define different concepts and are not interchangeable. The following definitions are used throughout this study. The term *sex* refers to the biological, hormonal, and chromosomal differences that determine if a person is male or female (Lindsey, 1997). By definition, *gender* refers to "meanings that societies and individuals ascribe to male and female categories," (Eagly, 1987, p. 4) and the term *gender roles* defines prescribed behaviors that are deemed appropriate for women and men (Lipman-Blumer, 1984). Gender roles, differing from sex roles which are physiological differences based on sexual genitalia, are social constructs, and they "contain self-concepts, psychological traits, ...[and] family, occupational, and political roles assigned dichotomously to members of each sex" (p. 2).

As the study of gender roles became formalized, six predominant schools of thought emerged in an effort to explain why women and men occupy differing roles within a given

culture. These theories—biological, structural-functional, social learning, cognitive development, gender schema, and symbolic interaction—are based on different outlooks on human development and cultural practices. Biological theory suggests that the differences in male and female roles result from the biological differences inherent in both sexes (Christen, 1995; Dobson, 1995; Maccoby, 1966). The structural-functional theory proposes that in order for society to maintain itself, each sex must have roles and jobs that will perpetuate society and keep it functioning in an efficient manner (Eagly, 1987; Parsons, 1960; Parsons & Bales, 1955). Both cognitive development theory (Baldwin, 1971; Kohlberg, 1966) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1971, 1977; Mischel, 1966) explain that gender roles are learned by children in stages and are predicated on rewards for correct gender behavior; however, the theories differ in their interpretations of rewards and learning. Gender schema theory, a combination of the stage and the socialization theories, suggests that humans develop schemas for learning about gender and gender roles (Bem, 1988). Symbolic interaction theory posits that gender is strictly a social construction, and based on society's definition of masculine and feminine, distinct gender roles are passed on and reinforced by different mechanisms within society (Blumer, 1969; Lipman-Blumer, 1984; Mead, 1964).

Especially important to this study was the symbolic interaction theory of gender roles. Symbolic interaction attributes gender role development to the process of socialization which is "the lifelong process through which individuals learn their culture, develop their potential, and become functioning members of society" (Lindsey, 1997, p. 53). Symbolic interaction suggests that social roles are learned over time and are subject to constant reinforcement (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1964). Additionally, symbolic interaction theory holds that a person's understanding of his or her role is subject to change. If plays are considered social models, then how female and

male characters are presented suggests how society at large views the roles of women and men. Furthermore, the presentation of gender in plays can serve to reinforce or to call for a change in accepted gender behavior for women and men.

### World-Views

If plays provided the source material and symbolic interaction theory provided the sociological framework for this study, then the world-views of Modernism and Postmodernism provided this study with a unifying lens through which to examine the position of women and men in culture.

Modernism, as a cultural and literary movement, began to develop as early as the late 1880s but traditionally runs from 1900 to approximately 1950, with the first 25 years of the century characterized as the height of the period (Brockett, 1971; Cantor, 1988; Singal, 1987). As the Industrial Revolution shifted the economic focus from rural to urban life and as inventions changed lifestyles, the past, most notably seen in the Victorian culture, seemed outdated. Modernists viewed the world as an isolating place yet a place full of mystery that beckoned an exploration of its very essence. Described as ardent individualists, Modernists reveled in their personal accomplishments. As a natural outlet of their creativity, artistic achievement became important; however, art and the artist became elitist in nature. Art, regardless of the genre, became fragmented in presentation, while the artist adopted an isolationist persona. Literary works of all modes advanced non-linear plots and new themes such as the effects of technology on humanity or the struggles of individuals with the industrialized world.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed and society became more dependent upon technology as a way of life, changes in artistic expression and philosophic views called Modernism into question. Since the late 1950s, changes, reflected in new literary and artistic pieces and in philosophical ideas are often referred to as the "Contemporary" period, but for this study these changes were referred to as the period of Postmodernism (Chabot, 1988; Goodman, 1993; King, 1991; Laqueur, 1996; Linn, 1996). Postmodernists began to break away from the purely scientific explanation of things, and they searched for non-scientific validation and answers. They eschewed the notion that Truths could be found in nature or in the Self. They celebrated diversity and embraced the notion of the Other, meaning those who were different either because of race, gender, or socioeconomic level. Avoiding the "high" art that was a hallmark of Modernism, Postmodernists found inspiration in popular culture. As language became an obsession of this period, Postmodern literary theorists turned to a detailed linguistic analysis that would help them to understand segments of society. Because of their anti-elitist stance, they often primarily focused on the reader and not the author or the text.

Especially relevant to this study was the increase in status for women that occurred during the periods defined as Modern and Postmodern. Not only did women gain an elevated status, but also the concepts of gender and gender roles and the systematic study of each started and continued during these periods.

During the Modern period women rose to political and social prominence. In the early 1900s, the women's movement was organized around the question of suffrage. After years of work, the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States' Constitution was ratified in 1920 giving women the right to vote. Although Modernists advocated feminism and female writers gained prominence, Dekovan (1999) noted that

Despite the powerful presence of women writers in the founding of modernism and throughout its history, and despite the near-obsessive preoccupation with femininity in all modernist writing, the reactive misogyny so apparent in much male-authored Modernism continues in many quarters to produce a sense of Modernism as a masculine movement. (p. 126)

With the Postmodern interest in the Other and in giving voice to the silent, literary women broke ground during the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As female authors and feminist criticism surfaced as subjects in college classrooms beginning in the 1960s, women also made inroads into theatre. Although women had always been characters in plays, women's voices as serious playwrights were silent, and it was not until the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that this began to change (Case, 1988). By the 1960s, the status of female playwrights was increasing, and after the rise of the second wave of feminism, a more "energized and forceful refocused attention on women's sociopolitical status, reopened artistic avenues for women and redefined both the nature and artistic expression of women's experiences" (Kachur, 1991, p. 16; see also Case, 1988). The general movement by women in the theatre gained academic significance by the 1970s when anthologies of female playwrights emerged (King, 1991; see also Case, 1988).

### The Problem of the Study

Building on the symbolic interaction theory of gender which suggests that gender roles are social constructs, the problem of this study was to explore the subject of gender and the accompanying gender roles that characters in selected American Modern and Postmodern plays take on or have assigned to them. By using narrative analysis methods to characterize and to describe the gender roles of the characters, this study led to inferences about the messages that

these plays sent regarding gender behavior. This study also revealed themes that suggested what cultural attitudes were reflected about gender roles.

### Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine how gender roles were described and defined in a selection of American Modern and Postmodern plays. Even though the essence of this project was a "women's study," effective gender studies cannot be conducted by exploring only one point of view. Therefore, in order to explore how women were depicted requires that male characters be simultaneously examined. To achieve this end, this study focused on four major research questions:

Research Question 1: What gender roles did the characters have in each play?

Sub-Question A: Once described for the characters, did the identified gender roles fall into the "traditional" realm or were the characters taking on roles outside the traditional categories?

Sub-Question B: Did the characters' gender roles determine their situations, and were the characters' situations limited by their gender roles?

Sub-Question C: Were there consequences for the characters as a result of their gender role assignments or for their actions within their gender roles?

Research Question 2: Did the plays cast the female and male genders using certain patterns and were the gender patterns polar opposites?

Research Question 3: Were there differences in gender portrayals of the characters in the plays that were designated as Modern or Postmodern?

Research Question 4: Did the sex of the playwright make any difference in the portrayal of gender in the characters that he or she created?

#### Assumptions and Limitations

The very nature of this study and its research design brought up assumptions and limitations. This study was based on the assumption that the chosen plays were credible examples of American drama from the Modern and Postmodern periods. There were 15 plays used for this study, thus the small number of selected plays limited the study. However, it was not the purpose of the study to make general conclusions about all plays written by American authors during the Modern and Postmodern period. Although authors representing both sexes and various ethnic backgrounds and diverse sexual orientations wrote the plays included in the study, it was not the purpose of this study to draw sweeping conclusions about how playwrights of a particular ethnicity, sexual orientation, or sex think, feel, or write.

#### Significance of the Study

The primary significance of this study rested in the broad topic of gender. The study of gender is "multidimensional" in that it crosses the bounds of history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, leadership, and organizational development. Because of the far-reaching impact of gender, "Research from other disciplines can therefore do much to inform one's own work and to provide new perspectives and a broader context for understanding research in one's own field" (Stevenson, Paludi, Black, & Whitley, 1994, p. ix). Given that plays were a lens for understanding society, this study enhanced what was known about how gender was a part of society.

As an increasing number of women enter the workforce and as they achieve higher levels of success within a variety of organizations, then the more leaders of all types of organizations know about gender issues, the more effective they can become. Building on the notion that gender studies are "multidimensional," then exploring the effects of gender in one field will contribute to the understanding of gender in another field. By investigating gender as a theme in dramatic literature, this study provided additional information about how gender affects interpersonal relationships. From a broader perspective, how individuals relate to one another is necessary to understanding how people work together in any organization.

The secondary significance of this study was derived from studying the individual pieces of literature. The study of gender and its portrayal in the selected pieces of drama expanded and added to the canon of research about these specific works.

### Overview of the Study

This study was organized into multiple chapters. Chapter 1 consisted of the introduction, the problem of the study, the purpose of the study and research questions, the assumptions and limitations, the significance of the study, and an overview of the study. Chapter 2 contained a review of the literature for a variety of topics. These topics included gender role theories, Modernism, Modernism and the Theatre, Postmodernism, Postmodernism and the Theatre, and a sampling of studies with similar research methodologies. Chapter 3 explained the research design of this study. Chapters 4 through 7 presented the data gathered about each individual play. Chapter 8 included a summary of the data, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The review of relevant literature created a textual backdrop for this study. This literature review begins with an overview of the significant research in gender role theory. In order to provide an historical context and to describe the characteristics of the two literary movements encompassed in this study, this review addresses the following aspects of cultural and literary history: Modernism, Modernism and the Theatre, Postmodernism, and Postmodernism and the Theatre. The final section provides a background for the methodology of this study. This section begins with a brief discussion of how theatrical vernacular has been used as an analogy for explaining sociological theory and how the theatre exposes connections between social reality and dramatic presentations. The section concludes by presenting studies that have similar research methodologies as this study in order to substantiate the premise that literature or other creative genres provide information relevant to exploring other fields such as sociology, psychology, or leadership.

#### Gender Role Theory

The study of gender roles and how men and women learn different roles has been the subject of many debates over the past several decades. According to Musse (1971),

It is a banal truth that an individual's sex role is the most salient of his many social roles. No other social role directs more of his overt behavior, emotional reactions, cognitive functions, covert attitudes and general psychological and social adjustments.... Nor is the ascription of any role more fundamental for the maintenance and continuity of

society. Activities, tasks, characteristics and attitudes are assigned differently to men and women in all cultures. (p. 707)

Because gender is such a defining characteristic for culture, researchers have varying views about the fundamental factors of how humans come to understand gender and the development of gender roles. In truth, in the areas of gender and gender role research, nowhere has "so much been written, with so little agreement" (Fagot, 1995, p. 2). Researchers suggest six different theories about how gender roles are developed and why these roles exist. The six theories are biological, structural-functional, social learning, cognitive development, gender schema, and symbolic interaction.

### Biological Theory

Biological theory suggests that the differences in male and female roles result from the biological differences inherent in both sexes. Significant areas of research traditionally center on chromosomes, brain structure, or hormones. For example, Maccoby (1966) examined verbal, numerical, spatial, creative, and analytical abilities and concluded that the different female and male hormones and genetic structure contributed to females being geared to success in verbal tasks while males excelled in numeric, spatial, and analytical tasks. In creative tasks, if the problem required logical solutions boys excelled, but if the problem required that a new solution be developed, girls excelled. Christen (1995) focused on the differences in brain size and structure between women and men. Because of the difference in brain size, women were better at verbal projects, and males were better suited for mathematical and spatial projects.

Two predominant conclusions came from the biological theories. First, men, because of their larger physical structure, greater strength, and aggressive behavior, are the protecting and providing entity for the family. Second, women, because of their reproductive capabilities and

traditionally passive behavior, are more commonly associated with nurturing and domestic care. In support of these conclusions, Dobson (1995) cited several research studies that supported the view that women were biologically different and that these differences were innate and "resistant to change through the influences of culture" (p. 33).

One major criticism of the biological view of gender is that because of physical differences, female and male actions and functions are unchangeable and that society has no bearing on the roles that women and men play (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). Consequently, biological theories created rigid gender dichotomies that govern male and female behavior. As Chodorow (1978) pointed out, the biological point of view assumed that women had "a natural mothering instinct, or maternal instinct, and that therefore it is 'natural' that they mother, or even that they therefore *ought* to mother" (p. 22). As further evidence of the strict gender portrayals, children who did not conform to their respective roles were considered "abnormal, or even psychologically unhealthy" by doctors or clinical psychologists (Singleton, 1987, p. 4).

Although criticized, biological research has opened avenues for discussions and further research projects. As summarized by Wood (1999; see also Kessler & McKenna, 1978), the value of the biological theories was the "identification of ways in which our choices are influenced by innate and relatively stable factors. Yet biological theories tell us only about physiological and genetic qualities of men and women *in general*" (p. 42).

### Structural-functional Theory

The structural-functional theory is based on the notion that a given society must find a way to perpetuate itself to ensure survival. This view suggests that how women and men come to understand their place in society is not biologically determined but is determined by what the culture needs. Central to this theory is the notion of the "organization." As defined by Parsons

(1960), the central purpose of an organization was the "attainment of a specific goal," and this goal was achieved by the division of labor in a group that allowed the group to produce something that would be used by another group (p. 17). As individuals found themselves in certain groups, the individuals collectively shared a common experience (Eagly, 1987). The division of labor, placing males in the breadwinner capacity and females in the domestic capacity, existed within society to help children prepare for their futures as functioning adults within their group. Gender and gender roles created a stable society because each person comes to understand how his or her position is linked to a larger group (Lindsey, 1997; see also Eagly, 1988). The belief and value system of the culture exerted pressure on an individual to maintain her or his given roles.

Parsons and Bales (1955) refined the structural-functional theory with their work on the socialization of the nuclear family. Their work rested on the observation that people no longer lived in large, communal tribes but instead lived as nuclear families in independent dwellings. Therefore, families became "a more specialized agency than before" (p. 9). As a result of this new position, the roles of the woman and the man in the family gave the family stability and a medium in which to socialize a child into the ways of the world. Thus, Parsons and Bales concluded that

It seems quite safe in general to say that the adult feminine role has not ceased to be anchored primarily in the internal affairs of the family, as wife, mother, and manager of the household, while the role of the adult male is predominantly anchored in the occupational world, in his job and through it by his status-giving and income-earning functions for the family. (p. 14-15)

With these established roles in place, the family became a structured unit with its primary function resting on socializing a child to the "pattern of values" so that the child will be able to carry on society's structure (p. 15).

Parsons and Bales (1955) suggested that the socialization of a child came in stages, and that the parents were the primary agents of socialization. For effective socialization, the role of the father for the sons and the mother for the daughters was the proper role for emulation. In order to emphasize the different gender roles, they categorized men as being "instrumental superior" and women as "expressive superior." "Instrumental" meant that a man had an external concentration that was focused on seeing the family in relation to his objectives of earning an income and providing status in the world (p. 47). In contrast to this, "expressive" meant that a woman had an internal focus that centered on maintaining the relationships between family members (p. 47).

Structural-functionalism, as a theory for explaining society and gender, has its theoretical limitations. One basic criticism of the theory was that structural-functionalism presented an oversimplified view of society (Eagly, 1997). In addition to its simplicity, the structural-functional view of gender was conservative and did not take into account variety within society. As noted by Lindsey (1997), households with single parents "are immensely adaptable and exhibit a diversity of patterns and circumstances" that were not taken into account by the theory (p. 6). Finally, the structural-functional perspective has been used as a "justification for the persistence of male dominance and overall gender stratification" (p. 6) as well as a support for the "white, middle-class family ethic" (p. 6). Thus, this theory did not consider the rapidly changing dynamics of the contemporary family nor did the theory consider race, political power, and socioeconomic differences as relevant factors (Millett, 1969; see also Lindsey, 1997).

Millett concluded that structural-functionalism operates in an "endless present" with a "nostalgic flavor" as a prescriptive methodology for dictating "cultural policy" (p. 221 & p. 222).

### Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory explains gender and how gender roles are formed by using a developmental process orientation. Much like behaviorism, central to social learning theory is the notion of gaining rewards for exhibiting the correct gender role behavior, and the major emphasis is on the "agents of reinforcement" (Howard & Hollander, 1997, p. 45; see also Gewirtz, 1971; Hargreaves, 1987; Musse, 1971). Social learning theory, although it recognizes the importance of socialization in defining gender roles, posits that gender identity is set in childhood.

Mischel (1966) defined the process for how a child developed an understanding of gender role behavior. First a child learned to "discriminate" between the differences in male and female behavior. From there, the child "generalized" this behavior from specific experiences to new situations, and this finally led to "performing" sex-typed behavior (p. 57). Observation of appropriate behavior and gaining positive rewards for imitating such behavior explained how children's concepts of gender became entrenched. For example, Mischel noted that "Dependent behaviors are less rewarded for males, and physically aggressive behaviors are less rewarded for females" (p. 75). As a child observed dependent behavior in the mother and aggressive behavior in the father, she or he began to associate these two behavior traits with other females and males. In a child's activities, positive rewards were attributed to emulating the behavior of males if the child was a boy and the behavior of females if the child was a girl.

Bandura (1971, 1977; see also Bussey & Bandura, 1999) was another proponent of the social learning theory. He suggested that both identification and modeling were two key

methods that a child would use to begin forming an understanding of gender behavior. The identification process for a child began right from birth with items such as pink or blue blankets to identify the child as female or male. Identification then continued with the parent's choice of clothing, hairstyles, toys, games, playmates, and finally through "nonpermissive parental reactions to deviant sex-role behavior" (p. 215). Modeling, or the copying of behaviors seen by parents, other adults, peers, or images from television and film, also contributed to a child's understanding of gender related behavior, but the extent of how modeling affected a child or who a child chose to imitate was hard to discover. Bandura, however, noted that for a child the "observation of rewarding or punishing consequences to a model can substantially affect the extent to which observers willingly engage in identificatory behavior" (p. 237).

Social learning theory was criticized for the passive role given to children in the process of socialization and for the failure to consider variety in children's cognitive abilities (Bascow, 1992; Lindsey, 1997). Under social learning theory, children took no part in their socialization; they merely reacted to rewards that guided them to their sense of identity. Likewise, a child's mental ability and values from ethnic differences were not taken into account.

### Cognitive Development Theory

The cognitive development theory, like social learning theory, focuses on the development of a child in stages. Cognitive development theory is patterned after the work of Jean Piaget (1952, 1954) who focused on intellectual and social learning stages in children. Following the general stages of learning—contiguity, generalization, reinforcement, and repetition—cognitive development theory assumed that a child constructs a "cognitive representation of the distal environment" (Baldwin, 1971, p. 328; see also Musse, 1971).

Lawrence Kohlberg (1966) advanced the cognitive development perspective. He proposed that neither biology nor culture influenced a child's understanding of gender, but a child's "cognitive organization of social roles" explained the existence of gender role differences (p. 82). A child's gender identity, or the categorization of boy or girl, was the first basic building block; from there, the child began to comprehend what being a boy or girl meant with regard to his or her activities. Kohlberg developed the following pattern for how gender roles were learned: "I am a boy, therefore I want to do boy things, therefore, the opportunity to do boy things is rewarding" (p. 89). Cognitive development theory suggested that gender identity is stable, is set by the age of six, and does not change like other concepts such as age or social class (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; see also Kohlberg, 1966).

Both social learning theory and cognitive development, although they seem to describe the same process, have distinct differences. One major difference was that social learning theory focused on "sex-typing behaviors and the process of sex-role acquisition" and cognitive development theory focused on "the development of a stable gender identity" (Constantinople, 1979, p. 124). Another major difference between the theories was that instead of seeing reinforcement as the guiding principle as in social learning theory, cognitive development theory suggests that "imitation and reinforcement of sex-typed behavior is actually guided by some form of internalized sex-typed identity" (Hargreaves, 1987, p. 33). Using this premise, social learning theory explained gender differences developing as a result of identification with the father while cognitive development theory regarded identification with the father as the cause of gender differences.

One criticism of cognitive development theory, as well as social learning theory, was the total dependence on only male research subjects when the theories were developed. For



example, Kohlberg only used boys in his research activities, and he assumed that the same pattern of development worked for girls. Social learning theory also placed great emphasis on the father figure as the "most powerful provider of rewards and punishments"; therefore, gender role development was again explored from the male perspective (Hargreaves, 1987, p. 31; see also Bascow, 1992; Katz, 1979). Again, it was assumed that girls would follow the same pattern with mothers; however, "empirical studies of imitation and identification have shown that the question of symmetry of the process of sex-typing between boys and girls is by no means straightforward" (p. 31; see also Gilligan, 1982).

### Gender Schema Theory

Unlike the other theories of gender that focus on the content of gender differences, gender schema theory focuses on the process of how an individual comes to understand gender differences (Bem, 1988; Hargreaves, 1987). In other words, the division between male and female is the important issue, not what makes up male and female. Gender schema theory is based on the premise that humans develop cognitive schemas, which are organizing systems that store information about particular objects or concepts. As defined by Howard and Hollander (1997):

Schemas are abstract. They serve as theories, as preconceptions that drive cognitive processes. The construction of social schemas is precisely what allows us to think as cognitive misers. Through schemas, people simplify reality, interpreting specific instances in light of a general category.

Schemas are vital for processing information. Schemas influence what information we attend to and what information we do not "see" in social situations. (p. 71)

According to schema theory, the ability to create schemas helped people to process information and make judgements. Judgements were likely to confirm existing schemas thereby people perpetuated "both...individual and societal expectations about others" (p. 72). Because schemas organized a vast amount of information, they are "resilient and highly resistant to change" (p. 72)

Schema theory was appropriate for explaining gender role development because people live in a sex-typed world (Fagot, 1995). In learning gender roles, gender schema theory suggested that first a child learns the culture's definition of male and female (Bem, 1988). Once gender definitions became a schema, "The child also learns to invoke this heterogeneous network of sex related associations in order to evaluate and assimilate new information. The child, in short, learns to encode and organize information in terms of an evolving gender schema" (p. 130). This encoding process was then transferred to the self. A child, to see if her or his behavior matches the established schema, used the gender schema as a lens: if the behavior does not match, then the child modifies the behavior to adhere to the cultural definition.

As a model for understanding gender, gender schema theory is also not immune to criticism. The theory was criticized for ignoring situational variables and for reducing all situations into a gender schematic processing point of view (Bascow, 1992). Critics also suggested that more empirical research was needed to fully understand gender schema theory (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Lindsey, 1997). Proving that schemas exist has been the subject of debate, and only additional research could help to clarify how schemas are developed and if changes in established schemas are possible.

### Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic interaction presents a different way of looking at individuals and individual learning than any of the other theories discussed here. Unlike biological, functional,

developmental, or schema theories that characterize the person as a passive agent in learning and socialization, symbolic interaction characterizes the person as engaged in the process of learning and responsible for internalizing the messages of socialization. Additionally, symbolic interaction "acknowledged and explored various levels of experience neglected by other sociological traditions" (Gould & Kern-Daniels, 1977, p. 184). In short, symbolic interaction examines how "people attach symbolic meanings to objects, behaviors, and other people and develop and transmit these meanings through interaction" (Howard & Hollander, 1997, p. 2).

The basis of symbolic interaction theory comes from the work of George Herbert Mead (1964). Mead was concerned with the idea of the self and how that self was created. He theorized that the self resulted from the interaction of the individual with the group to which the individual belonged. Interaction existed in two forms, non-symbolic interaction and symbolic interaction. Non-symbolic interaction, such as running from danger, was a reflex action or an action taken without premeditation. Symbolic interaction involved interpretation and thinking about the action. Language and communication were essential to symbolic interaction and to the forming of the self because the individual could "talk to himself in terms of the community to which he belongs and lay upon himself the responsibility that belongs to his community" (p. 33). Additionally, language helped the individual to internalize social habits, and these social habits or customs created a "universal discourse" among all the participants in the group (p. 38). The universal discourse created a common language between the participants. For example, a handshake was a universal discourse in that it is commonly understood as a form of social greeting. Mead concluded that "The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there at birth but arises in the process of social experience and activity" (p. 199).

Howard and Hollander (1997) also noted the importance of the self to symbolic interaction. Like Mead, they acknowledged that the self was a "social construct" (p. 107). They contended that the self was not singular in nature, but made up of multiple identities. Constructing the identities required that the individual interact with others. The basic mode of interaction became language, which they acknowledged as another form of social construction.

Building on the work of Mead, Blumer (1969) further refined and developed the process of how symbolic interaction theory worked in the confines of a society. Blumer suggested three premises for symbolic interactionism. First, "Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (p. 2). Second, "The meanings of such things are derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's followers" (p. 2). Third, "These meanings are handled in and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (p. 2). These three premises summarized the notion that symbolic interaction looked at the development of meanings as a process directly involving the individual. Blumer, who labels the individual as an actor, theorized that the process for developing meaning first began with "self-communication" when the actor defined the meaning for things. As a result of this self-communication, interpretation followed:

The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroupes, and transforms meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his actions. Accordingly, interpretation should not be regarded as a mere automatic application of established meanings but as a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action. It is necessary to see that meanings play their part in action through a process of self-interaction. (p. 5)

Because individuals lived in groups, Blumer went on to suggest that how the group reacted to the actions of an individual was important to a individual member's development of meanings and subsequent future actions. People took into account their words, objectives, and self-images in order to structure the self; therefore, it was "the social process in group life that creates and upholds the rules, not the rules that create and uphold the group life" (p. 19).

Objects, according to Blumer (1969) were "anything that can be indicated, anything that is pointed to or referred to," and objects were physical objects, social objects like a teacher or friend, or abstract like philosophies or ideas (p. 10). The meaning of an object for a person, regardless of the type of object, was derived from interactions with others and how the others defined that object. Central to this position was the notion that objects were social creations with no fixed status or definition; therefore, object definitions could be "created, affirmed, transformed, or cast aside" (p. 12).

Gender, then, became an object that was given meaning by the group, and this meaning was affirmed for the individual by interaction with the group. Because social definitions for objects could be changed, gender and gender roles were subject to affirmation or change.

As noted in Chapter 1, symbolic interaction provided the theoretical model for this investigation of gender. Biological theories do not consider culture a relevant factor in determining gender identities and gender role activities; therefore, studying a cultural medium such as theatre would not prove useful under this theory. Although the structural-functional, social learning, cognitive development, and gender schema theories do acknowledge the importance of culture in their respective processes, the theories do not see gender roles as changeable, so looking for changes would not theoretically fit. Additionally, the passive nature assigned to the participants in the theories would be incompatible with this study. Symbolic

interaction, while suggesting that gender roles are subject to change, also suggests that participants play an active and vital part in the creation of identity.

### Modernism

If history is seen as a time-line that records great periods of change, then the period defined as Modernism stands as a dominant force. As a major cultural movement of history, the characteristics and beliefs of Modernism came to dominate all aspects of life (Cantor, 1988; Singal, 1987). Following the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the Romantic era, the tenets of Modernism affected Western culture and forever changed the way humanity thought about itself and its place in the world (Cantor, 1988).

Modernism, as a movement, touched all areas of society. Earnest Rutherford and Albert Einstein changed the nature of physics and ideas about the universe. The behavioral and social sciences, with developments by Franz Boas and Margaret Meade, were a direct outgrowth of the Modernist world-view (Cantor, 1988). The first wave of feminism, with its focus on a woman's right to vote, corresponded with the rise of Modernism. The artistic world saw changes in poetry, novels, theatre, and music, as exemplified by T. S. Eliot's poem "The Wasteland," James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, Luigi Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, and Igor Stravinski's composition the *Rite of Spring* (Worthen, 1995). The Modernist view changed concepts regarding architecture; the skyscraper with plate glass, stainless steel, and concrete began to alter urban landscapes (Adams, 1978). In short, "Modernism affected nearly every area of culture, and for us today, it is memorialized most dramatically in the novel and poem, architecture, in painting, philosophy, physics, and anthropology" (Cantor, 1988, p. 41).

Signs of the new movement began to surface as early as 1880 and 1890. However, Modernism dominated the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until approximately 1950 with "the center of intellectual gravity weightiest in the period extending from the decades prior to World War I into the early years of World War II" (Quinones, 1986, p. 7). From the turn of the century to the middle of the century, "The culture of Modernism eroded the restraining hold of traditional values and world-views and allowed the new technology and science to shape social life in relatively emancipated fashion" (Cantor 1988, p. 32). Victorian society provided the "traditional values and world-views," and Victorian beliefs were founded on

a bedrock of assumptions. These included a belief in a predictable universe presided over by a benevolent God that governed by immutable natural laws, a corresponding conviction that humankind was capable of arriving at a unified and fixed set of truths about all aspects of life, and an insistence on preserving absolute standards based on a radical dichotomy between what was deemed "human" and that regarded as "animal." (Singal, 1987, p. 9)

This same bedrock that grounded a culture provided the fodder for the Modernists' rebellion.

By the end of the 1800s, historical and cultural changes were happening in Victorian society. Victorian society was overwhelmed by a variety of social problems; widespread poverty and homelessness plagued major cities with no clear solutions in sight (Cantor, 1988). Imperialism, especially in Great Britain, was collapsing. During the last decade of the century, people had weathered an economic depression, and by 1895 the economy was prospering again with high employment and low inflation. The Industrial Revolution brought great lifestyle changes to the masses, while bringing with it great advances in technology and consequent social ills (Esslin, 1986; see also Cantor, 1988). As the automobile, mass-transit systems like railroads

and subways, and advances in printing and photography, just to name a few, swept over society, artists, writers, philosophers, and scientists began searching for a new paradigm to define culture and humanity's place within that culture.

As a movement, Modernism had distinguishing characteristics that exemplified its break with the past. These characteristics were radical departures from the past and were what propelled the cultural infusion of Modernistic thought.

A primary characteristic of the new movement was that Modernists disagreed with the Victorian concept of history and the discovery of truth and knowledge. Victorians viewed history with an eye on the big picture and the macrocosm while the Modernists, instead, viewed the microcosm as more important and that by studying the small elements, the bigger picture would come into focus (Cantor, 1988). In seeking knowledge, Victorian culture divided everything into rigid categories; they divided races into black and white and cultures into superior and inferior (Singal, 1987). They based these divisions on their understanding of the laws of biology and the operations of nature. Modernists, instead, focused on inner meanings, the unconscious, and the finite (Cantor, 1988). In attempting to expand the knowledge base, Modernists were preoccupied with self-referentially, which was the belief that answers were contained within the text itself—within the smallest piece of the puzzle.

Because they looked at the world through a different lens, Modernists became concerned about the newly developing mechanized culture, which led them to a new concept of the world. They paid great attention to the cultural impacts and changes resulting from the dependency upon technology (Cantor, 1988). The changing face of culture, described as a "deadening of consciousness," led to the Modernist world image that was fragmented and often pessimistic (Spender, 1963). An outgrowth of this pessimism was a "loss of faith" in all that seemed stable



just a few decades before (Levenson, 1999, p. 4). This instability created a "nameless faceless anxiety" or alienation that was especially noted in the philosophy and literature of the period. Tancheva (1996) described this complex shift as a change in "what constitutes reality, in what constitutes human nature, in the relationship between man and nature. Reality...becomes hard to pin down" (p. 12). To combat this new culture and changing definition of reality, art, and especially literature, became a way of expressing all that was wrong with the world as a result of the technological invasion (Spender, 1963; see also Pippin, 1991).

Another trait of the movement was that Modernists were less conservative with their attitudes toward people and lifestyles than the previous generations. While the Victorian society separated people into class structures, the Modernist view was less restrictive (Cantor, 1988). Modernists openly discussed sexuality and accepted homosexuality; they philosophically declared that men and women should not be separated based on their differences. Running counter to the Victorian focus on the nuclear family, Modernists held the individual and individual accomplishments in high regard.

As an outgrowth of the shift in society's structure and their focus on the individual, Modernists struggled with social theory. They were influenced by the works of Karl Marx and later by Max Weber (Giddens, 1990). As the social and behavioral sciences began to become intellectual pursuits, functionalism, which suggested that objects exist in terms of their function, came to be applied to societies as well as to scientific principals (Cantor, 1988). Tied to this shift was the dominant view of the individual who was imbued with rights and freedoms that society could not take away or limit (Pippin, 1991).

A unique feature of the Modern movement was the elevation of artistic endeavors. Modernists advanced that humanity was at its best when it was involved in art (Cantor, 1988).

But this devotion to art was not the liberal view of the Victorian age. Victorians believed that art and literature should be open to all people—even to those who had a limited education.

Modernists took an elitist stance and suggested that art should be complex and only accessible to the well educated. In order to perpetuate this elitist stance, Modern artists "endeavored to produce an art form of 'great' artistic worth, aesthetically *higher*" than what has previously existed (Tancheva, 1996, p. 26). The imagination of the artist gained status; the imagination was what helped the artist to create fantastic works of art, and the imagination began to be personified as the "arbiter in a world of fragmented values" (Spender, 1963, p. 14). The effort to create art on a higher level produced a distancing effect between the artists with their work and society, and consequently isolated the artists.

Building on the isolation of the artist, Modernists produced a dichotomy between the artistic and the scientific. Science, especially the natural sciences, represented the "authority for understanding nature" (Pippin, 1991, p. 4). Science became the guiding light to "demystify" life and natural phenomena (p. 4). To balance the rise of science and the influx of scientific discoveries, the status of the artist, especially writers, was also elevated. In a world that was dominated by scientific truths, writers established a counter-voice:

The responsibility of saying "This is how I see things" and "This is how they happen to me," is entirely different from the responsibility of scientists. Their responsibility is to make their minds the instruments through which objective truths add to the sum of disinterested knowledge, and inventions advance according to the logic of preceding processes. (Spender, 1963, p. 61)

Therefore, the artistic culture became the critics of the scientific culture.

Modernists, in keeping with the newness of the movement, broke with the major philosophical stances of the past. Rejecting Hegelian idealism, Modernism ushered in three philosophical schools of thought: phenomenology, logical positivism, and pragmatism (Cantor, 1988). These new philosophies represented the underpinnings of Modernism and gave the movement an intellectual base. Although Edmund Husserl originally suggested phenomenology, Martin Heidegger was credited with advancing and refining the ideas (Ozmon & Craver, 1992). Heidegger suggested that the lived experiences of the individual were the starting points for understanding the self and for creating a personal world of meaning. Heidegger also posited that an industrial lifestyle crushed the individual's authentic spirit and clouded an understanding of the self (Cantor, 1988). Logical positivism, associated with the "Vienna Circle" and proponents of the work of Bertrand Russell, advanced the "principle of verification" which suggested that "no proposition can be accepted as meaningful unless it can be verified on formal grounds" (Ozmon & Craver, 1992, p. 287). The "formal grounds" by which all were tested was logic and mathematics. Adding to this movement was Ludwig Wittgenstein who focused on truth in language. Because he witnessed a decline in language and the ability to communicate clearly, Wittgenstein developed a new logic devoted to the analysis of language (Cantor, 1988). In general, pragmatism was a philosophy that focused on processes and desired ends (Ozmon & Craver, 1992). Both William James and John Dewey brought pragmatism to the forefront. James concentrated on human experiences and the idea that truth cannot be separated from experiences; therefore, truth was not an absolute. Dewey, like James, placed experiences as the cornerstone of his work. However, Dewey emphasized solving real-life problems and dealing with the consequences of the problems.

The characteristics listed here focus on the theoretical aspects of Modernism. However, Modernism was more than theory—it became a battle cry for the artist who was raging against the system. It became infused into the fabric of humanity's existence and dominated a generation. A testimony to the richness and depth of Modernist thought was demonstrated in the fields of literature and theatre where the very concepts that defined literature and drama were forever modified.

### Modernism and the Theatre

As the tenets of Modernism became infused into society, changes in literature occurred. These changes surfaced in the themes and in the writing style of the literature. Although Modernism influenced novelists and poets, this discussion will focus mainly on Modernism's impact on theatre as that was what was most applicable to this study.

As reflected in their new world-view, Modernist writers, in general, emphasized how creative works, such as novels, poems, or plays, were tools for examining the world and describing how the world affects the people who live in it. Modern literature was founded on the principles of creating a work that was "autonomous" in its origins, was dedicated to the notion of novelty in its stylistic innovations, and employed fragmentation as a defining characteristic (Hoffman & Murphy, 1992, p. 8-9; see also Fokkema, 1984). In summarizing the shift in literature, Bentley (1946) noted "Experiment in the arts always reflects historical conditions, always indicates profound dissatisfaction with established modes, always gropes toward a new age" (p. 1). Thus, the transition from the old to the new in theatre (as well as in literature) occurred with the change from the theatrical periods identified as Realism and Naturalism to Modernism.

The contributions of Realism and Naturalism to theatre provide a background for understanding the Modernist changes in theatre. Realism in drama, which occurred between 1850 and 1880, was an outgrowth of the French Well-Made Play (Bentley, 1946). The theory of the Well-Made Play was attributed to Eugene Scribe who "determined that the plot helped hold the attention of the audience and that rambling character studies were of lesser interest" (Jacobus, 2001, p. 647). Scribe created a formula for drama which included a "careful exposition" to introduce the characters, an unfolding of surprises, a building of suspense, a strong climax, and a tight resolution in the end (p. 647). Building on this, Realism in drama incorporated historically authentic costumes, elaborate sets, and contemporary vernacular so that the audience would see a realistic portrayal of the familiar. As a reaction to Realism and pioneered by Emile Zola, Naturalism employed a "scientific" approach to creative writing by applying the methodology of natural science to a work of art. Authors became like scientists who take an objective view of their work, and they did not try to alter the outcome of the characters' situations. By using forces such as "Fate" or predetermined destiny, characters were depicted as pawns of these forces (Worthen, 1995). Zola intended for his works, both novels and plays, "to help change social conditions," and his plays contained "no twists, surprises, or even much suspense," and the subjects were "uniformly grim" and "associated with the darker side of life" (Jacobus, 2001, p. 648). Without the technical advances in set designs, costuming, and the stylistic and thematic changes of Realism and Naturalism, Modern drama could not have existed (Bentley, 1946).

Even though the novelists and poets of the Modern period developed great stylistic changes for their literature, the playwrights of the period still held onto the Realistic presentation methods of the past. One explanation for this adherence to the past was that theatre is an art dependent upon a viewing public. In the early years of Modernism, the theatre was one of the

only sources of entertainment, and the viewing public did not attend a play in order to have their world-views shattered (Cantor, 1988). Additionally, some of the stylistic experimentation of Modernism was harder to achieve on the limited confines of a stage. Unlike novelists, painters, or sculptors who create art with inanimate objects, playwrights must use human actors to fulfill their artistic visions. They were hindered by this human element (Worthen, 1995). While other artists could abandon "direct representations of reality, of 'characters' and a recognizable world, in order to direct attention to the ways that art constructed itself and mediated a vision of the world, modern theater often remained wedded to these notions" if the playwrights wanted an audience for their works (p. 7). In essence, "compromises had to be made if viable work was to be produced for the stage; and in drama, the most influential practitioners of Modernism [were] defined by the infusion of a modernist spirit into standard theatrical forms" (Innes, 1999, p. 147).

What separated the Modernist theatrical movement from the other Modernist literary movements was the desire to create a public for this new "high" art that was being produced on the stage (Tancheva, 1996). To accomplish this, Modern playwrights followed a variety of paths. One method represented by Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekov was to present plays in a realistic mode but the plays themselves critiqued middle class society and its oppressive attributes. Thus, the plays had a traditional feel, yet they were infused with Modernist themes (Worthen, 1995). Another approach, Expressionism, was practiced by August Strindberg and Eugene O'Neill. These playwrights wrote plays that tried to show "the mind and heart of the character visually, and to express it directly in the objects and actions of the stage" (p. 17). A final approach, taken by playwrights like Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett, was to create theatre that expressed a philosophical or political point of view.

After the drama from the Modernist period began to gain acceptance by audiences, noticeable changes in the subject matter of plays began to surface as it had occurred in novels and poems. As a theatrical device, playwrights from previous eras, from Sophocles to Shakespeare and beyond, incorporated a supernatural power into their dramas "who had some plan in mind which gives order to the universe" (Brockett, 1971, p. 59). Modernism abolished this technique; characters were depicted as products of society, and plays showed the interaction between the environment, the character, and the action (Bentley, 1946; Levenson, 1999; see also Brockett, 1971). As the mechanization of the culture became more prevalent, Modernist playwrights examined the "pities of contemporary social life" and strove to "both represent that world and to change it" (Worthen, 1995, p. 21). By carrying on what was started in the Naturalistic period, the Modernist playwrights continued to explore the world with all of its foibles by not avoiding themes that were social taboos such as sex, incest, religion, and economics (Bentley, 1946). Over time the theatre became a "weapon for change" by forcing the audience to confront long-held prejudices (Brockett, 1971).

In addition to thematic changes, Modernism also brought stylistic changes to drama. Plays no longer developed plots in linear fashions but changed to a more fragmented style (Levenson, 1999), which Brockett (1971) described as an "[abandonment of traditional unity] in favor of thematic unity achieved by introducing an idea or motif and then developing variations upon it in order to increase perceptions about it" (p. 24). Modernist playwrights also developed a more terse style of dialogue that was incorporated to "assault and shock the spectator's senses" (p. 25). In order to accommodate stylistic changes, traditional ideas about the presentation of characters also changed. In order to handle emotional and lexical changes as well as changes in plot development, characters became more multifaceted (Quinones, 1986).

In conclusion, the Modernist movement in the theatre traveled a path much different from the other literary modes. As summarized by Tancheva (1996), Modernist drama did not remain tied to familiar topics developed in new techniques, but also reached out for new subjects. Foremost among them was the quest for a super-reality, an intense and distilled artistic vision of the world. The exploration of the two levels of experience, the real and the surreal, [resulted] from the attempt to transcend everyday meaning either through the fantastic or the mundane.... No longer able to refer to a single truth or even some truth, the modern dramatist can only hope to express the world subjectively—through impressions or symbols, through aestheticization of real individual experience, through distortion and exaggeration.... (p. 142-143)

### Postmodernism

Just because Modernism developed a new way of looking at the world that addressed the issues of a particular generation, this in no way guarantees that all of society's philosophical and scientific questions will be answered, its fears calmed, or its writers revered for producing capstone literary works. As the restless nature of society surfaced and precipitated the change from Victorian thought to Modern thought, this same restless nature caused the Modern paradigm to be replaced. That change, starting in the 1950s and solidifying by the 1960s, was first noticed by cultural historians, literary critics, and philosophers who sensed a transition in art, literature, and culture (Jameson, 1988; Linn, 1996). Those who saw a shift in beliefs and trends struggled with a name for this emerging new era. A variety of terms emerged, such as Contemporary (Gilbert, Klaus, & Field, 1994; Jacobus, 2001; Worthen, 1995), Postmodernism (Hassan, 1982), Avant-gardeism (Hassan, 1982), Neo-avant-gardeism (Zadworna-Fjellestad,



1990), or Poststructuralism (Cantor, 1988; Huyssen, 1986). The designation "Postmodernism" often caused the most conjecture; Zadworna-Fjellestad (1990) questioned the terminology of "post" and did this "'post' indicate a *break with* or a *continuation of* (high or classical) modernism" (p. ix). Throughout this study, in a reflection of the currently accepted terminology, the term "Postmodernism" was used to refer to the cultural and literary period that began in the late 1950s.

In addition to the debate with regard to terminology, many theorists and critics argued over the existence of the period. In general, some writers took the position that Postmodernism was an extension of Modernism; others viewed it as a new movement with separate characteristics, while still others viewed it as merely a literary movement. Hassan (1982), a prolific commentator on Postmodernist views, described the period as having "related cultural tendencies, a constellation of values, [and] a repertoire of procedures and attitudes" (p. 260). Later, Hassen (cited in Chabot, 1988) described Postmodernism as something more than a literary development; he postulated that "it [represented] a broad response to pressing contemporary issues, and [was] likely to emerge in social practices as within literary products" (p. 2). Similar to Hassan, Linn (1996) described Postmodernism as a "widespread cultural development which has been taking shape during the last few decades" (p. xiii). Other views, such as Chabot (1988), saw Postmodernism as a broad term that only described artistic developments. Jameson (1988) argued that Postmodernism emerged as a reaction to high Modernism. Laqueur (1996), in a more encompassing view, suggested that Postmodernism was "mainly preoccupied with literary theory and criticism, with semiotics and narrative, with metacriticism, narratology and theories of the grotesque" (p. 26). For this study, Postmodernism was classified as a cultural movement that was separate from Modernism.

As with the rise of Modernism, historical and social conditions of the period prior to the advent of the 20<sup>th</sup> century significantly contributed to the texture and beliefs of the periods. The same relevance of the historical and the social conditions promoted the rise of Postmodernism. The period from the end of World War II through the 1980s influenced this new movement.

A contributing factor to the development of Postmodernism was the climate after World War II. World War II caused mass destruction, demonstrated unprecedented human cruelty, and introduced new weapons that could cause cataclysmic annihilation. World War II also altered the landscape as new geographic boundaries were drawn by the actions of those responsible for the formation of the Iron Curtain. As Modernists had been concerned with the fast-paced change in society resulting from technology, change accelerated after World War II (Jameson, 1988). In the 1950s, not only did fashion and styles quickly come and go, but television and advertising permeated and persuaded society as never before. Networks of highways that make mobility easier connected people and places. However, the decade of the 1950s was unprepared for what would follow in the 1960s.

The tumultuous decade of the 1960s brought about the earliest hints of a Postmodern revolution (Hutcheon, 1988). During the 1960s, the new youth movement was the center attraction as phrases such as "Flower Power," "Peace," and "Make Love Not War" all epitomized a generation (Huyssen, 1986). This subculture, with its music, poster art, and drugs, created a lifestyle "which rebelled against authority and sought liberation from the norms of the existing society" (p. 141). More importantly, it was during the 1960s that "previously 'silent' groups defined by differences of race, gender, sexual preferences, ethnicity, native status, [and] class" all emerged (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 61). In general, the 1960s possessed an energy and a vitality; it

was a decade of optimism about technology, the media, and what would be known as pop culture (Huyssen, 1986).

However, the optimism of the 1960s quickly eroded in the 1970s. In the United States, the decade was marred by the Vietnam War and embarrassed by the actions of a President. Where the media was viewed with hope in the 1960s, the sobering assessment in this decade was that "television was pollution rather than panacea" (Huyssen, 1986, p. 196). Rising fuel prices and an energy crisis plagued the decade. The Women's Liberation movement was organized with the goal of passing the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. Both houses of Congress passed this legislation, and in 1972 the ratification process started (Donovan, 1994). Many women supported the ERA because they believed "that women were similar to men in capabilities and merely needed to be afforded equal opportunities and accorded natural rights" (p. 60). As an outgrowth of the youth movement of the 1960s, the 1970s saw the flourishing of the sexual revolution where sexual relationships, often with multiple partners, began to lose its cultural stigma (Schmor, 1994). As the decade closed, it was destined to be remembered as the "Me Generation."

But the excesses of the 1970s gave way to the conservative backlash of the 1980s. Ronald Reagan's advance to power in the early 1980s signaled a change (Schmor, 1994). The Equal Rights Amendment was defeated in 1982, thus temporarily slowing the women's movement. By 1985 America saw a rising homeless population. Seen by some as an outgrowth of the sexual revolution, AIDS surfaced in the mid-1980s. The 1980s became a "self-help generation" with a focus on psychotherapy and pop psychology. The youths of the decade were tuned in to MTV, and they faced a "media-hyped 'war on drugs' [that] failed to reduce or even fairly report the class-less, race-blind, widespread addictions" (p. 164).

In addition to changes born from historical events, Postmodernism's roots had a philosophical underpinning. The earliest basis for future Postmodern thinkers was Nietzsche, and many Postmodern writers, such as Foucault, Derrida, and Habermas, acknowledged Nietzsche's work as their foundation (Hekman, 1990; Linn, 1996). Nietzsche was the first philosopher to offer a world-view that looked at people as creatures who searched for power and control of the world. As summarized by Linn, Nietzsche argued that it was

language, history, and the ability to create new worlds that separate us from other power-seeking animals, not our ability to find truth. With regard to language, Nietzsche is apparently the first Western philosopher to stress that all thought is linguistic, and, furthermore, that language itself imposes a shape on the way human beings think about the world. (p. 19)

Because Nietzsche's work was filled with contradictions, summarizing his philosophy becomes challenging; therefore, caution should be exercised when taking an overall view of his influence (Jaspers, 1936/1965). However, an important concept advanced by Nietzsche was his "total break with traditional historical substance" (p. 441). As Jaspers summarized,

All human ideals seem to [Nietzsche] to have come to nothing.... He views truth as a universal lie; previous philosophy as an established deception; Christianity as the triumph of the misfits and the failures, the weak and the impotent.... Compared with the breaks made by previous thinkers,...Nietzsche's break is a *ne plus ultra*.... The pessimistic analyses and dire predictions of eventual decline that have appeared since his time merely repeat the statements of Nietzsche, who saw Europe press onward towards inevitable catastrophe. His vision, in its magnificence and its depressing ominousness, was original and true.... (p. 441)

It was Nietzsche's break with traditional thought that would later resurface in Postmodern thought.

Postmodernism has several striking characteristics that define the movement as well as separate it from earlier Modernist views. Largely, the Postmodern view was characterized by overwhelming feelings of discontent—far greater than the pessimism of the Modern age (Linn, 1996). Postmodernist views stemmed from a dissatisfaction with the traditional philosophic reverence for logic, science, and economics and with the attempts to create "totalizing" theories in science, art, social sciences, and history (Kaplan, 1988; see also Eagleton, 1990; Linn, 1996). Postmodernists called for a rejection of the metanarratives, or the all-encompassing theories, which claimed supremacy. Instead, Postmodernists forged a new way of describing and defining knowledge that undermined the foundations of the Enlightenment, Humanism, and Modernism (Hekman, 1990).

Integral to understanding the Postmodernists' position was their approach to science and history. Although science and the scientific methodology were the Modernists' vanguard, the Postmodernists were indifferent to science (Merwick, 1993). This indifference stemmed from an interest in examining issues that could not be "proved" by a scientific methodology. Additionally, from the Postmodern perspective, scientific discoveries led to nuclear weapons, ecological destruction, and pollution (Linn, 1996). As with science, Postmodernists took a different view of history. Postmodernists saw history as a text that had been constructed by humans; furthermore, this text carried the weight of human agreement for how that text should be constructed (Hutcheon, 1988). Consequently, they felt that a re-evaluation of the past was needed for perhaps all that happened before was not included in the standard versions (Merwick, 1993). Moreover, the Modernist view of the past was characterized by an effort to find large

theories that explained all of humanity; the Postmodern view differed in that they rejected the premise that a "Grand Theory" that was used to explain everything could be found or even existed (Goodman, 1993). Postmodernists surmised that no single meaning existed and "authoritative" theories should be shunned. Richard Rorty, a Postmodern philosopher, summarized this view when he surmised that the search for truth was impossible and that any descriptions of nature that explained the truth about the way things really are was impossible (Linn, 1996).

Growing out of the revamped perspectives of science and history, Postmodernists developed a new definition of discourse. Traditionally, subjects such as history, philosophy, and literary criticism were studied in isolation and were governed by distinct, subject-specific rules and theories. Postmodernists developed what Jameson (1988) termed a "theoretical discourse" where what were once separate fields of study were now merging and overlapping (p. 15). An example of this blending of discourse was evident in the writings of Foucault who could be described as an historian, sociologist, and/or philosopher. As the theoretical principles behind traditional subjects blurred, a multidisciplinary approach to gaining knowledge emerged; teaching and learning, across texts, languages, and disciplines, provided the backbone to a new pedagogy (Merwick, 1993).

Because of the shift in the definition of discourse and because of a newly retooled process for gaining and discovering knowledge, language rose to prominence in Postmodernism. As many historians and critics have noted, language became an obsession for the Postmodernist (Merwick, 1993). The traditional view of language held that "thought is prior to language" (Linn, 1996, p. 22). This means that as objects were seen in the world and thoughts about those objects occurred, words to express those thoughts were developed. Thus, language evolved as

lists which stand for objects and words derive meaning from standing for objects or representing thoughts. The Postmodern view of language suggested that language was a game and that a word's meaning comes from its relationship to other words. By concluding that "thought is essentially linguistic," the Postmodern view came to see the self as created by language and not vice versa (p. 25).

The notion of Deconstructionism resulted from the intense focus on the importance of language. Deconstruction defined language as a system that could be interpreted much like a code can be broken by an interpreter (Cantor, 1988). Derrida suggested that "The text, through a self-generating mechanism that is inscribed in the very beginning of language, breaks down itself into several simultaneous layers of meanings" (p. 361). Derrida referred to his theory of discourse as "grammatology" which was a "science that deconstructs concepts" (Hekman, 1990). Deconstruction was a formal theory of criticism based on structured rules (Wood, 1979). The practice of Deconstructionism benefited the pursuit of knowledge in that it "illuminates in previously innocent books, structures of presupposition, structures of authority which run diagonally across the logical order of argument" (n. p.).

A resurgence of political activity and political motivation was also a trait of Postmodernism. However, the politics of Postmodernism were diverse in scope. Zadworna-Fjellestad (1990) noted that the resurgence of political activity was not confined to a singular point of view but instead encompassed views ranging from the radical Left to the ultra-conservative. One area of political commentary arose from the view that capitalism encouraged excess. As technology and free enterprise became more advanced, greed became an inescapable focus of the culture, and many Postmodernist thinkers searched for alternatives to capitalism (Linn, 1996). Although Communism seemed to present a solution to unbridled capitalism,

history had proven that widespread oppression and human cruelty resulted from its practice, thereby leaving Communist thought as an unacceptable solution.

The concern with the human condition resulted in one of the most recognizable characteristics of the Postmodern movement, which was the focus on the Other, and an embracing of diversity. The theme of the Other was seen as a keen interest in the under-represented minorities of a culture. As Goodman (1993) noted, the Postmodern belief in openness was characterized by a willingness to break down "traditional hierarchies of knowledge and breaking open ethno- and andro-centric class-specific cannons" (p. 18). Rorty envisioned a "democratic society devoted to freedom, creativity, and the reduction of cruelty" (cited in Linn, 1996, p. 34). Because this view accepted that Others have a place in society, feminist thought re-emerged as a Postmodernist focus (Zadworna-Fjellestad, 1990).

The acknowledgement of the Other caused Postmodernists to emphasize social change. Social change for some Postmodernists was influenced by the renewed focus on language, and they sought to change on how issues or people were described by a culture (Linn, 1996). Because a human self was created by language, change of an oppressive condition then hinged upon changing how the condition was labeled by a society. Rorty captured this notion of social change when he said, "The oppressed must always realize that they are fighting the way previous generations have described things" (p. 61).

The focus on the Other of society also resulted in a new perspective about the individual self. Traditionally, the self was understood from an internal point of view, but when the view of the Other is considered, individuals gained a better understanding of the self because every individual's "sense of self must depend on the eye of the other" (Linn, 1996). Thus the view of the self took on an external flavor.



Postmodernists broadened their views about art and what was art. Modernism, with its elitist views about art, was seen as exclusionary by Postmodernists (Laqueur, 1996). They favored a more egalitarian view that suggested that the "difference in importance between *Hamlet* and *Dallas* was not always obvious" (p. 27). Standing as icons of the new definition of art were Andy Warhol, with his paintings of soup cans, and Roy Lichtenstein, with his cartoons; from these artists and others like them, the public found art that reflected their everyday, mass-produced life (Huyssen, 1986). Postmodernists became advocates of "pop culture," and they saw value in what was produced today (Hoffman & Murphy, 1992; see also Laqueur, 1996). Pop culture was applicable to the Postmodern view because pop culture drew attention to the Postmodernist's

lack of concern for contact with anything that exists beyond our human-made world. [Pop culture] doesn't attempt to give us truth about God, nature or the self. Rather it simply focuses our attention on the mass produced world of consumer products and media images without attempting to give that world a rational shape. (Linn, 1996, p. 105)

Finally, Postmodernists also advanced that the artist and artistic creations should not be separated from life as was established by the Modernists (Hutcheon, 1988).

The foundation for the characteristics of Postmodernism can be viewed in summary by a brief examination of two of the major thinkers of this age. The writings of Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault best demonstrate the Postmodern philosophical break with past traditions and the influence of Nietzsche on current philosophical thought. Habermas' work called for the end of traditional, reason-based philosophy and for the end of the dependence on logic (McCarthy, 1978). He considered reason to be a human creation, not a universal Truth to be discovered;

consequently, he advocated a "rethinking" of the concept of reason as a mode of explanation and justification for all human action. Habermas developed two general theories to expand on his ideas. The first was the theory of communicative rationalization that focused on "reflecting upon our background assumptions about the world" in order to define, analyze, and renegotiate what has been determined to be the truths about the world (Braaten, 1991). The second theory was the theory of social rationalization that suggested societies were learning entities, but in order for a society to learn and to advance, certain principles must be accepted and agreed upon by the members of the society. Like Habermas, Foucault agreed that the tie to reason and scientific thought should be broken (McCarthy, 1978). He saw reason as generating a particular picture of society that regulated the operations of a society and the discoveries of so-called truths. Foucault explored power as it was tied to language and to discourse; he argued that discourse creates subjects and objects that are then tied to knowledge and power (Hekman, 1990). Foucault continued to investigate power by examining the power vested in societal institutions and proclaimed an end to injustices that were caused by the dependence on the views of the Enlightenment (Cantor, 1988).

Postmodernism and the historical, philosophical, and political movements of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, stand as an eclectic array of ideas and actions. Giddens' (1990) dark conclusion to this period was that "we have discovered that nothing can be known with any certainty" (p. 46). However, Huyssen (1986) took a slightly different view to the contrasts and divergent nature of Postmodernism; he noted that, "No matter how troubling it may be, the landscape of the Postmodern surrounds us. It simultaneously delimits and opens our horizons. It's our problem and our hope" (p. 221).

Modernists brought change to literature and the theatre as an outgrowth of the movement. Modern dramatists, as previously demonstrated, gave audiences a variety of plays that encapsulated the very core of the movement. The creative spirit that guided the Modernist generation of playwrights in a new direction also steered the Postmodernist playwrights so that they, too, reflected the thoughts and beliefs of their age.

### Postmodernism and the Theatre

Given the Postmodernists' skepticism regarding the discovery of universal truths and presenting the nature of reality, Postmodern writers infused the dynamics of their philosophy into their work. As the nature of what defined art had changed, Postmodern writers and dramatists freely experimented with a variety of forms for fiction, poetry, and drama. As with Modernism, Postmodernism influenced all forms of literature, but this section summarizes Postmodernism and theatre because of its relevance to this study.

In general, Postmodern drama was an age of examination and an age of experimentation (Jacobus, 2001). Playwrights examined every conceivable facet of society and humanity while many experimented with daring, if not confusingly frustrating, modes of presentation. One reason for the continued experimentation of playwrights was the achievements of Modern dramatists such as Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. In essence, Postmodern playwrights pushed through the door that had been opened by the Modernists. Furthermore, mass culture provided a source of inspiration (King, 1991). With the breakdown of high art, the influences of mass culture provided "a new sensibility, new tastes, and an openness to the unconventional" (p. 3).

Because the nature of society had changed since World War II, three movements within Postmodern theatre developed to encompass these changes: Theatre of Cruelty, Theatre of the Absurd, and Political Theatre. These three movements, especially during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, defined theatre's response to the changing world. Although these categories are artificial and it is difficult to force plays into one category or another, the ideologies within each category served to demonstrate the new theatre that emerged.

The Theatre of Cruelty was derived from the work of Antonin Artaud. Although Artaud's work was written in the 1920s and 1930s, it was not translated into English until 1958. His influence on Postmodern drama came after his works' translation into English. Thus, the height of his influence came in the 1960s and 1970s (Jacobus, 2001; Worthen, 1995). Artaud attacked the theatre for merely representing experiences, and he "advocated transforming the theatre into an all consuming spectacle" (Worthen, p. 424). Artaud described what theatre should be with the metaphor "the plague" which Artaud explained as a theatre that would "transmit experiences corporeally, through the body, like disease, like mystical wisdom, alchemically transforming all of its participants" (p. 424). Artaud suggested that plays should no longer rely on an excellently written text, but that all human senses, physical, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, auditory, and visual should be affected by the theatrical experience. In order to intensify the experience, Artaud called for the incorporation of movement, gesture, music, light, and sound in order to propel the audience into the midst of the action (Jacobus, 2001). Although Artaud never explained, in practical terms, how any of this should be accomplished, he did inspire many playwrights, including Ntozake Shange and Marguerite Duras.

The Theatre of the Absurd marked a new form of playwrighting. Martin Esslin, in 1961, coined the phrase "theatre of the absurd" to describe the infusion of existential philosophy into

dramatic works (Jacobus, 2001; Worthen, 1995). As introduced to the theatre by Jean-Paul Sartre, existentialism was based on the notion that "existence precedes essence," and humans were on a path filled with choices for actions. The choices were morally and ethically neutral in themselves, and the individual was free to make choices that would lead to an "authentic" self or a self that is filled with degradation (Worthen, p. 425). Additionally, existentialists viewed the world as a meaningless place; meaning was a human construct, and "individuals must create significance and not rely on institutions or traditions to provide it" (Jacobus, 2001). As summarized by Worthen, absurdist drama rejected

the sense of causality found in realistic plays...absurdist plays resist the notion that it is possible to find causes for events either in the environment or in the psychological motives of the characters themselves. Instead, the theatre of the absurd tends to be about a world in which inexplicably, arbitrarily, or irrationally events simply happen. (p. 425)

Absurdist drama also did not incorporate the use of dramatic irony, which exists when the audience knows more than the characters; instead the audience was left to choose the meaning with no guidance from the actions of the play. The idea of existential philosophy and this mode of theatre were most evident in the works of such playwrights as Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, and Tom Stoppard.

Beginning in the Modern period, Political Theatre continued into the Postmodern period. Political Theatre was based on the notion that theatre itself was a social institution responsible for guiding the beliefs of a society (Worthen, 1995). Thus, the power of theatre rested in showing how others were "represented" in the world. This representation was based on demonstrating who made the images; who benefited from the images; how oppression resulted from the images, and how the images maintained a certain status quo. Political Theatre most

often chose to focus on minority groups within a culture. From there, the playwrights went on to expose the stereotypes that were associated with the groups. Playwrights Adrienne Kennedy, Jean Genet, and Wole Soyinka were noted examples of this movement.

As an outgrowth of the Political Theatre and its ideology, the 1980s and 1990s have seen a surge in the formation of theatre groups devoted to minority issues. Having been ignored by commercial and mainstream theatre operations, theatre groups representing gays, lesbians, African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Native-Americans have emerged as powerful dramatic forces (Jacobus, 2001). The recent interest in multiculturalism has made these theatre groups even more significant because they represent the lost voices of contemporary society (King, 1991).

Not all Postmodern plays were experiments in the extreme or the strange. Many playwrights of this age have continued in the realist traditions and have achieved commercial success and critical acclaim (Jacobus, 2001). Playwrights such as Wendy Wasserstein, Marsha Norman, and August Wilson were but a few whose works were founded upon traditional, realistic presentation. However, these playwrights have used Postmodern issues and themes as the basis for their material.

As a reflection of Postmodern principles, Postmodern drama developed several unique characteristics that separated it from Modern drama. First was a change of the definition and the parameters that dictated what it meant to represent something on the stage. Postmodern plays have been described as "anti-essentialist" in their views of how experience and identity are depicted (Worthen, 1995). It can no longer be assumed that categories, such as gender or ethnicity, were "essential and universal"; these categories were now "performative, part of the essentially fictive means with which a culture reproduces itself" (p. 735). Thus playwrights have

characters who cross gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity lines. This new form of drama was best seen with the rise of performance art where the performer, in first person monologues, "performs" what were "real" events. Second, Postmodern art makes use of what Jameson (1988) termed "pastiche" or the recollection of earlier styles. In the theatre, pastiche was accomplished by borrowing from an earlier theatrical period. This borrowing was not done in order to recreate or to provide an understanding of the past, but instead, the borrowing "denatures that style by removing it from history and history from it" (Worthen, 1995). Third, Postmodern drama incorporated the use of the montage, or a collection of images. In Modern drama, these images were united to form a story line that the audience could piece together and follow; however, in Postmodern drama, the images were presented without any connection. Often the images were contradictory and produced no coherent story line. Fourth, because of the use of the montage, Postmodern drama has become increasingly fragmented in its presentation. Traditionally, characters and actions were depicted in order for the audience to gain an understanding of the situation and of the people. Often referred to as "death of the subject," Postmodern plays force the audience to question the idea of comprehension of not only actions but characters, thus leaving open the question that people and situations can never be understood (p. 736).

As playwrights became more daring, other areas of the theatre changed to meet the new demands of the plays. For example, set designers built sets that reflected a symbolic message or underscored the expressive nature of the play (Gilbert et al., 1994). Actors, as a result of being challenged by characters presented in non-traditional formats, enhanced their craft and artistic range of expression by reaching out to the techniques of mime and dance in order to convey the new characters. The directors of the plays became more imaginative in presenting the total effect the play. As a whole, theatre became a more collaborative venture than ever before.

In summary, Worthen (1995) provided this applicable insight:

By disorienting language, fragmenting narrative, and dispensing with such organizing principles as "plot" and "character," Postmodern art claims that we have entered a new age in which the complex disconnections of modern culture have made obsolete many of our beliefs about the world and our ways of representing the world and ourselves. (p. 736)

Postmodern theatre stands as a testimony to the changing nature of the art form known as theatre. Its creative streak, combined with a touch of the past, suggests that the contemporary theatre of the past few decades is alive and responsive to the world.

### Research Methodologies

Several sociologists and anthropologists turned to the theatre as a means of creating social theory or as a means of assisting them in the explanation of their theories. Goodlad (1971) focused on the premise that popular drama provided a way to pass on a culture's definition of correct behavior and as a way to "emphasize the distinctiveness of [social] roles" (p.39). Goffman (1967, 1972) explained his theories of human relationships and the self by employing a theatrical metaphor. Turner (1982) explored tribal rituals by recreating ceremonies using actors from another culture in order to examine the fundamental aspects of such practices.

Hart (2000), Colmenero (1999), Turner (1996), Barnett (1991), and Lyman and Scott (1975) used literature or film as data sources for their work. By using literature or film, these researchers explored how theories generated in a variety of fields were used in settings other than traditional research settings. Additionally, these studies establish the credibility of the general research pattern that was employed in this study.



Hart (2000) researched how people with AIDS were represented in American movies during the first two decades of the AIDS pandemic. The study was based on the social-construction point of view that suggests "contemporary historical reality" is constructed by participants in the society, and the way "social actors" talk about subjects goes a long way in indicating how society will address a subject (p. 5). Applying this line of thought to his research topic, "individuals respond to AIDS in terms of its social definition...regardless of the scientific validity of that definition" (p. 6). Media representations of how people contract HIV or die from AIDS generated the social definitions of HIV and AIDS; often these images, whether true or not, were taken as reality.

In order to create a picture of how people with AIDS are portrayed in film, Hart (2000) used content analysis and textual analysis techniques to examine 32 "AIDS movies" released during the 1980s and 1990s. Hart used the term "AIDS movie" to refer to

Any fictional or fictionalized narrative movie which features at least one character who either (1) has been infected with HIV, (2) has developed full-blown AIDS, and/or (3) is grieving the recent death of a loved one from AIDS and which also explores the process of such characters confronting realities associated with transmitting, living with, and/or dying from HIV or AIDS as a significant component of its narrative. (p. 9)

By examining film and video guides, Hart produced a list of 45 movies meeting the established criteria, of which 32 were available for viewing (see Appendix A for a complete listing of films used in his study). The films were analyzed based on demographic characteristics of the characters, infection status of the characters with HIV/AIDS, "evidence of victim blaming, and the ultimate status of each character identified to be infected with HIV/AIDS at the movie's end" (p. 11).

Hart (2000) concluded, based on the results from his analysis, that "the need for diverse and more accurate representations of AIDS in movies and other media offerings has never been greater" (p. 98). Hart's overall conclusion was derived from several observations. First, most AIDS movies contained an "Us" and "Them" grouping for characters. The "Us" category were "innocent victims" who contracted HIV/AIDS from non-risky behavior such as blood transfusions while the "Them" category referred to those who participated in behaviors, most notably homosexual intercourse, that brought on their conditions (p. 35). These images reinforced the notion that gay males with AIDS deserved no sympathy and were deviant members of society. Second, in 75% of the movies, gay males were the central character (p. 47). This intensified the erroneous assumption that AIDS is a gay disease even though women represent the fastest growing segment of the population who are contracting AIDS (p. 64). Third, the majority of the movies (84%) were set in metropolitan areas with three-fourths of the settings being New York, Los Angeles, or San Francisco. The films' settings strengthened the notion that AIDS is an urban problem; this notion ignored the "geographically boundless" nature of society and the disease (p.80).

Whereas Hart (2000) incorporated a specific lens for examining society through film, Colmenero (1999) incorporated a broader sociological lens in her analysis of literature. Specifically, she addressed "whether the images of gender presented in a single medium, today's best-selling, mass-market paperback novel, continue to confirm traditional representations of men and women or if there has been a transition to a modern and egalitarian notion of the genders" (p. 3). Her study focused on the genres of horror, mystery/thriller, and romance, and two representative novels from each category were selected using the *Publishers Weekly's* yearly "The Red and the Black" report for the years 1990-1997. For this time frame, Colmenero

determined the top 50 best-selling authors and then narrowed the group down to the top 2 authors in each category. She randomly selected the novels by each selected author. Colmenero chose the following novels: Stephen King, *Delores Claiborne* (1993); Dean Koontz, *The Voice of the Night* (1991); Mary Higgins Clark, *I'll Be Seeing You* (1994); John Grisham, *Pelican Brief* (1993); Danielle Steel, *Star* (1990); and Johanna Lindsey, *Gentle Rogue* (1990).

Colmenero (1999) coded the first 50 and the last 50 pages of each novel based on 6 gender-image categories. These categories were Position, Relationships, Valued Characteristics, Approach to the World, Area of Authority, and Occupation. "Position" referred to the position of the character with regard to dominance or subordination. "Relationships" defined the character's attitude towards romantic/sexual relationships. "Valued Characteristics" focused on the importance of the character's physical appearance. "Approach to the World" explained the character's response to stressful or problematic situations. "Area of Authority" investigated whether a character's authority was in the domestic or career arena, while "Occupation" defined the career of the character. For each category, Colmenero compiled descriptors based on traditional male, female, and non-gendered definitions and characteristics. In addition to the coding in each of the categories, Colmenero found it necessary to diagram the context of the plot and to describe the scenes of the novels in order to understand completely the dynamics of each novel.

Colmenero (1999) drew the following conclusions based on the analyses of these six novels. Overwhelmingly, for the areas of Position, Relationships, Valued Characteristics, Approach to the World, and Occupation, the novels adhered to traditional gender typing for the characters. Area of Authority did not yield significant data for consideration. Two novels, *Pelican Brief* and *Delores Claiborne*, contained gender images that were the least traditional of

all the novels. In *Pelican Brief*, the female character acts in a dominant manner and portrays a more egalitarian view of relationships. In *Delores Claiborne*, the female also acts in a dominant manner, but Colmenero noted that there were no major male characters that would provide a source for comparison in this novel.

Differing from Colmenero's (1999) use of literature and focus on gender, Turner (1996) studied leadership traits found in Western film characters. He noted that sociologists, historians, journalists, health care professionals, business leaders, political scholars, religious scholars, and educators have all used the cinema as sources for study within their respective fields. Turner noted that at the time of his study, leadership portrayal in the Western film genre had not been studied. In order to fill in this void in the research, Turner focused his study on an examination of "leadership portrayed in films representative of the American western cinematic genre from 1945 to 1995" by categorizing and describing the "leadership styles of the western 'heroes' of each film" in an effort to "determine how, or if, the leadership style presented reflects leadership theory" (p. 9).

Turner (1996) selected 29 Western films for his study out of a possible 100 films (see Appendix B for a complete listing of the films used in his study). Because the number of possible films was quite large, Turner outlined an exacting methodology for film selection. First, the time period of 1945 to 1995 eliminated some films. Second, all "B" westerns, comedies, parodies, and made-for-television films were excluded. Outside sources were also included in the selection process; these resources included film critics, film rating guides, and standard definitions for commercial film success. Turner also used a panel of experts as a final validation of the list of chosen films.

Turner (1996) chose to incorporate a character and item analysis approach to study each film. Each film was viewed to discover the main character and then reviewed to discover the character's leadership patterns and styles. Relevant quotations of dialogue and a description of the situation of the character were used to establish the leadership traits of the characters. Once the leadership style was recorded, Turner considered if the exhibited style preceded or coincided with accepted theories of the time. Turner found films that depicted the following leadership theories and/or traits: McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, charismatic leaders, leaders as change agents, transformational and transactional leaders, the "Great Man" theory, and Ouchi's Theory Z. Additionally, he noted gender and cultural influences on leadership, several instances of leaders without followers, and leaders without a shared vision among the followers.

Turner (1996) drew several conclusions from his analysis. He suggested that leadership was a hallmark feature of Western films and that the leadership styles of the characters remained constant to the end of the film. He noted that the importance of a strong leader was essential to achieving a desired outcome. Turner found some films that exhibited characteristics of leadership theories prior to the theories becoming accepted; "however, more often than not a general introduction to, and acceptance of, the theories had already been established prior to the release date of the suggested films exhibiting corresponding leadership characteristics" (p. 527). This led Turner to conclude that Westerns "served as a vehicle to transport these theories" (p. 528). As a final thought, Turner decided that the analysis of Western films was a worthwhile endeavor because of the portrayal of leadership through a "myriad of 'lenses,' displaying a variety of styles, motifs, and characteristics representative of several leadership theories" (p. 536).

In keeping with an analysis of leadership theories, Barnett (1991) explored the leadership traits found in academic novels written from 1950 to 1990. She was interested in identifying the leadership traits of the characters and then discovering if the characters portrayed recognizable leadership types. By looking at leadership as practiced by or observed by characters in novels, Barnett used the evidence gathered from her research to gain insight into an "understanding of how these administrators were stereotyped and presented to a mass audience" (p. 8).

Barnett (1991) chose 40 academic novels for the study and used a content analysis methodology as the research approach (see Appendix C for a complete listing of novels used in her study). Barnett defined "academic novels" as books in which "academia was depicted with seriousness and the main characters were either students, professors, or academic administrators" (p. 67). The novels for this study were chosen after examinations of bibliographies from previous similar studies and from other print resources such as periodicals and *Books in Print* and *Books Out of Print*. After selecting the novels that represented the decades from the 1950s to the 1990s, Barnett classified the leadership positions of the characters as president, vice-president, dean, or chairperson. She identified an index of leadership behaviors as "autocratic (telling), democratic (selling), participative (shared) and delegating (minimal)" (p. 70). The characters' leadership type was labeled as autocratic, democratic, participative, delegative, situational, or other. Barnett then grouped the actions of the characters by the position of the characters, the types of leadership styles, and the characters' decision making processes.

Barnett (1991) drew several conclusions from her study. She noted that of the 97 leaders in the study, 28 were presidents, 8 were vice presidents, 31 were deans, and 30 were chairpersons. Additionally, the autocratic style of leadership was the most common style depicted with 40% of the leaders exhibiting this trait. For the other leadership styles, 14% were

democratic, 4% were participative, and 39% were considered "other" because they did not fit into a category, or the novel did not have enough information for classification. The images of the leaders in the study represented both positive and negative images of academic leaders. She concluded that on the negative side many of the leaders were "satisfying a need for power," lacked creativity, and were "not champions of liberal or humanistic values" (p. 160-161). On the positive side, some of the leaders were presented as guardians of the "procedural order of academe" (p. 160). Barnett pointed out that most of the novels were written from the point of view of characters who were in the faculty ranks, and this could account for some of the negative imagery associated with the leaders. As a final conclusion, Barnett stated,

If the image of academic leadership found in the selected novels of this study is accurate, the findings suggest that the introduction of various leadership methods in education is warranted in order to effect the leadership ability of administrators and, thereby improve the leadership performance of educators and, eventually, improve the leadership image of academic administrators in American society. (p. 164-165)

Differing from all of the previously discussed studies, Lyman and Scott (1975), by basing their work on the premise that "the social world is inherently dramatic," studied several Shakespearean plays in order to explore modern sociological and philosophical theory (p. 3). Their thematic study used the following plays: *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and passages of relevant dialogue were quoted to support how each play embodied a particular theme.

Two of the plays, *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, addressed the conflict that arises when opposing world-views collide. Hamlet is trapped between two opposing world-views about how to play the political game. On the one side was the view of Plato and Cicero that

Hamlet studied in school; this traditional view defined a ruler as someone who followed virtue and justice. This type of ruler, who was civilized and separated from the beasts of the field through respectable actions, upheld the grand order of nature. On the other side was the view of Machiavelli and Montaigne; this view challenged the divine appointment of a leader and the grand order of nature. Machiavellian politics encouraged animal-like cunning in order to conquer and then maintain one's leadership. Throughout the course of the play, Hamlet moves from Cicero's concept of a leader to a Machiavellian view of a leader, and the play outlines his coming to terms with his new philosophy and new role. A similar structure of conflict is presented in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Rome, as personified by Anthony, symbolizes the Apollonian world-view, which is structured, ordered, rational, and reasonable. Egypt, as personified by Cleopatra, symbolizes the Dionysian world-view, which is sensual, formless, expressive, and charismatic. These two world-views collide in the love affair between Anthony and Cleopatra. Octavius, the conqueror of Egypt and Anthony's successor, symbolizes the "rational bureaucrat" who wins out. The deaths of Anthony and Cleopatra mark the end of both the heroic period in Rome and the sensual excesses in Egypt; what is to follow is the bureaucratic, i.e. Modern, world.

*Macbeth* differs in that it does not represent a collision of world-views, but the play predicts a future philosophical world-view. Lyman and Scott (1975) viewed *Macbeth* as Shakespeare's quest to explore what is now defined as the Modern concept of the absurdity of life and the alienation of social roles. By killing Duncan and assuming the position of king, Macbeth finds his experience as king meaningless. In a moment of keen insight into the futility of his actions and the meaninglessness of his experiences, Macbeth exclaims: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/And then is heard no



more: It is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/Signifying nothing" (p. 7). Macbeth becomes trapped in meaninglessness and absurd activity, and only death ends his absurd existence.

Lyman and Scott (1975) presented only a partial discussion, and seemingly incomplete analysis, of *Troilus and Cressida*. They focused on the play as a study of hierarchy and its usefulness in sustaining social order. In discussing why the Greek army cannot conquer Troy, two Greek leaders, Agamemnon and Nestor, argue that Fate is keeping them from victory, but Ulysses argues that the "specialty of rule hath been neglected" (p. 143). Ulysses suggests that when weak leaders allow the vertical rule of the hierarchy to be destroyed, the consequences are ineffective subordinates and ultimate chaos.

In their final analysis, Lyman and Scott (1975) identified Shakespeare as both "an ancestor and a contemporary" of sociological thought (p. 159). As an ancestor, they surmised that Shakespeare's plays possess his "ethnology and theory of the substance and transformation of human experiences" (p. 159). As a contemporary, they categorized Shakespeare as a builder of social realities that transcend the culture of his day. Lyman and Scott concluded that "Shakespeare thus [provided] a formal prism through which the human condition may be refracted in all its manifold experiences and existences" (p. 159).

## Conclusion

This review of the literature provided a look at gender theories, examined the cultural and literary movements designed as Modern and Postmodern, and summarized studies with similar research methodologies to this study. Two major conclusions emerged as a result of this overview of relevant material. The plethora of work regarding gender and gender roles suggests that this field is still a relevant research topic. This study, because of its design and focus, was a timely and appropriate addition to the work in the field. In the tradition established through the studies by Hart (2000), Colmenero (1999), Turner (1996), and Barnett (1991), this study uncovered a different voice about the inner workings and ramifications of gender and gender roles than a more traditional research methodology.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study consisted of analyzing a group of American Modern and Postmodern plays with regard to the theme of gender and gender role behaviors of the characters. To fulfill the parameters of this study, a representative list of plays for study was required. Furthermore, it was necessary to have a systematic approach for examining the content of each play based on the principles of qualitative research. This chapter addresses these topics in order to articulate the precise research methodology for this study.

#### Research Questions

This study concentrated on how gender roles were described and defined in a selection of American Modern and Postmodern plays. This study was guided by four major research questions:

Research Question 1: What gender roles did the characters have in each play?

Sub-Question A: Once described for the characters, did the identified gender roles fall into the "traditional" realm or were the characters taking on roles outside the traditional categories?

Sub-Question B: Did the characters' gender roles determine their situations, and were the characters' situations limited by their gender roles?

Sub-Question C: Were there consequences for the characters as a result of their gender role assignments or for their actions within their gender roles?

Research Question 2: Did the plays cast the female and male genders using certain patterns and were the gender patterns polar opposites?

Research Question 3: Were there differences in gender portrayals of the characters in the plays that were designated as Modern or Postmodern?

Research Question 4: Did the sex of the playwright make any difference in the portrayal of gender in the characters that he or she created?

### General Methodology

The nature of this study lent itself to a qualitative research methodology. In its basic form and regardless of the specific data gathering technique (i.e. interviewing, participant observation, content analysis, etc.) that is adopted, as a whole qualitative research is used to "discover themes and relationships" that exist in a given situation (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 29). As a more detailed definition supplied by Mason (1996) suggested, qualitative research principles were "concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, or produced," and these principles attempted "to produce [a] rounded understanding on the basis of rich, contextual, and detailed data" (p. 4; see also Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As qualitative principles captured the broad methodological approach of this study, the techniques of content analysis and textual analysis provided the working parameters for this study.

Several research theorists provide definitions for what is meant by the term "content analysis" and how this procedure is employed. Krippendorff (1980) defined content analysis as a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context," (p. 21) and it was "characterized as a method of inquiry into [the] symbolic meanings of messages" (p. 22; see also Weber, 1985). Content analysis was based on the notion that societies have

institutions that specialize in creating and disseminating the "operating rules" of the society and that these rules and notions are demonstrated in the written communications of a particular society (Krippendorff, 1980). In essence, because the written documents of a society represented that society, they became "cultural indicators" and were considered to be valid and reliable data for study (Weber, 1985, p. 10). For this study, plays provided the written documents and were the "cultural indicators" with regard to gender and gender role behavior.

Traditionally, content analysts took a specified sample of written documents, coded the material based on specified categories, looked for frequency of words or phrases, and performed statistical calculations based on the number of coded references in order to validate the researcher's conclusions (Berelson, 1952; Budd & Thorp, 1963; Gall et al., 1996; Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1985;). However, frequency counts and statistical analysis were not used in this study. Rogers (1991) noted that literature, because of its aesthetic qualities, does not lend itself to being reduced to a numerical analysis. Furthermore, direct quotations, as opposed to paraphrases, of the authors' words were necessary in order to preserve the playwrights' messages. Instead of moving in a statistical direction, this study incorporated a textual analysis approach to the content as is often found in the study of literature. As noted by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), a textual analysis found in literary studies treated each selected text as "a self-contained system" in order to explore where meanings were brought into view (p. 7). As the selected plays were the "self-contained systems" for investigation, this study used quotations from the plays to uncover relevant themes and to assemble character descriptions that were used to explore the topic of gender.

### Selection of Plays

The plays for this study were selected using the following procedure. The discussion covers the literary time period and other basic requirements, the process used to compile the list of plays for the study, and a final rationale for that list of plays.

#### Time Period and Basic Requirements

Integral to this study was the careful selection of the plays to be analyzed. Rogers (1991) summarized the importance of selecting the literature for study when the literature is the basis for a cultural study: "Sampling literary works requires sketching broad boundaries and insistently including all the widely read and/or critically acclaimed writers whose work gives those boundaries literary and cultural meaning" (p. 17).

In order for the nature of this study to be preserved and the research questions of this study to be addressed, it was imperative that the selected plays represent a variety of Modern and Postmodern plays. The initial list of plays met the following specifications. First, even though the case could be made that Modernism predated the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all the plays in this study were written after 1900 so that gender roles could be examined during a single century. Second, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century authors whose native tongues were languages other than English wrote many prominent plays. In order to avoid issues associated with working with a translation, all the plays for this study were written in English. Third, because this study was ultimately addressing questions of gender and gender roles for women in society, all the plays contained at least one character that is designated by the author as female. Fourth, an effective exploration of gender calls for a variety of voices and points of view to be accessed; therefore, the plays for this study represented a diversified list of authors with regard to sex and ethnicity.

### Preliminary Selection

In order to obtain a cross-section of plays from the Modern and Postmodern periods, six drama anthologies were consulted. By referencing the table of contents of each of the following anthologies, *Masterpieces of the Drama* (Allison, Carr, & Eastman, 1991), *Modern and Contemporary Drama* (Gilbert et al., 1994), *Modern Drama: Plays, Criticism, Theory* (Worthen, 1995), *Stages of Drama: Classical to Contemporary Theater* (Klaus, Gilbert, & Field, 1995), *The Harcourt Brace Anthology of Drama* (Worthen, 1996), and *The Bedford Introduction to Drama* (Jacobus, 2001), a preliminary list of 35 plays was compiled (see Appendix D for the preliminary list of plays). These six anthologies were chosen because they represented a variety of publishing companies, and the books were a representation of some of the anthologies available for the college-level teaching of dramatic literature from the last decade to the present. College-level teaching, as explored below, was a test of acceptance of the artist and his or her work.

The decision to use drama anthologies as the first phase in the selection process was made for a variety of reasons. Anthologies devoted to a specific literary genre take a given time period and bring together examples that best define what was occurring during that period. For example, in the introduction to his anthology, Jacobus (2001) stated that his anthology contained "a collection of fifty-two important plays that have shaped dramatic literature from the time of the early Greek dramatists to the present" (p. v). Furthermore, Worthen (1995) stated that his anthology was "a collection of the classic plays of modern European and American drama, a provocative sampling of new work...by writers working from a variety of positions of racial, ethnic, cultural, and sexual identity" (p. v). A second consideration for the use of anthologies was their classroom use. Because these anthologies condense broad subjects into manageable units, they were designed to be teaching tools for introductory or advanced college classes

(Gilbert et al., 1994; Worthen, 1995; Jacobus, 2001). Writers and their works included in anthologies become easily accessible, and the standard often used for judging the merit of an author or of a piece of writing is found in whether or not the person or the work is taught in college classrooms. Third, because editors compile anthologies, the question of subjectivity on the part of the editor can become an issue. In other words, were the plays included because of their merits as plays or were they included because of the personal tastes of the editor? All the anthologies used in this selection included a repetition of most of the writers selected for this study, thereby suggesting that the writers were included because they best represented Modern and Postmodern dramatic writers and not just a particular editor's personal tastes.

### Play Selection Process

A panel of four experts was used in the final play selection process. Three of the panel members hold advanced degrees in theatre and are currently college theatre instructors and directors. One panel member is employed in the theatre industry and learned her craft through a variety of apprenticeships. The panel consisted of Dr. Robert D. Funk, Associate Professor of Theatre, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN; Mr. Richard Major, Professor of Theatre and Chair of Performing, Visual, and Communicative Arts, Milligan College, Elizabethton, TN; Dr. Dennis R. Elkins, Professor of Speech and Theatre and Dean of Humanities, Walters State Community College, Morristown, TN; and Ms. Amanda Aldridge, Resident Costume Designer, Barter Theatre, Abingdon, VA. The panel members were contacted either by electronic mail or by telephone to request their participation in this project, and all agreed to participate.

Originally, the panel was to evaluate, approve, or suggest modifications to a final list of plays produced by narrowing down the preliminary list. However, in order to eliminate any



questions of personal bias and to ensure that the plays suggested for this study represented a sampling of Modern and Postmodern plays, it was determined that the panel of experts would select the plays to be analyzed in this study. Along with a cover letter explaining the nature of this study, the preliminary list of plays and specific questions about the list was sent to each panel member (see Appendix E for the letter to panel members).

The panel members were asked to determine if the plays were correctly designated as Modern or Postmodern and to select five plays that they best felt represented each literary period. They were instructed that they could add any plays that were not included in the preliminary list. Additionally, they were encouraged to add brief justifications where they deemed it to be necessary. The panel members were given the latitude to add additional plays in order to uncover any plays that would be relevant to this study but were not, for whatever reason, included in the anthologies. All the panel members responded to the same questions, and a consensus of the views would determine the plays for the study.

### Panel Responses

Two panel members responded in a timely manner to the request, and one panel member, because of performing obligations, responded after a lengthy delay. One panel member, after repeated telephone, traditional mail, and electronic mail inquiries, never responded to the request. With only a few exceptions, the panel agreed that the plays were correctly designated as Modern or Postmodern, and they all submitted plays for the study (see Appendices F-H for the individual panel member responses).

After examining the panel members' recommendations, several concerns surfaced about their list of suggested plays. Besides a lack of consensus, there was a distinct lack of diversity among the playwrights, and the plays covered a narrow time span with respect to when the plays

were written. Additionally, two of the suggested plays contained plots or thematic material that were unsuitable for this study. In consultation with the Dissertation Committee, plays from the panels' responses were selected and then supplemented with other plays from the preliminary list. The final list of plays covered a broad time span (1907 through 1997), included a mix of female and male authors, and incorporated both Caucasian and African-American playwrights. In order to have a common cultural background from which to view gender and gender behavior, a final decision was made to include only American playwrights. The following plays were then chosen for this study:

<b>Playwright</b>	<b>Play</b>
Elizabeth Robins	<i>Votes for Women</i>
Susan Glaspell	<i>Trifles</i>
Thornton Wilder	<i>Our Town</i>
Eugene O'Neill	<i>Moon for the Misbegotten</i>
Tennessee Williams	<i>The Glass Menagerie</i>
Arthur Miller	<i>Death of a Salesman</i>
Lorraine Hansberry	<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>
Adrienne Kennedy	<i>Funnyhouse of a Negro</i>
Wendy Wasserstein	<i>Uncommon Women and Others</i>
Marie Irene Fornes	<i>Fefu and Her Friends</i>
Ntozake Shange	<i>spell #7: geechee jibara quik magic trance manual for technologically stressed third world people</i>
Sam Shepard	<i>Fool for Love</i>
August Wilson	<i>Fences</i>

David Mamet

*Oleanna*

Paula Vogel

*How I Learned to Drive*

Of the plays selected for this study, there was a balance between Modern and Postmodern works. The designation of these plays as either Modern or Postmodern was determined by their placement in the anthologies and supported by the opinions of the panel of experts. The Modern plays are *Votes for Women*, *Trifles*, *Our Town*, *Moon for the Misbegotten*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *A Raisin in the Sun*. The Postmodern plays are *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Uncommon Women and Others*, *spell #7: geechee jibara quik magic trance manual for technologically stressed third world people* (hereafter referred to as *spell #7*), *Fool for Love*, *Fences*, *Oleanna*, and *How I Learned to Drive*.

### Specific Methodology

The following summarizes the techniques that were used in the analysis of each selected play and for determining the validity of the study. Additionally, this section explains how the plays were grouped in subsequent chapters in order to present the gathered data.

### Gender Role Categories

In order to provide a systematic approach for the exploration of each play and in keeping with the methodology, categories were the basic unit of analysis. According to Budd and Thorp (1963), categories were "classes into which material is grouped for the purpose of analysis" (p. 10). If categories were to be effective then they must be "(1) tailored accurately to fit the needs of the study so that they will provide answers to the questions asked, (2) exhaustive (again relative to the questions under study), and (3) mutually exclusive" (p. 10).

In order to describe the gender roles of the characters in the plays, an overall division of masculine and feminine characteristics was needed. Gender is often described by traits that are dichotomous—males take on certain characteristics and females take on the opposite. As noted by Bascow (1992), the term "opposite sex" characterized how these differences were presumed. Research into gender and gender roles led to the following overarching division of the male and female roles (Bascow, 1992; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1970, 1972; Chodorow, 1978; Dobson, 1995; Eagly, 1987; Layng, 1995; Lindsey, 1997; Lipman-Blumer, 1984; Tannen, 1990; Wood, 1999). Males were the breadwinners and providers; they were aggressive and independent. Females were domestic caretakers; they were passive and dependent.

From the basic premise of the male as breadwinner/aggressive/independent and the female as domestic/passive/dependent, four categories, with specifically assigned traits, were used during the analysis of each play. The four categories are Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Source of Power, and Physical Appearance. Masculine and feminine gender traits were condensed into the four categories thereby providing the working definitions for masculine and feminine behavior that guided this study.

The category of Behavior Characteristics described, overall, how women and men acted in relationship to each other and to the world at large. By far, these traits were the most numerous, and they reflected the domestic and work lenses usually attributed to each gender.

<b>Masculine</b>	<b>Feminine</b>
Non-emotional/non-excitabile	Emotional/Excitable
Objective	Subjective
Competitive	Non-competitive

Logical/rational	Illogical/irrational
Direct	Sneaky
Self-confident	Not self-confident
Ambitious	Non-ambitious
Sloppy	Neat
Provide security/stability	Need security/stability
Self esteem from work	Self esteem from relationships
Act alone	People oriented/others considered first
Fearless	Fearful
Rough	Gentle
Less intuitive about others' feelings	Intuitive about others' feelings

The category of Communication Patterns referred to how men and women communicated with each other. These traits described how men and women behaved toward each other, toward members of the same sex, and toward the world at large.

<b>Masculine</b>	<b>Feminine</b>
Talk freely about sex	Do not talk freely about sex
Use harsh language	Do not use harsh language
Not talkative	Talkative
Blunt	Tactful
Do not express tender feelings	Able to express tender feelings
Use talking/communication techniques to build dominance and hold/gain position and power in a hierarchy	Use talking/communication to build consensus and to hold people together

The category of Source of Power defined where women, in the domestic sphere, and men, in the public sphere, found their loci of control. These traits defined the domestic sphere as less prestigious and as a less desirable place to work.

### **Masculine**

Institutional resources provide power and a method to gain status: political office, economic factors, technology, education, legal system, occupation

Achieves lots of public recognition for advancement

### **Feminine**

Individual resources provide power: beauty, youth, wit, sexuality, reproductive capabilities

Achieves little public recognition for using these skills

The category of Physical Appearance emphasized how men and women were viewed from a physical standpoint.

### **Masculine**

Not concerned with appearance

Greater physical size and strength

Strength is a valuable asset.

Aging is considered distinguishing.

### **Feminine**

Appearance oriented—"Barbie" figure

Smaller physical size and weaker

Beauty is a valuable asset.

Aging is something to be avoided.

The plays in this study were read and analyzed in their entirety. For the purpose of clarity, a plot summary for each play was provided thereby substantiating who the characters were in each play as well as establishing both the action and setting of the play. The analysis of each play was exhaustive in nature meaning that all aspects of the play were considered to be data. For each of the established categories that define masculine and feminine behavior, relevant passages of dialogue and/or stage directions from each play was used to demonstrate

how each category was presented in the play. In addition to examining the characters' behaviors, actions, and dialogue, symbols and/or themes in the plays were incorporated in order to draw conclusions from each play about the subjects of gender, gender portrayal, and gender behavior. If additional material from the plays was relevant but not included in the discussion of the categories, the material was presented in a separate section. Based on the analysis of each individual play, the research questions about gender in the plays of the Modern and Postmodern periods and the sex of the playwright with respect to the gender behavior of her or his characters was addressed.

### Study Validity

In order to establish the accuracy of any study, the validity of the research methodology must be addressed, and for this study, validity, defined by Budd and Thorp (1963) as "actually measuring what the researcher says he is measuring" (p. 26), was assessed in several ways. Krippendorff (1980) suggested that validity for a textual analysis began with a detailed and up front explanation of the procedures that will be followed for any given study. Additionally, validity was established by providing careful definitions for each category (Berelson, 1952). For this study, the "up front explanation" of the methodology and the definitions for relevant categories was provided in this chapter. Another test of validity rests in comparing the data or the conclusions back to an established theory (Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1985). For this study, comparative information was provided by the work of literary critics who have analyzed the particular plays in question, and their material, when available and relevant to the subject matter, was incorporated into the discussion of the individual play. As a final method for research validity, a peer debriefer and an auditor was used. The peer debriefer served as a sounding board for ideas and conclusions drawn from the exploration of the plays. Ms. Tami R. S. Penley,

Instructor of English at Mountain Empire Community College, functioned in this capacity (see Appendix I for peer debriefer formal verification). To stimulate discussion during the meetings and as a method for keeping a log of meetings and the outcomes, a reflective journal was kept throughout the entire process. At the conclusion of the data collection process, an auditor reviewed all the gathered materials including the journal, critical essays, and textual information as a means of establishing that the conclusions indeed emerged from the material. Dr. Jon P. Harr, Director of Admission at Northeast State Technical Community College, served as the auditor of this study (see Appendix J for auditor formal verification).

### Chapter Organization

In the early design stages of this study, it was planned that the plays would be discussed in individual chapters. However, after the detailed analysis of each play was completed, a better organizational structure for the presentation of the material emerged. The following chapters reflected a grouping of the plays based upon the setting, and the plays within each chapter were discussed in chronological order. One group of plays was set in and around the home; the plays included were *Trifles*, *Moon for the Misbegotten*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Death of a Salesman*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Fences*. The second group of plays was set in an environment other than the home and included *Votes for Women*, *Uncommon Women and Others*, and *Oleanna*. The third group of plays included those where the setting of the play was symbolic and included *Our Town*, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *spell #7*, *Fool for Love*, and *How I Learned to Drive*. Observations about the plays with regard to the literary period and the sex of the playwrights as related to gender portrayal were discussed in a separate chapter. Overall conclusions and subsequent recommendations were discussed in the final chapter of the study.



This revised method of presentation allowed for a more unified presentation of the material and for a more thorough articulation and development of the overall premise of this study.

### Conclusion

As detailed in this chapter, careful thought and planning entered into the methodological choice, analysis process, and play selection process. An outcome of this careful planning was evidenced in the analysis of the plays.

## CHAPTER 4

### PLAYS OF THE HOME: GENDER ROLES AND THE FAMILY

This chapter explores the plays that take place in the home environment—a setting that usually invokes gender roles that are divided along what are considered traditional boundaries. A summary of relevant background material about the development of the American family precedes the analysis of seven plays. The plays that are discussed in this chapter include *Trifles*, *Moon for the Misbegotten*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Death of a Salesman*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Fences*. An explanation of common themes among these plays concludes the chapter.

#### Background Material: The Development of the American Family

Every culture has its own way of defining what constitutes a family. Mintz and Kellogg (1988) characterized a "proper" American family as having the following traits: a married couple with dependent children living with them in a dwelling apart from other family members. The father, as the head of the household, supplied an income to support the family, while the mother was responsible for supporting her spouse, doing household duties, and providing childcare. Additionally, marriage was a lifetime commitment, and the parents had the sole responsibility of raising the children. Mintz and Kellogg concluded that this definition of a family included the premise that "families that fail to conform to one or more of these givens may be regarded as 'troubled' or 'problem' families" (p. xiii).

Although the concept of the "proper" family has been supported by television shows such as *Leave It to Beaver* or *Father Knows Best*, both the definition and the media images perhaps represent merely a picture of how Americans wish family life to be. Especially over the past 20

years, the true picture of the American family has evolved to include single-parent households, blended families with stepchildren, couples deciding to remain childless, and couples, both homosexual and heterosexual, living together without the bonds of marriage. In truth, only one in five families lived according to the "proper" family definition, and the numbers are even less for African-American families (Ahlburg & De Vita, 1995; O'Hare, Pollard, Mann, & Kent, 1995). By examining the history of the American family, scholars noted that family structures have changed over time and have adapted to relevant circumstances.

During the Colonial period of American history, family structure was important to helping the family survive the harsh realities of life on a new continent. Families were production units by necessity because they had to produce everything that was required to live, including food, clothing, shelter, and miscellaneous items such as soap or candles (Gerstel & Gross, 1995). All members of the household were expected to work in order to ensure the survival of the group. Marriage was a political institution because families gained strength, power, and wealth through marital arrangements; affection for one's spouse came after marriage, and each person was expected to bring skills to the marriage partnership (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). Husbands and wives shared in child rearing, and child rearing was not seen as the most important work of the family. Often older siblings cared for younger children until they were old enough to contribute to the farm work (Hoffnung, 1995).

The dominance of the father in Colonial America was a steadfast rule. The father was active in selecting proper mates for his children (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). He owned the land, and, in turn, passed that land onto his sons thereby making it economically possible for them to marry. As a result of this strict patriarchy, the man, upon marriage, absorbed any property belonging to the woman prior to her marriage.

By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the definition and the function of the family began to change as society began to change. Differing from the almost arranged marriages of an earlier generation, marriage and mate selection now became an individual's prerogative, and marriage became a relationship based on mutual attraction between the man and the woman (Gerstel & Gross, 1995; see also Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). The concept of the male as the breadwinner came into being and the self-made man, who made his own way in the world by working in a job outside of the home, rose in prominence. To complement the new role for the husbands, wives became the caregivers and nurturers in the marital relationship. As an industrial economy replaced an agricultural economy, the lines between family and work were more sharply divided, which caused a segregation of duties to form between female and male tasks. A man was paid a "living wage" for his work, which was the amount of money needed to support a family. For the first time, the home became a place of refuge for the husband from the world of work, and the wife's duty was to make the home a safe and relaxing environment (Hoffnung, 1995). However, the concept of the home as a refuge was reserved for wealthy or middle class, predominantly Caucasian families; poor, immigrant families of various ethnic backgrounds could not survive on the wages of one family member. Thus, family structures and patterns began to differ based on the socio-economic status and ethnicity of the family; consequently, the portrait of the "ideal American family" was based on white, middle class values and lifestyles.

African-American families, because of slavery, developed their own family structures. Africans brought to America as slaves were property and could not enter any legal contract, such as marriage. In spite of this, slaves lived together as committed couples after a symbolic marriage ceremony (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988; Staples & Johnson, 1993). In order to endure the

harsh conditions of life as slaves, they developed a strong sense of community by establishing kinship ties in both nuclear and extended families. Slave families were often split when children were sold to neighboring farms, and if blood relatives were not present to raise the children, extended family members stepped into that role because

slave parents taught their children to call all adult slaves "aunt" and "uncle" and to refer to all younger slaves as "brother" or "sister." In this way slave culture taught younger people that they were members of a broader community in which all slaves, whether related or not, had mutual obligations and responsibility. (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988, p. 69)

Fathers in slave households could provide additional food for the family, but they could do little to protect their wives from sexual assault or their children from brutality (Staples & Johnson, 1993). Consequently, many males had wives on other farms so that they did not have to witness the abuses and indignities heaped upon their wives (Franklin, 1988). By the time of the Civil War, most slave families were two-parent households with children, and most were living in squalid conditions with very meager food supplies (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988).

After the Civil War, the abolition of slavery did little to improve the quality of life for most black families. Many former slaves began to search for lost family members, and many couples legally wed (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). A majority of post-Civil War black families were female-headed due in large part to the high mortality rate that existed for males who were slaves. Some former slaves stayed close to where they used to work but were now trying to survive by working their own land. Others moved their families to the North to an urban setting and looked for work in the mills and factories, but the growing opportunities of the industrial economy afforded to whites were denied to blacks. Post-Civil War black families were characterized by strong familial bonds, and families cherished their children and had a great desire to see them

educated (Staples & Johnson, 1993). Whereas many African-American males were denied work, women could more easily find domestic work in urban areas, so large concentrations of female-headed homes developed in the urban ghettos. The inability of African-American men to find work that provided a living wage continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The beginning of World War II saw the next great change for the American family. Approximately 16 million men left the job market and entered the war, leaving women to fill the vacated positions (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). It is estimated that nearly one half of all American women held a job outside of the home at some point during the war. The majority of these women were middle class mothers, and many endured criticisms. Opponents of working mothers suggested that because the mothers sought employment outside the home that they were leaving their children vulnerable to exhibiting antisocial behavior and that as working wives, eventually they would be "[undermining] their husbands' self-images" (p. 162).

When the men came home after the war, the women were shut out of the workplace, and they were forced to return home to their traditional domestic work. By the 1950s, the golden age of the family was born (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). During the post war period, the United States experienced high marriage and birth rates and low divorce rates; couples were marrying sooner and having more children. Families migrated to the suburbs and had their chosen lifestyles praised in popular literature, by psychologists, and in the emerging media of television.

By the 1960s, however, the picture of the ideal family was breaking down because reality did not match the popular image. The stereotype of a male breadwinner and female homemaker did not accurately describe the majority of homes, and for women, the contrast between the "images of womanhood popularized by advertisers, women's magazines, educators, and psychologists and the actual realities of women's lives" was growing greater and was differing by

ethnicity (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988, p. 198). White women were beginning to seek options outside the home that included education and work, and many, as a result of the women's movement, were seeing marriage as a form of slavery. African-American families, especially in the South, were still the targets of intense racism; additionally, the Moynihan Report would for many years cast the African-American family in a dismal light. Blaming the condition of African-American families on slavery, Moynihan concluded that the African-American family had dissolved. He based this conclusion on several observations such as the fact that black families had high divorce rates, high welfare rates, high child delinquency rates, and a high number of absent fathers in the homes (Staples & Johnson, 1993). He characterized the black family structure as a matriarchy, and he blamed black women for running off black men for their failure to provide (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). However, Moynihan failed to take into account the poverty that existed for many black families, and he ignored the stabilizing force of a vast kin network that existed within the black community. He blamed the black family, and especially black women, for creating their conditions instead of looking at American society, which included the forces of segregation, poverty, and discrimination (Morgan, McDaniel, Miller, & Preston, 1993; see also Staples & Johnson, 1993). In short, he compared black families to white families, saw differences, and immediately labeled the black families as failures—a stigma that many black families are still fighting to this day.

Although many stereotypes for both black and white families have become entrenched into the American psyche, the truest statement about the American family that can be made is its ability to adapt to the times at hand. As summarized by Mintz and Kellogg (1988):

The history of American family life suggests that we need not be disturbed by change in and of itself, because change—and not stability—has been the norm. American families

have repeatedly had to change in order to adapt to novel circumstance—from the challenges of New World colonization to the commercial and industrial revolutions, enslavement, immigration, depression, and war—and the changes that have taken place in family structure, roles, and conceptions have been so far reaching that they might be considered revolutions. (p. 243)

Yet American culture has neglected to acknowledge the vast changes in family structures that have taken place since the birth of this nation. The provider role for the male, according to Bernard (1995), lasted roughly a century and a half, from approximately 1830 to 1970 when the U. S. Census Bureau "declared that a male was not automatically to be assumed to be head of household" (p. 237). However, the image of the male as the head of household has become "a rocklike feature of the national landscape" (p. 237).

This brief discussion of the dynamics and characteristics of the American family provided an historical basis for examining the plays in this chapter. As it was demonstrated, an examination of the gender roles and accompanying behavior of the characters in the plays that were set in the home provided a glimpse into how the family is portrayed in drama, thereby suggesting how much historical fact and how much a preference for the ideal family entered into these playwright's depictions of the family.

### Trifles

After Susan Glaspell and her husband, George Cram Cook, formed the Provincetown Players in 1915, Glaspell took an interest in writing for the stage (Ozieblo, 1990). Unlike the other major playwright for the group, Eugene O'Neill, Glaspell did not have a stack of plays ready for production, and she created all of her plays especially for the group to perform. Both



O'Neill and Glaspell "expanded the possibilities of what could be shown and discussed on the stage, offering glimpses of a theatre to come; both experimented with new dramatic forms, stage language, and subject matter" (Ben-Zvi, 1995, p. 1). Unlike O'Neill's work, Glaspell's work faded into obscurity until, as a by-product of the feminist movement, a renewed interest in female writers led to the rediscovery her work in the 1970s.

Written in 1916, the one-act play *Trifles* is Glaspell's most popular play, and the play has become "one of the most frequently anthologized American dramas, used both as a model of the one-act form and...as an example of women's literature" (Smith, 1982, p. 172). The genesis of the idea for the play came from newspaper articles written about the trial of Margaret Hassock who was accused of murdering her husband (Ben-Zvi, 1995). *Trifles* is a play about the differences between male and female gender roles, and Glaspell uses not only the setting—a home—but the plot itself—a murder investigation—to demonstrate how men and women differ with respect to prescribed gender norms and expectations.

The plot of the play focuses on conducting a murder investigation into the death of John Wright, who was brutally, and strangely, strangled in his sleep with a rope. The focus of the investigation is directed toward Minnie Wright, the deceased man's wife. The action takes place in the Wright's home on the morning after the murder. George Henderson, the county attorney; Henry Peters, the sheriff; and Lewis Hale, the neighbor who discovered the crime have returned to the scene to gather evidence for the case against Minnie. Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale have accompanied their husbands to the Wright home, and they are assigned the task of gathering some clothes and personal items to take to the incarcerated Minnie. While the men search the house and the barn for clues to determine a motive for the crime, the women are left in the kitchen where the men assume no evidence could possibly be found. Through both careful

observation of the kitchen and conversations about how Minnie Wright had changed since her marriage to the cold-hearted John, the women solve the crime first by uncovering evidence and then by interpreting that evidence. Although they solve the crime by finding what the men are looking for, they conspire to conceal the evidence from the men. Presumably, this concealing of the evidence will allow Minnie to go free because the men, unsuccessful in their efforts to understand the crime and the criminal, will not have enough evidence to successfully prosecute Minnie.

The four gender trait categories, Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance, were germane to the analysis of the gender roles and gender role behavior in *Trifles*.

#### Behavior Characteristics

The behavior characteristics of the male and female characters in the play follow the traditional divisions of male and female behavior. The behavior characteristics of the characters are brought out as a result of their connection to the physical environment.

From the very beginning, the play separates the male characters from the female characters in order to demonstrate the differences in their worlds. When Henderson, Peters, and Hale enter the Wright home, they are in a group, and they immediately go to the stove to warm themselves. Conversely, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale come "in slowly, and stand close together near the door," (p. 206) and they only move in closer to the heat of the fire when they are invited. The separation continues when the men go off to walk through the house and the barn to look for clues to clarify what the motive was for the murder. The women are left behind in the kitchen because as Peters points out to Henderson there is nothing important in that room—"only kitchen things" (p. 207).

Henderson, Peters, and Hale are the independent thinkers who are trying to solve the murder through logical thinking and an objective analysis of the crime scene. The men dictate what the women are there to do—gather clothing and personal items, and these items will be inspected prior to leaving the crime scene. The men go room by room looking for evidence, and Henderson has Hale repeat, several times, his narrative about finding the body in order to make sure that nothing has been left out or overlooked.

Henderson, in his quest for concrete evidence, dismisses two key statements. Hale makes the first statement in reference to installing a party telephone line. Hale thought that perhaps if he discussed it with John in his wife's presence, it would help to convince John to participate. However, Hale concludes, "I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John—" to which Henderson replies "Let's talk about that later" (p. 206). The second comment is made by Mrs. Hale with regard to John's personality and the characterization of their home: "I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it" (p. 207). Again, Henderson responds with a similar statement as before, "I'd like to talk more of that a little later" (p. 207). Henderson never follows up on these comments. These two remarks characterize the victim's personality and are directly tied to the motive for murder, but Henderson, as demonstrated by his actions, dismisses the comments because to him they do not seem relevant.

Yet for all of their logic and objective analysis, the men cannot come to any conclusions or unlock the motive for murder. Henderson is the most perplexed by the morning's unsuccessful activities:

No, Peters, it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to women. If there was some definite thing. Something to show—something to

make a story about—a thing that would connect up with this strange way of doing it—.  
(p. 210)

Unwilling to give up, Henderson remains behind when the others leave: "I'm going to stay here a while by myself [...] I want to go over everything [...]" (p. 210).

Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, functioning as domestic caretakers, view the Wright house differently from the men. To the men, the entire house is a crime scene, but to the women, it is a home, and they are protective of Minnie's domain. For example, when Henderson begins to criticize Mrs. Wright's apparent lack of housekeeping skills, according to the stage directions, Mrs. Hale "stiffly" replies, "There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm" (p. 207). Although Mrs. Peters attempts to justify the men's remarks as part of their duty and having "awful important things on their mind," Mrs. Hale does not accept this as a plausible reason for the men's judgmental behavior (p. 208).

In contrast to the men, the women solve the crime based first on emotional responses and then on their ability to intuit the feelings of others. The women notice the unfinished wiping of the table and the bread set to rise but never finished, and they do not see a poor housekeeper but instead interpret the incomplete activities as signs describing Minnie's mental condition. Mrs. Hale explains how Minnie changed after marrying John; in her youth, she was outgoing and vivacious, but after she married she rarely went out and socialized with others. Mrs. Peters empathizes with how lonely life can be for women, especially those with no children: "I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died—after he was two years old, and me with no other then—" (p. 210). When they discover the poorly stitched quilt piece and then the canary with its broken neck, the women are then able to piece together exactly

what happened in the home. They realize that that they have discovered the motive that the men are looking for; it is laid out in plain view in the "woman's room"—the kitchen.

### Communication Patterns

Working in concert with how the male and female characters behave is how the characters communicate. As with the behavior characteristics, the division of the characters into male and female groups contributes to how the characters communicate with each other.

Throughout the entire play, the men discuss only facts relevant to the case. They stay focused on the task at hand in hopes of solving the crime, and they are never at a loss for words nor do they struggle to find the correct words to use in order to express themselves. They never ask for the women's opinions or thoughts on the case. While once passing through the kitchen on the way to the barn, the men overhear the women discussing quilting, and Peters remarks, "They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it!" followed by the stage directions which indicate that the men all laugh (p. 208). Thus, the men find not only women's work unimportant, but they also pass the same judgement on the women's conversations.

Unlike the men, the women often have difficulty expressing themselves. As noted by Ben-Zvi (1982), Glaspell often connected language and action, and the dialogue in *Trifles* was no exception. A connection between how the women are perceived by the men, what they discover, and how they formulate a conclusion is evident in the play. The women struggle to voice what they are thinking, and they "pause, stammer, and speak in half sentences" (p. 25). Yet aside from the women's lack of verbal skill, they are able to overcome what would be considered a weakness in the masculine world—they communicate without speaking.

The women speak volumes to each other without saying the words or finishing their sentences. After discovering the final clue, the dead canary, the stage directions indicate the following actions:

The two women sit there not looking at one another, but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back. When they talk now it is in the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they cannot help saying it. (p. 210)

Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters then proceed to discuss the feelings of loneliness and isolation that often accompany being a wife, and although the women are discussing themselves, they are also discussing Minnie. Never once do they verbalize how the clues that they have discovered will convict Minnie, but they each know the truth. In an effort to camouflage their thoughts, Mrs. Peters says, "My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a—dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with—with—wouldn't they laugh!" (p. 210).

In the final moments of the play, when Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale decided to conceal the evidence, they communicate their intentions non-verbally. As indicated by the stage directions, the men leave the room, and

Then Mrs. Hale rises, hands tightly together, looking intensely at Mrs. Peters, whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting Mrs. Hale's. A moment Mrs. Hale holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly, Mrs. Peters throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens the box, starts to take the bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there

helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room. Mrs. Hale snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat. (p. 210-211)

This is the pivotal moment for the women, and it is decided upon, agreed to, and carried out without a word being spoken, thus demonstrating the ability of these women to communicate clearly and effectively to achieve a common goal.

Because the communication patterns for the characters are different, Glaspell is able to demonstrate how women can effectively communicate with each other. Although the women communicate in a different manner than the men, the actions of the play suggest that it is just as effective, if not more so, than the men's modes of communication.

### Sources of Power

Glaspell was known as a playwright who examined power struggles between characters, especially for her female characters, and Noe (1995) aptly summarized the theme of power in *Trifles* by saying that the play

[foregrounds] the absence of women from sites of power in pre-suffrage American, exploring issues of power and control that characterize gender relationships, and representing silencing and marginalizing as patterns of interaction through which power is wielded and control is exercised and maintained. (p. 42)

*Trifles* contains two themes relevant to the discussion of power, and both themes are tied to gender issues.

The first type of power evident in the play is power that is vested in men who work. Both Peters, as the Sheriff, and Henderson, as the County Attorney, have legitimate legal power bestowed upon them by their occupations. They are the physical embodiment of "the law," and they have the responsibility to enforce the law or to prosecute those who break the law. Hale,

although not employed in law enforcement or in the legal profession, is allowed to participate in the investigation by virtue of discovering the body.

The women, although encouraged to turn over anything suspicious that they might find in the house, are not granted the same power as the men. Although Mrs. Hale knows the victim and the accused, she, as was noted earlier, is told by Henderson that he will get back to her to gather that information and he never does. Henderson, by declining to search the items the women have gathered to take to Minnie, affords Mrs. Peters, by virtue of her marriage, some power. He says: "No, Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law" (p. 210). However, her husband "chuckles" at this analogy and does not take it seriously. Ironically, this conversation takes place before the men exit the room one last time, which gives the women the opportunity to hide the dead bird.

The second form of power that is seen in the play is the power of the husband over the wife in marriage, and this theme is best demonstrated by the relationship between John and Minnie Wright. In several places throughout the text, John is characterized in terms of his power. For instance, he isolated his wife in a house back off of the main road (p. 209), and he refused to install a telephone (p.206). Although he kept his word, paid his debts on time, and did not drink, Mrs. Hale describes John as a "hard man [...] just to pass the time of day with him— Like a raw wind that gets to the bone" (p. 209). Prior to her marriage, Mrs. Hale notes that Minnie wore pretty clothes and was actively involved in church activities but that changed after her marriage because

Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. (p. 210)



According to Hedges (1995), the Ladies Aid was a church affiliated organization where women could come together to do craft projects to raise money for missionaries or church projects. More importantly, organizations of this type allowed women fellowship, companionship, and a break from the mundane drudgery of housework. John kept Minnie from participating in groups like this as another form of isolation and power.

The broken birdcage and the dead canary are the two most powerful pieces of evidence that could suggest why Minnie Wright became a murderer, and they are also the strongest symbols that characterize the marriage between John and Minnie. The bird and its cage symbolized Minnie's restricted life—a life of "solitary confinement" with only John to break the silence (Smith, 1982, p. 176). The strength of the evidence, as well as the symbolism, is not lost on Mrs. Hale; she muses, "I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around. No, Wright wouldn't like the bird—a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that too" (p. 210). Taking all of these examples together, the women are able to understand the kind of life that Minnie Wright was living.

Although Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale do not directly share from their own experiences in marriage, they do come to understand what Minnie's life must have been like. This understanding for Mrs. Hale is expressed by her guilt for not seeking out Minnie and visiting her. She equates this abandonment of Minnie with a crime; a crime that she knows will go unpunished. Toward the end of the play, Mrs. Hale summarizes the unspoken sadness for women in marriage:

I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be—for women. I tell you, it's queer, Mrs. Peters. We live together and we live apart. We all go through the same things—it's just a different kind of the same thing. (p. 210)

This passage suggests that a unity exists among women, and all women, regardless of their situations, share in each other's trials.

Staging patterns in the play create a reinforcement of the theme that men possess the power and that the women are powerless in marriage. As noted, the play takes place in the kitchen of the Wright home, but only the women stay in the kitchen, while the men move from room to room upstairs. This staging underscores the trapping of women in the domestic role and suggests the mobility and freedom that men have in a marriage. Whenever the men leave the kitchen, their return is announced by their footsteps being heard before they are actually seen. The first re-entrance of the men finds the women discussing the quilt Minnie is making (p. 208). The women, engrossed in conversation, do not hear the men approaching. Consequently, the men laugh at the women's discussion. Immediately after the men leave, Mrs. Hale discovers the poorly stitched quilt square, and she removes the erratic stitching (p. 209). Being more aware of approaching footsteps, before the men enter a second time they hide the newly discovered dead canary (p. 209). When the men arrive in the kitchen and notice the broken birdcage, both women lie and suggest that a cat broke the cage (p. 210). As the women are putting the pieces of the murder together, the men do not enter the kitchen, but the women "look upstairs where steps are heard" (p. 210). The footsteps from above symbolize the men's power and the danger that the women could be in if they go through with their unspoken plans. By the time men make one more entrance, the women will have jointly agreed to conceal the evidence that would convict Minnie.

A final aspect of power and its inequitable distribution among the characters is demonstrated by the names assigned to the characters. The male characters all have first and last names. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters only have last names, and their last names represent their

married names. They even refer to each other by these names. Minnie Foster Wright is the only female character to have a full name. Mrs. Hale on three different occasions refers to her as "Minnie Foster" (p. 208, p. 209, & p. 210) and never once does she refer to her as "Minnie Wright" or "Mrs. Wright." By referring to Minnie Foster by using her given and maiden name shows how Mrs. Hale is attempting to give her an identity beyond her husband or her current circumstance. This subtle name recognition, as applicable to Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, according to Grose (1999), emphasized both the women's subordinate role to their husbands and the loss of identity for women in marriage.

### Physical Appearance

Of the gender characteristic categories, the descriptions in the Physical Appearance category are the least evident to this play; however, a few observations can be made. First, none of the male characters are described in terms of their appearance. Only the women are defined in terms of appearance. As indicated by the stage directions, Mrs. Peters is "a slight wiry woman [with], a thin nervous face. Mrs. Hale is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking" (p. 206). Minnie, in her youth, is also described on two occasions, and both passages are similar in content. Both passages, which are spoken by Mrs. Hale, describe Minnie Foster's lively manner, her pretty clothes, and her beautiful singing voice (p. 208 & p. 210). These two passages refer to a person that is no more—a person who was changed by sadness and circumstance into a suspected murderer.

### Additional Observations

The accused, Mrs. Minnie Foster Wright, does not appear on the stage, but she is a vital character in the play. She does not speak for herself, but Glaspell created the dialogue of the other female characters to speak for Minnie. Furthermore, through the attention to detail

concerning action, props, and the setting, "Glaspell [made] the unseen woman vividly present on the stage" (Noe, 1995, p. 39). Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale have the insight, either generated from personal experience, empathy, or intuition, to understand the conditions in the Wright household. Therefore, the play is stronger without Minnie because it forces the audience to consider the personal plight of the accused. As supported by Ben-Zvi (1995), because the audience did not see the character of Minnie, "it [was] not swayed by her person but, instead, by her condition, a condition shared by other women who can be imagined in the empty subject position" (p. 35).

By having the play set in the home of the accused as opposed to the public courtroom, details and facts, like the County Attorney so swiftly ignored, can be brought to the surface and can be a factor in judging the accused. Additionally, at the time when the play was written, only Utah, Washington, Kansas, and California allowed women to sit on juries, so Minnie would not have been tried by a jury of her peers (Alkalay-Gut, 1995). Instead of *Trifles* merely being a suspenseful murder tale, Glaspell used the play to criticize not only the court system but also "the conditions under which these women live" and the brutality and silence that was a daily part of women's lives (Ben-Zvi, 1995, p. 38).

#### Summary of the Research Questions

As detailed by the gender behavior categories, the male and female characters in *Trifles* follow traditional and prescribed gender roles and behaviors. The men are the leaders, and they control the situation. Their work in the public sphere is assumed to be valuable and is never belittled during the play. The women are domestic caretakers who are responsible for household chores such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, and canning fruit. Their work is trivialized in several passages. Even the title of the play connotes the diminished status of their world because as Hale comments in reference to Minnie worrying about her preserves, "Well, women are used to

worrying over trifles" (p. 207). The characters are not taking on roles outside of their traditional gender assignments; the men do not clean up the mess in the kitchen, and the women do not advise the men in legal matters concerning the case at hand. The only exception is the covert act by the women to hide important evidence from the men. This act is an act of defiance that requires strength, courage, and independent thinking on their parts. All the characters are in a position where their gender roles determine and limit their situations. As a consequence, the men, looking from a logical point of view, dismiss the very room and its activities that could have won them a conviction. For Minnie, the consequences are the greatest; she had no outlet for her frustrations and she suffered in silence in her marriage and now in a jail cell.

Glaspell's work does present the gender traits of the characters by using patterns, and those patterns are opposites. Both the men and the women, from the beginning of the play until the end, are presented as two literally separate worlds. The gender patterns are established and maintained through the dialogue and the actions of the characters.

### *Moon for the Misbegotten*

Eugene O'Neill, often praised as a "theatrical innovator and experimenter" (Barlow, 1988), was credited with taking American theatre to a new level of creativity. He produced more than 50 plays during his career, and he frequently suggested that many of his characters were inspired by people he knew from his personal life (Hall, 1993a). *Moon for the Misbegotten* was the final play that O'Neill ever wrote, and it, along with *Long Days Journey into Night*, were considered to be his most autobiographical works. These highly personal plays represented a "psychological milestone" for O'Neill by allowing him a venue to come to terms with his own past, while at the same time, the plays also represented "the artistic climax to his many years of

searching for an appropriate dramatic form in which to convey his vision of modern experience" (Gilbert et al., 1994, p. 291). O'Neill finished writing *Moon for the Misbegotten* in 1943, but as with his other autobiographical play, he requested that its production be delayed and would not agree to have it produced until 1947.

Despite his acclaim as a major force in the advancement and development of American drama, O'Neill was not without his critics. O'Neill was often evaluated based on his seemingly chauvinistic attitude toward women (Barlow, 1988; Drucker, 1988; Nelson, 1988). As summarized by Barlow,

[O'Neill's] depiction of women only rarely strays from the narrow limits of the conventional male view prevalent in Western culture and literature, or in fact from much of the Catholic ethos with which he grew up. For the most part O'Neill's female characters are perceived from the outside, from a masculine perspective that wishfully invest them with powerful maternal desires or condemns them for the lack of such feelings. If O'Neill seems daring in his often sympathetic portraits of prostitutes, this is because to him the distinction between the virgin and the whore is less important than the division between those women who "mother" men and those women who do not. (p. 7)

Few of O'Neill's female characters were gainfully employed in jobs other than prostitution, and many were searching for the "perfect marriage, the perfect love, [and] the perfect son" (Nelson, 1988, p. 3). While the male characters explored, dreamed, succeeded, or failed, O'Neill's women were confined to the domestic world and "aspiration and achievement [were] focused on relations with a man" (Drucker, 1988, p. 10). In contrast to O'Neill's traditional character depictions, Josie Hogan in *Moon for the Misbegotten* is not a prostitute but is searching for a

husband. O'Neill created in Josie a character who vacillates between traditional and non-traditional gender attributes.

Set on the Hogan farm in Connecticut in 1923, the plot of *Moon for the Misbegotten* runs from noon on one day until dawn of the next day. Phil Hogan, the family patriarch, is tyrannical, parsimonious, and abusive, and his behavior was the contributing factor that prompted Josie, his daughter, to help her three brothers run away. Only Josie remains, and this situation suits both Hogan and Josie just fine. Although Hogan had little use for his sons, he is dependent upon Josie, and he values her for not only her ability to do physical labor but for her domestic abilities as well.

Hogan is a schemer, and he takes delight in short-changing others. Hogan displays his scheming ability when T. Stedman Harder, the wealthy owner of the adjacent farm, visits the Hogan farm to discuss his displeasure at Hogan's pigs breaking the fence that separates the two farms. Hogan, in concert with Josie, insults, befuddles, and threatens Harder until he leaves in a state of panic and fear. Through his schemes, the Hogan family has managed to live on their farm without paying much rent, and Hogan is now poised to purchase the farm from James (Jim) Tyrone, the alcoholic son of Hogan's deceased landlord, at a price far less than the value of the land.

Josie created for herself the reputation of a whore. She brags that she has had sexual relations with the majority of the men in the county, and she is proud of her reputation. She is an "oversize" (p. 294) woman who appears to be devoid of compassion and sympathy for others; she has created a tough exterior complete with harsh language and physical violence heaped on those who cross her. However, her true desire is to marry Jim Tyrone, stop him from drinking, and thereby save him from himself. Hogan, who truly wants his daughter to be happy, tricks

Josie into agreeing to a scheme to arrange a scenario where Jim will have to marry Josie, but the plan fails miserably.

When Josie is attempting to seduce Jim, it becomes clear that he cannot marry her but instead needs her to be his confessor. Jim, an actor by trade, has spent his life abusing alcohol and keeping company with prostitutes. He is tormented by the memory that shortly before his mother died he broke his sobriety, and she awoke briefly from her coma to see that he was drunk. So filled with anguish over his mother's death and over her discovery that he was drunk, while on the train returning his mother's body for burial, Jim turns to the comfort provided by a prostitute. His mother's coffin is in the adjacent room. Although the memory of his mother's waking may be just a fantasy, Jim feels so guilty since his mother's death that he has had few sober moments. The consequence is that he will shortly die of the effects of alcohol abuse. Jim is the only person who figures out that Josie is in fact a virgin, and he pleads with Josie to be different from his other women just for one night. Josie cannot lure Jim into a sexual liaison that, upon discovery by Hogan, would force the honorable Jim to marry Josie. Instead, as Jim's tale unfolds, Josie symbolically becomes his mother in order to facilitate the cleansing of Jim's troubled soul so for one night he can sleep in peace. As the dawn breaks, Hogan returns to find the couple not in bed as he and Josie had planned, but finds instead that Josie is cradling Jim in her arms as a mother would hold a frightened child. Josie knows she will never marry, but her night with Jim has changed her into a softer woman. She will spend the rest of her days with her father working the land and tending to the home.

The four gender trait categories, Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance, were applicable to the analysis of gender roles and



their accompanying behaviors in *Moon for the Misbegotten*. In this four-act play the gender roles and behaviors are established in Act I and then are slightly modified in the remaining acts.

### Behavior Characteristics

Act I of *Moon for the Misbegotten* establishes the gender behavior for the members of the Hogan family. In Acts II through IV, the behavior characteristics for Josie and Hogan are slightly modified, but the patterns that are established in Act I remain a viable impetus for the action. The most notable behavior characteristics are seen in Josie and her father.

Josie represents a mixture of male and female traits in a variety of both traditional male and female gender roles. As a male, she functions like a son to her father, and as a female, she takes on the roles of mother and wife.

Josie's most dominant and most masculine trait presented in Act I is her ability and willingness to use physical violence against others. Josie is a large woman, standing "five feet eleven in her stockings and [weighing] one hundred and eighty," (p. 294) and she takes full advantage of her size. Josie's propensity for violence is established in the opening moments of the play when Josie is helping her brother, Mike, to run away. Mike insults their father, and the stage directions and Mike's accompanying dialogue indicate that

*(Josie's right arm strikes with surprising swiftness and her big hand lands on the side of his jaw. She means it to be only a slap, but his head jerks back and he stumbles,*

*dropping the pitchfork, and pleads cringingly.)* Don't hit me, Josie! Don't now! (p. 295)

Josie also uses violence, or the threat of violence, when she perceives that she is in danger or has been insulted. On one occasion when her father is annoying her, she threatens to "beat some sense" into his skull (p. 297), and when Harder condescendingly assumes the Hogans are drunk,

Josie retorts, "You'll apologize first for insulting a lady—insinuating I'm drunk this early in the day—or I'll knock some good breeding into you!" (p. 306).

Hogan has learned to use Josie's physical nature to his advantage. In fondly recalling an incident when Hogan was assaulted by the victims of a scam, Josie reminds him he would have been beaten to a pulp had she not stepped in and "knocked one of them tail over tea cup against the pigpen" (p. 297). Since that incident, Hogan calls on Josie to protect him against others. For example, when Harder visits the farm, Hogan shouts, "Don't try running away or my daughter will knock you senseless" (p. 306). In cases like this, Josie becomes more like a son to Hogan than a daughter.

In keeping with her physical nature, Josie enjoys the physical labor of the farm. As noted in the opening stage directions, Josie is "more powerful than any but an exceptionally strong man, able to do the manual labor of two ordinary men" (p. 294). Josie uses the physical labor on the farm to "clear her head" when she becomes frustrated with any situation (p. 301). Because Hogan knows the value of Josie as a farm hand, he is not disappointed when his sons leave one by one; he knows Josie is more capable and can accomplish more work than they did.

In contrast to her physical side, Josie also performs the domestic labor in the home, and she has been a mother to her brothers and a wife, in all but the sexual sense, to her father. Although she assumed the mother role when her own mother died, she has not complained about these additional domestic duties. Josie always makes sure that there is food on the table and that the home is kept clean and neat. Josie mothered her brothers to the point of preparing them to leave the nest and make their own ways in the world (Hall, 1993a). As he does with her physical prowess, Hogan calls on Josie to perform the duties of a wife. For example, when Jim visits the

farm, Hogan instructs Josie to bring them something to drink and later invites Jim into the house "to have a drink while Josie's fixing the grub" (p. 307).

In terms of becoming a wife in her own right, Josie is ambivalent about entering marriage. She curses marriage yet yearns to be married, and in Act I, she would never admit to anyone her desires to marry. Upon leaving the home, Mike's final words of advice to Josie are to marry and have a home of her own, but because of Josie's scandalous reputation, Mike is sure no decent man would want to marry her. However, Josie curtly informs Mike that she does not "want a decent man, thank you. They're no fun. They're all sticks like you. And I wouldn't marry the best man on earth and be tied down to him alone" (p. 295). Hogan, like Mike, suggests that Josie should marry Jim because she could save him, and he would not look down on her for her past indiscretions with men.

Because she has become such a vital necessity to running of the home and to the operating of the farm, Hogan does feel some remorse about Josie's condition. He says,

I'm afraid that you were born to be a terrible wonton woman. But to tell the truth, I'm well satisfied you're what you are, though I shouldn't say it, because if you was the decent kind, you'd have married some fool long ago, and I'd have lost your company and your help on the farm. (p. 298)

Although couched in a self-serving realization, Hogan's observation about his daughter is what keeps Josie on the farm and contributes to the stability of the family.

Even though Josie is an integral part of the household and the farm and despite the fact Hogan calls on Josie to solve a multitude of problems, he, as the family patriarch, is the head of the household. This is demonstrated in a scene near the end of Act I when Harder comes to visit. When Jim announces that Harder is planning to visit the Hogan farm, Hogan exclaims, "Oh,

won't I welcome him!" to which Josie replies, "Won't *we*, you mean" (p. 304). The "we" in the text is italicized. Hogan completely ignores Josie's correction. A few lines later, Hogan tells Josie, "Will you listen to this, Josie. He's [Jim] warning me not to give Harder a beating—as if I'd dirty my hands on the scum" (p. 304-305). Josie quickly responds, "As if we'd need to. Sure all we want is a quiet chat with him" (p. 304). This time the "we" is not italicized, but a response to the change in pronouns offered by Josie is still not given. When Harder comes to the farm, he says, "I want to see the man who runs this farm" (p. 305). Harder's request is a customary greeting, and Hogan answers as the head of the house. Hogan does not acknowledge Josie's presence until he needs her physical strength to intimidate Harder, thereby solidifying his position as head of the household while simultaneously negating Josie's position in the family.

Whereas Hogan is clearly defined as the head of his household, he stands in contrast to Jim, the play's other dominant male character. He has no family to support, and he has no plans to have a family. He blindly stumbles through life from one drink to the next, working only occasionally as an actor. He is free from the traditional trappings of the family man. Yet, he is not happy and carefree as is assumed of a bachelor.

In Act II, two major events take place: Josie begins to feel sorry for herself, and Hogan lays the groundwork for his grand scheme of getting Josie and Jim together so they will be married. Both of these events put Josie in a more traditionally feminine light and will eventually point to Jim's "failure" as a suitable candidate for a husband for Josie. As the act begins, Josie has put on her best dress and fixed her hair in preparation for Jim to call on her as he had promised a few hours earlier. Jim does not keep their date, and Josie is in a rage of anger and awash in utter disappointment. She is angry with herself for acting soft like a woman, and at the same time disappointed that Jim did not come. When Hogan arrives home, he chastises Josie for

her behavior: "A great proud slut who's played games with half the men around here, and you act like a numskull virgin that can't believe a man would tell her a lie!" (p. 310). In order to begin his machinations, Hogan begins to act more drunk than he is, and Josie berates him for "sobbing and acting like a woman" (p. 311). Hogan succeeds in convincing Josie that Jim is going to doublecross them and will sell the farm to Harder, and if she can seduce Jim and then be caught in a compromising position with Jim, marriage will follow and the farm will be theirs. Hogan knows that Josie will never express her true feelings for Jim, and this is the only way that he can bring them together so his daughter will have some happiness in her life. He advises Josie to go and fix herself up, and when she leaves the room, Hogan's true feelings about what he is doing come into the open:

*(Hogan stares after her. Abruptly he ceases to look like a drunk, who, by an effort, is keeping himself half-sober. He is a man who has been drinking a lot but is still clear-headed and has complete control of himself.)* God forgive me, it's bitter medicine. But it's the only way I can see that has a chance now. *(Josie's door opens. At once, he is as he was)* [...] (p. 314)

Hogan's selfless act of wanting Josie to be happy even though it will change his life immeasurably suggests a depth of character not seen until this point.

In Act III, Josie, filled both with rage at what she thinks Jim is going to do to her and her father and with a deep and yearning love for Jim, tries to be a soft and alluring woman for Jim but to no avail. Jim is too plagued by guilt to see Josie as a lover; therefore, Josie must take on a new role if the evening with Jim is to last any longer than just a few moments. He needs someone who will cleanse his soul and help him find peace. Josie chooses to participate in what Hall (1993a) labeled the role of "the Madonna in order to alleviate the suffering of another

human being" (p. 46). She listens long into the evening to Jim's tales of debaucheries with prostitutes and the story of the death of his mother. As the evening wears on, Josie becomes the woman whom Jim needs, and she gives up her desire to marry Jim.

Josie does struggle with her own desires and feelings during the course of the evening with Jim. Although Josie has symbolically been a mother for many years, the role on this night with Jim is different from what she did for her brothers and for what she has done for Jim in the past. Usually, in playing the mother to Jim, she tries to watch out for him. For instance, she often encourages Jim to eat as a "foundation" for drinking (p. 307). Josie acknowledges her mothering tendencies with Jim, while at the same time, she sexually comes on to Jim to suggest that she can be more than a mother—she can be a lover as well (p. 308). For Josie, this behavior will lay a foundation for her to become Jim's wife so that she can change him, stop him from drinking, and prevent his slow suicide. Josie thinks, as does Hogan, that she can protect Jim from the world and keep him safe and in return he will love her and be her lover and her husband.

But Jim's request of Josie is different than what she had in mind. What he needs will not lead to a physical union between the two of them, nor a marital union; it will, in reality, end their relationship after Jim gets what he needs—temporary relief from the haunting nightmares. By accepting the mother-role based on Jim's definition, Hall (1993a) explained that O'Neill "accentuated" both Josie's feelings for Jim and her precarious situation, and "since Josie [did] not move into the role easily and since she must deny a part of herself in order to play it, O'Neill makes it clear that such roles neglect to account for female desire" (p. 50). Hall continued and suggested that Jim puts women in two roles—mother or prostitute; therefore, he cannot consider or accept Josie as a wife because that role for him does not exist. Jim does not want to turn her

into a prostitute, and he even asks her upon waking in the morning, "You're sure I didn't get out of order last night—and try to make you, or anything like that" (p. 328). His only recourse is seeing Josie as a surrogate mother.

Resolution for Josie comes in Act IV. Hogan returns to find them sitting on the front porch, and he realizes that his plan has failed. Josie, who was mad at Hogan for tricking her, finally forgives him. Upon waking, Jim remembers his confessions from the night before, and he leaves Josie never to return, for she has served her purpose. Although she will never know marriage, as she explains to Hogan, "Don't be sad, Father, I'm all right—and I'm well content here with you. (*forcing her teasing manner again*) Sure, living with you has spoilt me for any other man, anyway. There'd never be the same fun or excitement" (p. 329). Although happy about what she did for Jim, Josie's happiness came with a personal sacrifice and a complete denial of her needs.

#### Communication Patterns

As with her behavior characteristics, Josie's communication patterns are more in keeping with male traits than female traits. First, Josie, by her own admission, has a "rough tongue" and most of Josie's lines of dialogue involve some explicative, name calling, or some other verbal assault. Her verbal attacks are not just limited to her family members; Josie boldly cursed at Harder by exclaiming, "Who the hell cares who you are?" and later "I don't like his silly sheep's face [...] I'll wager he's no damned good to a woman" (p. 306). However, when Harder manages to reply "Damn you, I'm the one who's had enough—" Josie interrupts and shouts "Hold your dirty tongue! I'll have no foul language in my presence" (p. 306). Thus demonstrating that she knows that it is not acceptable for vulgar language to be used in the presence of women but not caring if she goes against customary practice and uses such expressions. Second, Josie freely

discusses her sexuality and her sex life with anybody. She is unashamed of her supposed conquests even though her comments embarrass those around her. Third, Josie has little patience with verbal communication. She is a woman of action, and she refers to ineffective communication as "blathering like an old woman" (p. 311).

In Acts II and III, Josie does alter her normal communication pattern with Jim. She uses less harsh language, does not discuss the activities of prostitutes, and ceases to discuss her sexual exploits. At first, her change in speech patterns comes after Hogan warns her avoid the "brazen talk he's tired of hearing, while you act shy as a mouse" (p. 313). Jim also pleads with her to be less abrasive: "How about your not talking the old smut stuff to me? You promised you'd be yourself" (p. 319). Jim equates such vulgar language with whores, and Jim wants his evening with Josie to be different. He wants her to be the pure virgin she is, not the image she has created. For Josie to become his confessor, she must be pure, and she acquiesces. As summarized by Barlow (1988):

Josie...stills her own voice, abstains from the liquor that might...free her tongue, and accepts the role of listener to Jim's tale of woe—a double role, because she listens not only for herself but for his deceased mother as well. (p. 13)

In effect, Josie must maintain a self-imposed silence if she is to be effective.

In Act IV, to show to her father that she is all right with the turn of events, Josie reverts to her customary language patterns. To prove that she is her old self, she says, "A ginger-haired, crooked old goat like you to be playing Cupid!" (p. 329). However, the stage directions indicate the following before Josie delivers the line: Josie "forces a teasing smile and a little of her old manner" (p. 329). Thus suggesting that she has been changed inwardly by her evening with Jim and that she is deeply saddened by the turn of events even though she is trying not to show it.



## Sources of Power

For Josie, Hogan, and Harder, their power comes from different places, and each character uses the power she or he has in different ways to achieve what she or he wants.

As demonstrated with the other gender categories, Josie's sources of power include both male and female characteristics, and she is most comfortable with traditional male behavior. Josie creates most of her power from her physical strength—an uncommon power source for a woman. She does not back away from a physical confrontation, and she seeks out situations where she can use her physical strength to its full advantage. She has learned to harness the power of a well-planned verbal attack in order to goad others into doing what she wants. Additionally, she has learned from her father how to manipulate others, but this is a skill she does not choose to use very often, preferring more direct methods instead. She uses "feminine charms," such as putting on playful airs and creating a delicate persona with Jim, even though she detests such tactics (p. 315 & p. 316).

Hogan gains power by his physical strength, but more importantly he gains power by scamming other people. Whereas men traditionally draw power from institutional resources such as educational attainment or job status, Hogan is low on the institutional power chain: he is uneducated, Irish, poor, and a farmer. Thus, he has learned to use his wits to take from others. He will use others in his plans when it is necessary. For example, when Jim's father would come to the farm to evict the Hogans for not paying rent, Hogan would have Josie dressed up with ribbons in her hair to "soften his heart" before Hogan entered the room (p. 299). Such scheming behavior is indirect and is in contrast to his usually masculine behaviors.

Harder represents the best example in the play for traditional male power. His power comes from his accumulated wealth, his education, his status as a successful business owner, and

his political clout. However, he is unprepared for his encounter with the Hogans, as noted by stage directions:

It would be hard to find anyone more ill-equipped for combat with the Hogans. He has never come in contact with anyone like them. To make matters easier for them he is deliberate in his speech, slow on the uptake, and has no sense of humor. The experienced strategy of the Hogans in verbal battle is to take the offensive at once and never let an opponent get set to hit back. Also, they use a beautifully co-ordinated, bewildering change of pace, switching suddenly from jarring shouts to low, confidential vituperation. And they exaggerate their Irish brogues to confuse an enemy still further. (p. 305)

By the time Harder is chased from the Hogan farm, the one who should have had power has been humiliatingly stripped of his power, while those to whom little power was attributed took control of the scene and brought to fruition the ending they desired.

### Physical Appearance

*Moon for the Misbegotten* presents two contrasting images for women with respect to physical appearance gender traits. As established, Josie does not fit the traditional picture of the "ideal" woman. She is large, but she is also described as having "no mannish quality about her. She is all woman" (p. 294). She describes herself as "an ugly overgrown lump" (p. 300) and "a cow," (p. 317 & p. 321) having "paws" instead of hands (p. 320). Josie's self-image has trapped her; as noted by Manheim (1988), Josie's "fixed view that she has been unattractive to men has led to her playing the role of a whore while remaining a virgin" (p. 27). She thinks that the women that Jim likes are "dainty dolls" (p. 303) and "pretty little tarts" (p. 300 & p. 317) because those are the women he keeps company with when he is in New York. In reality, Jim thinks of those women as "pigs" (p. 319, p. 320, p. 321, & p. 324), "gold-digging tramps" (p. 317 & p.

328), and "tarts" (p. 300, p. 316, & p. 317). He associates their looks with his destructive lifestyle and the worst side of himself. Jim sees Josie in a different light, and he does find her attractive: "You have a beautiful strong body, too, Josie—and beautiful eyes and hair, and a beautiful smile and beautiful warm breasts" (p. 318).

Manheim (1988) concluded that Jim forced Josie to "explode that fixed view" she has sustained all these years thus "leaving her free for the first time to accept herself in human terms" (p. 27). However, there is a price Josie must again pay. Although Jim may have succeeded in reassuring Josie that she is beautiful and attractive, he leaves her with the message that she is beautiful in a maternal way. For example, Jim is attracted to Josie's large bosom. But Josie's breasts symbolize maternal caring, and Jim wants to lie in their comfort and protection. By doing so, Jim does not reassure Josie that she is sexually appealing to men as a lover.

#### Summary of Research Questions

The gender roles for the characters in *Moon for the Misbegotten* are traditional in one regard, yet the characters' behaviors often run contrary to their assigned roles. Hogan is the breadwinner for the family, and he is aggressive but often in an indirect way. By his own admission, he is dependent on Josie's company and her work around the farm. Josie assumes the role of mother and wife within the household, but she is far from dependent or passive. She is just as comfortable working outside on the farm as she is working inside the house. Josie appears not to be limited by her gender and its roles because she takes on non-traditional roles and behaviors depending on the situation. Even though she may be content with her situation, she experiences consequences for and is conflicted by her behavior. For all of her bravado and brash ways, Josie, at times, wants to be "like" other women. She wants to marry but will not admit it or take the steps to make that happen. She is proud of her strength and physical

prowess, but she can be self-deprecating about her size as well. For as much as she would like to be like a refined woman, she is unhappy when she must be coy and sweet. Josie assumed the maternal role within her family, but she did not ask Jim to turn her into his mother. Jim, by turning her into a mother, used Josie; he used her because she is a different kind of woman than his prostitutes. He used her to make his life better without considering her feelings. Although he is grateful to Josie for her compassion, he did not take into account the impact of his choice to convert her into his savior for one night.

The portrayal of gender in *Moon for the Misbegotten* is presented in strict patterns and the patterns are polar opposites, but in the case of Josie, although she acknowledges differences in male and female behavior, she does not always follow the patterns. She is comfortable in not acting like a traditional woman. Hogan, and to a greater extent Josie, exhibit traits and take on roles that are generally associated with the opposite gender. Josie is the most complex character, and she exhibits the most blending of feminine and masculine traits. Yet in the final analysis, Josie gets trapped in a maternal role and is rewarded for her sacrifice by remaining alone for the rest of her life.

### *The Glass Menagerie*

Tennessee Williams' first commercial success as a playwright was in 1945 with *The Glass Menagerie*. Growing up in the South, Williams was characterized as a Southern writer, and his most memorable characters were often labeled Southern belles. As described by Falk (1961), Williams' plays were often "studies in the frustrations of women of a culture and refinement associated with the Victorian era that disintegrated during the decade of World War I" (p. 71). Largely an autobiographical play, *The Glass Menagerie* is based on Williams' own

mother and sister and their life in St. Louis when their father worked as a traveling shoe salesman. Additionally, this play is the first of several plays that Williams categorized as a "memory play" because the majority of the action comes from the memory of a character within the play. *The Glass Menagerie* is a play where the female lead, Amanda Wingfield, is steeped in the Southern traditions of a bygone era, and most of the action in the play focuses on how she copes with life in the mid-1940s. For Amanda and her children, Tom and Laura, life is bleak, and the future looks bleaker unless significant changes can be made.

Tom Wingfield narrates the plot of *The Glass Menagerie* as he is looking back on his life and the events that led up to his joining the Merchant Marines. As the play's narrator, Tom provides introductions to the action, and he steps into and out of the past action in order to fulfill this role. The bulk of the action of the play takes place in 1945 in the Wingfield apartment; however, when Tom is serving as the narrator, he is in the present which is a few years after the play's main events took place. The Wingfield home has been run by Amanda since the departure of her husband—a "telephone man who fell in love with long distances" (p. 339). Amanda, who had fallen in love with her husband's charm and his grin, prior to her marriage had lived a life of a Southern belle. Becoming her solace and her refuge, this lifestyle is brought to life for her children in numerous stories about her feminine charms and her "seventeen gentlemen callers" (p. 339). These gentlemen have become giants among men for Amanda because they all became prosperous and provided for their families. Tom has assumed the role of the breadwinner for the family, and he works in a shoe warehouse. He detests his job and would rather be pursuing his dream of being a writer. In order to escape the dullness of his existence, he goes out every evening to the movies and to bars. Laura is content to stay at home all day and tend to her collection of glass ornaments, which she refers to as her glass menagerie. Walking with a leg

brace and a slight limp, Laura is painfully shy and has great difficulty relating to other people. She did not complete high school, and later, she dropped out of business school after an embarrassing attack of nervous indigestion.

The majority of the plot centers on Amanda's fervent quest to marry Laura to a nice and respectable man so as to ensure Laura's future and hers as well. Amanda implores Tom to bring home a gentleman caller for Laura—a task to which he finally acquiesces. Ironically, Tom brings home Jim O'Connor, a man on whom Laura had an adolescent crush in high school. Jim successfully engages Laura in conversation that culminates with a kiss. However, Jim is engaged to another woman and confesses to Laura he will not be able to return to visit her and continue the relationship Laura assumes they have begun. The confession forces Laura to retreat further into her own world thereby dashing Amanda's hopes for Laura's future as a wife. As a result of the disastrous evening, Tom leaves the home but is forever haunted by the sad memory of his sister.

*The Glass Menagerie* is organized into seven scenes, with all of the characters appearing in each scene except for Jim O'Connor who only appears in the final scene. The four gender trait categories, Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance, provided a basis to gather information that was applicable to understanding the gender roles and the behaviors of the characters.

### Behavior Characteristics

Before exploring the behavior characteristics of the characters in *The Glass Menagerie*, two initial observations are important. First, the genteel Southern way of life as seen through the eyes of Amanda is vital to understanding how she looks at the world and how she expects people to act. Her life is controlled by those ideals, and her actions are grounded in this lifestyle. The

second relevant fact is the Wingfield family structure. Amanda and Tom have a combative relationship because of the stresses caused by an absent father. Although Laura and Jim exhibit their own behavior characteristics, their behavior is filtered through the Southern motif and the Wingfield family tensions and structure.

Raised as a Southern lady on a plantation in Blue Mountain, Amanda was prepared to assume the more traditional role of the entertaining wife, dependent upon her husband to provide an income to support the family. However, Amanda's life did not follow this prediction. She assumed the role of breadwinner and provider when her husband abdicated that role. In a single parent role for almost 16 years, Amanda raised and supported her children even though her own upbringing would not have prepared her for such a position. Although not a part of the play, over the time when her children were small, Amanda must have worked to provide food, shelter, and clothing for her children. As a result of the life that Amada has lived, she is capable of showing traditional male characteristics, such as strength, logic, and dominance when she needs to and then just as easily she can revert to a feminine, passive, and dependent woman when that is more relevant to the situation and her own ends.

Amanda clings to her Southern upbringing in trying to prepare Laura for the future. As Amanda sees it, Laura has two choices: marriage or a career until she gets married. She does not want Laura to become the dreaded old maid. Upon discovering that Laura dropped out of business college, Amada tells Laura,

What is there left but dependency all our lives? I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South—barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife!—stuck away in some little mousetrap of a room—encouraged

by one in-law to visit another—little birdlike women without any nest—eating the crust of humility all their life! (p. 341)

From Amanda's point of view, dependency comes when a woman has no husband or when she cannot work until a suitable husband comes along. Independence is gained by having a home of her own. However, Laura cannot accept either choice that her mother has planned for her.

Amanda becomes focused on finding a husband for Laura so as to secure not only Laura's future, but also her own as well. As Tom noted, "Mother was a woman of actions as well as words. She began to take logical steps in the planned direction [...]" (p. 342). Showing the traditionally male characteristics of logic and planning, Amanda's plan to get a husband is based on getting Tom to bring home suitable candidates and then preparing the home to show how domestic and capable Laura would be as a wife. In order to initiate the first part of the plan, Amanda bargains with Tom; she will release Tom from his breadwinner obligations when he finds a husband for Laura: "as soon as Laura has got somebody to take care of her, married, a home of her own, independent—why, then you'll be free to go wherever you please" (p. 346). To further entice Tom, she included that he will also be free from any obligation to her because she assumes that Laura's future husband will provide her care. After Tom informs Amanda that a gentleman caller will be coming to the Wingfield home, Amanda shifts to the more domestic chores such as polishing the silver, preparing the menu for dinner, and redecorating the home to create the illusion of domestic perfection. When Jim does arrive, she casually mentions how all the preparations were handled by Laura to ensure Jim will see Laura as an able candidate to be a wife and domestic caregiver.

As dictated by Southern protocol, each parent played a specific role in examining a daughter's potential beau. In the absence of a father, Amanda plays both parts. Working from



the premise that "old maids are better off than the wives of drunkards" (p. 348), Amanda bombards Tom with questions as to Jim's personal habits, especially where alcohol is concerned. When Tom objects to this line of questioning, Amanda explains:

When I was a girl in Blue Mountain and it was suspected that a young man drank, the girl [...] would sometimes speak to the minister of his church, or rather her father would, if her father was living, and sort of feel him out on the young man's character. That is the way such things are discretely handled to keep a young woman from making a tragic mistake. (p. 348)

In the absence of a father, Amanda must take on what would be a masculine role in order to protect Laura. Although matters of character are held for the father to explore, Amanda, as the mother in this situation, is delighted to learn Jim holds a higher position at the warehouse than Tom, makes more money than Tom, and attends night school in order to better himself. As she gleefully exclaims when she learns this information, "Those are the sort of things that a mother should know concerning any young man who comes to call on her daughter" (p. 348). In short, Jim represents all the classic qualities that are required of a man in order to be considered a good husband and provider.

In addition to needing Tom to bring home potential husbands for Laura, Amanda is dependent on Tom as the major breadwinner of the family. Because of the family situation and now that he is an adult and can work, Tom has been forced into the breadwinner role. Traditionally, as the primary breadwinner, Tom should be the head of the house, but he is only the financial head; Amanda retains ultimate control of the family. His \$65 a month provides the Wingfield family with living necessities. However, Tom is not happy as the provider. As he tries to explain to Amanda, "I give up all that I dream of doing and being *ever*!" (p. 345). In

order to relieve the pressure of his home situation, Tom seeks two outlets of escape. First, he goes to the movies in order to find adventure, and second he spends whatever moments he can find to steal away and write. However, Amanda does not understand Tom's need for adventure, which she believes should be found in his job; furthermore, she never once seeks to understand why Tom wishes to be a writer.

Tom's need for adventure and a place to write eventually bring an end to his role as the breadwinner of the family. His desire for adventure prompts him to pay his Merchant Marine dues instead of the family's light bill. His practice of hiding in the bathroom at work to write poems on shoebox lids ultimately gets him fired. Like his father, he abandons the family, but he is guilt ridden about forsaking his sister, "Oh Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful that I intended to be!" (p. 360). Therefore, even though Tom did not want to be the provider for his family, he is also unhappy when he is not in that role. As the narrator of the play, then, Tom is trying to bring closure to this most painful memory and to come to terms with his behavior.

Laura is trapped in the middle between Amanda and Tom. Laura feels the emotions of others and grieves for them; Amanda has even found her crying because of Tom's unhappiness (p. 345). Laura, as Falk (1961) suggested, was a "go between" for Tom and Amanda when they feuded (p. 71). For instance, Laura pleads with Tom to begin speaking and to apologize to their mother after Amanda and Tom had an argument. As a peacemaker, Laura knows if Tom apologizes, then the balance will be restored to the home. Amanda wants Laura to have a happy future, filled with the independence that comes from a job and then, more importantly, a loving husband. Most of their conversations focus on preparing Laura to meet men or how to act around men to encourage their interest in her. Ironically, Amanda never considers that her most

unhappy moments are derived from men and marriage; she seems to blindly wish the same fate on her daughter. Babcock (1999) poignantly summarized Laura's condition: "Ultimately, Laura cannot conform to the values of either business or marriage, so she renounces the real world in favor of the couch, where she plays with her glass figures and listens to records" (p. 28).

Amanda's husband, Laura, Tom, and Jim do not fulfill the designated roles that Amanda has mapped out for them. Symbolized now only in a "blown-up photograph" on the wall of the Wingfield apartment, Amanda's departed husband failed to live up to Amanda's expectations. Laura is too painfully shy to meet men or to function in a work environment. Tom cannot fulfill his role as family supporter and is driven off by his mother's relentless pressure to conform to that role. Although having all the correct qualities on the surface, Jim is engaged to another woman and cannot return to the Wingfield home to court Laura.

### Communication Patterns

Gender based communication skills and patterns are most relevant to Amanda and Jim, but gender behavior as demonstrated through communication patterns was the least developed gender behavior category in the play. However, communication as a theme in the play is relevant to understanding the relationships between the characters.

As noted in the section on Behavior Characteristics, Amada often exhibits both male and female characteristics, but her communication style follows strictly female patterns. As a part of her Southern background, Amanda understands the art of communication from a female perspective. She knew how to entertain her gentleman callers with conversations about "things of importance going on in the world! Never anything coarse or common or vulgar" (p. 339). Thus, by her admission, there were things that "ladies" did not discuss. Amanda fulfills the female stereotype of being a "nagger." She constantly corrects Tom on how to chew his dinner

(p. 339) or how to drink his coffee (p. 345). She criticizes his personal appearance (p. 346 & p. 347), and she wishes that he smoked less (p. 347).

Jim demonstrates the masculine patterns of communication. For Jim, his past was and his future will be defined by his speaking abilities. In high school, Jim starred in all the class musicals and was awarded a silver cup in debating. Because Jim is in a dead-end job that does not allow him the personal glory of his high school days, he counts on his speaking ability to bring him a brighter future. Jim is taking a public speaking class because the ability to speak well "[fits] you for—executive positions" (p. 351). His enthusiasm and confidence in the power of effective speaking to move him up the workplace chain of command causes Jim to try and convince Tom to participate in the class.

As a theme in the play, a lack of true and honest communication is evident between all the characters. For example, during Scene IV when Amanda begins to explain to Tom her plan to get a husband for Laura, Amanda begins the conversation by admitting something that she never shared with Tom—the fact that she loved Tom's father. Tom, interpreting this bit of information as an opening to true communication, also admits, "There is so much in my heart that I can't describe to you" (p. 345). Amanda, instead of inquiring, lets the comment fall aside and moves ahead with explaining her plan. Likewise, Amanda and Laura never have a truly honest conversation at any point in the play. Amanda talks to Laura, and Laura never has the ability to respond except in only a few short sentence or phrases. The only person who engages Laura in a conversation is Jim, yet the subject of their conversation is mostly about him and his future. Additionally, Laura begins to open up to Jim under the mistaken notion Jim will be able to return for future visits. Laura is devastated when she learns otherwise.

Amanda also uses language to preserve an illusion about Laura that in turn amplifies the lack of communication in the family. Amanda will not allow the word "cripple" to be used to describe Laura (p. 342 & p. 348). She prefers the phrase "slight disadvantage" (p. 342) to describe Laura's condition. By avoiding what is presumed to be a harsh description, Amanda does not have to face the reality of the situation. Only at the end of the play does Amanda acknowledge the truth about herself and Laura; she yells at Tom, who is leaving to go to the movies after Amanda blames him for the disastrous evening with Jim, "Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job!" (p. 360).

### Source of Power

The two characters in the play who struggle with power are Amanda and Tom. Laura is powerless throughout the entire play. But the character with the most power in the play is the absent father.

Amanda, as the true head of the household, has the power in the family. She has learned to develop her feminine wiles as her source of power. She learned as a girl on Blue Mountain amusing conversation, a nimble wit, and a beautiful face are all resources women have, and these resources are used primarily to catch a husband (p. 339). Amanda tried to instill this same behavior into Laura, but Laura is mystified by such behavior. But because Laura so hates to be the object of her mother's disapproving stares, she attempts to behave as her mother wishes.

If power is associated with providing income and stability, then Tom should control the action, but he does not. Amanda is in full control of the home. She repeatedly reminds him of his obligation to the family if she fears that he is about to leave. She returned his books to the library because she did not want that "hideous novel" by that "insane Mr. Lawrence" in her house (p. 342). By stripping Tom of his possessions and making him feel guilty if he should leave,

Amanda hopes to keep him confined in the warehouse and to supporting the family. As discussed by Single (1999), Tom was "forced to assume the responsibilities that his father abandoned sixteen years ago while never being granted the autonomy that normally accompanies these adult responsibilities" (p. 199). The only way that Tom can control his own future and function as an adult is to free himself from the home—a move he eventually makes.

Unlike a traditional male who garners power from income, education, or job status, the absent husband and father of the Wingfield home maintains power by his absence. His sudden departure left a void from which the family has yet to recover. Despite being gone for many years, a "larger than life photograph over the mantle" symbolizes his continuing impact on the family (p. 339). Amanda refers to the photograph during moments of regret about the past such as when she is reminded of his charm or his grin that fooled everybody (p. 342 & p. 348). Tom refers to the photograph in wishing about the future—a future that contains no familial responsibility (p. 344).

### Physical Appearance

Amanda has most of the dialogue that is associated with the traits in the Physical Appearance category. As it relates to power, Amanda understands that a woman's appearance is part of the feminine package, and she encourages Laura to always look her best and to stay "fresh and pretty" at all times (p. 339). Amanda also tries to encourage Laura to look her best prior to Jim's arrival, and this time, Amanda pads Laura's bra to compensate for being flat chested. These "gay deceivers" as Amanda refers to them are acceptable and expected of women who are trying to vie for a man's attention; as she says, "All pretty girls are a trap, a pretty trap, and men expect them to be" (p. 350). Laura finds this technique mortifying.

In as much as Amanda believes that women should present a beautiful outward appearance, she also has strong feelings about the appearance of men. Her departed husband had been a handsome man, and his looks fooled people. Therefore, she hopes that Jim O'Connor "isn't too good looking" because character in a man is much more important than his appearance (p. 348).

#### Summary of Research Questions

The gender roles and the accompanying behaviors of the characters in *The Glass Menagerie* are a blending of traditional and non-traditional standards. The behavior of the characters is based largely on the circumstances in which the characters find themselves. Tom, as the male of the household, is the primary wage earner now that he has reached adulthood. However, he is not the head of the family, and he did not ask to be put into the role of financial provider. Amanda, who raised her children by herself, is no longer the primary financial provider, but she is the effective head of the household by controlling and manipulating all that goes on in the household. She is independent although this behavior is couched in genteel Southern charm. She has had to take on roles outside of the traditional sphere for a woman because that was what was required of her by circumstance. Laura is just floating through life, listening to the Victrola, and polishing her glass animals. She will be dependent on others for her entire life.

Certainly for Amanda, she expected that her life was predetermined—she was to be the lovely wife of a plantation owner, but by choosing the wrong suitor for a husband, she found herself living in a cramped, drab, apartment in St. Louis. As a result of her situation, Amanda would rather fondly remember the past because the future looks grim at best. Tom, on the other

hand, suffered in the present for the actions of another man. When Tom leaves his mother and sister behind to pursue a life that had been denied to him, he finds enormous guilt for having left.

*The Glass Menagerie* does support the idea that gender behaviors for men and women are different, yet the play also suggests strict gender roles are stifling to the characters and behavior often occurs based on the situation and not on the gender of the person.

### *Death of a Salesman*

Standing as the most famous of American plays ever written, Arthur Miller's 1949 masterpiece, *Death of a Salesman*, captured the essence of an era and the imaginations of many (Murphy, 1998). In the year after the play first appeared,

Arthur Miller had received more than a thousand letters explaining the personal ways in which the play was related to their writers' lives...A number of sermons, both spiritual and secular, had been preached on the text of the play, with ministers, rabbis, and priests explaining its exposure of the emptiness of Willy's dream of material success, and sales managers using Willy as an object lesson of how not to be a salesman. (p. 757)

For *Death of a Salesman*, Miller won a Pulitzer Prize and a New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for best play, and in its first run, the play had 742 productions (Jacobus, 2001). In 1972, an all-black cast performed the play, and in the 1980s Miller directed a version of the play in China. In 1999, "exactly fifty years to the day from its original opening," *Death of a Salesman* returned to the Broadway stage again garnering critical praise (p. 1185).

Willy Loman has transcended being a mere literary character and has been transformed into a cultural icon of immeasurable proportions. He demonstrates both all that is wrong with the American spirit, yet curiously, all that is right with it, too. But *Death of a Salesman* is more



than just a play about Willy—it is also a play about his family and how the members of his family react and respond to Willy's circumstances.

Willy Loman is an aging salesman in the waning years of a mediocre career. However, to his wife, Linda, and to his sons, Biff and Happy, Willy was the best salesman to ever work the New England territory. Building on blind faith in the American Dream of hard work begetting prosperity, Willy has lived his life on the premise that being well-liked is the key to success. The action of the play takes place in 1949, and in the present, Willy finds himself in a changed work environment. A new and younger generation runs the workplace in a different manner from their fathers; it is a world where a handshake means very little and the bottom line is more important than the person who works to achieve the bottom line. For Willy, life is a daily struggle to earn enough to meet his expenses.

Willy re-lives pivotal moments in his life through the incorporation of several flashbacks. These scenes, with action dating as far back as 1928, provide insights into Willy's character. These scenes depict how Willy created an exaggerated image of a successful salesman for his family's benefit; how he condoned his oldest son's petty thievery; how he always felt "temporary" about himself in light of not knowing his own father and in the face of his brother's successful life; and how Biff accidentally discovered his father's adulterous affair. These flashbacks round out the plot of the play by providing the background to understanding the current relationships between Willy and his family.

When the play opens, it becomes immediately clear that Willy's life is in turmoil. In the opening scene, Willy returns from a failed selling trip, an occurrence that is replaying itself with increasing frequency. Linda explains to her sons that Willy is working strictly on commission just like a beginner, and in order to make ends meet, he has been "secretly" borrowing money

from their neighbor, Charley. Additionally, Linda finds evidence that suggests that Willy has been trying to commit suicide. Furthermore, his sons are not the pictures of success that he had imagined that they would become. Happy is a low-level office boy who, like his father, inflates his status with the company, while Biff is a drifter and a part-time ranch hand, and he has just served a stint in the county jail for stealing a suit. Willy is at a point in his life where he should be able to look back on his life and see success, but he only looks back and sees failures and mistakes.

In an effort to help support his parents, Biff decides to stay in New York City and look for employment. Convinced by Willy he can be a successful businessman and convinced he was a valuable employee to Bill Oliver, Biff decides to visit Oliver to ask for a loan to open his own business. Standing in Oliver's office after waiting all day and being denied an appointment, Biff recalls the truth about his relationship with Oliver. He remembers he stole a carton of basketballs from Oliver and in a state of panic steals Oliver's fountain pen before running from the office. Biff, in a moment of clarity, understands his life has been one lie after another, and he must confess the truth to his father if he has any hope of securing a meaningful future. During a prearranged dinner date with his father, Biff cannot create the tale of success his father desperately needs to hear. Frustrated by Willy's insistence that Biff lie and embarrassed by Willy's incoherent babbling, Biff and Happy cruelly desert Willy in the restaurant.

Having lost his job and having been disillusioned by his eldest son all in the same day, Willy returns home in a broken mental state. Biff confronts Willy and urges Willy to abandon his life based on illusion and false pretense. Biff also tries to get Willy to acknowledge that Biff has lived a life of crime and that Willy is responsible, in part, for Biff's inflated sense of self-importance. Biff tries to explain in order for him to find true happiness, he must leave the family

and make his way in the world on his own terms. Willy cannot accept the truth about his son's life, or for that matter, his own life.

In a delusional conversation with his deceased brother, Ben, Willy decides that through suicide he can ensure the financial survival of his family. He imagines he will have the funeral of a salesman, with buyers and other salesmen coming from miles around to pay their final respects. This glorious funeral will demonstrate to his sons, especially to Biff, that Willy Loman was not "a dime a dozen" and was a leader among men. However, Willy leaves behind a wife who is mystified by her husband's actions, one son who will try and prove his father did not die in vain, and another son who leaves to pursue a dream much different than his father's.

*Death of a Salesman*, with its focus on the family, is well suited for a gender role analysis. The four gender trait categories, Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance, were pertinent to exploring the gender roles and the behaviors of the characters.

#### Behavior Characteristics

On the surface, the Loman family presents the model American family—a husband who works and comes home to a meal and a wife who loves him. They have two sons who are handsome and athletic and show great promise for a successful future. Kintz (1979) noted *Death of a Salesman* presented a "romantic nostalgia" for a time when men were the authority at home and in the workplace; however, she also pointed out the play "simultaneously [critiqued] the restriction and damage perpetrated by the rigid gender roles" of this type of family structure (p. 107 & p. 110). Indeed, to go much beyond the surface uncovers a family filled with strife and unhappiness. Each character has his or her way of behaving in order to preserve the family

harmony. And, through the flashback scenes, how the characters developed into their present states becomes evident.

The family patriarch, Willy, is far from the independent, confident, and aggressive male. In the beginning of Act I, Willy returns home unable to complete his business trip—again. In a world that values a man based on his job and his income, Willy draws no esteem from his work because he is unable to work. As he tells Linda, "I'm tired to the death. I couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it, Linda" (p. 338). As depicted in the first flashback, Willy has never felt very secure about his position, but he always presented the image he was selling more than anybody else. For example, he tells Linda,

I was sellin' thousands and thousands, but I had to come home [...] I did five hundred gross in Providence and seven hundred gross in Boston [...] Well, I—did—about a hundred and eighty gross in Providence, Well, no—it came to—roughly two hundred gross on the whole trip [...] The trouble was that three of the stores were half closed for inventory in Boston. Otherwise I woulda broke records. (p. 345)

A few lines later, he makes the following admission: "I get the feeling that I'll never sell anything again, that I won't make a living for you [...]" (p. 346).

Willy's philosophy for living and for being successful governs his every move. In order to be the successful provider for his family, Willy believes a man must be "well liked" (p. 344) and have "important contacts" within the business community (p. 350). These contacts spring directly from being well-liked. And finally, a man "never leaves a job till [it is] finished" (p. 343). A successful man should "dress to advantage" and be a man of "few words" in a business meeting (p. 346). As Willy preaches to his sons, "The man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and

you will never want" (p. 345). Only Linda knows the real Willy—the one who never quite lives up to the image that he paints, but she steadfastly encourages him anyway. Biff and Happy, for better or for worse, idolize Willy, think he is perfect, and believe he is breaking selling records all over the New England territory.

In Act II, Willy's position as head of the family and breadwinner deteriorates. In a meeting with Howard, his boss, Willy completely loses control. He breaks every behavior rule for success that he reminded Biff of the night before. He grovels for a position off the road, picks up dropped paper off of the floor, and begs for less and less money. Willy also identifies the crux of the problem that he is having with his job; he says

In those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear—or personality. You see what I mean? They don't know me anymore.  
(p. 358)

By the end of the meeting, Willy is yelling at Howard about promises made in the past. The world is changing all around Willy, and he finds himself in a world he does not understand and one in which he cannot successfully compete. Willy believes "a man can't go out the way he came in [...] a man has got to add up to something" (p. 371). It is this belief in a legacy that leads Willy to take his own life for the sake of \$20,000 in insurance money.

Standing in contrast to Willy is his brother, Ben, and his neighbor, Charley. Both men are successful providers for their families, and Willy feels inferior to both of them. Ben, introduced during the flashback scenes, is rugged and successful; he made his fortune by the sweat of his brow. As he repeatedly tells Willy and his sons, "when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by God, I was rich" (p. 349 & p.

350). Many times, Willy laments he did not leave his job in New York and go with Ben to Alaska. More than anything, Willy wants approval from Ben about his life, his career, and how he is raising his sons. Charley, who is in both the present scenes and the flashbacks, has repeatedly offered Willy a job, but Willy is too proud to accept the position. If he took Charley's job offer, Willy would have to admit that he failed and that Charley succeeded. During the flashbacks, Willy makes cutting remarks about Charley in order to make Charley seem small and himself seem big. For example, he insinuates that Charley is "liked but he's not—well liked" (p. 344). By applying Willy's philosophy for success, Charley should be a failure, but he is not, and Willy will not accept the reality that Charley succeeded in spite of the fact that he is not liked.

Linda's behavior characteristics are in keeping with traditional image of a passive and dependent woman. She provides comfort to Willy when he is feeling low, and as the center of Willy's domestic world, she cooks, cleans, does the laundry, and is the mother to his children. She keeps the household finances straight, and in order to maintain stability, she always knows how much money is needed to make it from payday to payday. Linda enables Willy to be great, and as Porter (1979) noted, Linda "stays in her place, never questioning out loud her husband's objectives and doing her part to help him achieve them" (p. 39). As a symbol of her domestic life, every time that Linda appears in a flashback scene, she enters carrying a basket of laundry (p. 345, p. 349, & p. 359). Several times she is shown mending or has finished mending clothes (p. 346 & p. 356). Especially symbolic is her association with Willy's suit jacket. She keeps his jacket looking neat, and she helps him put it on when he is ready to leave the house (p. 339, p. 355, & p. 356). The jacket becomes a symbol for Willy's masculinity—he wears it as part of his armor in the business world. For Linda, the jacket become a symbol for her domesticity—she makes sure that there are no holes in Willy's armor so he will be protected when he is away

from home. However, only Willy can wear the jacket; he can leave the home to venture into the world. Linda remains behind to wait for his return.

After a lifetime of standing behind Willy, his death leaves her in a state of confusion. Standing at his graveside, she says, "I don't understand it. Why did you ever do that? [...] I search and I search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home" (p. 375). She is at a point where her family is disintegrating—Biff is leaving; Willy is dead; Happy is self-absorbed. She has lived a life according to her gender's dictates. She waited at home, comforted her husband and children, and was the "glue of the household" (Kintz, 1979, p. 106). She received no credit for her place within the family. Now she is left all alone to sort through her situation and piece a life together for herself.

Just as Linda lives according to a prescribed set of rules as a wife, Biff lives with his own set of rules for being a good son and a productive man. Biff is a failure in his father's eyes for not living up to his full potential as a son and as a man. At the opening of the play, Biff has returned home, but it is not a joyous homecoming because Biff is not settled into a stable job with a wife and children on the way. As Biff explains to Happy,

Well, I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it's a measly manner of existence. To get on the subway on the hot mornings in summer. To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year of the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always to have to get ahead of the next fella. And still—that's how you build a future [...] I'm thirty-four years old, I oughta be makin' my future. (p. 341)

Happy notices that Biff has lost "the old confidence" (p. 341) and his once competitive nature. Biff is feeling guilty for not fitting into the business mold and for being, as he describes, "like a boy" (p. 342).

In his youth, Biff could do no wrong; likewise, he thought his father could also do no wrong. Biff was captain of the football team, and he was always surrounded by a group of people he could lead into doing his household chores by simply asking. Biff idolized his father, and he believed all of Willy's stories about how respected his father was in the New England market. More importantly, Biff believed his father's notion that to be well liked ensured success. When Biff flunked math, he took a train to Boston to get his father to talk to the teacher. Biff tells Willy:

You gotta talk to him [the teacher] before they close the school. Because if he saw the kind of man you are, and you just talked to him in your way, I'm sure he'd come through for me. The class came right before practice, see, and I didn't go enough. Would you talk to him? He'd like you, Pop. You know the way you could talk. (p. 369).

Standing in his father's hotel room, Biff discovered his father's affair with Miss Francis. From that moment on nothing was ever the same between father and son. Biff lost all respect for his father as head of the family, and he felt betrayed by Willy. As Bernard pointed out to Willy, on the day Biff returned from Boston, Bernard saw the change in Biff, and as Bernard explains to Willy, he "knew [Biff had] given up on his life" (p. 362).

As other men stand in contrast to Willy, other sons stand in contrast to Biff. Charley's son, Bernard, is everything that Willy thought Biff would be. In high school, Bernard tutored Biff in math. Willy described Bernard as "a pest" and "an anemic" because Bernard was not an athlete and was always more concerned with making good grades than anything else (p. 345).



Willy was positive Biff would have a much brighter future than Bernard would because Biff was better looking. Ironically, Biff cannot hold a job and is not married while Bernard is married, with two sons, and as a successful lawyer is arguing a case before the Supreme Court.

Happy, although presenting the superficial appearance of success, is not anymore successful than Biff. As the second son, Happy was always following in Biff's shadow. He always enters a flashback scene following Biff, and in order to garner some of Willy's attention, he is always saying, "I'm losing weight, you notice, Pop?" (p. 344, p. 345, & p. 350). As an adult, Happy sees other men as his competition, but he "knows" that he is physically and mentally superior to them. He dreams of surpassing all those that he works with:

Sometimes I just want to rip my clothes off in the middle of the store and outbox that goddam merchandise manager. I mean I can outbox, outrun, and outlift anybody in that store, and I have to take orders from those common, petty sons-of-bitches till I can't stand it any more. (p. 342)

Happy has a job, his own apartment, and his own spending money, but he also has his father's tendency to exaggerate his own self worth. As Biff points out, Happy is not the assistant buyer, but is "one of the two assistants to the assistant" (p. 373).

Willy tried to pass onto his sons the legacy of the American Dream and how to find success. Porter (1979) suggested that should Willy fail to live up to his standard of success, by passing his values onto his sons, and should they become successful, Willy will ultimately succeed. But this legacy is not destined to happen. Whereas Biff has come to terms with himself, what his father is, and how he wants to live his life, Happy remains wedded to his father's false notions of success. Biff understands that he is "a dime a dozen" and "not a leader of men" (p. 373). He realizes that his father should have pursued a career in construction or

working with his hands, but because those jobs have less prestige than business, Willy would not follow that path—the one path that may have led to his success. Biff has learned to define the characteristics of manhood from an internal perspective, not an external one. Conversely, Happy firmly believes Willy "had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have—to come out number-one man" (p. 375). He will continue to pursue his father's vision of success, until ultimately he will end up the same broken man as Willy.

So far, this analysis has focused on individual characters and their specific actions. However, the nature of this play also supports examining gender from a larger perspective. In looking at the play as a whole, the play presents a diminished status for women in general. Moreover, Willy can be seen as an example of how this discrimination is perpetuated from one generation to the next.

There are five women in *Death of a Salesman*: Linda Loman, The Woman (later identified as Miss Francis) with whom Willy has an affair; Jenny, who is Charley's secretary; Miss Forsythe, who is the woman in the restaurant where Happy and Biff are to meet Willy; and Letta, who is the friend of Miss Forsythe's. As previously established, Linda does not work outside the home, and she does not leave her home during the entire play except to attend Willy's funeral. Three of the remaining women are employed in traditional female occupations. Jenny and Miss Francis are secretaries, while Miss Forsythe is a model on the cover of a magazine. The dialogue never reveals Letta's occupation.

Except for Linda, these women are "known" only by their positions or their physical appearance. Willy treats Jenny with very little respect, and he greets her with sexual innuendo: "Jenny, Jenny, good to see you. How're ya? Workin'? Or still honest?" (p. 361). When she replies that she is fine and inquires as to how Willy is feeling, Willy remarks, "Not much any

more, Jenny" and proceeds to laugh (p. 361). Biff, although he feels guilty about his tactic, relates that he tried to date Bill Oliver's secretary in order to gain entrance to see Oliver. Linda, by virtue of being married, is granted some respect, but this respect is overshadowed by a chauvinistic attitude. Biff characterizes marriage as something to "get stuck into," and Happy would only marry someone with substance, character, and resistance like Linda (p. 342). Additionally, the unmarried women in the play, according to Austin (1989) were characterized as forces that come between fathers and sons, and because women like Miss Francis and Miss Forsythe were not wives, they were not under the control of a man thereby tempting men into destructive and dangerous relationships.

For Biff and Happy, Willy is responsible for how they responded to women. When Biff was in high school, Willy instructed him in the following manner:

Just wanna be careful with those girls, Biff, that's all. Don't make any promises. No promises of any kind. Because a girl, y'know, they always believe what you tell 'em, and you're very young, Biff, you're too young to be talking seriously to girls. Too young entirely, Biff. You want to watch your schooling first. Then when you're all set, there'll be plenty of girls for a boy like you. (p. 343)

When Happy and Biff are in their old bedroom and are reminiscing about their high school days, Happy claims that "about 500 women would like to know what was said in this room" (p. 341). They continue by discussing one woman in particular, "Betsy something" that was Happy's first sexual encounter; he fondly remembers her and then describes her with the phrase "what a pig" (p. 342).

Happy sees women as collections of body parts, and he is the most chauvinistic character in the play. Happy refers to women as "gorgeous creatures" (p. 342) or "strudel" (p. 364), or in

the case of Miss Forsythe, as having both an incredible mouth and "pair of binoculars" (p. 364).

Happy dates all the women that he wants too, and he compares his activities to bowling—"I keep knockin' them over and it doesn't mean anything" (p. 342). Additionally, Happy is drawn to women who date the men where he is employed,

That girl Charlotte I was with tonight is engaged to be married in five weeks [...] The guy's in line for the vice-presidency of the store. I don't know what gets into me, maybe I just have an overdeveloped sense of competition or something, but I went and ruined her, and furthermore I can't get rid of her. And he's the third executive I've done that too...And to top it all, I go to their weddings [...] I don't want the girl, and still, I take it—I love it. (p. 342)

As for settling down into a marriage himself, Happy thinks that he might marry, but as Biff points out, he would never come home to just one woman (p. 342). Just as he would use losing weight as a method for diverting attention to himself when he was a teenager, Happy suggests he will get married to gain attention as an adult: "I'm gonna get married, Mom, I wanted to tell you" (p. 355 & p. 374). As summarized by Austin (1989), Happy turned to marriage when he felt needy or guilty about the situation at hand and not because he truly wanted to get married.

### Communication Patterns

The communication patterns of the major characters in *Death of a Salesman* follow traditional gender patterns. How the characters communicate with each other is indicative of how they relate to one another.

Willy, Biff, and Happy all use profanity with ease. Willy is the biggest offender, and he curses over 20 times throughout the play. Linda does not object to the cursing, but she also does not employ such expressions—even if she feels anger or frustration. The only woman in the play

to curse is Miss Francis who says, "Whyn't you have another drink, honey, and stop being so damn self-centered?" (p. 368). However, by being the partner in Willy's affair, Miss Francis is relegated to a low class of women; therefore, she would be stereotypically cast as the type of woman to use such language.

Willy and Linda have a repeated pattern of communicating with each other. Their conversational patterns suggest that Willy is the dominant force in the home, and Linda holds a less than equal status in their relationship. Part of Willy's domination stemmed from the fact that Willy never listened to anybody in his family, and the remaining family members have grown accustomed to never expecting a response to their messages (Cohen, 1979). In the opening scene of the play, when Willy has returned from the road, Linda, as indicated by the stage directions, "very carefully, delicately" questions Willy about why he has returned (p. 338). When Willy offers reasons why he failed and had to return home, Linda offers a potential solution. For example, Willy suggests that he cannot drive any more, and Linda counters perhaps the car's steering needs repair.

Linda has trouble participating in a conversation with Willy because he constantly interrupts her. For example, Willy is looking out the window and is frustrated they are "boxed in" by the surrounding buildings, and the following dialogue occurs,

Linda: Well, after all, people had to move somewhere.

Willy: No, there's more people now.

Linda: I don't think there's more people. I think—

Willy: There's more people! That's what's ruining this country [...] (p. 340)

Willy's interrupting of Linda is evident again toward the end of the Act I; however, this time Linda is completely silenced in front of her children. Over the course of several pages of

dialogue, Willy cuts off Linda eight times with phrases like "Don't interrupt" (p. 353), "Stop interrupting" (p. 354), "Will you let me talk" (p. 354), and "Will you let me finish" (p. 355) before he finally "goes right through her speech" and talks over of her dialogue (p. 355). When Willy chastises Linda, his voice gets louder and louder until he is yelling. Every time that Willy silenced Linda, she was in the act of participating in the conversation when there was an opening; never once does she interrupt anybody else and never did she interrupt Willy's thoughts. When Biff protests his father's behavior toward his mother, Willy accuses him of trying to take over the household.

Inasmuch as Willy controls Linda by never allowing her to speak, Ben does the same thing to Willy. Ben immediately corrects Willy when he does not accurately remember details about their childhood. Willy says their father left when he was four, and Ben interjects "three years and eleven months" (p. 349). Willy thinks they were in Nebraska, but Ben says South Dakota (p. 349). Willy never becomes angry with Ben for his rudeness; in fact, he praises Ben for having such a keen memory for details.

The only time that Linda is ever in control of a conversation is when she is talking to her sons. Her speech then becomes strong and powerful without a hint of the hesitancy she exhibits when she is talking with Willy. She interrupts her sons, and she maintains control of the situation so she can say what she needs to say and to tell them what they need to hear. She is direct, blunt, and forceful. Smith (1995) noted that Linda differs from the other characters in the kinds of things she talked about; Smith said,

Linda, unlike all men in the play, offers no philosophy, no opinion on how life ought to be lived. Her passive, attentive domesticity places her in direct subordination to Willy, Biff, and Happy. She does not talk about herself, only about the men.... (p. 31)

Thus, her care and concern for her husband come through in her dialogue even though Willy is rude and disrespectful towards her the majority of the time.

### Source of Power

This play represents what happens when there is a loss of power. Neither Biff nor Happy has the power that is usually afforded to men through their jobs. Biff had an opportunity to achieve a higher status job by attending college, but after discovering his father's infidelity, Biff gave up that chance. Happy, like his father, only assumes power and respect will come to him in the future, and for the present he relies on sexual conquests and perceived physical strength to feel powerful. For Willy, however, this lack of power is debilitating.

Willy based his life on a salesman named Dave Singleman, who at that the age of 84 was able to go into "twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved [...]" (p. 358). Willy built a career and a life around creating that type of persona for himself so that he could have a successful career comparable to Ben's. He raised his sons to follow in his footsteps and to share in his beliefs. Yet, nothing is working out. His sons are a disappointment, and Willy is out of a job—both devastating blows for a man who based his whole life on his career and the ability to provide for a wife and a family. As Willy tells Biff and Happy in the restaurant,

I'm not interested in stories about the past or any crap of that kind because the woods are burning boys, you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around me [...] I'm looking for a little good news to tell your mother, because the woman has waited and the woman has suffered. The gist of it is that I haven't got a story left in my head [...] (p. 366).

In essence, Willy no longer has any power. His stories of his wonderful life on the road, where the cops would protect his car and he could have coffee with the mayors, no longer validate his existence. Willy cannot face the lies of his life for then he would have to acknowledge his failures, both personally and professionally. Willy carries these delusions to his grave.

Linda at only one point in the play shows any type of power. When Ben returns for the second time, he wanted Willy to move to Alaska and manage some property there. Linda convinces Willy to stay in New York and keep selling as his career. Linda says,

*(frightened of Ben and angry at him)* Don't say those things to him! Enough to be happy right there, right now. *(to Willy, while Ben laughs)* Why must everybody conquer the world? You're well liked, and the boys love you, and someday—*(to Ben)*—why, old man Wagner told him just the other day that if he keeps it up he'll be a member of the firm, didn't he, Willy? (p. 360)

After this statement, Linda reminds Willy of Dave Singleman, and the discussion is over—the Lomans stay in Brooklyn. Linda "believed in the illusion of her husband as the successful salesman perhaps more than Willy himself did," and this contributed to her encouraging Willy to not leave behind their life in the city (Dillingham, 1967, p. 344). Gonzalez (1995) suggested that Linda, out of resentment for Willy's behavior, discouraged Willy from going to Alaska. However, as noted by Porter (1979), Linda, as "one of the few realistic people" in the play, knew her husband and his limitations (p. 38). Furthermore, Linda was only allowed to "participate vicariously in [Willy's] dreams" and she only knew one dream to follow—the image of her husband as a well liked drummer (Balakia, 1979, p. 120).



### Physical Appearance

The focus on looks and on having good looks is a force for both the male and female characters in the play. Willy places great stock in presenting a good physical appearance, which is uncharacteristic for a man. He perceives that others laugh at him behind his back because he is not attractive. He is glad that his sons are attractive, but he cannot understand how a Biff, who has great "personal attractiveness" cannot make it in the world (p. 340). On two occasions, he praises his sons by comparing them to Greek gods (p. 345 & p. 355). As previously noted, the women, other than Linda, are judged by their looks. The only reference to Linda's appearance that is made during the entire play is when Biff notices that her hair had turned gray. He wants her to go back to dying her hair so that she will not look old (p. 351).

### Additional Observations

It is difficult to discuss *Death of a Salesman* without considering the impact of the American Dream on the play's characters and how following that dream is both encouraging to and destructive for the characters. Ben is the epitome of the American Dream as it is applied to westward movement and adventure, while Howard Gardner, Charley, and Bernard demonstrate the dream successfully realized in the business community. In comparison to these characters, Willy fails miserably, and Biff and Happy will be no closer to achieving this mythic benchmark of success.

But what about the women and their place in the American Dream fascination? Willy has two sons; Ben fathered a huge family of seven sons; Bernard has two sons. Charley is never seen with a wife nor is any mention of a wife made in the play, but he has a son. Howard, differing slightly, has one daughter and one son. Ben and Willy's father abandoned the family in South Dakota to find fortune in Alaska, and Ben left to follow his father. Willy only wants his

sons to know about their grandfather, and he hopes Ben can explain to his sons the type of man his father was. Willy never mentions his mother even though she raised him, presumably, alone. Ben characterizes their mother only as a "fine specimen," whereas he characterizes their father as "a very great and very wild-hearted man" who was a "great inventor" (p. 349). Ben did not even know their mother had passed away or where she had been living (p. 348). Stanton (1989) observed that Willy's mother's story would have been interesting and that Willy should have learned strength from her, but he did not; he, conversely, felt "temporary" as an adult because he did not know his father. The focus only on heritage from a male perspective contributed to the marginalization of women in the play (Balakia, 1979). Similarly, Smith (1995) characterized the role of women in this play as "peripheral" but that is a position in keeping with the play's focus on the American Dream which is a white, male ideal: "the dominant image of the hero in American fiction as a restless adventurer on a quest, usually westward, fleeing traditional societal restraints embodied by the domestic woman" (p. 30; see also Stanton, 1989).

In order for the American Dream to be a reality for men, women must be a part of that quest. As concluded by Stanton (1989), Linda Loman

[embodied] the American Dream ideal of the model post-World War II wife, infinitely supportive of her man. She makes no mistakes, has no flaws in wifely perfection. But the perfect American wife is not enough for American Dreamers like Willy. He has been unfaithful to her, and he rudely interrupts and silences her, even when she is merely expressing support for him. (p. 75-76)

Her position in the family earns her no respect. In fact, none of the women in the play command any respect or are acknowledged for their contributions.

Several critics have found fault with Linda for her lack of participation in her own marriage and household. Dillingham (1967) condemned Linda for her preoccupation with financial stability for the family and suggested that she kept Willy from following another career where he might have found success. Jacobson (1979) acknowledged Linda's loyalty to Willy, but he criticized her for lacking "imagination and strength to hold the family together" in times of crisis (p. 57). Jacobi (1979) suggested that Linda misdirected Willy like Iago misdirected Othello in Shakespeare's famous play except Linda lacked "malevolent intent" (p. 66). However, these critics fail to acknowledge Linda did the best she could with what she had. They also fail to notice Willy's regrets focus partially on missing an opportunity to go with Ben when he had the chance, but his major guilt stems from how he treated Linda over the years and his failure to provide for her as he wanted too.

#### Summary of Research Questions

As highlighted in the discussion of the gender categories, the characters in *Death of a Salesman* are divided along traditional gender lines, and the characters do not step outside of the traditional categories. Willy is the head of the house and the breadwinner while Linda is the wife and the mother. Willy, however, is not aggressive except on rare occasions and only within his own home. He lacks any aggressiveness or competitiveness in a work environment; in the public world, Willy is weak, placating, and lacking in self-assurance. Linda is very dependent upon Willy, and she is lost without him. Other male characters, such as Charley, Ben, and Howard Gardner, are also presented as heads of households but are more shown to be more successful than Willy in that role. Other women, such as Jenny, Miss Forsythe, and Miss Francis are employed outside of the home. They are single women in traditionally female occupations, and the men with whom they interact afford them little respect.

All the characters are limited by their gender roles, and they each suffer consequences because of their limitations. Willy is so pressured by the drive to be successful that he followed a business career even though he was better suited for a career in carpentry or construction. He cannot see past society's rules for success. Linda is trapped by her domestic role, and even though she encourages Willy in his career, she has learned how and when to speak up. After Willy's death, she is lost both literally and figuratively. She cannot understand Willy's final action, and she has never known an adult life that did not involve taking care of Willy and her children. Happy, if he continues on his current path, will end up like his father. Happy is striving for the same goals as Willy, and he does not understand it is a path to destruction. By implication, Happy will eventually suffer the same consequences. Biff, because he came to terms with himself and with his father's view of the world, chooses to abandon that way of life. He will break the cycle. He will go off and find his own form of happiness, and it will not resemble Willy's eternal search.

Gender, then, in *Death of a Salesman* is presented by invoking traditional patterns that govern gender behavior, and those patterns are shown as opposite forces. Interwoven into the gender behavior of the characters is the theme of the American Dream and what it means to be successful. Strict gender roles are almost a necessity to achieving that version of the American Dream, but as a consequence, women are silenced, brushed aside, and not seen as equal partners in the pursuit of that dream.

### *A Raisin in the Sun*

Lorraine Hansberry was the first African-American female to win a Pulitzer Prize and a New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play of the Year for her 1959 drama *A Raisin in*

*the Sun* (Cheney, 1984). In competition for the Play of the Year, *A Raisin in the Sun* was victorious over Eugene O'Neill's *A Touch of the Poet*, Tennessee Williams' *Sweet Bird of Youth*, and Archibald MacLeish's *J. B.* Additionally, Hansberry's play was the first play by an African-American to ever be produced on Broadway and "was a landmark success and was subsequently translated into over thirty languages on all continents" (Wilkerson, 1983, p. 8).

As a writer, Hansberry's work focused on two primary and recurrent themes: race and the role of women in society. Hansberry often wrote about the contrast between black and white families, and how black families were often deprived of fundamental rights white families were granted without question (Phillips, 1973). She wrote about the "effect of deprivation and injustice" inflicted upon the black soul as a result this denial of privilege (p. 26). Additionally, Hansberry was dedicated to women's rights, and she characterized women in the 1950s as being restricted by society, but this restriction was even worse for black women (Carter, 1991). In short, Hansberry "created several intriguingly complex, many sided human beings whose blackness plays a major role in the formation of their human characters and in their relations to the societies in which they live" (p. 46). Thus, in *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry explores how gender and race are not mutually exclusive but are, rather, deeply intertwined. The characters are, on the one hand, controlled by their gender roles, but those roles and the behavior in those roles also reflects the impact of race on the family structure.

*A Raisin in the Sun* is the story of the Younger family who is struggling to live a life of dignity on the lower Southside of Chicago. Three generations of Youngers, now headed by Lena Younger, live in a cramped, roach-infested apartment that Lena and her husband moved into when they were first married. They share a bathroom, located down the hall, with other tenants on the floor, and Travis, Lena's grandson, sleeps on the couch in the living room because there is

no place for another bed. Walter Lee, Lena's son, is a chauffeur for a white family, and his wife, Ruth, and Lena do domestic work for white families. As the play opens, the Youngers are eagerly awaiting the arrival of a \$10,000 insurance check that will be coming to Lena after the death of her husband a few months earlier.

Conflict arises because each family member has a different idea about how the money should be used. Walter Lee wants the money to invest in a liquor store so he can work for himself and be his own man. Beneatha wants part of the money to secure her educational plans. Enrolled in college, Beneatha wants to become a doctor, and the money would allow that dream to come true. Because their views are so divergent, Walter Lee and Beneatha argue almost incessantly in an effort to "win" the money. Ruth, in the middle between Walter Lee and Beneatha, tries to convince Lena to allow Walter Lee to invest in the business. Although Ruth morally disagrees with a liquor store, she is pregnant. Realizing the financial hardship a baby will bring to the family, Ruth is prepared, if necessary, to terminate her pregnancy. When Lena witnesses Walter Lee's inability to tell Ruth not to have an abortion, Lena decides what to do with the money. In an effort to put her family on more stable ground and get them out of the destructive ghetto, Lena takes part of the money and makes a down payment on a small house in a white neighborhood.

For Walter Lee, the realization he will not be able to pursue his dream sends him into a period of depression and heavy drinking. Not only does Walter Lee begin drinking, but he also he quits his job and neglects to tell his family. In order to end the turmoil of her family, Lena gives Walter Lee the balance of the money, and she instructs him to put part of the money aside for Beneatha's education and then to place the rest in a checking account he will be responsible

for controlling. Walter Lee, in secret, gives all the money to his friend who will finalize the paperwork for opening the liquor store.

As the Youngers are packing to move into the new house, they find out that their white, soon-to-be-neighbors have collected money to pay the Youngers not to move to the neighborhood. Although the Youngers are able to laugh off this blatantly racist act, they are not so easily able to laugh off the next stunning blow; Walter Lee's "business partner" has absconded with the money leaving Walter Lee with no business and his secret betrayal of the family exposed. This loss leaves Beneatha with no medical school tuition and the Youngers with no money whatsoever. Walter Lee decides that he will take the money offered by the white neighborhood association, but when faced with the reality of selling out his pride and his dignity, especially in front of his son, Walter Lee cannot go through with the deal. He explains to the association's representative, Karl Lindner, that the Youngers have lived and worked in this country for five generations. Because Walter Lee's father worked hard for the money that was used to make the down payment on the house, the Youngers will be refusing his offer, and they will be moving into the house. Thus, the play ends with the family leaving behind their dingy apartment in search of a brighter future in a home of their own.

The four gender trait categories, Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance, present relevant material in order to explore the gender roles and behavior of the characters in *A Raisin in the Sun*.

#### Behavior Characteristics

*A Raisin in the Sun* presents some clear behavior characteristics associated with traditional gender roles. Walter Lee is the aggressive male, and although he is employed outside the home, he does not make enough money to be the sole breadwinner of the family.

Consequently, the women of the house, namely Lena and Ruth, must care not only for their home, but they care for other people's homes by doing domestic work. Furthermore, Walter Lee is not the designated head of the house; his mother is the head of the house. However, there are some non-traditional gender role characteristics in the play; these non-traditional traits are most vividly seen in Beneatha.

Throughout the play, Walter Lee proclaims what it means to be a man and what men ought to know about women. He is chauvinistic and domineering in his beliefs about what men should do, be responsible for, and how they should act in their own homes. Often his definition of manhood springs out of his notions and observations about women and how they act, and to accompany his superior position, he usually refers to his wife by the diminutive term "baby" and not by her given name. Lesson one focuses on not talking to women early in the morning: "First thing a man ought to learn in life is not to make love to no colored woman first thing in the morning. You all some eeeevil people at eight o'clock in the morning" (p. 1275). Lesson two, which he fails to convince Ruth the importance of, is "a man needs for a woman to back him up" in decisions that he makes or ventures that he wants to pursue (p. 1277). Lesson three suggests women are ignorant to the ways of the world; therefore, women need men to help them get along in the world: "See there, that just goes to show you what women understand about the world. Baby, don't *nothing* happen for you in this world 'less you pay *somebody* off!" (p. 1277). Pertaining to lesson two and serving to clarify that lesson, lesson four posits women do not understand the needs and dreams of men. As Walter Lee fervently explains:

Man say to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. Man say: I got to take hold of this here world, baby! And a woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to



work. Man say: I got to change my life, I'm choking to death, baby! And his woman say—your eggs is getting cold! (p. 1277)

Lesson five, Walter Lee's most global observation, indicts black women for the failure of black men when he says, "That is just what is wrong with the colored woman in this world...Don't understand about building up their men and making 'em feel like somebody. Like they can do something" (p. 1277). Lesson six is when men get "restless" women always assume there is another woman somewhere, which, in Walter Lee's view, is an emotional and irrational response by women and therefore is totally absurd (p. 1288). Because women do not understand men, Walter Lee seeks the company of other men who understand him, and they see the importance of his ideas when his wife and his mother do not (p. 1275).

Included in Walter Lee's definition of manhood is a focus on having material things. In Walter Lee's mind, to be a man is to be financially successful. Walter Lee likes to remind Ruth of another missed opportunity. Charlie Atkins wanted Walter Lee to go into the dry cleaning business, and he could not. Now, Charlie "is grossing a hundred thousand a year" according to Walter Lee (p. 1276). Walter Lee accepted "the American value which holds that owning one's own business is the primary path to economic success" (Washington, 1988, p. 115). He eschews the type of work his father did and that he now does. He sees the insurance money as opening up new avenues for the family, and he sees those opportunities as owning a big house with a garden, servants to help in the house, and a chauffeur to drive his big car (p. 1298). Walter Lee defined manhood in "extracultural terms, in the taking over and running the world, in the bossing of secretaries, and he is frustrated that he cannot have the sort of power which he assumes will guarantee his manhood" (Parks, 1995, p. 218). As observed by Cheney (1984), Walter Lee wanted the money in order to acquire "education, decent housing, human dignity" especially for

his son; however, those wants came second to the belief that he could purchase the social status that has been denied to him by society (p. 69).

Walter Lee's definition of manhood is vastly different from his mother's definition of manhood. Lena equates manhood with just one thing—the love of children. For her this definition came from her marriage to Walter, Sr. She says, "God knows there was plenty wrong with Walter Younger—hard-headed, mean, kind of wild with women—plenty wrong with him. But he sure loved his children. Always wanted them to have something—be something" (p. 1281). Lena could endure and excuse the behavior of her husband because he loved his children, and she applies the same judgement criteria to Walter Lee. She cannot abide by Walter Lee's silent support for Ruth's plan to have an abortion. To Lena, this is a defilement of true manhood, and she is disappointed in Walter Lee.

Although Lena and Walter Lee each seem to live according to their gender roles, conflict exists between them over who is the true head of the Younger household. Lena is the self-proclaimed head of the house. Lena reminds Beneatha, who was rejecting a belief in God, that "There are some idea we ain't going to have in this house. Not long as I am the head of this family" (p. 1283). Later she reminds Walter Lee he knows she "don't 'low no yellin' in this house," and she expects him to speak civilly and not yell at his wife (p. 1288). In contrast to Lena's strength as the leader of the family, Walter Lee feels helpless in his position as provider. He verbalizes his lack of self-worth when he tells Ruth, "I'm thirty-five years old; I've been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room—and all I got to give him is stories about how rich white people live" (p. 1277). From his perspective, having a business is the key to making something of himself and getting things for his family.

The conflict over head of household comes to a climax over the purchase of the home with the insurance money. Lena had an internal focus on her family, and Lena engineered the purchase of the home to save her family because in her mind a home would provide a nurturing center to maintain the family unity (Cheney, 1984). Lena sees her family as falling apart from living in a rented home, and as she tells Walter Lee, "it makes a difference in a man when he can walk on floors that belong to *him*," (p. 1294). She wants him to approve of her action, but Walter Lee has another opinion:

What you need me to say you done right for? You the head of this family. You run our lives like you want it. It was you money and you did what you wanted with it. So what you need for me to say it was all right for? So you butchered up a dream of mine—you—who is always talking 'bout your children's dreams. (p. 1294)

Walter Lee is jealous of his mother's position in the family; he is jealous that she had the financial capacity to purchase a home. He perceives that she is usurping his manhood and his rightful place as the head of the household.

In order to make things right in her family, Lena releases control of the home to her son through the release of the balance of the money. Lena gives Walter Lee the rest of the money and tells him to put some aside for Beneatha's education and the rest into his own personal checking account. She feels guilty for what she has done to Walter Lee, and she tells him, "It ain't much, but it's all I got in the world and I'm putting it in your hands. I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be" (p. 1298). After Walter Lee receives the money, as indicated by the stage instructions, he is a different man: "His happiness is deep in him; he cannot keep still with his newfound exuberance" (p. 1299). But Walter Lee's new found

"exuberance" comes more from investing in the liquor store than it does from getting the balance of the money in a checking account (p. 1298).

True control of the family and true manhood for Walter Lee comes after he loses the liquor store and the money. After Willie Harris ran off with the money, Walter Lee considers selling out to the white homeowners association because he focuses on the money they are offering as providing the answer to his troubles; as he boldly proclaims to his family, "I tell you I am a *man*—and I think my wife should wear some pearls in this world!" (p. 1308). But what he forgets is being a man is more than having material things; it is also about having personal dignity and pride. Lena tries to remind Walter Lee of his heritage, but to no avail. Only when Lena forces Walter Lee to keep Travis in the room when Lindner comes back the apartment does Walter Lee understand the deeper consequences of his actions. Walter Lee cannot sell out his pride or the pride of his family in front of his son. Although Lena is the true impetus behind Walter Lee's change of heart, she allows him to take the credit—thus she gives him the head of the household role. As Lena tells Ruth, "He finally come into his manhood today, didn't he? Kind of like a rainbow after the rain" (p. 1310).

Just as the play presents definitions of manhood, it likewise presents definitions of womanhood. Unlike the definition of manhood, which is clearly addressed and delineated by both Walter Lee and Lena, the depiction of womanhood comes from the characters' reactions to one another. More specifically, the definition of womanhood comes from examining Beneatha in comparison to her mother and sister-in-law. Both Lena and Ruth define what it means to be a traditional woman. They married young and had children. They are in charge of cooking and cleaning. They exhibit social grace and charm when the family receives company by offering guests refreshments and places to sit (p. 1286 & p. 1291). Both Ruth and Lena, in keeping with

black culture, represented the "backbone of the family" because they "shoulder much of the responsibility for day-to-day family life" (Parks, 1995, p. 210). By contrast, Beneatha is very different. First, Beneatha is not a full participant in the domestic chores of the home. Although she helps some, she is often at school or participating in extracurricular activities, and as Ruth suggests, Beneatha could do more around the home: "I wish a certain young woman 'round here who I could name would take inspiration about certain rugs in a certain apartment I could also mention" (p. 1281). Second, Beneatha is often combative and abrupt in dealing with people. Ruth, interested in helping her, suggests she could "be a little sweeter sometimes," which supports the demure and passive nature attributed to women (p. 1279). Third, Beneatha is criticized for not wanting to marry George Murchison. As both Ruth and Lena point out, he is rich and handsome and is thus a suitable candidate for marriage regardless of his personal habits or lack of personality. They are both appalled Beneatha is considering not marrying anybody and would rather have a career (p. 1282). Fourth, what sets Beneatha apart from all the other members of her family and from the traditional characterization of a woman is her desire to be a doctor. Although Ruth and Lena are supportive of her desire to be doctor, Walter Lee voices what they perhaps have thought and what Beneatha knew he had always felt but had never said. Walter Lee says, "If you so crazy 'bout messing 'round with sick people—then go be a nurse like other women—or just get married and be quiet" (p. 1278).

Just as Beneatha's family challenges her attitudes, beliefs, and career aspirations, the men whom she dates also challenge the same things. George Murchison, although rich and clearly interested in Beneatha, is the kind of man that Beneatha knows she "should" marry but could never marry. George has simple thoughts about things, such as the fact that "you read books—to learn facts—to get grades—to pass the course—to get a degree. That's all—it has nothing to do

with thoughts" (p. 1295). Additionally, George has specific suggestions to limit Beneatha's behavior and certain qualifications for his girlfriend:

I don't mind it [Beneatha's desire to have conversations] sometimes...I want you to cut it out, see—The moody stuff, I mean. I don't like it. You're a nice looking girl...all over. That's all you need, honey, forget the atmosphere—they're going to go for what they see. Be glad for that. Drop the Garbo routine. It doesn't go with you, as for myself, I want a nice—(*groping*)—simple (*thoughtfully*)—sophisticated girl...not a poet—OK? (p. 1295)

Asagai is vastly different from George, and according to Wilkerson (1999), Asagai was the "first un-stereotyped African character on the stage" (p. 142). He is an intellectual, who stimulates Beneatha's mind and peaks her curiosity about Africa. He challenges her to think about her heritage when he brings her a native African dress to wear and when he gives her an African nickname, Alaiyo, which translates as "One for Whom Bread—Food—Is Not Enough" (p. 1286). When he proposes that she accompany him to Africa and be his wife, Beneatha considers his proposal even though she has not previously been interested in marriage.

As the Youngers are moving into their home, Beneatha's goal to become a doctor is in jeopardy. Although Walter Lee did affirm her goal by telling Lindner his sister was going to be a doctor, if they move into the house without the nest egg provided by the remainder of the money, they must work to meet the payment note on the house. When Lena wonders about their future and what she will tell Beneatha about her education, Ruth urges Lena to move into the house anyway. She says,

We gotta go. Bennie—tell her...(She rises and crosses to Beneatha with her arms outstretched. Beneatha doesn't respond.) Tell her we can still move...the note ain't but a

hundred and twenty-five a month. We got four grown people in this house—we can work.... (p. 1307)

Whereas Ruth makes her own sacrifice, "I'll work twenty hours a day in all the kitchens of Chicago...I'll strap my baby on my back if I have to and scrub all the floors in America if I have to," by including Beneatha in the total of working adults suggests that Beneatha will not be able to continue her education (p. 1307). Beneatha remains silent during this conversation. This, taken in concert with her marriage proposal, leaves the question of Beneatha achieving a medical career open and uncertain.

### Communication Patterns

Of the gender categories, engendered Communication Patterns were the least evident in the play. However, three points can be made about the characters and how they communicate with each other.

Walter Lee, Ruth, and Beneatha have brief moments of cursing throughout the play. Ironically, nothing is ever said to Ruth or Beneatha about using such expressions given that it is usually associated with unfeminine behavior.

Two stereotypically female characteristics are associated with the women in the play. Nagging is associated with both Ruth and Lena (p. 1288 & p. 1292), while Beneatha is accused of talking too much (p. 1295). These criticisms of the women come from Walter Lee and George. And in all the instances, the women are encouraged to be silent which would change their behavior. By changing their behavior, they would become more acceptable to the men.

Walter Lee does implore Ruth to talk to Lena on his behalf about his liquor store proposition. He knows that Lena listens to Ruth, and he hopes that his wife can be more persuasive than he has been. As he explains and demonstrates to Ruth:

All you have to do is just sit down with her when you drinking your coffee one morning and talking 'bout things like you do and—(*He sits down beside her and demonstrates graphically what he thinks her methods and tone should be.*) —you just sip your coffee, see, and say easy like that you been thinking 'bout that deal Walter Lee is so interested in, 'bout the store and all, and sip some more coffee, like what you saying ain't really that important to you—And the next thing you know, she be listening good and asking you questions and when I come home—I can tell her the details. (p. 1277)

Walter Lee is counting on Ruth to use a different, more feminine, style of persuasion with his mother. He will then come in at the end and provide all the necessary information that he assumes that Ruth cannot understand.

### Sources of Power

The characters in the play have no power in the traditional sense—Walter Lee is uneducated and works in a low status job. Given their domestic roles both inside and outside the home, Lena and Ruth have even less power and influence. All of the issues of power are struggles within the domestic realm.

The one character that still holds a tremendous amount of power in the Younger home is the deceased Walter, Sr. When times get tough, Lena recalls her husband and the power he had within the family. She invokes the memory of Walter, Sr. whenever Walter Lee is going down a path that she does not approve of and she wants to change his direction. According to Cheney (1984), "in three of Hansberry's five plays...deceased fathers [exerted] such an influence over their children that we almost think they are alive" (p. 67). Even though in many ways, Walter Sr. was not worthy of this admiration, he is still afforded this respect based on his position within the



family, and Lena is certain to make sure that her children never forget the sacrifices that he made for the family.

Travis is a center of power struggles between the adults. One struggle occurs between Lena, as the head of the house and grandmother to Travis, and Ruth, as mother to Travis. Each woman has ideas about how Travis should be raised. Ruth wants Travis to learn to do some household chores, but Lena does the chores for him so he can go and play (p. 1280). Lena questions what Ruth feeds Travis for breakfast (p. 1280). Lena intervenes when Ruth is about to punish Travis for being out too late (p. 1293). The other struggle over Travis is between Ruth and Walter Lee, and Walter Lee wins. Travis wants 50 cents to take to school, but Ruth tells him that they do not have any extra money. When Walter Lee enters, the following exchange takes place:

Walter: *(to Ruth only):* What you tell the boy things like that for? *(Reaching down into his pants with a rather important gesture.)* Here, son— *(He hands the boy the coin, but his eyes are directed to his wife's. Travis takes the money happily.)*

Travis: Thanks, Daddy. *(He starts out. Ruth watches both of them with murder in her eyes. Walter stands and stares back at her with defiance and suddenly reaches into his pocket again on an afterthought.)*

Walter: *(without even looking at his son, still staring hard at his wife):* In fact, here's another fifty cents...Buy yourself some fruit today—or take a taxicab to school or something! *(Travis leaps up and clasps his father around the middle with his legs, and they face each other in mutual appreciation; slowly Walter Lee peeks around the boy to catch the violent rays from his wife's eyes and draws his head back as if he were shot.)*  
(p. 1276-1277)

In this short scene, Walter Lee gets to look like the great and generous provider, while Ruth looks like the mean miser. He is returned to his humble status, although not in front of Travis, when he has to admit to Ruth he gave away his carfare to get to work (p. 1279).

As previously discussed Walter Lee and Lena struggle with issues of power in the home and control of the insurance check. As noted in the Behavior Characteristics section, Lena was the head of the household and had been for a long time. She was the "economic and ideological head of the family," and she forced her children to return to her belief system if they strayed from her ideas and beliefs (Parks, 1995, p. 213). As a testimony to her mother's power, Beneatha describes her mother as a "tyrant" (p. 1283). Lena relinquished her power and position to her son when she realized, according to Carter (1991), that Walter Lee's "acute sense of powerlessness is driving him to self-destruction" (p. 54). Although it could be argued Walter Lee does not deserve power in the home given he was so easily conned, Lena stands behind her commitment to him. It could also be argue Lena does still retain some control in the home because it was her actions that pulled Travis into the center of the action when Walter Lee was getting ready to sell out the family. But her final comment to Ruth about Walter Lee coming into his manhood suggests she is still standing behind her commitment to let Walter Lee be the head of the household.

While Walter Lee is struggling to be understood and appreciated as a man who wants to follow his dream of success, Lena is struggling with larger issues of change in relation to giving up power. She cannot understand her children: "One done almost lost his mind thinking 'bout money all the time and the other done commence to talk about things I can't seem to understand in no form or fashion" (p. 1283). Additionally, Lena is berating herself:

Lena—Lena Eggleston, you aims too high all the time. You needs to slow down and see life a little more like it is. Just slow down some. That's what they always used to say down home—'Lord, that Lena Eggleston is a high-minded thing. She'll get her due one day! (p. 1307)

Right after this comment, Ruth persuades Lena to move into the house anyway, and Lena then has her second chance with Walter Lee. Although Lena settles her dilemma with power in the home, the play ends with the issue of the generation gap between her and her children still unresolved.

### Physical Appearance

The only references in the play to Physical Appearance traits are in relation to the women.

Walter Lee uses negative comments about Ruth and Beneatha's appearance as a means of belittling them, especially when they are annoying him. In the opening scene, when Ruth is fixing breakfast, Walter Lee "imagines" that she is young again, suggesting that she has grown "old and ugly" even though she is only 30 years old. They have been short and cross with each other since the beginning of the scene, and after making this comment and when Ruth will not let Walter Lee touch her, he says, "It's gone now—you look like yourself again!" (p. 1275). When Beneatha enters the room just a few lines later, all Walter Lee can say is that she is a "horrible looking chick at this hour" (p. 1278).

Most of the concern over physical appearance is focused on Beneatha, who is beginning to see her appearance as tied to her identity as a person. Asagai comments on Beneatha's hair and describes it as "mutilated" because she processes it to conform to the notion African-American hair looks better if it is less kinky. In order to explore her newfound interest in her

African heritage, Beneatha cuts her hair and leaves it in its natural state. When she appears in her African dress and with her new hair, all the characters that are present are astounded and each reacts in a different way. Ruth cannot believe that Beneatha actually intends to go out "with [her] head all nappy like that" (p. 1290). Walter Lee just stands there shocked and speechless at first, but when Ruth expresses that she is starting to like Beneatha's hair and she is looking in the mirror at her own hair, Walter Lee says, "Oh no! You leave yours alone, baby. You might turn out to have a pin-shaped head or something!" (p. 1292). As previously established, George is appearance-conscious, and Beneatha's new look is displeasing to him, for as he tells her, "Look honey, we're going to the theater—we're not going to be in it...so go change, huh?" (p. 1290). Only when she is wearing a more acceptable cocktail dress does George admit that he likes her hair—"It's sharp. I mean it really is" (p. 1292).

#### Additional Observations

A study of this play would not be complete without commenting on the impact of race on the characters. Inasmuch as their gender roles affect their behaviors, being black in a racist society has an even greater impact on the Younger family. As with other issues in the Younger home, the characters have differing and divergent ideas about race and impact of race on their daily lives.

The bitterest comments about race come from Lindner who comes to convince the Youngers not to move into their new home. Although he is described as a "quiet-looking" man, Lindner draws very sharp distinctions between the white families in Clybourne Park and the Youngers (p. 1299). This distinction is made clear by his reference to the Youngers as "you people" and to those he represents as "our people" (p. 1300 & p. 1301). He believes "Negro

families are happier when they live in their own communities" (p. 1301). When this argument does not work with the Youngers, he indicts the Youngers for their actions:

What do you think you are going to gain by moving into a neighborhood where you just aren't wanted and where some elements—well people can get awful worked up when they feel that their whole way of life and everything they've ever worked for is threatened. (p. 1301)

Lindner represents attitudes about race that come from outside the family; inside the Younger home, ideas about race are also prevalent.

Walter is the most outspoken critic of race. He attributes being held back more to the black woman than to a prejudiced society. As he tells Ruth, "We one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds" (p. 1278), or as he tells Ruth and Beneatha, "The world's most backward race of people, and that's a fact" (p. 1279). But his most bitter charge he levels at Ruth is "We all tied up in a race of people that don't know how to do nothing but moan, pray, and have babies!" (p. 1292). As discussed earlier, Walter Lee believes black women cannot comfort or understand their men, so to find solace and understanding, he turns to his friends. By blaming the black woman for the condition of the black man, Walter Lee is shortsighted and blind to the true injustices present in the larger society.

Beneatha's struggles with race focuses on identity. Because of her education, she struggles intellectually. She is the mouthpiece for anti-assimilation, but to her family her notions seem strange. She takes great pride in learning about her African heritage, but no one listens.

Lena, coming from a different generation, does not understand her children's views on race. She and Walter, Sr. moved from the South to the North in order to escape the more overtly racist South. Instead, they faced more covert racism that relegated her husband to a life of

manual labor and her son to being a chauffeur. Lena cannot understand her daughter's focus on Africa because Lena sees her heritage as beginning when her family was brought to this country as slaves. She takes pride in the fact that her family overcame that hardship and has survived and endured for six generations. It is this pride in family that she reminds Walter Lee of when he is considering selling out to Lindner, and from that pride, Walter Lee draws the strength to turn down Lindner's offer.

Although turning down Lindner's offer is an achievement for Walter Lee and moving into a home is an achievement for the Youngers, the end of the play is not a totally happy one. As indicated in a short scene with Mrs. Johnson, the Younger's neighbor, civil unrest happens when black families move into white neighborhoods. As Mrs. Johnson relates to Ruth and Lena, "You mean you ain't read 'bout them colored people that was bombed out their place out there?" (p. 1296). Taken in concert with Lindner's veiled threat, the Youngers are potentially going to be in harm's way, thereby leaving the issues of race largely unresolved in the play.

In addition to the theme of race, the American Dream also has an impact on the characters in this play. Because the Youngers are black, the American Dream of a home and financial success becomes even harder to achieve. Walter Lee is questing for the American Dream, and much like Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, has been frustrated at every corner. In comparison to Willy, Walter Lee possesses an extreme focus on material wealth as the determining factor for success, but unlike Willy, Walter Lee must battle against a racist society that prevents black men from easily achieving this success. As Willy's success is seen in contrast to others such as Howard Gardner or Charley, Walter Lee sees the possibilities for success of a black man in the Murchison family. Walter Lee feels inferior to the Murchisons and is jealous of their success. Miller (1996) observed that Walter Lee sees affluence all around him while at

work and he "desires a piece of this wealth, a slice of the American dream"; furthermore, Walter Lee

[modeled] himself after the white community that he encounters daily and seeks to make his presence felt in the larger American community...He [believed] in himself and [had] high expectations and a determination to succeed. In reality he [had] been an ignored man, an almost invisible man, a powerless man.... (p. 135)

Although Lena's desire for a house for the family was part of the American Dream, she stopped her version of the dream there (Washington, 1988). Walter Lee saw it as only part of the dream; he wanted the whole dream, not a "second-class version of it reserved for Black Americans and other poor people" (p. 114). Furthermore, as seen in *Death of a Salesman*, the women in the play were seen in subordinate roles to men when it comes to achieving success (Keyssar, 1989).

Miller (1996) surmised that Walter Lee blamed himself for his failures at success, but he also blamed his wife and his mother. Parks (1995) argued that because black women often held the power in the family, the domestic role of women was elevated in status. However, this does not appear to be the case in this play as evidenced by Ruth's lack of status in the family, Walter Lee's chauvinistic attitudes about black women in general, and Beneatha's uncertain future at the end of the play.

#### Summary of Research Questions

The characters in *A Raisin in the Sun* predominantly take on traditional roles, but there is one character that is non-traditional. Walter Lee is in the breadwinner position, and he ultimately ends up as the power head of the household. Ruth and Lena have traditional roles for women—wives and mothers, and their employment outside the home is in domestic work. Beneatha is the non-traditional character; she attends college, wants to be a physician, and

eschews marriage. She struggles to free herself from the traditional notions of acceptable female careers, and she must overcome these objections in her own home and with the men whom she dates. All the characters face obstacles because of their race, which keeps them from the better paying jobs, and, until Beneatha, has kept them from an education. Because Lena had been functioning in the head of household position and was competing with Walter Lee for that position, there was great tension in the family. Walter Lee felt incompetent in his role as family provider, but when Lena released that power to him, even though he had a brief moment of poor judgement, she upholds her decision and allows him to function as the leader of the house. Beneatha is the only character who could potentially feel consequences from her non-traditional behavior. At the end of the play, it is suggested that she will need to work full-time in order to help her family meet the note on the house. Furthermore, as she leaves the apartment, she is contemplating marriage to Asagai. Taken as a whole, *A Raisin in the Sun* presents gender following certain patterns and in a manner consistent with the notion that gender behaviors are opposite in nature.

### Fences

Of the contemporary playwrights, August Wilson is one of today's most active African-American playwrights. In focusing his drama on the African-American male down through history, Wilson was "one of the most vigilant historicizers of African-American experience" (Nadel, 1994, p. 1). He has won four New York Drama Critics Circle Awards, two Drama Desk Awards, one Outer Critics Circle Awards, two Pulitzer Prizes, and one Tony Award out of five nominations.



Written in 1985, *Fences* is the second play in Wilson's series of historical plays. In examining how Wilson's drama has changed from play to play, Marra (1994) said that *Fences* stood apart from the other plays in the series because, "This work offers greater complexity in the characterization of the female lead who is accorded more consciousness than her predecessors of her own and her male cohort's motivations" (p. 147). Her observations led her to conclude, "the most far-reaching and insurmountable 'fences' in this play...prove to be those of gender" (p. 147).

*Fences* presents the story of the Maxson household beginning in 1957. Illiterate, Troy has struggled with racism all of his life. Leaving home after a violent encounter with his father when he was 14, Troy took a variety of odd jobs as he made his way in the world. He fell into a life of crime in order to support his wife and son, Lyons. After a conviction for murder, Troy was sent to prison. While in prison, Troy learned how to play baseball, and after his release, Troy played for a while in the Negro League, but by the time baseball was integrated, he was too old to play. Failing to acknowledge his age prevented him from playing baseball, Troy remains bitter towards professional sports. His first wife left him when he went to prison, and Troy and his second wife, Rose, have been married for 18 years. They have one son, Cory.

Troy's struggle with racism did not end with baseball but enters into his current occupation. Troy is a garbage collector, and he complained to the Union about the injustice of allowing white men to drive the garbage trucks while the black men had to pick up the trash. Although Troy won this struggle and was granted the right to drive the truck, the victory was not as sweet as he had imagined. Driving the truck is a solitary job, and it isolates Troy from his friends.

Troy is the patriarch of his family, and his use of power over the other members of his family is the subject of much conflict. Lyons occasionally comes by the house to visit, especially on payday. Lyons, a musician, stops by to borrow money from Troy, and Troy usually criticizes Lyons' lifestyle. This repeated pattern usually ends with Lyons getting the money after a barrage of verbal criticisms. Cory is a high school football player, and he has dreams of going to college on a football scholarship. Troy, who has no use for organized sports, denies Cory the opportunity to play football and receive a college education, preferring instead that Cory learn a trade or try to move up at the A&P grocery store where his son has a part-time job. This conflict escalates into a physically violent brawl between father and son, and Cory leaves home when he is unable to live with his father's domination. Gabriel, Troy's brother, received a brain injury during World War II and has been living with Troy. Because he wanted independence away from Troy, he moved out of Troy's home and took his meager disability check with him. This angers Troy because the family needed the income from Gabriel's check.

The major family conflict takes place between Troy and Rose and is over his affair with another woman. Because Troy's girlfriend, Alberta, became pregnant with his child, Troy was forced to confess the affair to Rose. Rose requested Troy end his affair, but he refused. When Alberta dies in childbirth, Troy brings home his daughter and asks Rose to care for the child. Rose agrees by rationalizing that the child is innocent of her parent's sin, but the consequence is Troy will become a "womanless" man (p. 950).

Troy spends the remaining years of his life in isolation. What began as feeling isolated only at work, has now come into every aspect of his life. His behavior caused Cory to leave home. His best friend, Jim Bono, no longer associates with him because of his treatment of Rose. Rose was true to her word and isolated Troy from their marriage. She fills her time caring

for Raynell and doing volunteer work for the church. Troy has Gabriel committed to a state mental institution, and although he receives part of the disability check, Troy pays the price of having to live with placing his brother in an institution based on his own need for money.

The play's action ends in 1965 with Troy's death. Cory returns home from the military and is still filled with anger toward his father. Cory was not going to attend the funeral, but Rose convinces him to let go of his anger as she has had to do. As Rose understands, only through letting go and remembering the best in Troy will Cory be able to get along in this world.

*Fences* is presented in two acts, and the major themes and conflicts are presented in the first act, and the ramifications of the conflicts are concluded in the second act. The four gender trait categories used to analyze the characters' actions, Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance, contribute to understanding the family dynamics in the play.

#### Behavior Characteristics

The Maxson family is organized around very strict gender roles and accompanying behavior, and the family dynamics are firmly established in Act I. Troy, as the patriarch of the family, is a dominant force in the family and controls his wife and his son. He is quick to point out to those who question his authority, "I don't care what nobody else say. I'm the boss...you understand? I'm the boss around here. I do the only saying that counts" (p. 940).

Troy comes from a dysfunctional family where he saw his father drive his mother away because of the father's cruel behavior. Troy's father always ate the best meat at the dinner table and only valued his children for the work that they could do on the farm. Although Troy admits that his father was despicable, Troy did learn from his father a sense of responsibility to his

children. When Lyons suggested that Troy's father should have left to find a better job, Troy responds with the following:

How he gonna leave with eleven kids? And where he gonna go? He ain't knew how to do anything by farm. No, he was trapped and I think he knew it. But I'll say this for him...he felt a responsibility toward us. Maybe he ain't treated us the way I felt he should have...but without that responsibility he could have walked off and left us...made his own way. (p. 943)

Troy repeats this same message to Cory when Cory asks his father if he likes him. Troy readily admits that he does not particularly like his son but that is not important to Troy:

A man's got to take care of his family. You live in my house...sleep you behind on my bedclothes...fill you belly up with my food...cause you my son. You my flesh and blood. Not cause I like you! Cause it's my duty to take care of you. I owe a responsibility to you! [...] I ain't got to like you. [...] I gave you your life! (p. 940)

Inasmuch as Troy despised his father, he is treating his son as his father treated him.

Troy has a history of guilt over feeling like a less than capable family provider. He was a poor provider to his first wife and Lyons. Having to make his way in the world from a young age and having no education, crime was how Troy supported his first family—a lifestyle that eventually landed Troy in prison, caused his first wife to leave him, and denied Troy the opportunity of participating in Lyons' upbringing. In an effort to be a better provider for Rose and Cory, Troy has kept a clean record and maintained a steady job; however, Troy feels insecure as a provider for his family. He sees his life as a mundane struggle to make it from week to week. Troy knows the precarious financial situation that his family is in, and he feels guilty that he can do no better. He knows he would not have a house if it were not for Gabriel.

As he laments to Rose, "If my brother didn't have that metal plate in his head...I wouldn't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of. And I'm fifty-three years old" (p. 938).

One way that Troy feels he can create a better future for his son is to mold him into a proper man. In Troy's view, Cory should be able to be self-sufficient and have a marketable skill. Playing football is not the way to prepare for such a future; as he tells Cory,

You go on and get your book-learning so you can work yourself up in that A&P or learn how to fix cars or build houses or something, get you a trade. That way you have something can't nobody take away from you. You go and learn how to put your hands to some good use. Besides hauling people's garbage. (p. 939)

Troy, in an effort to control Cory and get his way, denies Cory the opportunity to go to college, which would provide a much better future for Cory than a life of manual labor.

Inasmuch as Troy is the aggressive and domineering male, Rose is the passive wife who is tied to the home, to supporting Troy, and to raising Cory. As the initial stage directions indicate, Rose's place within her home is dictated by circumstance:

Rose is ten years younger than Troy, her devotion to him stems from her recognition of the possibilities of her life without him: a succession of abusive men and their babies, a life partying and running the streets, the church, or aloneness with its attendant pain and frustration. (p. 932)

As a symbol of her domestic responsibilities, Rose is often asking others if they want to eat. She cooks for her family, and she immediately offers food to any guest who comes to the home (p. 932, p. 936, p. 937, p. 938, & p. 942). She is careful with the family finances and shops where the prices are the lowest. Even with all of its rough spots, Rose is satisfied with her life; it is the life that she was looking for when she met Troy. She contributed everything to making her

marriage work regardless of the circumstance. She "embodied the norm," according to Elam (1994) because she sacrificed her life for her husband and her family, and like other female characters in Wilson's plays, conformed to "traditional gender roles and historical expectations" (p. 165).

The other male characters in the play, Bono and Lyons, starkly contrast with Troy's behavior. Bono, who works with Troy on the garbage truck, is married, but he and his wife have no children. Bono lacks the aggression that defines Troy and is content to follow along behind Troy. Lyons has no permanent job and a girlfriend, not a wife. Troy finds his son's behavior disgraceful, and he does not understand why he will not get a regular job and "take care of that woman's he got" (p. 936). Although Bono and Lyons make brief statements about Lucile and Bonnie, their female companions are never seen in the play.

The carefully drawn family structure that has sufficed to glue the members of the Maxson household together for 18 years is destroyed in Act II. Troy's home and family stability are changed when he confesses he had an affair with Alberta, and she is pregnant.

Troy believes that having an affair was his right as the head of the house. Because he felt enormous pressure from being the provider, he feels entitled to having the extra-marital relationship. Over time, the relationship became his release from the pressures of reality:

I can step out of this house and get away from the pressures and the problems...be a different man. I ain't got to wonder how I'm gonna pay the bill and get the roof fixed. I can just be a part of myself that I never been. (p. 947)

Troy refuses to end his affair with Alberta because "A man's got to do what's right for him. I ain't sorry for nothing I done. It felt right in my heart" (p. 949). However, when Alberta dies in

childbirth, Troy has no recourse but to ask Rose to care for his child because he knows he cannot care for a baby.

Rose's response to Troy's revelation about his affair is uncharacteristic for her. She stands up to him for the first time in their relationship, and she breaks with her passive nature. In her most pointed speech in the play, she explains to Troy what it has been like for her to be his wife for the past 18 years:

I've been standing with you! I been right here with you, Troy. I got a life too. I gave eighteen years of my life to stand in the same spot with you. Don't you think I ever wanted other things? Don't you think I had dreams and hopes? What about my life? What about me? Don't you think it ever crossed my mind to want to know other men? That I wanted to lay up somewhere and forget about my responsibilities? That I wanted someone to make me laugh so I could feel good? You not the only one who's got wants and needs. But I held on to you, Troy. I took all my feelings, my wants, and needs, my dreams...and I buried them inside you. I planted a seed and watched and prayed over it. I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom.... (p. 948).

Rose knew that all her efforts to create a good home to keep Troy happy were all in vain, and she realized that he saw her "not as an individual entitled to pursue her own needs but as a functionary who fulfills expected roles" (Marra, 1994, p. 148).

Troy's position as head of his house has now come to an end. In one last effort to control his son, Troy permanently drives Cory from the home. As noted by Sterling (1998), Troy exiled Rose's child, Cory, and "[replaced] Cory with the daughter he fathered by Alberta" because he was "stung" by his loss of power in his own home (p. 55). Although Rose magnanimously agrees to care for Troy's baby, she leaves Troy a "womanless" man in his own home (p. 950).

Her willingness to take in the baby allowed Rose to "salvage some dignity in the wake of her crumbling marriage and to exercise her desire to nurture" (Shannon, 1994, p. 155). Through accepting the child, Rose found strength "to supplant Troy as the primary object of [her] love" (Sterling, 1998, p. 55).

Shannon (1994) argued that Wilson depicted the erosion of the African-American family because Rose chose to nurture the child and not her husband; however, he overlooked Rose's desire to preserve the family. For example, Rose's initial reaction to Troy fathering a child is anger at splitting the family; as she says,

And you know I ain't never wanted no half nothing in my family. My whole family is half. Everybody got different fathers and mothers...my two sisters and my brother.

Can't hardly tell who's who. Can't never sit down and talk about Papa and Mama. It's your papa and your mama and my papa and my mama.... (p. 947)

Additionally, Rose tells Troy, "Maybe you want to wish me and my boy away. [...]" Well, you can't wish us away. I've got eighteen years of my life invested in you" (p. 947). She is dedicated to preserving the family over and above her anger and disappointment in Troy for straying. Her final act to preserve the family rests in her reason for taking in Raynell; she tells Troy "I'll take care of your baby for you...cause...like you say...she's innocent...and you can't visit the sins on the father upon the child. A motherless child has got a hard time" (p. 950).

### Communication Patterns

Although not a prominent feature in the play, the gender traits for male and female communication patterns were present in the play. Mostly, the communication styles of the characters are indicative of their behaviors in their gender roles.



Troy's speech is characteristically male in that he enjoys playful banter with sexual overtones, and he uses coarse language throughout the play. However, most of his communication patterns are focused around maintaining power within the home by controlling all the conversations. One example, as demonstrated in Act I, is the Friday night ritual that he and Bono have. Every Friday evening, they share a pint of gin on Troy's front porch, and as Troy tells Rose "Well, go on back in the house and let me and Bono finish what we was talking about. This is men talk" (p. 932). This "men talk" usually consists of tales about coworkers, discussion about baseball, or a retelling of one of Troy's tall tales about how he "done wrassled with Death" (p. 933). Although the subject matter may be inconsequential, Rose is still barred from participating except on a very limited basis.

On the whole, Troy talks the most of any character in the play, and he always has to be the center of every conversation. Yet, he is the character who listens the least, and as Lyons tells him, he should give others a chance to talk (p. 942). Cory echoes this sentiment, "You don't never want to listen to nobody" (p. 945). Ironically, when Troy is telling Rose about Alberta, and Rose begins to get upset, Troy pleads, "We can talk this out...come to an understanding" (p. 947), but the time for Troy to be understood is over. Just as he shut out others, so too is he shut out.

In order to communicate their feelings, Troy and Rose use metaphors to help them articulate their feelings. Troy's favorite metaphor throughout the entire play is to use baseball imagery. He describes death as "nothing but a fastball on the outside corner," (p. 933) and when he has his first scuffle with Cory he tells him, "See...you swung at the ball and didn't hit it. That's strike one. See, you in the batter's box now. You swung and you missed. That's one strike. Don't you strike out!" (p. 945). In referring to his affair with Alberta, Troy says that he

"wants to go down swinging," and she gave him the courage to "steal second" (p. 947). Rose uses a planting metaphor to describe her relationship with Troy. She describes their marriage as planting a seed: "I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom. And it didn't take me no eighteen years to find out the soil was hard and rocky and it wasn't never gonna bloom" (p. 948). As defined by Kubitschek (1994), Troy's baseball allusions, especially with regard to Alberta were "sex-segregated," and they excluded Rose and reduced Alberta to an object; conversely, Rose's metaphor of planting was natural in tone and inclusive in nature (p. 187).

Indicative of her position in the home, Rose uses a less direct method to communicate. Troy normally does not do what Rose wishes. For example, she had to ask Troy three times to quit talking about death because she found it a morbid subject for conversation (p. 934). Because she cannot find out any information from Troy, she often relies on second-hand information from other women to learn about things that are happening in her own family (p. 948). Rose uses talking to keep the peace in the home; even though she knows that she will probably be unsuccessful. When she tries to convince Troy to let Cory play football, he becomes even more adamant against the idea. However, after Troy's confession, Rose's speech becomes much more direct, and she can hold her own with Troy as evidenced by the following exchange:

Rose: I'm taking this cake down to the church for the bakesale. Lyons was by to see you.

He stopped by to pay you your twenty dollars. It's laying there on the table.

Troy: (*Going into his pocket*) Well...here go this money.

Rose: Put it there on the table, Troy. I'll get it.

Troy: What time you coming back?

Rose: Ain't no use in you studying me. It don't matter what time I come back.

Troy: I just asked you a question, woman. What's the matter...can't I ask you a question?

Rose: Troy, I don't want to go into it. Your dinner's in there on the stove. All you got to do is heat it up. And don't you be eating the rest of them cakes in there. I'm coming back for them. We having a bakesale at the church tomorrow. (p. 950)

Thus, when Rose begins to develop into her own person, she begins to use a more direct language pattern, and she will not tolerate Troy's questions or accusations any longer.

### Source of Power

As previously discussed in the section on Behavior Characteristics, Troy holds the power in his home, but Troy struggles with a lack of power in the workplace because of racism. For every gain in power Troy makes, whether at work or at home, the victories are lacking in joy and satisfaction.

Troy's first major encounter with a lack of power as a black man was when he was still playing baseball. Although Troy played in the Negro League, it lacked the prestige afforded to the white teams. As Troy concludes,

I'm talking about if you could play ball then they ought to have let you play. Don't care what color you were. Come telling me I came along too early. If you could play...then they ought to have let you play. (p. 933)

When Troy was denied the opportunity to play professional ball, he did not fight the system; however, when Troy encountered racial prejudice at work, he chooses to fight this time. In the very opening scene of the play, Troy is explaining that he went to his boss and asked him, "Why you got the white mens driving and the colored lifting? [...] You think only white fellows got sense enough to drive a truck. That ain't no paper job! Hell, anybody can drive a truck" (p. 932). In a society that defines men and their power by their job status, Troy is fighting for a higher status job. He does, however, condone some racial segregation by his reference to a

"paper job." He sees he is not qualified, nor are any of his friends, for an office job, but he fails to consider that with an education, he would have been qualified for such a position. He ultimately wins this fight and gets his promotion to truck driver, but it is a hollow victory for him because he is now separated from his friends.

Another worthless victory that Troy wins is over Cory. Troy is so determined to control his son's life he is not aware, or does not care, that he is destroying their relationship. As he tells Bono, "That boy walking around here smelling his piss...thinking he's grown. Thinking he's gonna do what he want, irrespective of what I say. [...] When he get to the point where he wanna disobey me...then it's time for him to move on" (p. 943). Troy eventually drives Cory from the home in a physical battle much like Troy experienced with his own father. Even when he comes home to attend his father's funeral, Cory is still haunted by his father's memory:

Papa was like a shadow that followed you everywhere. It weighted on you and sunk into your flesh. It would wrap around you and lay there until you couldn't tell which one was you anymore. That shadow digging in your flesh. Trying to crawl in. Trying to live through you. Everywhere I looked, Troy Maxson was staring back at me...hiding under the bed...in the closet. I'm just saying I've got to find a way to get rid of that shadow, Mama. (p. 954-954)

But as Rose tells Cory, Troy wanted Cory to be everything that he was not, and to continue to fight the heritage Troy left would be a personal mistake for Cory.

As time brings perspective to all personal wounds, Rose has come to terms with her relationship with Troy. In a self-reflective moment, Rose assumes her share of the responsibility for what has happened in her marriage:

When I first met your daddy I thought...Here is a man I can lay down with and make a baby. That's the first thing I thought when I seen him. I was thirty years old and had done seen my share of men. But when he walked up to me and said, "I can dance a waltz that'll make you dizzy," I thought, Rose Lee, here is a man that you can open yourself up to and be filled to bursting. Here is a man that can fill all them empty spaces you been tipping around the edges of. One of them empty spaces was being somebody's mother. I married your daddy and settled down to cooking supper and keeping clean sheets on the bed. When your daddy walked through the house he was so big he filled it up. That was my first mistake. Not to make him leave some room for me. That was my part in the matter. [...] I didn't know to keep up his strength I had to give up little pieces of mine and mixed up the pieces so that you couldn't hardly tell which was which anymore. It was my choice. It was my life and I didn't have to live it like that. But that's what life offered me in the way of being a woman and I took it. I grabbed hold with both hands. (p. 954)

Rose understands how she allowed Troy to overpower her sense of self. She has grown to realize Troy "meant to do more good than he did harm," (p. 954) and she feels no guilt about raising Raynell and isolating Troy in her home. In truth, Troy's "adultery [provided] a catalyst that propels her to reassess her position, to gain a greater self-awareness and to change" (Elam, 1994, p. 179).

In summary of the destructive attempts to gain and hold power within this family, Sterling (1998) offered the following conclusion. He surmised Troy's father and he deprived their sons, causing the boys to leave home. The cyclical nature of these events manifests that the autonomous struggle into the boundless world is a rite of passage to

which Troy adheres. When the sons reach the age at which they may threaten their father's authority, the patriarchs disown them, forcing them to grow up on their own.... Unlike Troy, who never comes back home after leaving, Cory does reappear as the play concludes. This return implies that Cory may uphold different familial values than his father. Wilson thus leaves his audience with a sense of hope, indicating that the cycle may be broken, that in the future, the Maxson family may thrive. (p. 61)

### Physical Appearance

The Physical Appearance category was the least evident of all the gender traits in the play; however, two key points can be drawn from the play about the gender behavior as defined by this category. First, little is known about any of the characters' physical appearances or statures except for Troy, and his description is provided in the stage directions. Troy is described as "a large man with thick, heavy hands" (p. 931). For Troy, his physical self is a part of his manhood. As an athlete, Troy's body was vital to his success as a ball player, and his physical presence is what first attracted Rose to Troy. The only other character who is given any physical description other than Troy is Alberta. At the beginning of the play, Troy and Bono are discussing Alberta, who just arrived in town. The passage is the only direct comment made about Alberta, and they discuss her purely from the physical point of view. Troy says she has "a little bit of Indian in her," and like other women from Florida, she is "big and healthy" (p. 932). Bono pipes up to concur she is a healthy woman: "Woman wear some big stockings. Got them great old big legs and hips as wide as the Mississippi River" (p. 932). However, Troy is not taken with her legs, for as he says "you just push them out of the way;" he is enamoured with her hips—the hips that "cushion the ride! [...] Like you riding on Goodyears!" (p. 932). As

suggested by Kester (1994), Troy and Bono stereotyped Alberta's body by "describing the girl's body as a geographical space passively waiting for the male explorer" (p. 110).

### Summary of Research Questions

As outlined by the gender categories, the characters in *Fences* are defined by their roles in the family. Having been on his own since the age of 14, Troy is an independent and dominant male. He is aggressive with his friends and family and is the breadwinner for the family. Although Bono looks up to Troy as a natural leader, Troy's position as a leader is threatened when he takes his status too far and believes he has a right to have an affair. Rose, in keeping with her position as the wife, is responsible for the operations of the house including the cooking and the cleaning. None of the characters in the play take on roles outside of the traditional divisions.

More than any other characters in this study, both Troy and Rose address the limitations and consequences for their gender roles. Troy is overwhelmed by his role as the provider, and he is always worrying about how to have enough money to provide the home that Rose requires. By his own admission, he became so wrapped up in providing that he forgot about himself, and thus had an affair to ease his life and find a moment of peace and joy in living. Likewise, Rose put everything that she had into being a good wife for Troy. She let go of herself to be the kind of wife that Troy needed. She is rewarded for her efforts by his infidelity. For Troy the consequences for his actions are severe; he loses his wife, his son, and his best friend. Rose eventually finds peace with Troy and a deeper understanding of herself.

*Fences* does present gender following certain patterns and those patterns are opposites. For the next generation of Maxsons, Cory and Raynell will be imbued with the strength and experience of their parents, and hopefully some of their mother's wisdom as well.

### Common Themes

All six plays in this chapter have several common themes that unite the plays. These themes emerged as a result of the detailed examination of each play, and these themes were not discovered until after the plays were analyzed as individual pieces. Although many themes could be explored that unite these plays, all of these emergent themes are related to the gender behavior of the characters and the overall view of males and females in the plays.

In considering these plays and their relationship to the background information provided at the opening of the chapter, a large number of these plays construct families that are trying to achieve the mythic definition of what constitutes a proper American family. *Trifles*, *Death of a Salesman*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Fences* have families that are structured around working husbands and wives who stay at home to care for the children. The family structure in *The Glass Menagerie* has been changed to a single-parent situation, and Amanda would like to see her daughter's family have a more traditional structure as the families did on Blue Mountain. The family structure in *A Raisin in the Sun* features the African-American family trait of multiple generations living under the same roof. Only one play, *Moon for the Misbegotten*, shows a different family structure that is considered to be an acceptable situation by the members of the family.

The women in all the plays are shown as wives and mothers or are seeking to be wives. Additionally, the majority of the female characters, in contrast to the men, do not leave the home during the course of the play. The major female characters in *Trifles*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Death of a Salesman*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Fences* are all wives and mothers, and in *Moon for the Misbegotten*, Josie wants to be a wife. Mrs. Peters, Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Wright, Amanda, Linda, Ruth, Lena, and Rose are all characterized in light of their statuses as wives and mothers, and



they have limited experiences outside of the home. Although Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Wright are away from their own homes, they are confined to the kitchen of another woman's house. Mrs. Wright, although away from the home because of her incarceration, is described by Mrs. Hale as a woman who never left the home even to engage even in accepted female activities. Amanda is shown returning home after attending a DAR meeting, and she makes one reference to working in a department store in the recent past, but for the majority of the action, she is in the home and working there. As an extreme example, Linda never leaves the home except to attend Willy's funeral. Lena is the only character who leaves the home to conduct business that is directly related to the action of the play, and Rose leaves the home to do volunteer work, only after she gains the upper hand over Troy. It is suggested Josie has left the home on dates with men, but during the play, she never leaves the farm.

Beneatha, in *A Raisin in the Sun*, is the only exception to the above observation. She freely comes and goes during the play. Although a single woman, she is not actively seeking a husband in spite of the fact that she does date. She has changed because of her involvement with a world beyond the home. Her different ideas often place her in contrast to the other characters in the play. She incurs the wrath of her mother and extreme misunderstanding by the other characters for her beliefs and views. Although she aspires to a less than traditional lifestyle, whether or not she can fulfill her aspirations remains in question at the end of the play.

In their marriages, the women are described, directly or indirectly, as making sacrifices for the men. Mrs. Hale describes Minnie, in *Trifles*, as liking to sing, but she has given that up to accommodate her husband and the lifestyle that he wanted. In *Moon for the Misbegotten*, Josie make the ultimate sacrifice by putting aside all of her desires of marriage to be the confessor/mother figure for Jim. Linda, in *Death of a Salesman*, has sacrificed herself—she has

focused her entire life around Willy and her sons, and she is left with nothing in return. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha will potentially sacrifice her desire to become a doctor in order to work so that the family can own a home. Although she does not have to go through with her plans, Ruth's desire to have an abortion is symbolic of her willingness to endure a great loss in order to secure the family's financial situation and not to put more pressure on her husband. Rose, in *Fences*, is the only character who is able to verbalize how she willingly sacrificed her own needs and wants for Troy. She is betrayed by his adultery; Troy never acknowledges her sacrifices. However, she reassembles her life and is a stronger character for it in the end.

Only in *The Glass Menagerie* does a male character make sacrifices that are comparable to the sacrifices that the female characters make. Tom sacrifices his dreams and hopes in order to secure the well-being of his mother and sister. Differing from the female characters who are often revered for their sacrifices, when Tom changes his situation and leaves his family behind, he is plagued by guilt over his behavior.

Building on the association of the major female characters with the home is the relative silence of the female characters in all of the plays. This silence is either directly manifested by the dialogue, supported by the action, or symbolically suggested. The women in *Trifles* are silenced as participants in the investigation by not being viewed as full participants in the action. Glaspell depicted the silence of women in marriage as evidenced by her characterization of the marriage of John and Millie Wright. Although Josie, in *Moon for the Misbegotten*, does speak out, she is silenced by her father's actions prior to Harder's visit when he speaks only in the first person singular. Furthermore, she silences herself in order to be the kind of woman that Jim needs. *The Glass Menagerie* is the only play where a female character is not a silent force within the home. Because of the situation, Amanda's actions silence Tom's desires and needs.

However, if the circumstance of her marriage were as she had planned, she would have assumed the role of the silent wife as evidenced by her descriptions of her upbringing and her musings about the way a marriage ought to have been. Linda in *Death of a Salesman* is silenced in her own home by not being allowed to participate in conversations with Willy, and she represents the most silent of all women. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha's views about women and careers, although verbalized in the dialogue, are viewed as deviant behavior by the other characters, and they often fail to listen to her comments. George wishes that she were a quiet woman given to less talking. She is symbolically silenced when Ruth counts her as capable of working to meet the house payments. Walter Lee silences all women by his opinion that women cannot understand business relationships and the finer details of how to get along in the world. In *Fences*, Rose is silenced in her own home by not being allowed to participate in the male conversations and by Troy's dominant personality. However, Rose is the only character in any of the plays to break through this silence during the course of the play. Her voice comes into being only as a result of Troy's affair, and she then silences him within the home.

As a companion theme to the silence of the female characters is their isolation in the home and their isolation from other women. Often this isolation comes as a directive from the male characters. In *Trifles*, Mrs. Hale noted how Minnie never participated in women's groups like the Ladies Auxiliary, and Minnie's isolation is directly attributed to her domination by her husband. Although Mrs. Hale feels a sense of remorse for never leaving her own home and developing a friendship with Minnie, Mrs. Peters does try to justify the actions by suggesting that home responsibilities are time consuming. Additionally, the formality with which Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale speak to one another is a testament to their not knowing each other very well because they rarely leave their own homes. Josie, in *Moon for the Misbegotten*, does not

speak of any female friends, and although she has left the farm on occasions, she has not traveled out of the community like Jim has. She sends her brothers out into the world, but she remains behind. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda does have female acquaintances in the DAR, but she no longer enjoys the active social life that she knew as a girl. Linda, in *Death of the Salesman*, has no companions and is an example of the extreme isolation because of her devotion to her home and role as a wife. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha mentions a female friend who will be teaching her how to play the guitar, and she seems to enjoy an active social life with others who think as she does. Unlike Walter Lee who mentions several male friends in the dialogue and is even visited by one of his friends, Ruth has no friends. Lena seems to only associate with other women, like Mrs. Johnson, who live in the building. Ruth, at the beginning of *Fences*, has little contact with others, and Troy has friends with whom he spends time. By the end of the play, she interacts with other women and is involved with church activities, which take her away from the home, and Troy becomes isolated from all of his friends and social activities.

The majority of the plays in the chapter present the males as dominant forces within the home. This force is attributed to male characters whether present or absent. In *Trifles*, Henderson, Hale, and Peters control the action of the play, and John Wright, although not a part of the action is responsible, as Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters surmise, for the oppressive conditions that precipitated his murder by his wife. Jim, although not the male force in the Hogan home in *Moon for the Misbegotten*, is responsible for changing Josie into what he wants her to be, while ignoring her needs. The absent fathers, in both *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Raisin in the Sun*, are still affecting what is happening in the present for both families. Walter Lee desires control of the home, and although he is not deserving of this power, it is granted to him by his mother and acknowledged by the rest of the members of the family. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy

Loman is the family member who has controlled the lives of all of the members of his family, and in his failure, his family will be forever damaged. Troy's need for control, in *Fences*, is responsible for the dissolution of two families—his first by going to prison and his second by adultery.

As a by-product of the passive and unseen nature of the women and the domineering presence of the men, the final emergent theme of these plays is that of legacy, or what is passed down to the children, both the sons and the daughters, about gender and gender behavior as a result of their parents' actions. This theme is best seen in *The Glass Menagerie*, *Death of a Salesman*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Fences* because these are the plays that have children and parents interacting in the drama. Amanda's marriage did not turn out as she assumed it would, but she still clings to the notion that independence is gained when a woman marries and has a husband to provide for her. She cannot convince Laura this is true, and Laura cannot live up to Amanda's expectations. Amanda strives to pass on her views about the world, but she fails miserably with both her children. Tom, self-described as "the bastard son of a bastard" (p. 352), shows the same regard for the family provider role as his father, but the audience is privy to the guilt the abandonment causes him. Willy succeeded in passing on his self-aggrandizing manner and poor treatment of women to his son, Happy, but Willy failed to permanently influence his other son, Biff. As the play concludes, it can be interpreted Biff will be the happier of the two sons. Walter Lee's greatest desire is to pass on to his son material things and to be able to give his son the finest college education that money can buy. Troy, by treating his son as his father treated him, begins the legacy for the next Maxson generation; however, because of Rose, a change for the future of the Maxson clan is conceivable. Rose, by acknowledging her culpability in her situation and by presumably raising Raynell to think differently than she did suggests that

perhaps Raynell's future will be different. Likewise, encouraging Cory to forgive his father and take his father's good points into account will lead him down a different path as well.

### Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed analysis of *Trifles*, *Moon for the Misbegotten*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Death of a Salesman*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Fences*. Each play was examined based on the four gender categories of Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance. After the analysis of each play, several common themes that united all the plays were presented. All six plays were set in the home, and the predominant gender characteristics were centered on male and female behavior in the confines of the family.

## CHAPTER 5

### PLAYS IN THE PUBLIC: GENDER ROLES OUTSIDE OF THE HOME

This chapter explores the plays that take place in settings other than the home. Although these plays do not share a common setting, they present similar attitudes or beliefs about the behavior of women when they are functioning in the world beyond the home. A brief summary of relevant background material about the place of women in the public aspect of society precedes the analysis of three plays. The plays that are discussed in this chapter are *Votes for Women*, *Uncommon Women and Others*, and *Oleanna*. An explanation of common themes among these plays concludes the chapter.

#### Background Material: Women Outside the Home

As established in Chapter 4, women, especially as a result of the Industrial Revolution, became associated with activities in the home. They were the nurturers and the caregivers, and in ideal circumstances, women were expected to stay home and be content with the domestic role. For the few women who ventured outside of the home, barriers to success were enormous. Women lacked access to acquiring an education, finding gainful employment, and participating in the democratic process.

In the desire for education, women had to overcome a long-held belief that to educate women would somehow physically damage them. A prominent notion during the Greek age was that women did not have the mental capacity to be educated (Le Gates, 1995). Women who wanted to pursue an education were seen as trying to over-rule their natures, and by engaging in such activities, women could damage their reproductive organs and not be able to have children.

An Italian doctor in the 17<sup>th</sup> century wrote the following: "It is a miracle if a woman in wishing to overcome her sex and is giving herself to learning and the language, does not stain her soul with vice and filthy abominations" (p. 497).

In the United States, women had a long history of being denied access to education. During the Colonial period, women were uneducated beyond a few rudimentary skills (Fox, 1995). Only a very few girls during this time were privately tutored—if a tutor could be found who would teach girls (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). By the time of the Revolutionary War, a few larger cities had created high schools, which taught boys and girls in separate institutions. But the high cost of operating separate schools proved to be unmanageable, and coeducational schools began to become the norm.

Access to higher education proved to be another barrier to women. The higher education institutions that were formed in this country's early years were devoted to training ministers (Fox, 1995). Women were barred from the ministry, which meant that they were denied entrance into the universities. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, women were allowed to enter seminary schools, which specialized in domestic training for women with some academic studies on the side. A seminary education taught "the three M's: morals, mind, and manners" to the students who attended (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 19). The seminary schools of that century gave way to normal schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Fox, 1995). Normal schools trained, in what was rapidly becoming a female profession, teachers. Finally, Oberlin College was the first "regular" higher education institution to grant full admission to women in 1833. However, it would take many more years before women gained full access to participate in higher education and to be admitted into professional schools.



For women who wanted to find gainful employment, the choices were few and the pay was low. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women battled the belief that if they left the "cult of domesticity" they were not seen as authentic women (Golden, 1995, p. 482). Women engaged in work outside the home "could be ensnared by scheming men into sexual immorality" which in turn, could lead to the downfall of society (p. 483). As women became more literate, they began to read what it meant to be a "True Woman," which included the "cardinal virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity," and "these were the standards upon which society would judge them and by which they would judge themselves" (Lindsey, 1997, p.108; see also, Blau & Ferber, 1995). Ironically, because women were paid less than men, in some fields such as teaching or secretarial work, it was economically feasible to hire women instead of men (Golden, 1995). However, the notion that women should be protected and confined to the home was the predominant mindset of middle class society.

Working class and immigrant families, however, could not afford the luxury of protecting their wives at home. With the dawn of industrialization, many single or poor women worked long hours in factories (Lindsey, 1997). Men, who often refused to work beside women, were given higher prestige jobs along with higher wages. Women often kept silent about the injustice because they were employed at the discretion of men. Furthermore, discrimination was justified because women's employment was defined as "temporary" because it was assumed that women would leave their positions when they married. This temporary status also kept women "out of training programs" and from qualifying for "job-related benefits" (p. 112). It is estimated that by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 25% of the nation's single, immigrant women worked outside of the home.

Access to participation in the governing process was the longest and most difficult road that women had to fight. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women had what was defined as an indirect voice in the political machine. For generations, women believed that they had political influence through their charity work and through raising good sons (Marshal, 1995). Those who were opposed to women having voting rights supported the notion that women indirectly voted through their husbands by influencing their husbands' choices. Another aspect of the resistance to women voting was the now entrenched notion that women needed to be protected, but as the suffrage movement became structured and organized, the traditional stereotype for women began to erode (Lumsden, 1997). Using every available method, from mass meetings, delegations, street meetings, pickets, and conventions, women made their voices heard. However, the approval of direct representation proved to be a lengthy battle—taking many decades before the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified on August 26, 1920 (Lindsey, 1997).

This brief summary of women's participation in education, employment, and the governing process provided an historical basis for examining the plays in this chapter. An examination of the gender roles and accompanying behavior of the characters in the plays that are set in the world outside of the home provided a glimpse into how this participation is portrayed in drama.

### *Votes for Women*

Although playwright Elizabeth Robins was born in Kentucky, she moved to England when she was 26, and she spent the remainder of her life living abroad and working in European theatre as an actor (Worthen, 1995). Robins was involved in the women's suffrage movement in England, and she used England as the backdrop for her most famous play, *Votes for Women*,

which was written in 1907. Robins was among a group of playwrights who "actively challenged the relegation of women to a 'private,' domesticated world," and they "used the overtly 'public' forum of drama as a point of entry into the debate" (Stowell, 1992, p. 1). Robins had never written a play before, but she was determined not to merely copy the styles of successful male playwrights as she had seen other female playwrights do. She wanted to use her play to break the stereotypical characterization of women and to "challenge [the] separate-spheres ideology and [the] sexual double-standard it perpetuated" (p. 2). Throughout the writing process, Robins turned to her friends, Henry James and George Bernard Shaw, for advice, and she took most of the advice that Shaw offered. The character of Vida Levering was created "as an alternative to the plethora of male-dominated women," and to "reflect a major goal of the suffrage movement as a whole, which was insisting in ever more adamant terms upon women's rights to engage in the political life of the nation" (p. 17).

The first act of *Votes for Women* takes place in the home of Lord and Lady John Wynnstay. Lord and Lady John are entertaining for their niece, Jean Dunbarton, who has just become engaged to Geoffrey Stonor, a man several years her senior and a Unionist Member of Parliament. The gathering also includes: Mr. St. John Greateorex, a cynical, Liberal Member of Parliament; Mr. Richard Farnborough, an opportunist who wants to work his way into Stonor's inner circle of advisors; Mr. and Mrs. Freddy Turnbridge, a proper and elitist couple; and Mrs. Heriot, the sister of Lady John.

The main character in the play is Miss Vida Levering, an intriguing guest at the Wynnstay home. Vida is a strong, outspoken, and independent woman who defies social decorum. She is engaged in the plight of helping women who are downtrodden and silenced by society; her chief aim is to garner the vote for women. Vida is a mysterious woman to those

around her because she does not uphold the traditional values like those in her upper class circle of acquaintances. Her views about women and their place in society are born from experience. Vida lived on her own from the time she was a young woman, and she fell into a relationship with a young man who abandoned her when she became pregnant. After a risky abortion procedure left Vida close to death, Mrs. Heriot provided her some money and a quiet place to recuperate. Vida never disclosed the name her child's father to anyone. Vida persevered despite the social stigmas associated with pregnancy out of wedlock and abortion. She is articulate in her belief that women should not be dependent upon men. Preferring to discuss the plight of women to more traditionally acceptable female topics of conversation, Vida shocks the guests in the Wynnstay home—especially the men.

Vida stands in contrast to Jean Dunbarton. Jean has lived a relatively sheltered life and has been prepared by Lady John and her friends to assume a quiet and refined life as a gentleman's wife. Jean's fiancé is continuing in what looks to be a long and prosperous political career, and Jean is ready to stand by his side and do what he requires of her in order to advance his career. Although her fiancé and her family try to keep Jean away from Vida, Jean is drawn to Vida and is captivated by Vida's views because they open up a world Jean has never known or even knew existed. When Jean discovers Vida is on her way to a Sunday afternoon political rally, Jean convinces Stonor to take her to the rally. In order to keep Jean protected, Lady John accompanies the pair to the rally.

Act II, a relatively short act, presents the heart of the play's political message. Taking place on Trafalgar Square, the large rally scene includes several male and female characters who make speeches about granting women the right to vote. Counter arguments are presented via hecklers in the crowd. Vida is the final speaker at the rally. Unaccustomed to speaking to large

crowds, Vida stumbles through the first part of her speech, but by the end, she has taken control of the situation and begins to speak with authority and resolve. Jean, captivated and persuaded by Vida's story of abandonment and suffering at the hands of a man, decides to work for the women's cause. She purposely gets separated from Stonor and Lady John in order to make her way to the leaders of the movement so she can join forces with them.

Act III returns to the Wynnstay home. After listening to Vida's story and watching Stonor's reaction to her speech, Jean correctly concludes that Stonor was Vida's former lover and father of her child. Jean wants Stonor to do the honorable thing and now marry Vida in order to make amends for his past wrong. Although he protests this decision and it breaks her heart, Jean releases Stonor from his commitment to her so he can marry Vida. Vida, upon hearing of Jean's decision, decides upon another course of action. She is not interested in marrying Stonor, but she is interested in his political position. She offers a deal to Stonor: if he will use his political position to endorse the women's suffrage cause, then she will step aside and let Jean and Stonor marry. If a Member of Parliament endorses the women's movement then credibility will be established for the cause, and this is much more important to Vida retribution for a past wrong. Although it could destroy his career, Stonor agrees to Vida's terms, and the play ends with Vida taking Stonor's written declaration for support for the women's movement to the press.

The four gender trait categories, Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance, contained germane information for exploring the gender roles and behavior of the characters in *Votes for Women*.

### Behavior Characteristics

In examining the behavior characteristics of the characters, their gender role assignments are influenced predominantly by their social class. With the exception of a few characters who

make speeches in Act II, all of the characters in the play are from the British upper class. In general, the men are the heads of the households, although they do not have to work in the usual sense of the word to provide for their families. The women are expected to be quiet and to engage only in charitable work. Unlike middle-class or working-class families, these women have nannies and maids who perform the childcare duties and household labor, but the women are supposed to oversee their domestic workers. Vida is the only character who steps outside of the traditionally prescribed behavior characteristics.

Both the male and the female characters in the play voice the traditional boundaries that govern feminine behavior, but the more vocal characters about what constitutes proper feminine behavior are the men. Several characters express that to marry is a woman's chief aim in life. Mrs. Freddy describes marriage as a "balance wheel" that keeps a woman from being flighty and irresponsible (p. 177). Echoing Mrs. Freddy's assessment of a married woman, Lord John describes Vida's actions in the following manner: "Philanthropy in a woman like Miss Levering is a form of restlessness. But she's a *nice* creature; all she needs is to get some 'nice' fella to marry her" (p. 177). In addition to keeping a woman stable, marriage gives a woman an identity—she will learn to think like her husband; as Lord John tells Jean, when she boldly stated a political opinion, "It's all right, my child. Of course we expect now that you'll begin to think like Geoffrey Stonor, and to feel like Geoffrey Stonor, and to talk like Geoffrey Stonor. And quite proper too" (p. 176). According to Grotorex, a woman should not be independent or have the desire to engage in independent activities like voting (p. 178). He also believes illiteracy in a woman is best: "The greatest mistake was in teaching them to read and write" (p. 183). The only proper activity for a woman outside the home is charity work, and the work of the church is the

best type of charity work for a woman to do. Her charity work should not digress into "vulgar" areas such as homelessness or poverty (p. 177).

Lady John, Mrs. Heriot, and Mrs. Freddy are all sympathetic to women's issues, but they are also aware they are going against traditional behavior. When they are discussing their opinions and involvement with the suffrage movement, they are careful to move away from the men. Although Mrs. Freddy is an active participant in the women's suffrage movement, she knows she is going against the protocol for a woman. After some of the women in the suffrage movement were arrested for disorderly conduct, Mrs. Freddy acquiesces to her husband's views:

Freddy's been an angel about letting me take my share when I felt I must—but of course I've always known he doesn't really like it. It makes him shy. I'm sure it gives him a horrid twist inside when he sees my name among the speakers on the placard. But he's always been an angel about it before this. After the disgraceful scene he said, "It just goes to show how unfit women are for any sort of coherent thinking for concerted action." (p. 183-184)

Although Mrs. Freddy acts on her beliefs as a freethinking woman, her willingness to abandon her cause because of the public scandal demonstrates her lack of genuine commitment to the cause. Furthermore, Lady John, Mrs. Heriot, and Mrs. Freddy all agree the women's movement is a fad that is to be encouraged only to a point. As Lady John says, "We oughtn't do anything or say anything to encourage this ferment of feminism, and I'll tell you why: it's likely to bring a very terrible thing in its train" (p. 185). The "terrible thing" to which Lady John refers is "sex antagonism" (p. 185). Thus, if women engage too heavily in political affairs, the prescribed balance between the gender roles will be upset.

Jean is caught amongst her desire to be a good wife to Stonor, the elitist views of her relatives, and her newly found devotion to Vida. At the opening of the play Jean is eager to be Stonor's wife, and she is enthralled with being in love. Jean admits Stonor has opened her eyes to a new world. However, when she ventures into this new world by engaging in a political conversation, he does not come to her aid when she needs additional information, and he seems to be embarrassed by her actions (p. 183). Her relatives, especially Mrs. Heriot, want to keep Jean away from Vida's influence because they see Vida as not "a desirable companion for a young girl" (p.181). At the rally, Jean comes into her own and decides to join the movement when she realizes that she has power in her wealth. By the end of the play, however, it is likely that she will conform to be the kind of wife that proper society dictates.

Vida is the strongest and most articulate character in the play. She demonstrates several masculine characteristics; she is straightforward, non-emotional, rational, logical in an argument, and secure in her identity. She is the mouthpiece for the emerging feminist views, and this sets her apart as a "radical" amongst those in her social class. She has gained her strength from her past travails. Her past did not break her; it only made her stronger and more resolved about changing the condition for all women. As noted by Farfan (1996), the entire play was constructed to demonstrate that Vida's active participation in the suffrage movement was an "inevitable outcome" based on her past (p. 71). Vida posits that the greatest evil in the world is "the helplessness of women" (p. 179). More so than Mrs. Heriot or Lady John, Vida gets involved with those whom she is trying to help. She went into the slums of London, unaccompanied by a man as prescribed by the ruling of the magistrate, to see firsthand the condition of homeless women. Although this is shocking to others, Vida says, "You'll never know how many things are hidden from a woman in good clothes" (p. 179). According to Vida,



the female homeless population in London is a serious issue no one will address because of the class of those such poverty affects; as Mrs. Heriot exclaims "You needn't suppose, darling, that those wretched creatures feel it as *we would* [italics added]" (p. 179).

Vida will never marry because marriage adds to the "helplessness" of women. As she says, "Every woman's in a state of natural subjection—no, I'd rather say allegiance to her idea of romance and her hope of motherhood. They're embodied for her in man. They're the strongest things in life—till man kills them" (p. 185). She chides Lady John for upholding the pretense "that to marry at all costs is every woman's dearest ambition till the grave closes over her. You and I know it isn't true" (p. 197). Lady John, however, would never publicly admit that she agrees with Vida's assessment of marriage. Other characters gossip about Vida because she is an unmarried woman, but no one directly confronts her about her situation. She intuits their outrage when she says,

who is there who will resist the temptation to say, "Poor Vida Levering! What a pity she hasn't got a husband and a baby to keep her quiet?" [...] But I tell you the only difference between me and thousands of women with husbands and babies is that I'm free to say what I think. *They aren't.* (p. 198)

Unlike the other women in her social circle, Vida has the courage and the conviction to speak in public about her beliefs and her plans to change society. She does not approve of the passive tactics women have been using to get the laws changed. As she notes, "'Winning over the men' has been the woman's way for centuries. Do you think the result should make us proud of our policy?" (p. 185). In her speech in Act II, Vida outlines her more active path for changing society, and her path is directed at women and women alone. First, she advocates women must learn "to get over our touching faith that, because a man tells us something it's true"

(p. 192). Second, Vida charges society with having a double standard when it comes to judging women, and she wants this practiced changed. For example, she points out men who are homeless are considered more respectable than women who are in the same condition. Her third point is related to point one; she calls on women to abandon the notion they should "depend on the chivalry of men" (p. 193). As noted by Thomas (1997), the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were characterized by a return to the "medieval concept of chivalry" because that philosophy evoked "a nostalgia for a familial and patriarchal order in the face of an alienating industrialism, urbanization, and aggressive, capitalist individualism" (p. 49). Vida adopts an anti-chivalry stance because she believes such notions leave people blinded to the true reality of the subservient position of women (p. 51). Fourth, Vida attacks the judicial system for its inherent bias against women:

Men may boast that an English citizen is tried by his peers. What woman is tried by hers? A woman is arrested by a man, brought before a man judge, tried by a jury of men, condemned by men, taken to prison by a man, and by a man she's hanged! Where in all this were *her* "peers?" Why did men so long ago insist on trial by "a jury of their peers?" A man's peers would best understand his circumstances, his temptation, the degree of his guilt. Yet, there's no such unlikeness between different classes of men as exists between a man and a woman. What man has the knowledge that makes him a fit judge of a woman's deeds at that time of anguish.... (p. 193)

Vida is intent on changing the world without the help of men, but she does use Geoffrey Stonor to her advantage. In what is often characterized as a female ploy, she manipulates him, not with logic but with a form of emotional blackmail, to get what she wants. Vida intends to

use Jean's devotion to her to force Stonor to her side. When he relents, she removes herself as a barrier between them so Jean and Stonor can be married.

As a final point of discussion, the political speeches that are included in Act II demonstrate some clear examples of the division between the domestic world of the woman and the political world of the man. Four speeches are presented in the act, including Vida's speech, and all of the speeches are written to advance the political theme of the play. The first speech is made by a nameless woman, and she is met with taunts such as "Go 'ome and darn yer old man's stockens!" and "Just clean yer *own* doorstep!" (p. 186). The basis of her speech is, "a third of the women o' this country can't afford the luxury of stayin' in their 'omes. They got to go out and 'elp make money to p'y the rent" (p. 187). She continues by wondering, "w'y does any woman tyke less wyges than a man for the same work?" (p. 187). The second speaker, Miss Ernestine Blunt, an organizer of the rally, argues against traditional stereotypes of women and how those stereotypes limit women. Although she is met with some of the same catcalls as the previous speaker, she ardently argues:

Men tell us it isn't womanly for us to care about politics. How do they know what's womanly? It's for women to decided that. [...] And they say it would be dreadful if we got the vote, because then we'd be pitted against men in economic struggle. But that's come about already. Do you know that out of every hundred women eighty-two are wage-earning women? It used to be thought unfeminine for women to be students and to aspire to the arts—that bring fame and fortune. But nobody ever said it was unfeminine for women to do the heavy drudgery that's badly paid. [...] Let the women scrub and cook and wash. That's all right! But if they want to try their hand at the better paid work of the liberal professions—oh, very unfeminine indeed! [...] Men say if we persist in

competing with them for the bigger prizes, they're dreadfully afraid we'd lose the beautiful protecting chivalry [....] We'll let this poor ghost of chivalry go—in exchange for plain justice. (p. 188)

The speaker before Vida is a man, Mr. Pilcher. He points out to the crowd that for the poorest men in England, the vote gave them a power they never had before. He uses humor in his remarks, and as evidenced by fewer negative remarks from the audience, he is listened to by more of the people in the audience than the women, thus supporting the notion that men are more credible sources of information in a public forum.

### Communication Patterns

Because the nature of *Votes for Women* is mainly a propaganda piece, much of the dialogue is structured around the well-crafted debate in the guise of a conversation. Although common communication patterns are not as prevalent in the play, the notion that public speaking is acceptable for men and not for women is woven throughout the play.

As with other behavior characteristics, certain activities are acceptable for men or for women. The women who do speak in public are ridiculed for their actions. Men are revered for their public speaking skills. Jean greatly admires Stonor's speaking skills; she doubts she could ever be as eloquent as he is (p. 176). While hearing Vida speak, Jean says, "I shall never be able to make a speech like that!" to which Stonor replies, "I should hope not, indeed" (p. 189). Even though Stonor wants Jean to be included in his affairs and make speeches on his behalf, he wants her to make "nice little speeches with composure" not the wild and raucous rally speeches he considers undignified and unfeminine (p. 189). Even though she is a member of the upper class and is described as an "inoffensive looking little lady," Greatorrex is abashed when he learns that Mrs. Freddy "had been speaking in public; about Women's Trades Unions" (p. 177).

## Sources of Power

Throughout the play, the sources of power for most of the characters come from traditional gender-based resources. Additionally, because the play addresses the issue of class differences inherent in British society, the play also explores how class is tied to power.

The men in the play, Lord John, Stonor, Greator, Farnborough, and Turnbridge, all have institutionally granted power. They are, by nature of their upper class status, the ones who control the government. They have the financial resources to uphold their power. Farnborough is the only man in the play who is overtly seeking more power. He ingratiate himself to those who know Stonor the best and implores them to help him get into a position of influence within Stonor's cabinet. His pursuit of power and his manner of gaining power are noticed and approved of by those around him; as Lord John says, "that discreet young man will get on" (p. 176).

Jean and Stonor have a relationship built on traditional behavior and power structures—until Vida enters the picture. Jean is described as a beautiful woman, and she understands the power that comes from her youth and her looks. As she tries to grow in her understanding of the world, Stonor tries to keep her in her place. In order to control Jean at the rally, he diverts Jean's attention from the speeches by telling her how pink her cheeks are and later by whispering in her ear (p. 189 & p. 190). However, Stonor's ploys do not have a lasting effect because Jean repeatedly refocuses on the speeches. After hearing Vida make an appeal for contributors, Jean comes to understand her money will lend power to Vida's cause. She takes her newly found understanding of financial power and attempts to use that power to set things right for Vida by trying to make up for a wrong ten years in the past. As she tells Stonor after returning to her aunt's home, "I know you smile at sudden conversions. You think they're hysterical—worse—

vulgar. But people must get their conversions how they can" (p. 196). Even though Jean's motives were for good, she is still naive to the fact that Vida will use Jean's sincere offer to have Stonor marry Vida to gain what she really wants from Stonor.

One other avenue all the other characters use to keep Jean in line is to both subtly and overtly suggest she is inferior because of her age. Jean is 24, but those around her often treat her as a child instead of an adult. Jean is often referred to by the following nicknames: "spoilt child" (p. 175), "my child" (p. 176), "little girl" (p. 195), "poor little innocent" (p. 196), "romantic child" (p. 197), and "inexperienced girl" (p. 200). Both Lady John and Mrs. Heriot try to shelter Jean from conversations and situations they deem inappropriate. Most often, they try to keep her away from Vida. Vida, even in the face of Jean's admiration, also considers her a child. When she and Stonor are discussing Jean's proposal of their marriage, Jean is only referred to by her name one time. Vida even admits to Lady John, right before she talks to Stonor, that Jean "isn't old enough to be able to care as much about a principle as a person" (p. 198). It is this childlike quality that Vida exploits:

I shall coin her sympathy into gold for a greater cause than mine. [...] [I will] hold her over Geoffrey Stonor to make him help us! [...] Geoffrey Stonor shall make it harder for his son, harder still for his grandson, to treat any woman as he treated me. (p. 198)

Vida's power is an intrinsic power that comes from being comfortable with herself and her position in the world. She draws great strength from her past, and she channels that strength into her causes. She has the ability to encourage others, mostly men, to give money to worthy causes because she understands the power that money brings to a cause. She is the only character who understands women in society lack power, and the plight for poor women is even worse. Even though she would rather have women pull together and change society on their own

merits and skills, Vida knows she must have the endorsement of a man like Stonor to secure any type of future success. This reality inspired Vida to manipulate Stonor because she demanded "political compensation" from Stonor, and Farfan (1996) concluded through the final manipulation of Stonor, the play passed judgement "on men and on a patriarchal society" (p. 71-72).

As a final point, a contrast emerges between those in society who can vote and those who cannot. All of the speeches in Act II address shifting power from men only to women and men through voting privileges for all. All the speakers argue if women are given the chance to participate in the political process by voting, the world would be better for all. As Vida says in the conclusion to her speech,

We must get the conditions of life made fairer. We women must organize. We must learn to work together. We have all (rich and poor, happy and unhappy) worked so long and so exclusively for *men*, we hardly know how to work for one another. But we must learn. (p. 193)

### Physical Appearance

Of all of the gender categories, Physical Appearance traits were the least applicable to the play. However, two notable passages are important to this study. First, both Jean and Vida are described as beautiful women (p. 176 & p. 177). Whereas Jean has probably used her beauty to attract men to her, Vida has chosen not to use her beauty to get what she wants because she knows the futility of such actions. As she tells Stonor when he comments that time has not taken away her beauty, "The gods saw it was so little effectual, it wasn't worth taking away" (p. 202). Second, the men in the play have a picture of women who are active in civic affairs. Greatorix posits all women who know anything about politics are "discontented old maids and hungry

widows" (p. 178). His most pointed description of a woman who is strong and politically active is the following:

[She is] the sort of woman who smells of indiarubber. The typical English spinster. You know—Italy's full of her. She never goes anywhere without a mackintosh and a collapsible bath—rubber. When you look at her, it's borne in upon you that she doesn't only smell of rubber. *She's* rubber too. (p. 177)

Thus, the male characters suggest that beautiful and refined women cannot be active in the political scene; only unattractive, disgruntled, single women work in that environment.

### Summary of Research Questions

The majority of the characters in *Votes for Women* fall into traditionally defined gender roles, and their social class enhances these roles. The upper class men are the heads of their households, and they hold all the authority and power both in their homes and in society. They are independent in thought and action. The upper class women are also governed by traditional expectations. They marry because that is what is expected of them, and they exist in a dependent position all their lives. Jean and Stonor will have this type of marriage, as do Lord and Lady John. The older women are careful to pass onto younger women the behavior rules that govern their class. The men in the lower classes, as demonstrated by their inclusion in Act II, are also the heads of their households; however, because the family cannot exist on one salary, many of the lower class women must work. These families are not afforded the privileges the upper class families are. The women, when they must work outside the home, must do so for considerably smaller wages than the men.

The characters' gender roles are determined by their situations, and the limitations and consequences of those roles are relative to the class of the characters. The women in the upper



class may be limited as to the kinds of public activities they can participate in, but wealth allows a degree of privilege the women of a lower class do not have access to. The upper class women see the feminist movement as merely a passing whim—something to occupy their time until the next movement comes along. They are not earning a wage and have never seen the effects of poverty on a family. Consequently, these characters at times come across as elitist, shallow, and unsympathetic to human suffering and depravity. They are naive to the nature of their situation, and they are content to stay that way. Jean is the only character in the group, who by her natural curiosity, comes close to understanding the world beyond her social class.

Vida is the only character who does not fall into the traditional realm, and she is the only character to exhibit behavior outside of the confines of her gender. She will never marry, and she lives a completely independent lifestyle. She goes wherever she wants, whenever she wants. She is an outspoken advocate for women ending their helpless dependency on men. She is determined not to be hindered by being a woman, and she works to end this condition for all women. Vida has come to terms with the fact society will not allow her to marry and be a mother and be an activist for the cause so dear to her heart, so she has resigned herself to a single life. As she poignantly summarizes for Stonor, "You will have other children, Geoffrey—for me there was to be only one. Well, well—since men have alone tried and failed to make a decent world for the little children to live in—it's as well some of us are childless. Yes, we are the ones who have no excuse for standing aloof from the fight" (p. 202). Vida, unlike Jean or any of the other women in her class, has learned not to worry about the pretense that comes with wealth, position, and gender; she lives to accomplish what needs to be done because it is right and just for all.

*Votes for Women* casts gender following a pattern, and the gender patterns are opposites. This pattern is evident both in the upper class and lower class characters. Only Vida defies the nature of the pattern and refuses to be bound by the pattern.

### *Uncommon Women and Others*

Wendy Wasserstein grew up in Brooklyn, New York where she "experienced the conspicuous double standards between boys and girls that ignited her feminist instinct" (Balakain, 1999, p. 231). Her mother insisted she attended charm school and take dance lessons in order to improve her poise and grace. As a student at Mount Holyoke College in the mid-1970s, Wasserstein again faced the double standard; as she articulated in an interview, "first they told young women to graduate and marry lawyers, then to become lawyers [...] they changed the rules in the middle of the game and what you get is both confusion and liberation" (p. 214). Writing from a point of view bestowed upon her by her upbringing, Wasserstein was often described as a "social historian" who "[tracked] social change in a generation both cynical and hopeful, self-aware and confused" (p. 215). Her play, *Uncommon Women and Others* is based on that clash of messages that women receive, and the play uses humor, irony, and sadness to delve into gender roles from the point of view of women on the verge of entering society.

*Uncommon Women and Others* explores the lives and exposes the personalities of five college friends. The opening scene of the play takes place in 1978 in a restaurant six years after the five characters have graduated from Mount Holyoke College. The next seven scenes take place on the campus and are flashbacks to the characters' senior year in college. During these flashbacks, three more college friends are introduced, as well as one woman who was the housemother in the dormitory. The final scene returns to the present time in the restaurant.

The play is basically plotless, and the major thematic focus is on the women and their responses to a changing world. The major characters, Kate, Samantha, Muffet, Holly, and Rita, along with the minor characters of Susie, Carter, Leilah, and Mrs. Plumm, are all trying to come to terms with a traditional lifestyle and the burgeoning alternative lifestyles offered by the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. As best characterized by Worthen (1995), *Uncommon Women and Others* presented

a series of vignettes of affluent young women on the cusp of the nascent women's movement in the U. S.: they are shown trying to negotiate the desire for political and social freedom with their own internalized vision of a woman's traditional social role—seeking a husband, for instance. The college itself becomes a kind of metaphor for their situation...by offering a deeply divided message. Rather than preparing women for an independent intellectual and social life, the college prepares them for a life of dependency and subordination.... (p. 797)

The vignettes address different issues such as premarital sex, career options, family relations, physical appearance, dating, and marriage. Through conversations between varying combinations of characters, they are allowed to present their views about the topic at hand, which in turn develops each character as a separate individual. This technique knits the scenes together even though there is no single, predominant plot line. The restaurant scenes at the beginning and the end provide a framing device to contrast how the characters were in college with how they are functioning in society six years later.

The very core of the play was a study of "old" versus "new" roles for women, but Wasserstein did not suggest that one was better than the other; she provided "a context where all such roles coexisted and can be studied, challenged, accepted, altered, or dropped" (Carlson,

1990, p. 213). As a way of accessing what Wasserstein was writing about, the four gender trait categories, Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance, were helpful in understanding how gender behavior affects the lives of the characters in *Uncommon Women and Others*.

### Behavior Characteristics

The behavior characteristics of the characters are developed in two ways. The first way is through the conversations the characters have with each other both when they were in college and after graduation. Each character is an individual, and she represents differing views about what is acceptable behavior for a woman. From a broader perspective, the behavior characteristics of women in general come from examining the college environment that molds the characters. This view is developed in the play by short speeches by the College president that are included at the beginning of most of the scenes.

Kate Quin is the first to arrive at the restaurant for the reunion. She attended Harvard Law School and has become a successful attorney. She has two men in love with her, and she is dating a third. Being the consummate over-achiever, when Kate felt a contrast between reality and her personal philosophy, her lover strongly urged her to see a psychiatrist. As she says, "I went to see this shrink and we had four productive sessions together and I feel fine" (p. 814). Kate is the one who comments that none of the women attending the reunion have any children, and Kate cannot decide if she even wants to have children.

Kate always held a negative view of marriage and preferred instead to follow a career path, but her notion of marriage is based on a traditional definition. Although she wants passion in her relationships with men, the ideal living arrangement with men would be "if all women had communal apartments [...] and the men came to visit on the weekends and were very nice and

charming, bright—all those things—but they left on Mondays" (p. 806). In the scene where the characters are playing a game of selecting whom they would marry from their circle of friends, Kate would marry Carter because Kate understands she will be the breadwinner in the marriage, and she thinks she can support Carter. Additionally, Carter is an acceptable match because she "is very bright. And if I'm going to be a boring lawyer then I'd want to be married to someone who would stay home and have an imagination" (p. 807). Furthermore, Kate thinks that Carter would "need" her, and she feels that is important in a marriage (p. 807).

Although Kate focused her entire college career on getting into Harvard and being a lawyer, Kate does express some reservations about her chosen path. As she tells Carter,

I'm afraid that I'm so directed that I'll grow up to be a cold efficient lady in a grey business suit. Suddenly, there I'll be, an Uncommon Woman ready to meet the future with steadiness, gaiety, and a profession, and what's more I'll organize it all with time to blow dry my hair every morning. (p. 811)

Kate's concerns suggest although women in the early 1970s were planning on non-domestic careers, the stereotype of working women and the knowledge of that stereotype preceded their entry into the work environment.

Whereas Kate stands as the career woman, Samantha Stewart is at the other end of the spectrum as the devoted wife and expectant mother. She met her future husband, Robert Cabe, in college: "this is the one that I want. He's handsome and talented, and he's better than me and he'll love me. You'll see" (p. 803). Unlike her other friends, Samantha remained a virgin until she married. She knows how to be a good wife to her husband and part of being a good wife is staying home and being available to her husband (p. 807).

Her friends acknowledge Samantha's skills as a wife. In their game of marriage, Rita would marry her because "she'd make the best wife and in a matrimonial situation I could admire her the longest" (p. 807). After a detailed analysis of her friends' skills for marriage, Samantha selects Muffet because she is glamorous, would be able to work in the world, and would get along with her stuffed Piglet.

In a later conversation between Rita and Samantha, Rita tells Samantha she admires her because she is an "ideal woman" and if she could be another woman, Rita would be Samantha (p. 810). Samantha seems to have come to terms with herself and her desire to marry instead of having a career like her classmates. But her self-analysis has an air of sadness; she says,

Robert says that I never grew up into a woman. That I'm sort of a woman child. I've been reading a lot of books recently about women who are wives of artists and actors and how they believe their husbands are geniuses, and they are just a little talented. Well, that's what I am. Just a little talented at a lot of things. That's just why I want to be with Robert and all of you. I want to be with someone who makes a public statement. (p. 810)

Samantha, in the restaurant scenes, still expresses this insecurity. She tells the group she is happy married to Robert, but she is also so intimidated by her husband's friends she does not talk when they come to their home (p. 814).

Although Samantha has chosen the traditional life for a woman that her friends seem to acknowledge and approve of, three scenes in the play suggest the traditional lifestyle for women is not considered to be the best choice. When Samantha rushes in to tell all her friends Robert proposed to her, as indicated by the stage directions, they "are frozen" (p. 810). Only Susie Friend is delighted with her news and rushes off to celebrate with Samantha. Later, when Mrs.

Plumm asks Samantha what she is going to do with her future, Samantha proudly responds, "I'm marrying Robert Cabe. He's going to be a successful actor" to which Mrs. Plumm responds "good luck, dear" (p. 813). However, the accompanying stage directions read as follows: "The good luck, dear here is said in a different tone than it was to Kate" who just announced she was accepted to law school. Given that Mrs. Plumm always regretted her marriage, the less than enthusiastic tone of her "good luck" is strongly suggested. Finally, at the end of the play, Samantha feels inferior to her friends because she thinks they disapprove of her lifestyle; as she says, "I don't live alone, I'm not a professional and I tend to be too polite" (p. 814). What she really wants to tell her friends is she is pregnant, but she hesitates to tell them because she thinks they will be disappointed in her and they will disapprove of her life.

Standing between Kate and Samantha who made opposing choices for their lives, Muffet DiNicola is trapped in the middle. At the restaurant, Muffet tells her friends she is an "insurance seminar hostess" with Metropolitan (p. 800). As in her college days, Muffet still has a tendency to be outspoken, is very self-absorbed with her problems, and is unintentionally cruel with her comments.

In college, Muffet dated several men on her quest to find her "prince." Although she is not as eager to get married as Samantha is, Muffet says, "I suppose this isn't a very impressive sentiment but I would really like to meet my prince. Even a few princes. And I wouldn't give up being a person. I'd still remember all the art history dates" (p. 803). During her senior year Muffet dated a man she referred to only as "pink pants" who told her he was going to go away the following year to see the world on a freighter (p. 809). She is confused because she observed how Samantha could meet a man and get engaged, but when she meets a man and kindles a relationship, he tells her that she is "being clutchy," and he accuses her of putting pressure on

him to make a commitment to their relationship (p. 809). Ironically, Muffet was out on a date with "pink pants" when the other characters are playing their marriage game, so whom she would have selected remains a mystery.

The same confusion that Muffet has in her dating relationships also carries over into other parts of her life. She is unsure of what her life will bring after she graduates from college, and she is the only character who can admit she is frustrated and unsettled. As an example of her confusion brought on by the mixed messages she receives while at Mount Holyoke, she tells Leilah in a self-reflective moment, "But I'm prepared for life. I can fold my napkin with the best of them" (p. 809). However, six years after graduation, Muffet has managed to find some self-reliance:

When I first took my job I wondered what I was doing being an insurance seminar hostess. I mean, where was my prince? I guess I assumed something would happen to me. Now I live in Hartford and I go to work everyday. I won't be in the Alumni Magazine [...] But I never thought that I'd be supporting myself and I am. (p. 814)

Although Muffet may still be searching for what she wants life to bring, she finds contentment for the first time in her status as an independent, working woman.

Just as Muffet is in between Kate and Samantha, Holly Kaplan is also in the middle. By the time of the reunion, Holly is working on her third masters degree and is still very unsure about her future. She, even more than Muffet, is conflicted about following a career path or the marriage path. Holly comes from a wealthy, Jewish family, and her family often puts pressure on her to conform to traditional gender behavior.

Holly has always been insecure about herself and insecure about her life after college. She envies men because they have confidence and many options (p. 811). She wants to be Rita



or Kate because they are confident and self-assured; as she tells Leilah, "Sometimes I want to clean up my desk and go out and say, respect me, I'm a respectable grownup, and other times I just want to jump into a paper bag and shake and bake myself to death" (p. 806). Her insecurity carries over into her relationships with men and her views on marriage. On the one hand, Holly does not want to fall in love with somebody she perceives is better than she is because she would give them everything and then she would end up despising them because she would "live through" them (p. 807). However, a few lines later, Holly reverses her belief and selects Kate to marry in their hypothetical marriages because Kate has the best financial prospect, and she would be happy living vicariously through Kate. Furthermore, she surmises, "I'm sure if we got married my parents would approve and one of us would get our picture in the *Sunday Times*" (p. 807).

Holly lives with the pressure that she is disappointing her parents by her choices in life. In a telephone conversation with Mark, a doctor she met over a holiday break with Muffet, she asks:

Do you know what the expression "Good Ga Davened" means? It means someone who davened or prayed right. Girls who good ga davened did well. They marry doctors and go to Bermuda for Memorial Day weekends. These girls are also doctors, but they only work part-time because of their three musically inclined children and weekly brownstone restorations. (p. 812)

Holly wants to be one of those women, but she is far from it. As she tells the others at the restaurant, "I haven't made any specific choices. My parents used to call me three times a week at seven A. M. to ask me, 'Are you thin, are you married to a root canal man, are *you* a root canal man?' And I'd hang up and wonder how much longer am I going to be in 'transition'" (p. 814).

The final character in the group that meets at the restaurant is Rita Altabel. Rita was the rebel of the group when they were in college, and after six years, she has abandoned some of her radical ways. She has married a man whom she really does not love, and she is seeing a psychiatrist on a regular basis. She is still clinging to her dreams of being a writer. She has revised her prognostication that she will be "pretty fucking amazing by the time [she is] thirty" to reaching her amazing stage at the age of 45 (p. 815).

As the radical feminist while in college, Rita had a specific theory about the way society was organized to keep women from getting ahead in the world. Rita's theory is that the entire society is based on cocks [...] everything I can name is male. When I see things this way, it becomes obvious that it's very easy to feel alienated and alone for the simple reason that I've never been included because I came into the world without a penis. (p. 805).

Her theory extends into her relationships with men. Although she does participate in the marriage game, in fact she initiated it, Rita is not particularly interested in getting married. She moves from man to man and is not afraid to discuss her many sexual conquests in great detail. She enjoys sex with men, and she does not care her promiscuity flies in the face of proper female behavior.

Rita goes on a job interview during the final weeks of the semester prior to her graduation. The tone and the substance of the job interview directly points to the conflicted message about how successful a woman can be in the business environment and to what type of job she is qualified for even with a degree from a prestigious university. Rita narrates how the interview went to her friends:

I told the interviewer that I was an English Composition Major, and I liked Virginia Woolf and Thackeray, but I really wanted to assistant edit beauty hints. I told her yes, I thought it was so important for women to work and I would continue to write beauty hints even with a husband and a family. The big thing at these interviews is to throw around your new found female pride as if it were an untapped natural resource. [...] At the end of the interview she told me it was delightful, I told her it was delightful, we were both delightful. She walked me to the door, as said, "Tell me dear, do you have any experience with a Xerox machine?" I said, "Yes. And I've tasted my menstrual blood." (p. 812)

Rita's explanation of her final shocking remark is that she "refuses to live down to expectation" and be judged by a stereotype or have to fit into a job that is beneath her abilities and skills (p. 812).

Although shortly before graduation all the characters are struggling with their places in the world, Rita is the one character who can verbalize the frustration that they all feel. When Mrs. Plumm asks her about her plans after graduation, Rita offers the following response:

Well, God knows there's no security in marriage. You give up your anatomy, economic self-support, spontaneous creativity, and a helluva lot of energy trying to convert a male (half person) into a whole person who will eventually stop draining you so you can do your own work. And the alternative—hopping on the corporate ladder is just as self-destructive. If you spend your life proving yourself, then you just become a man, which is where the whole problem began and continues. All I want is a room of my own so I can get into my writing. (p. 813)

Even though she has an understanding of the reality of society, she leaves herself no choice to fit into any part of society. Carlson (1990) concluded that in college Rita had an "unabating hatred of roles" and had "not let society pigeonhole her, but she [had] not yet found a way to fashion a world without the old pigeonholes" after her graduation (p. 213).

There are four characters, Mrs. Plumm, Susie Friend, Carter, and Leilah, who are only in the flashback scenes. They are not a part of the reunion, but their gender behavior is swayed or controlled by strict conventions, just as it is for the main characters.

Mrs. Plumm teaches Gracious Living at Mount Holyoke, and she is the housemother who looks out for the students' safety and monitors their growth and development by molding them into proper ladies. She was a graduate of Mount Holyoke, and she always had a desire to study birds. However, she was a "dutiful daughter" and at her parent's insistence she married a sensible and conservative man (p. 808). Upon her retirement, Mount Holyoke will no longer be teaching "Gracious." She is now her own woman for the first time in her life. She is leaving on a trip to Bolivia with her life-long friend, Dr. Ada Grudder, to study birds and possibly rekindle a lesbian relationship she surreptitiously alluded to in her retirement speech (p. 813).

Susie Friend is the perky college student who knows everybody and is involved with everything. She integrates others into college life, and she knows which Ivy League schools have the best men for potential husbands. Samantha, during their marriage game, could never imagine Susie as a good wife because she would be involved with too many committees to be at home much (p. 807). All the characters really did not care for Susie, and ironically, after she seemed so focused on finding the perfect man, she left college to work as a security analyst. No one knows what became of her after graduation.

Carter was a freshman when all the other characters were seniors. She is "incredibly bright" but is also described as a "catatonic" (p. 799). Carter often sits in the room with the other characters, but she speaks very little, and often the other women talk to Carter and tell her things that they would not admit to the others. Carter is not interested in joining all the clubs that Susie suggests nor is she interested in dating Ivy League men. She does make a career decision during her freshman year; she wants to put Wittgenstein on film. Although Carter is not at the reunion, she has completed her dream because Samantha saw Carter's Wittgenstein film on public television. Carter seems to be the only character who was unencumbered by society's norms for women, yet she was also considered to be the strangest of all the characters.

Leilah does not appear very much in the play, but she was probably at one time in the inner circle of friends. She had been Kate's roommate until they parted company prior to their senior year. Leilah, a philosophy major, is like some of the other characters in that she is dissatisfied with her life in general. She dates a man whom she always refers to as "my gentleman friend, Mr. Peterson" (p. 805). She, like Carter, has made a plan for her future. The day after graduation she is flying to Iraq to study anthropology because she is looking for a "less competitive culture" (p. 809). Also like Carter, the reunion group learns what happened to Leilah. According to Muffet, Leilah "married some Iraqi journalist, archaeologist. She gave up her citizenship and converted to Moslem. She can never be divorced" (p. 814). Thus her search for happiness ended in her matriculation into one of the most repressive cultures for women's rights and freedoms; she truly found her "less competitive culture."

The final point in this section is the effect of the characters' education at Mount Holyoke College, and how that education impacted their self-understanding as women. As one of the seven Sister Schools, Mount Holyoke has a long history as a well respected women's college, but

for all of the institution's propaganda about training women to be respected members of society, the College sends mixed messages about what women can really accomplish in society.

The College requires that the women participate in Gracious Living—an etiquette class on how to entertain, how to engage in polite conversation, and how to drink tea in a proper fashion. But the tenants of "Gracious" do not fit into the life that the women will be entering. As Holly aptly complains,

I think "Gracious" is a cultural excess. When I get out of here, I'm never going to have dinner by candlelight in the wilderness with 38 girls in hostess gowns. Unless, of course, I train for Amazon guerilla warfare at the Junior League. (p. 802)

Gracious Living is a ritual at Mount Holyoke, and the course represents the last vestiges of a supposedly bygone era that sought to prepare women for entering into domestic living.

In addition to "Gracious," a male voice, representing the College president, opens almost every scene. The dialogue for the voice reveals the subtle pressure on the women to conform to traditional behavior. The play opens with the following:

The college produces women who are persons in their own rights: Uncommon Women who as individuals have the personal dignity that comes with intelligence, competence, flexibility, maturity, and a sense of responsibility. This can happen without loss of gaiety, charm, or femininity. Through its long history the college has graduated women who help to make this a better, happier world. (p. 799)

Right from the beginning, the dynamic contrast begins and continues throughout the play. The following dialogue opens the last flashback scene:

Commencement brings a whole set of new opportunities, as varied as they are numerous. By the time a class has been out ten years, more than nine-tenths of its members are

married and many of them devote a number of years exclusively to bringing up a family. But immediately after commencement nearly all Mount Holyoke graduates find jobs or continue studying. Today all fields are open to women, and more than fifty percent continue in professional or graduate school. Any one of a variety of majors may lead to a position as Girl Friday for an Eastern Senator, service volunteer in Venezuela, or assistant sales director of *Reader's Digest*. (p. 813)

Although the College wants its graduates to be successful, according to this passage, the success of a woman is found in being a glorified secretary before becoming a wife.

The only opening dialogue that is a true evaluation of what the women will be facing is the opening to the final scene. In this passage, a male voice fades into a female voice for the delivery of the following lines:

A liberal arts college for women of talent is more important today than at any time in the history of her education. Women still encounter overwhelming obstacles to achievement and recognition despite gradual abolition of legal and political disabilities. Society has trained women from childhood to accept a limited set of options and restricted levels of aspirations. (p. 813)

As noted by Balakain (1999), this final passage truly summarized the glaring obstacles that will stand in the paths of all of the characters, and "indeed, their elite education at Mount Holyoke has not prepared them for all the complexities of the world outside their college dorms" (p. 217).

### Communication Patterns

The communication patterns of the characters follow a mixture of feminine and masculine traits. The characters do conform to the traditional view that women should avoid harsh language. Their favorite expression, as they are barred from other more "colorful"

expressions, is "gross-me-out." However, unlike the female pattern, the characters rarely express what could be described as tender feelings towards others, and they do not use talking to bring people closer together. Muffet and Rita are the two characters who have the bluntest and most masculine speech; they lay it on the line, and they do not hold back when they have something to say. Rita will often come into a room and make a pronouncement such as "I've tasted menstrual blood" or make the observation that men should experience menstrual cycles so that they can "be forced to answer phones on a white naugahyde receptionist chair with a cotton lollipop stuck up their crotch" (p. 806). Rita is the only character who freely curses, yet the others seem not to be offended by her language. As a final masculine trait, Rita, Holly, Muffet, and sometimes Kate freely discuss sex and their sexual liaisons.

Samantha is the only character to exhibit a purely female speech pattern. Samantha does not discuss sex with the others, and she is very tactful and polite in her speech. At the opening of the play, Samantha refers to one of her husband's friends who had a "buttock enhancement," and Muffet quickly retorts, "Samantha, only you would call an ass lift a 'buttocks enhancement'" (p. 799). When the dorm room conversation one evening turned to the subject of masturbation, the stage directions indicate that Samantha, "politely changing the subject," offers the group some mixed nuts her mother had sent in the mail (p. 806). The only time that Samantha breaks her feminine speech patterns is when Rita entices her to role-play a male; Rita enters the room and begins the following scene:

Rita: Hey, man wanna go out and cruise for pussy?

Samantha: Beg your pardon?

Rita: Come on, man.



Samantha: (*Putting hair brush in her mouth as if it were a pipe.*) Can't we talk about soccer? Did you see Dartmouth take us? They had us in the hole.

Rita: I'd sure like to get into a hole.

Samantha: Man, be polite.

Rita: (*Gives Samantha a light punch on the arm*) Fuck, man.

Samantha: (*Softly at first.*) Shit man. (*She laughs hysterically.*)

Rita: Fucking "A" man.

Samantha: Excuse me.

Rita: Samantha, you're losing the gist.

Samantha: I just feel more comfortable being the corporate type. Won't you sit down?

Can I get you a drink? Want to go out and buy *Lacoste* shirts and the State of Maine? (p.

810)

While Rita has no problem taking on a male persona and accessing male banter and male characteristics, Samantha, although she tries to participate, cannot fully feel comfortable with the game.

### Sources of Power

*Uncommon Women and Others* presents a contrast between the power that education provides and the traditionally powerless domestic role for women. Higher education has always provided men with institutional power, and the female characters in the play will all have the resource of education. However, any belief in the advancement of women is countered by the male voice at the beginning of the scenes; he suggests the women who graduate from Mount Holyoke can be successful without a loss of their femininity. The characters are reminded of

their other duties by Gracious Living which reinforces the use of individual resources such as charm and beauty from which women have traditionally drawn power but no recognition.

Scene VII highlights the lack of institutional power the women have and underscores that the women should be drawing on their sexuality to provide power. In this scene, Muffet recounts an incident in her women's history class, which ironically is taught by a man. As Muffet explains:

After two months of reading about suffragettes and courageous choices, this French dish comes into class dressed in a tight turtleneck and skirt. And you know how for seminar breaks everyone brings in graham crackers, well this chick brings in home made petit-fours. And she stands in front of the class and tells us she had not prepared her report on Rosie the Riveter because, "You girls are wasting your time. You should do more avec what you have here—(*Muffet points to her breasts.*) than what you have up here." (*Muffet points to her head.*) And in less than five seconds the class is giving her a standing ovation, everyone is applauding. Except Holly and Rita, who grabbed the petit-fours and ran out of the room in protest. I didn't do anything. I felt so confused. I mean this chick is an obvious imbecile. But I didn't think she was entirely wrong either. (p. 803)

Muffet articulates the bind that she and all her friends are in; as she says a few lines later, "Sometimes I know who I am when I feel attractive. Other times it makes me feel very shallow like I'm not Rosie the Riveter" (p. 803).

Additionally, Kate, Rita, Samantha, and Holly all feel their inherent lack of power when compared to men, and each character has her own way of dealing with the situation. Their "uncommon education" has not equipped them with the necessary skills to stand up against this

deficit. In order to cope, Rita and Holly sometimes use sex to even the score, but they are trapped in a static state of indecision six years after graduation. Kate tries all that much harder at work. Samantha just sits quietly and copes by not saying anything.

### Physical Appearance

The Physical Appearance category is the least applicable category to this play; however, the notion that women should look a certain way is brought out in the play. The characters must wear skirts or dresses to tea and to their Gracious Living class so that their dormitory, according to Mrs. Plumm, does not "get a reputation" (p. 801). Acknowledging the perception that women are focused on their bodily image, they are all nonetheless concerned with remaining thin in the face of midnight snacks of graham crackers and marshmallow fluff. As far as individual appearances are concerned, Holly is the only character who is referred to as heavy. Her family, as they do about other issues, pressures her to lose weight. Holly tells Rita, Kate, and Samantha about her mother's latest telephone call: "My mother called me today and told me she saw a 280 pound woman on Merv Griffin, who had her lips wired together and lives on *Fresca*. She offered me a lip job as a graduation present" (p. 809).

### Additional Observations

An additional theme that is relevant to this study is the importance of female friendships. The entire premise of the play is a reunion six years after graduation, and all have gained the perspective time can bring. They all comment about how important that it is for them to remain in contact over the years. Muffet expresses she misses female friends in her new life, and even the career-absorbed Kate understands she more deeply appreciates friendships with other women now than she did when she was in college (p. 800). Holly probably best summarizes what the others are thinking when she says, "I guess since college I've missed the comfort and acceptance

I felt with all of you" (p. 814). A final example of the importance of friendship to the characters is their marriage game. As discussed in the Behavior Characteristic section, the women engage in a game of picking a marriage partner out of the members of their group. Carlson (1990) suggested this scene was the purest form of female bonding and friendship within the entire play.

### Summary of Research Questions

The gender roles for the characters in *Uncommon Women and Others* are a blend of traditional and non-traditional roles. Kate and Muffet are working women who have not married at this time. Samantha is married and is expecting a baby. Rita, although she is married, is still focused on being a writer. Holly is still a student and does not work and is unmarried. Of those who do not attend the reunion, Carter is working, and Leilah is married. Of those who have chosen to work, all are in traditionally masculine fields—law, insurance, and filmmaking. By the time of the reunion, all the women have made clear choices about their futures, except for Holly and possibly Rita. For Samantha, her choice to marry and be a housewife causes her to feel inferior in comparison to her classmates because she did not decide to work, but all of her friends admire her for her choice. Yet each character, to one degree or another and regardless of her decisions, has had to come to terms with the nature of society in the 1970s after the second wave of feminism. As Wasserstein pointed out in a 1987 interview, *Uncommon Women and Others* "was a play about Holly and Rita, which examines the fact that the Women's Movement has had answers for the Kates of the world (she becomes a lawyer), or the Samanthas (she gets married). But for the creative people, a movement can't provide answers" (Worthen, 1995, p. 818).

The one character who was truly limited by gender expectations was Mrs. Plumm. She definitely had interests that did not fall in line with acceptable female behavior, but she

succumbed to the pressure and married because that was what was expected of her. She spent her entire professional career teaching women how to use their charm and personality in order to develop signs of good breeding and civility. These skills only cultivate dependency and are not valued in a work setting. In truth, she is propelling the women into a situation that was similar to hers.

Although there are no male characters in the play, the male view does come into the play and it does impact the characters. They have male teachers and the voice of Mount Holyoke is male. Even with no direct characters and only an indirect presentation in the play, the male and female gender characteristics are developed along specific patterns and those patterns are polar opposites in nature.

### *Oleanna*

As a contemporary playwright, David Mamet has carved out a niche all his own through his unique style of writing. His work was characterized by its "staccato, often elliptical dialogue; small casts; and Spartan stage settings; and conclusions that leave the audience searching to find words capable of defining what the characters' behavior has implied" (Ryan, 1996, p. 393). Cast in a slightly different way, Gidmark (1998) tersely described Mamet's style as "gritty urban dialogue in a dog-eat-dog world" (p. 184).

Set on an unidentified college campus in the late 1980s or the early 1990s, *Oleanna* is Mamet's exploration of sexual harassment and its accompanying power struggle between a college professor, John, and his student, Carol. Mamet said he began working on this play prior to the Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas sexual harassment hearing, and he repeatedly emphasized it was merely a coincidence the play was released only a few months after the sensationalized

hearings (Ryan, 1996; Walker, 1997). For Mamet, *Oleanna* was a "play about two people, and each person's point of view is correct. Yet they end up destroying each other" (Walker, p. 157).

In Act I of the play, Carol is in John's office to plead her case about her grade. She is failing his course, and she is there to try and make John understand her position and to get help in understanding the course material. John is about to be granted tenure, and so he is purchasing a home on the prospect of having a long career with the university. His wife, in celebration of their new home and of John's tenure appointment, is trying to get John to leave work and come to their new home to attend what is, for John, a surprise party. Thus, John takes numerous phone calls from his wife, his realtor, and one of his friends throughout the time he and Carol are having their conference. During their time together and amid the telephone calls, John never lets Carol complete her thoughts; he repeatedly interrupts her and finishes her sentences or swiftly changes the topic of conversation. He even at one point gets wrapped up in his own musings he begins making personal notes while Carol waits to resume their conversation. John projects the persona of the rebel professor who flaunts his knowledge and his power in front of his students. Carol negatively reacts to these tactics, and she disapproves of his apparent disdain for the higher education system that has brought them together. John, because he "likes" Carol and because he sees a younger version of himself in her, offers to give her an A in his class if she will come to his office a few more times for tutoring sessions (p. 1646). Although Carol is reticent to agree to John's offer, she gives in after John assures her he can make the rules that govern his course and, they will not be doing anything wrong. After several more attempts to have an intellectual conversation with Carol, John finally ends this session when he receives a telephone call and is told about the surprise party that is now about over.

In Act II, the shortest act in the play, John has discovered Carol has filed a complaint of sexual harassment against him with the Tenure Committee. The Tenure Committee has called a special meeting to investigate the charges. John requests that Carol come to his office to discuss these charges. John does not understand how Carol could make such a claim. In contrast to the first act where she is woefully inarticulate, Carol is becoming more self-confident and more able to articulate how she feels and what she thinks. Out of frustration, John tries to physically restrain Carol in his office so she will continue to talk to him. Carol begins screaming for help, manages to break free, and runs from his office.

Act III is the final encounter between John and Carol. John again calls Carol to his office to attempt to persuade her to recant her charges. Having been found guilty of improper behavior by the Tenure Committee, he is in danger of being terminated by the University, and he has spent two nights in a hotel thinking through how his life has changed and trying to understand what he has done that was so wrong. Carol, who is now a member and spokesperson for a vaguely identified Group, refuses to change her mind. She comes to John's office this one last time to try and convince him his behavior was wrong. John finds out, through a telephone call, Carol is planning to bring criminal charges of attempted rape against him for the behavior he demonstrated when she was last in his office. As a bargaining chip, Carol wants John to sign a statement of support—a list of demands—to be given to the University and in turn she will drop the criminal charges against John. Carol's statement includes a list of books that her Group wants banned from the campus because of their sexist themes and overtones. John's book is on the list, and he refuses to sign the document. John receives a final phone call from his wife, and during the phone call, he calls his wife "baby" (p. 1656). As Carol is gathering her things to go, she off-handedly rebukes John for referring to his wife as "baby" because, as she explains to him,

the pet name is diminutive and sexist. In the closing moments of the play, John loses control and brutally beats Carol.

Three of the four gender categories were evident in *Oleanna*. The three relevant categories are Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, and Sources of Power. Because the play included no references to the appearances of the characters nor did the characters discuss physical traits, the category of Physical Appearance was not evident in this play and was not included in this analysis.

### Behavior Characteristics

John and Carol begin by exhibiting traditional gender behavior characteristics, and by the end of the play, they change positions. Whereas John portrays a strong and articulate persona at the beginning of the play, by the end, he exhibits a weaker and inarticulate persona. This same reversal is also applicable to Carol who moves from weak to strong in how she presents herself.

During the entire first act, John exhibits masculine behavior traits. He is objective, logical, direct, self-confident, and is non-emotional except for brief moments of anger. He has little patience with his wife. He implies she is not good at solving problems because during the opening telephone conversation, he insists she call his friend Jerry to help solve the supposed problem with the purchase of the house. When he finally gets off of the telephone, he turns to Carol and treats her as an interruption in his day; as he explains, "I'm very sorry. I'm somewhat rushed" (p. 1642). In a business tone, John explains to Carol the importance of his time when he tells her, "I have a *telephone* call that I have to make. And an *appointment*, which is rather pressing; though I sympathize with your concerns, and though I wish I had the time, this was not a previously scheduled meeting, and I ... (p. 1645). John is ambitious and draws his esteem from his position as a college professor. He acts in isolation—his classroom is his to control and to



operate as he alone sees fit. In a brief theoretical, albeit one-sided conversation he attempts to have with Carol, he summarizes his breadwinner position in his home. John's career as a professor has been going well, and he has published his first book. On the basis of that book, John will be granted tenure—a move that will secure his position within the University. Although he needs the Tenure Committee to secure his future, he boasts of his superiority over the committee:

They're *garbage*. They're a *joke*. Look at me. Look at me. The Tenure Committee. The Tenure Committee. Come to judge me. The Bad Tenure Committee.

The "Test." Do you see? They put me to the test. Why, they had people voting on me I wouldn't employ to wax my car. And yet, I go before the Great Tenure Committee, [...] (p. 1647)

He says, "Am I entitled to my job, and my nice home, and my wife, and my family, and so on [...] (p. 1647). Although he poses this as a question, the remark is more of a statement that characterizes how he looks at his position in the world.

John's only different moment with Carol is when he begins to tell her something about his childhood. He tells Carol his "most persistent memories" from his early childhood were of being told he was stupid which left him feeling "unworthy and unprepared" (p. 1645 & p. 1646).

When Carol questions why John is taking the unorthodox approach of being personal with her, John says,

Listen: I'm talking to you as I'd talk to my son. Because that's what I'd like him to have that I never had. I'm talking to you the way I wish that someone had talked to me. I don't know how to do it, other than to be *personal*,...but.... (p. 1646)

However, John cannot persuade Carol to see things from his point of view. In a moment when Carol borders on hysterical behavior, John, acting in a fatherly manner, "goes over and puts his arm around her shoulders" and repeatedly says "Sshhhh. Sshhhh. Let it go a moment [...] It's all right. [...] I understand..." (p. 1649). But his venture into the personal only serves to place a deeper wedge between them.

John's supreme security in his position as a teacher in command of his students allows him to make his proposal to Carol. He offers to "take off the Artificial Stricture, of 'Teacher,' and 'Student'" in order to help Carol understand the material (p. 1646). He suggests to Carol that

Your grade for the whole term is an "A." If you will come back and meet with me. A few more times. Your grade's an "A." Forget about the paper. You didn't like it, you didn't like writing it. It's not important. What's important is that I awaken your interest, if I can, and that I answer your questions. Let's start over. (p. 1647)

Carol's objections to his proposal are weak, and he dismisses any concerns she has because it is his class, and he can make the rules.

In contrast to John's bravado and self-assurance, Carol is meek, weak, and searching. As a student in John's class, she turns to him for help. She tells John three times in quick succession that she has been doing what she was told to do, but that she does not understand the course material or what John is talking about (p. 1643). Early in their meeting, John tries to dismiss Carol's complaint, but in one of her longest speeches in Act I, Carol recognizes his status as teacher and hers as student:

No. No. There are *people* out there. People who came *here*. To know something they didn't *know*. Who *came* here. To be *helped*. To be *helped*. So someone would *help* them. To *do* something. To *know* something. To get, what do they say? "To get on in

the world." How can I do that if I don't, if I fail? But I don't *understand*. I don't *understand*. I don't understand what anything means...and I walk around. From morning 'til night: with this one thought in my head. I'm *stupid*. (p. 1644-1645)

Carol has learned to sit in class and smile to hide her inferiority (p. 1649). Throughout the entire first act, she is emotional, non-competitive, and lacks self-confidence and self-esteem. She came to the University to better herself, but all she finds is isolation, loneliness, and a lack of understanding.

Act II is a transition act for both John and Carol. John is slightly weaker in his position, and Carol is slightly stronger in her position. In Act I, Carol came to John seeking help, but in this act, John initiates the meeting with Carol.

As in Act I, John takes a straightforward approach in dealing with Carol. However, he lacks some of his confidence and self-importance he had in the first act. He tries several strategies to get Carol to withdraw her complaint from the Tenure Committee, and all are based on maintaining his role as provider and head of his household. His first appeal is based on maintaining a job that he loves: "You see, (*pause*) I love to teach. And flatter myself I am *skilled* at it. And I love the, the aspect of *performance*. I think I must confess that" (p. 1650). John admits that he was covetous of tenure and that to gain tenure was to secure his position within his family. Building on his position within his family, his second appeal is to point out that the report could jeopardize his provider status with his family. As he tells Carol, "Now, as you don't have your own family, at this point, you may not know what that means. But to me it is important. A home. A Good Home. To raise my family" (p. 1650). John concludes this argument by informing Carol that if the Tenure Committee reverses its decision and does not grant him tenure then his future is in jeopardy. As he explains, "I will not be able to close on my

house. I will lose my *deposit*, and the home I picked out for my wife and son will go by the boards" (p. 1650). But these arguments do not work; Carol is unmoved.

John then changes his tactics with Carol. In a move that is traditionally female, he tries to express his feelings: "I was hurt. When I received the report. Of the tenure committee. I was shocked. And I was hurt" (p. 1650). Again, Carol is unmoved by his display of emotions, and she tells, "I don't care what you feel. Do you see? DO YOU SEE? You can't do that anymore" (p. 1651). When he questions her feelings, she informs him that what she feels is "irrelevant" (p. 1651).

In a return to masculine behavior, John tries logic couched in a quasi-philosophical stance. John suggests if he and Carol agree they are both human beings then by nature of their humanity they must acknowledge they have different opinions. If these two premises are true, then they could agree to disagree and thereby set aside the complaint as a form of understanding each other. Again, Carol is not swayed by his approach. Finally, in his most patriarchal move, he tries to "save" Carol from the humiliation this scandal will cause her, and again she is not affected by this approach (p. 1653). As a last resort born of his frustration to get through to Carol, he tries to physically restrain her in his office, which prompts Carol to scream, "LET ME GO. LET ME GO. WOULD SOMEBODY HELP ME? WOULD SOMEBODY HELP ME PLEASE...?" (p. 1653).

Just as John is changing, so is Carol. Differing from Act I, she grapples less and less to find the words to express herself, and she is more confident in her ability to deal with John. Carol's writing is so precise in her report to the Tenure Committee he can hardly believe she wrote the report. In her most pointed speech up to this point, she succinctly tells John the crux of the problem:

But to the aspirations of your students. Of *hardworking students*, who, come here, who *slave* to come here—you have no idea what it cost me to come to this school—you *mock* us. You call education "hazing," and from your so-protected, so-elitist seat you hold our confusion as a *joke*, and our hopes and efforts with it. Then you sit there and say, "what have I done?" and ask me to understand that *you* have aspirations too. But I tell you. I tell you. That you are vile. And that you are exploitative. And if you possess one ounce of that inner honesty you describe in your book, you can look in yourself and see those things that I see. And you can find revulsion equal to my own. (p. 1652)

Carol isolates the one tactic that John did not try with her—admission to his participation in the events; however, this acknowledgement would require empathy, which is a trait John does not seem able to use.

John only receives one telephone call in Act II. The call in this act is from his wife, and she is concerned about losing the house and the deposit that they made on the house. When John realizes he cannot calm his wife's fears and frustrations, as he did in Act I, he sends another man to help her, "Baby, baby, will you just call Jerry" (p. 1652). This does not seem to appease his wife because he has to say it again before he ends his conversation. This telephone call is different from the Act I calls in that at the end of the call, he after he hangs up the telephone, he turns to Carol and says, "I'm sorry we were interrupted" (p. 1652). John did not show Carol this respect during any of the Act I interruptions.

In Act III, the transformation that started in Act II is now complete. John has lost all of his verbal prowess and his confidence, while Carol has gained confidence, strength, and a very commanding speaking ability. Just as Carol had to endure John's pontifications in Act I, he must now sit and listen to her expound on her views.

John tries one more time to change Carol's mind about the situation. He will be fired if she does not go to the Tenure Committee and ask for mercy on him. The only argument that he can muster is to accuse Carol of having no feelings. She counters his charge with the following: "That's my point. You see? Don't you have any feelings? Your final argument. What is it that has not feelings? *Animals*. I don't take your side, you question if I'm human" (p. 1654). As she points out to John, he is angry with her and the situation, but he is to blame for his circumstances:

You don't understand? You're angry? What has led you to this place? Not your sex. Not your race. Not your class. YOUR OWN ACTIONS. And you're angry. You ask me here. What do you want? You want to "charm" me. You want to "convince" me. You want me to recant. I will not recant. Why should I...? What I say is right. (p. 1654)

John assumes Carol is acting as she is because she is angry about some long-ago wrong. Although she must do it for him, Carol describes what John thinks about women like Carol: "You think I'm a, of course I do. You think I am a frightened, repressed, confused, I don't know, abandoned young thing of some doubtful sexuality, who wants, power and revenge. (*Pause.*) Don't you? (*Pause.*)" (p. 1654). After finding out about the charge of rape and about the list of demands that Carol's Group wants signed that includes banning his book, John is reduced to nothing. When Carol says, "Don't call your wife baby" (p. 1656 & p. 1657), John resorts to the only outlet that he has left—a show of physical strength and force.

### Communication Patterns

As with their behavior characteristics, John and Carol also go through a transformation with their communication patterns. In Act I, John exhibits very masculine communication traits

and Carol very feminine communication traits, but by Act III, John and Carol have reversed their traits. Language, its use, and its interpretation, is a major recurring theme within the play, and ultimately, Carol's interpretation of John's language costs him his tenure and his position at the University. Indeed as Dean (1990) summarized, "Mamet's characters yearn for more than they have, and they express their yearnings in words that, although are often impoverished and debased, authentically—often brilliantly—reflect their predicament" (p. 16).

Act I depicts John and Carol's inability to communicate because they come from different circles. John does almost all of the talking during his initial meeting with Carol. He speaks in long, often convoluted, sentences with no regard for whether or not he is understood. He tells a story about the fornication habits of the rich and the poor that only he finds topical and amusing (p. 1648). John's speech, because he uses long sentences and big words, maintains his power and authority as a college professor. For example, John is trying to get Carol to take fewer notes and listen more, so he says, "But I was suggesting, many times, that that which we wish to retain is retained oftentimes, I think, better with less expenditure of effort" (p. 1647). Bechtel (1996) summarized that John's "language has earned him the identity of teacher; a title which, ironically, lends his language a credibility it would not otherwise have. Thus language has bestowed on him a certain privileged use of language" (p. 36). Carol keeps repeating over and over in Act I that she "doesn't understand" the course material, his book, his thoughts, or his answers. Yet John refuses to set aside his erudite manner; he speaks to impress. Additionally, Carol's "lack of access to [John's] discourse put her at a compelling disadvantage" when trying to plead her case to her teacher (Babenhause, n. p., 1998).

Throughout the act, John interrupts Carol or completes her sentences for her (p. 1643, p. 1644, p. 1647, & p. 1648). After being interrupted on several prior occasions, the following dialogue takes place:

John: [...] What is a prejudice? An unreasoned belief. We are all subject to it. None of us is not. When it is threatened, or opposed, we feel anger, and feel, do we not? As you do now. Do you not? Good.

Carol: ...but how can you...

John: ...let us examine, Good.

Carol: How...

John: Good. Good. When...

Carol: I'M SPEAKING... (*Pause.*)

John: I'm sorry.

Carol: How can you...

John: ...I beg your pardon.

Carol: That's all right.

John: I beg your pardon.

Carol: That's all right.

John: I'm sorry I interrupted you.

Carol: That's all right.

John: You were saying?

Carol: I was saying...I was saying...(She checks her notes.) How can you [...] (p. 1648)

After this incident, John is more careful, and he does not interrupt Carol anymore.



John uses gender exclusive language. He incorporates the "he" pronoun when the situations could just as easily refer to a "she." For example, he makes the following statement "If the young child is told he cannot understand. The he takes it as a *description* of himself" (p. 1645). A few lines later, John makes an analogy to a pilot flying an airplane, and he labels the pilot as "he" (p. 1646). Finally, this last piece of dialogue comes toward the end of the act:

John: Should all kids go to college? Why...

Carol (*Pause*): To learn.

John: But if he does not learn.

Carol: If the child does not learn?

John: Then why is he in college? Because he was told it was his "right"? (p. 1649)

The irony of the last example is that John is talking to a female college student who has been questioning her ability to learn in a college environment, while he continues to refer to generic college student with a masculine pronoun.

In contrast to John's speech, Carol's speech is tentative and hesitant. She searches for the right words to express her thoughts, and she rarely speaks in complete sentences, preferring mostly phrases. She asks numerous questions, often answering John's question with another question. Her only moment of verbal strength is when she shouts at John to stop interrupting her. Badenhausen (1998) summarized Carol and John's opposing patterns of communication. He said Carol "prefers clarity to language that obscures meaning. John, on the other hand, repeatedly employs an artificially-heightened vocabulary that draws attention to his academic status" (n. p.).

Act II is also the transition act for the characters' speech patterns. John, although he still has the majority of the lines in the act, speaks less than in Act I. Carol is beginning to speak in

longer and longer sentences. She still, when she begins to get uncomfortable, will revert to asking questions or using short phrases, but on the whole, she is more aggressive in her conversation skills. Carol is now the one who interrupts John on two occasions. In the first example, John begins by saying, "I feel that one point..."; Carol begins to speak, but John swiftly says, "One second..." (p. 1650). Carol does let John complete his thought. In the second example, Carol does not back down:

John: I would like to help you now. I would. Before this escalates.

Carol (*simultaneously with "escalates"*): You see. I don't think that I need your help. I don't think I need anything that you have.

John: I feel...

Carol: I don't *care* what you feel. Do you see? DO YOU SEE? You can't *do* that anymore. [...] (p. 1651)

In addition to interrupting John, Carol calls attention to his gender-biased speech. When he refers to the Tenure Committee as "Good Men and True," Carol explains,

And you speak of the tenure committee, one of whose members is a woman, as you know. And though you might call it Good Fun, or An Historical Phrase, or An Oversight, or, All of the Above, to refer to the committee as Good Men and True, is a demeaning remark. It is a sexist remark, and to overlook it is to countenance continuation of that method of thought. (p. 1651)

By Act III, the transformation in communication patterns is complete. John now is the one who must ask for an explanation of words or asks Carol to repeat that which he does not understand. He evokes language that will bring Carol to his side instead of language that will maintain a hierarchy of power. But it is all too late for John, as Carol summarizes:

The issue here is not what I "feel." It is not my "feelings," but the feelings of women. And men. Your superiors, who've been "polled," do you see? To whom *evidence* has been presented, who have *ruled*, do you see? Who have weighted the testimony and the evidence, and have *ruled*, do you see? That you are negligent. That you are guilty, that you are found wanting, and in error; and are not, for the reasons so-told, to be given tenure. That you are to be disciplined. For facts. For facts. Not "alleged," what is the word? But proved. Do you see? By your own actions. (p. 1654)

As Carol did not understand John in the first act, John does not understand Carol in this act.

The core of the indictment against John is based on interpreting his words. John's love of words, their finite meanings, and their implications that he so skillfully used in Act I are the source of his undoing. Carol takes John's words, his actions, and his belief that "we interpret the behavior of others through the screen we...[...] create" and uses John's own words to build a successful case of sexual harassment against him (p. 1646). She is now the teacher, and John is the student:

Carol: My charges are not trivial. You see that in the haste, I think, which they were accepted. A *joke* you have told, with a sexist tinge. The language you use, a verbal or physical caress, yes, yes, I know, you say that it is meaningless. I understand. I differ from you. To lay a hand on someone's shoulder.

John: It was devoid of sexual content.

Carol: I say it was not. I SAY IT WAS NOT. Don't you begin to *see*...? Don't you begin to understand? IT'S NOT FOR YOU TO SAY. (p. 1655)

Even to the very end, after the Tenure Committee has found him guilty, John never once accepts culpability for his actions or for his words that he so flippantly threw around.

Although written prior to Mamet's completion of *Oleanna*, Dean (1990) summarized Mamet's unique use of language in all of his plays. Dean observed that Mamet's work "constitutes a theatre of language: the lines spoken by his characters do not merely contain words that express a particular idea or emotion; they are the idea or emotion itself" (p. 15). This observation is applicable to the use of language in *Oleanna* because it is John's use of language that begins the conflict between teacher and student.

### Sources of Power

The very center of this play is a struggle for power. John has all the power in the beginning, while Carol has none. He loses his power by the end, and Carol has all the power; however, John strips Carol of the ability to use her newly acquired power when he refuses to sign her statement and when he violently beats her in the closing moments of the play.

As an acknowledgement of John's power, Carol comes to John at the beginning of the play to get help to pass his course. John and Carol are participants in what he calls "arbitrary" and "institutional" rules of decorum that govern a classroom. John is the authority figure in his class, and Carol must follow his dictates if she is to pass the course. John points out to Carol the nature of higher education is for him to make assignments and then to "grill" the student to see if she or he has met the requirements of the class (p. 1647). From this position of power, John is able to change the rules in order to strike a bargain with Carol:

John: Your grade for the whole term is an "A." If you will come back and meet with me.

A few more times. [...] Let's start over. (*Pause.*)

Carol: Over. With what?

John: Say this is the beginning.

Carol: The beginning.

John: Yes.

Carol: Of what?

John: Of the class?

Carol: But we can't start over.

John: I say we can. (*Pause.*) I say we can.

Carol: But I don't believe it.

John: Yes, I know that. But it's true. What is The Class but you and me? (*Pause.*)

Carol: There are rules.

John: Well. We'll break them.

Carol: How can we?

John: We won't tell anybody.

Carol: Is that all right?

John: I say that it's fine.

Carol: Why would you do this for me?

John: I like you. Is that so difficult for you to...

Carol: Um...

John: There's no one here but you and me. (*Pause.*)

Carol: All right. I did not understand. When you referred [...] (p. 1647)

The text never mentions any sexual contact between Carol and John, nor does the text suggest that John's ulterior motive was sexual in nature, but he does use the power of his position to bargain with Carol.

John fails to recognize the power in his position, and he truly believes he has the power of the institution on his side. Because he is in need of the power of the institution, John now

whole-heartedly supports the academic process and the people that he so openly condemned under his persona of a rebel professor. He tells Carol, "they [the Tenure Committee] will meet and hear your complaint—which you have the right to make; and they will dismiss it. They will dismiss your complaint" (p. 1650). John also fails to see that, from Carol's point of view, he is a "Patriarch in [his] class," (p. 1651) and that he "[loves] the Power. To deviate. To invent, to transgress...to transgress whatever norms have been established for us" (p. 1652).

Carol came to the University seeking knowledge to better her life—to garner the institutional power of education that society freely gives to men. From a view that is alien to John, Carol tries to explain how his elitist views harm those who are different:

And some of us. (*Pause.*) Overcame prejudices. Economic, sexual, you cannot begin to imagine. And endured humiliations I *pray* that you and those you love never will encounter. (*Pause.*) To gain admittance here. To pursue that same dream of security *you* pursue. We, who are, at any moment, in danger of being deprived of it. By...

John: ...by...?

Carol: By administration. By the teachers. By *you*. By, say one low grade, that keeps us out of graduate school; by one, say, one capricious or inventive answer on our parts, which, perhaps, you don't find amusing. Now you *know*, do you see? What it is to be subject to that Power? (p. 1655)

Carol is seeking understanding from John—something that he cannot give. Ryan (1996) supported Carol's position; he said,

Carol's socioeconomic background, her sex, and her educational experience are, in truth, incomprehensible to the professor. For Carol, John's class, and probably most of

academia as well, is a Tower of Babel, where each professor hawks his—or her—own peculiar, contradictory doctrine. (p. 396)

Ryan described John as "the last straw" for Carol; therefore, Carol's unidentified Group was her only source of comfort, support, and understanding (p. 396).

However, Carol wants something from John. Carol, either from her own personal analysis, from the influence of her Group, or from a combination of the two, understands that in the higher education system, somebody must select the textbooks, and with the selection of the books comes enormous power. The books govern what is taught and by implication what is not taught. As she tells John, "You have an agenda, we have an agenda. I am not interested in your feelings, or your motivation, but your actions. If you would like me to speak to the Tenure Committee, here is my list" (p. 1656). She is now in a position to bargain with him, as he was with her in the first act. But John stands behind his career, his family, and his position:

No, no. It's out of the question. I'm sorry. I don't know what I was thinking of. I want to tell you something. I'm a teacher. I am a teacher. Eh? It's my *name* on the door, and I teach the class, and that's what I do. I've got a book with my name on it. And my son will *see* that *book* someday. And I have a respon...No, I'm sorry I have a *responsibility*...to *myself*, to my *son*, to my *profession*...[...] And, and, I owe you a debt, I see that now. (Pause.) You're *dangerous*, you're *wrong* and it's my job...to say no to you. That's my job. You are absolutely right. You want to ban my book? Go to *hell*, and they can do whatever they want to me. (p. 1656)

Although he does not realize it because he does not interpret his comment in the same way that Carol does, to call his wife "baby" on the telephone just moments after the above dialogue takes place, affirms all that Carol has said about John. His physical assault, presumably heard by his

wife because the stage directions do not indicate that he hung up the telephone as they do in previous instances, will, most likely, remove John permanently from higher education.

#### Additional Observations

*Oleanna* has stirred both audiences and critics to mixed reviews of the play. Some see Carol as an unrealistic character because seemingly overnight she changes from an inarticulate and shy student to a vengeful and spiteful woman (Bechtel, 1996). MacLeod (1995) suggested that

Carol seemed to be regarded, from all points on the political spectrum, as a monster straight out of men's worst nightmares. This grotesque figure may then be disavowed as an insulting caricature or affirmed as the whole horrible truth about current feminist trends; either way, though, the consensus is that the play has constructed Carol in such one-sided negative terms that no genuine debate about the merits of her position is necessary or even possible. (p. 200-201)

Likewise, Carol was also characterized as the mouthpiece of a radical and subversive group that brainwashed her and filled her with their brand of hate speech to be directed at John (MacLeod, 1995). The harshest critic described Carol as a "femme-fatale and p. c. fascist rolled into one" and concluded that Mamet's working title for the play was "The Bitch Set Him Up" (Mufson, 1993, p. 111). However, these views sell Carol short and do not allow her the ability to have her own cognitive and rational thoughts. Furthermore, they disregard John's actions and behaviors as demonstrated by the treatment of his wife on the telephone.

Additionally, a final point of unrest about the play comes from the charge of rape Carol levels at John and then the subsequent violent ending of the drama. At the very end of Act III, a telephone call from Jerry alerts John to the fact that Carol is pressing charges of attempted rape.



As she tells him when he hangs up the telephone, "I thought you knew [...] You tried to rape me. According to the law. [...] You tried to rape me. I was leaving this office. You 'pressed' yourself into me. You 'pressed' your body into me" (p. 1656). A common response to the ending of the play is cheering, by both female and male audience members because they considered John's attack on Carol an appropriate response to "Carol's overblown" charge of rape. Her charge against him shifted the sympathy away from Carol and moved it to John (Ryan, 1996, p. 401). As summarized by Ryan,

The professor may be patronizing and less effective as an educator than he ever dreamed, but a rapist? Carol's feckless charge denigrates the plight of true rape victims and cheapens many of her earlier, excellent points about sexism and abuses of power in academia. (p. 401)

Also noting the usual audience response to the final scene, Silverstein (1995) took a slightly different interpretation. He noted that "Never before has Mamet allowed the verbal aggression his characters directed towards women to express itself in terms of brutal physical violence, and never before has an audience (both men and women) shown itself so ready to embrace this misogyny" (p.103). Silverstein posited that the audience members' response was based on interpreting John's action not as an act of aggression but as a defensive maneuver designed to protect the institutions of the home and the University from unfounded charges and attacks. Although Carol's charge of attempted rape probably would not stand up in a court of law, she does lose some credibility as an advocate for changing unjust behavior, which diminishes the play's message about gender equity in higher education.

### Summary of Research Questions

Although the primary role John assumes is that of a teacher and Carol's is that of a student, they exhibit traditional characteristics attributed to men and women. John takes great pride in traditional role of family supporter. He, on several occasions, points out to Carol he picked out the house he wants to purchase and his career is what makes him the head of his family. But it is his role as leader of his class that motivates him to deprive Carol of any power as a student and is what ultimately drives him to self-destruction. Carol is limited both by her status as a student and by her place as a female in the traditionally male bastion of higher education.

Both characters suffer consequences when they change roles. John takes his power too far when he beats Carol. Carol's power in their relationship is short-lived; she cannot capitalize on the situation as she had hoped.

Both of the characters demonstrate gender behavior drawn down very sharp lines, and the gender lines are opposite in nature.

### Common Themes

All three plays in this chapter had several common themes that unite the plays. These themes emerged as a result of the detailed examination of each play, and these themes were not discovered until after the plays were analyzed as individual pieces. All of these emergent themes are related to the gender behavior of the characters and the overall view of males and females in the plays.

In relation to the background material presented prior to the analysis of the plays, all three plays in this chapter were in line with the historical perspectives of women in the public

world. For example, Greateorex, in *Votes for Women*, laments that women were ever educated in the first place while the characters in *Uncommon Women and Others* are bombarded by the notion that they will eventually end up as wives and mothers regardless of the fact that they pursued an education to prepare them for a life beyond the home. Carol, in *Oleanna*, battles the exclusive nature of higher education. For the characters like Vida, in *Votes for Women*, or Kate, in *Uncommon Women and Others*, who choose to focus on causes or careers instead of domesticity, they are met with stereotype images of their behavior and reprimands from others for their actions. Finally, even though *Votes for Women* was set in Great Britain, the arguments why women should not vote also applied to the women in the United States, as did the notion that women needed the privilege to vote in order to be seen as equal participants in a democratic society.

When female characters are engaged in activities outside of the home, they strive to be heard and to participate and often will become extreme in their beliefs. Vida, in *Votes for Women*, has abandoned what society deems appropriate for women. Consequently, she must continually explain herself and contend with the stares and whispers of others. As women with similar interests to Vida's come together in the public forum to rally for the vote, they must endure heckling and humiliating comments in order to advance their cause. Vida, because she is so devoted to her cause, has completely abandoned the need for men, and she will have nothing to do with them on a personal level. She has made this conscious choice so that she can work more efficiently for her cause. Likewise, in *Oleanna*, Carol is the invisible student in the first part of the play; she is ignored in class and when she tries to seek help, she is met with condescending attitudes and paternalistic care. In order to be heard and taken seriously, Carol changes—she becomes the articulate equal of her professor and she eventually overpowers him

for a brief moment. Carol's association with her Group has given her a place where she is heard and has provided Carol with the confidence to speak out. Carol is now associated with radical feminism, and she seems very comfortable with that association.

A stereotyped image for women who participate in activities outside the home developed in all three plays. In *Votes for Women*, Greatorox was the chief spokesperson for the image when he described the spinster, "rubber" women in the first act of the play. Mrs. Freddy and Vida shatter the notion that politically active women cannot be attractive. They do not fit into his view that women who are politically active are drab and mannish creatures because they are beautiful, petite, and alluring women. In *Uncommon Women and Others*, Kate describes the view of the corporate woman as the cold and efficient woman in the gray suit. She fears if she achieves her goal of becoming a lawyer this will be her fate and her future. In *Oleanna*, Carol is the most articulate character when it comes to voicing how women who have certain beliefs about the equality of women are perceived by those around them. Her evaluation that John thinks of her as "a frightened, repressed, confused, I don't know, abandoned young thing of some doubtful sexuality, who wants, power and revenge" suggests that women who advocate a feminist stance are lacking in maternal warmth, are hostile toward men, and are devoid of feminine sexuality (p. 1654).

Several characters experience an overwhelming personal battle in deciding between home and career—or a traditional versus a non-traditional lifestyle. The plays present several varied methods of looking at how this theme is applicable to the plot and to the characters. Jean, in *Votes for Women*, experiences this pull when she thinks she is going to be involved in Stonor's political career. She expects to be treated as an equal participant, but as she learns, she is expected to be the decorative trim on his path to success. She does not expect to have her own

career in her own right, which places her in contrast to Vida, who has abandoned the notion of being a traditional woman. Jean's offer to not marry Stonor implies that she is prepared to live a life without Stonor and will instead join the movement as wholeheartedly as Vida has. However, Vida ensures that Jean will have a traditional life with a husband and children even though she is against that lifestyle. Vida chooses this lifestyle for Jean on the basis that her past too sheltered; therefore, Jean cannot be more than intellectually committed to the movement. In other words, Vida is judge and jury for Jean based on Jean's carefree past in contrast to her own troubled past. The contrast between traditional and non-traditional is most evident in *Uncommon Women and Others*. Characters like Kate and Muffet have their own careers and they support themselves, while Samantha has a husband who supports her, and they are expecting a child. Others like Holly and Rita cannot decide which path to take, so one stays in school while one chooses to indulge her neurotic side and has a husband whom she does not love. For Kate and Samantha, there is a sacrifice each must make because of their choices. Kate, as a result of being so career and success-oriented, has trouble committing to a personal relationship, and her newest man is bothered by her work-oriented lifestyle. He was bothered enough to suggest she see a psychiatrist in order to "cure" her competitive nature. Samantha's sacrifice is that of silence in a crowd. Her husband's friends intimidate her, and she believes that her own friends will look down upon her for not having a career.

As a final theme, the plays demonstrate an attempt by men to hold onto the status quo in order to preserve their power in the world outside of the home. At its very center, *Votes for Women* is a play driven by the need to change society in order to equalize power for all. Denying women the right to vote ensures that the men will continue to control public policy. The majority of the male characters do not want women to have a part in the democratic process

and have successfully kept the women who seek to change the system at bay. Stonor lends his support to the movement not because he believes in the moral premise of the women's movement but because that is the only way that he can be assured he will marry Jean. Similarly, in *Uncommon Women and Others*, the position of women as primarily as wives in society is affirmed by the male voice that introduces the scenes. By speaking about how the women who graduate from Mount Holyoke can obtain work as aids to men in power and they will eventually marry and devote all of their time to raising children suggests that even though they will be educated, the women will still occupy less than influential positions in society. The most personal look at the preservation of men in power is found in *Oleanna*. John argues his case with Carol from his position of power within his home and within the academic structure. She threatens to dismantle that position on all fronts. She is responsible for his eventual dismissal from the University thus he cannot purchase a home and will lose all he has worked for and all he thought was secure. As John's personal world of power is changed, so too would the power in higher education if he agreed to sign Carol's list of demands and had textbooks banned from classroom use. John cannot go that far, which ultimately is disastrous for Carol.

### Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed analysis of *Votes for Women*, *Uncommon Women and Others*, and *Oleanna*. Each play was examined based on the four gender categories of Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance. After the analysis of each play, several emergent themes that united all the plays were presented. All three plays were set in an environment other than the home, and the predominant gender characteristics were focused on male and female behavior in the public world.

## CHAPTER 6

### PLAYS WITH SYMBOLIC SETTINGS

This chapter explores the plays that take place in settings that are symbolic in nature. The setting represent places such as utopias, fantasy worlds, or the inner workings of a character's mind. Often, the settings of the plays are used to bring out other themes, especially gender related themes about women in the home or women in the public domain, and these themes are similar to the emergent themes from the plays with more realistic settings. This chapter discusses the following plays: *Our Town*, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *spell #7*, *Fool for Love*, and *How I Learned to Drive*.

#### *Our Town*

Thornton Wilder's classic play *Our Town* was written in 1938 and has become one of the most produced plays in the American canon (Biggsby, 1982). Originally a novelist, Wilder had written four novels by the time he turned to the theatre and penned *Our Town* (Bunge, 1999). As a dramatist, Wilder wanted to engage his audience in the action so that they would absorb the meaning and learn from the play itself. Wilder engaged his audience in two ways—through the use of "familiar characters and situations" and a "heavy reliance on theatrical convention" (p. 350). *Our Town* used both of Wilder's tenets to draw the audience into the action, and Haberman (1989) noted Wilder's techniques of incorporating flashbacks and presenting information that does not flow in chronological order were unique theatrical inventions for his time period. Although Wilder's masterpiece focuses on the theme of living every moment to the fullest, he uses two families to develop his theme. Gender issues are brought into focus through the manner in which Wilder presents not only the two families but the entire town as well.

*Our Town* examines the fictional town of Grover's Corners, New Hampshire by spotlighting events beginning in 1901 and ending in 1913. Two families, the Webbs and the Gibbs, are the central focus of the action, and the action of the play is presented by scenes that a Stage Manager calls for in order to bring the town to life for the audience.

Both the Webbs and the Gibbs are four member families—two parents and two children—and they are neighbors. Mr. Webb is the editor of the newspaper, and he and his wife are proud of their children, Wally and Emily. Emily is older, and at the beginning of the play, she is a bright, talkative young girl who excels in her academic studies. Likewise, Doc and Mrs. Gibbs are also proud of their children, George and Rebecca. George is older, and his talents are expressed on the baseball field rather than in the classroom. To round out their family units, Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Gibbs are housewives who run two thoroughly efficient households. Neither of the families seems to suffer from any financial difficulties, nor do any of the scenes demonstrate that the characters argue or have any relationship difficulties beyond the trivial level. George and Emily, who have known each other all their lives, eventually marry and form a home of their own before Emily dies unexpectedly in childbirth.

In addition to the Webbs and the Gibbs, the play has other characters who are used to round out the description of the town. Other tangential characters in the play include the sheriff, Constable Warren; a milkman, Howie Newsome; a friend of Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Gibbs, Mrs. Soames; the drugstore proprietor, Mr. Morgan, and a town drunk and Methodist choir director, Mr. Stimson. Some characters like George and Emily's friends and the schoolteachers are spoken to during the play, but they are never seen.

A major character in the play is the Stage Manager and his command of the action of the play. He calls on characters to re-enact scenes from the past in order to give the audience a feel



for the town and to advance the plot of the play. He is an omniscient character who knows the past and the future. In the third act, through his power, the audience hears the reflections of dead characters, and he allows Emily to relive a day in her life. According to Bigsby (1982), the Stage Manager operated in total isolation from the rest of the characters because he was "not challenged for his supremacy. His manipulative control [was] not threatened. He [sculpted] the action and [elicited] the moral purpose" (p. 260).

The final act of the play, which is comprised mainly of the deceased town members' conversations, articulates the play's primary theme—people's inability to live and enjoy life while it is happening. Burbank (1961) described the play's inner message as "a picture of the priceless value of even the most common and routine events in the life and of the tragic value of every moment...the people of Grover's Corners live their lives banally and seldom get beneath the surface of life" (p. 90).

The four gender trait categories used to analyze the characters' actions, Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance, were applicable to understanding the gender behavior that is presented by the characters and by the entire town. Although this is a three-act play, only Acts I and II contain relevant material to this study. Act III completes the action of the play, but because the characters in the act are speaking from the grave, the act expands on the larger theme of the play and did not hold any information pertinent to this study.

### Behavior Characteristics

The behavior of the characters with regard to their gender is established in Act I, which is entitled "Daily Living," and then reaffirmed and refined in Act II, which is entitled, "Love and

Marriage." The play presents a sharp division between the male and female characters, and all the characters adhere to strictly traditional gender behavior characteristics.

The Stage Manager begins the play by explaining the geography of the town, and he provides the audience with an initial characterization of the town. He describes Grover's Corners as a "nice town," and it is a town where "nobody very remarkable ever come out of it" (p. 6). In addition to commanding the specific scenes of the play that demonstrate the lives of the inhabitants, the Stage Manager brings in experts to talk about the town. First is Professor Willard from the university who gives a brief sketch of the "history of man" in Grover's Corners (p. 22). Then, the Stage Manager calls on Mr. Webb to provide a social and political report about the town. Mr. Webb describes the town in the following manner: "Well...I don't have to tell you that we're run here by a Board of Selectmen.—All males vote at the age of twenty-one. Women vote indirect. We're lower middle class: sprinkling of professional men...ten per cent illiterate laborers" (p. 24). As a final testament to how the town operates, the Stage Manager explains that a copy of the play *Our Town* will be placed in the cornerstone of the new bank building so, "the people a thousand years from now'll know a few simple facts about us [...] This is the way we were in the provinces north of New York at the beginning of the twentieth century" (p. 33). To leave this legacy about the town is important to the Stage Manager because

Y'know—Babylon once had two million people in it, and all we know about 'em is the names of the kings and some copies of wheat contracts...and contracts for the sale of slaves. Yet every night all those families sat down to supper, and the father came home from his work, and the smoke went up the chimney,—same as here. (p. 33)

In essence, the Stage Manager lays the groundwork that supports the traditional view of men and women, and his remark concerning an ancient culture suggests he assumes the past operated by the present's view of what constitutes a proper family.

The play firmly establishes the differences between the male and the female roles with respect to the responsibilities of each role. The men of the town are family providers, and they all have jobs away from the home. Doc Gibbs practices medicine, and Mr. Webb runs the newspaper. Howie Newsome produces and delivers dairy products to the townspeople; Mr. Morgan operates the drug store; Simon Stimson directs the choir, and Constable Warren enforces the law. Although the audience never sees him, Mr. Cartwright runs the bank, and he has the distinction of being the richest man in town. The opening scene depicts Joe Crowell as a boy of 11 delivering the local newspaper which suggests he is learning to be responsible and work outside of the home. This tradition is continued when Joe's brother Si assumes this job after Joe grows up and leaves Grover's Corners to attend the university. The Gibbs' son, George, grows up and becomes a farmer, and had he not died on a camping trip, the Webb's son, Wally, would probably also have grown up and assumed some type of job, possibly even inheriting the newspaper from his father. All of the women, Mrs. Gibbs, Mrs. Webb, and Mrs. Soames, are wives and mothers. The daughters of the two major families, Emily and Rebecca, both grow up to become wives and mothers. The young women in the play do not have part-time jobs like the young men. The only females in the play who work are Miss Foster and Miss Corcoran, and they are both teachers. At the opening of the play, Joe Crowell tells the Stage Manager that Miss Foster is getting married and will be leaving her post at the school, thereby establishing that women, who must work outside of the home, will only do so until they marry. Additionally, Joe does not approve of Miss Foster's choice because in his words, "I think if a person starts out to be

a teacher, she ought to stay one" (p. 8). Cardullo (1998) commented that Miss Foster's options were clearly defined in the course of the play; she could "either remain the teacher she was trained to be and become a spinster, or give up teaching for the life of a wife and a mother" (p. 9). Because a scene in a classroom is not a part of the play, the audience never sees a female character work outside of the home. Furthermore, with regard to the Gibbs and the Webbs, the audience never sees any scenes where the men are working at their professions. They are shown coming home from work (p. 7 & p. 43) but never at work. This is not the case for their wives who are repeatedly shown preparing meals, doing laundry, or performing other domestic chores.

The domestic work of the women is further noted by the Stage Manager. When he observes both Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Gibbs making breakfast, he stops the action of the play at the beginning of Act II to comment, that

I don't have to point out to the women in my audience that those ladies they see before them, both of those ladies cooked three meals a day—one of 'em for twenty years, and other for forty—and no summer vacation. They brought up two children apiece, washed, cleaned the house,—and *never a nervous breakdown*. (p. 49)

According to Haberman (1989), this passage highlighted the necessity of domestic work in society, and he concluded that "the two women have lived the lives they found themselves in...a life of full of productivity and effective action" (p. 94).

Within the two separate homes, the actions of the characters also support a very traditional behavior concept for the men and the women. For example, Mrs. Gibbs acknowledges her husband's position as head of the household by asking him to speak to George about chopping wood: "I declare, you got to speak to George. Seems like something's come over him lately. He's no help to me at all. I can't even get him to cut me some wood" (p. 13).

Furthermore, Mrs. Gibbs leaves the amounts of the children's weekly allowance up to her husband, but she does promise George that she will ask his father about giving him a raise even though she thinks, "twenty-five cents a week's enough for a boy your age" (p. 15).

Traditional roles are passed down from parent to child. Emily, in response to a friend's invitation to come to her home to study, says, "I *can't* Lois. I've got to go home and help my mother. I *promised*" (p. 27). When Emily arrives home from school, Mrs. Webb instructs Emily to "help me string these bean for the winter" (p. 30), and she carefully monitors how Emily does the chore and instructs her to "get them a little bigger" (p. 31). A similar form of instruction takes place in the Gibbs home, except this time it is between father and son, and the lesson addresses what chores a son should willingly do around the home. Doc Gibbs says,

Well, George, while I was in my office today I heard a funny sound...and what do you think it was? It was your mother chopping wood. There you see your mother—getting up early; cooking meals all day long; washing and ironing;—and still she has to go out in the back yard and chop wood. I suppose she just got tired of asking you. She just gave up and decided it was easier to do it herself. And you eat her meals, and put on the clothes she keeps nice for you, and you run off and play baseball,—like she's some hired girl we keep around the house but that we don't like very much. (p. 37)

In addition to correcting his son's behavior, Doc Gibbs also raises his son's allowance, but "not, of course, for chopping wood for your mother, because that's a present you give her, but because you're getting older" (p. 38). Although Doc Gibbs is respectful of the tasks that his wife performs, his lesson to George is that there are some duties that women will perform and the men should do some duties for the women. Doc Gibbs also neglects to mention his wife asked him to speak to George; he makes it sound like he observed George's irresponsible behavior.

Although Emily is being instructed by her mother on how to do household chores, Emily, especially at the beginning of the play, is the only character to exhibit both traditional and non-traditional female behavior traits. As a precocious teenager, Emily announces to her mother at breakfast that she is "the brightest girl in school for [her] age" and that she has "a wonderful memory" (p. 15). To this boastful remark, Mrs. Webb merely retorts, "Eat your breakfast" (p. 15). Emily enjoys making speeches in class, and as she tells her mother, "I'm going to make speeches all my life" (p. 31). Even George acknowledges that Emily is much better in school than he is—especially in math, and he enlists her help with the homework. In a more traditional belief pattern, Emily believes that a "man [should] be perfect" like her father and George's father, and that girls are "too nervous" to be perfect (p. 66). Eventually Emily puts aside her dreams of making speeches and is content to marry George and build a life and family with him.

The relationship between George and Emily bears out the traditional gender patterns established by their parents. George is steadfast in his decision to become a farmer, which would allow him to provide for a family. As he tells Emily, "I want to be a farmer, and my Uncle Luke says whenever I'm ready I can come over and work on his farm and if I'm any good I can just gradually have it" (p. 29). Emily, in keeping with the traditional, dependent role, responds by saying, "you mean the house and everything?" (p. 30). They eventually marry, build a home of their own, and have children, thus keeping alive the traditional pattern for men and women in Grover's Corners.

Act II, which focuses on the marriage of George and Emily, presents how men and women look at the institution of marriage. As with everything else in the town, how the characters look at marriage is governed by their sex.

Doc Gibbs and Mr. Webb have set ideas about entering marriage and about weddings in general. On the morning of his son's wedding, Doc Gibbs recalls his own nervousness about his wedding, but he also suggests his wife will suffer more than he will today: "Well, Ma, the day has come. You're losin' one of your chicks" (p. 52). His stoic attitude reflects the non-emotional attitude that men are expected to have. Although Mr. Webb describes marriage as a "wonderful thing," his comments address the importance of a wedding to women. He tells George that

It's the womenfolk who've built up weddings, my boy. For a while now the women have it all their own. A man looks pretty small at a wedding, George. All those good women standing should to shoulder making sure that the knot's tied in a mighty public way. (p. 59)

In addition to describing the wedding procedure for George, Mr. Webb also offers some marital advice to George. His advice represents the only non-traditional male behavior in the entire play. Mr. Webb says,

George, I was thinking the other night of some advice my father gave me when I got married. Charles, he said, Charles, start out early showing who's boss, he said. Best thing to do is give an order, even if it don't make sense; just so she'll learn to obey. And he said: if anything about your wife irritates you—her conversation, or anything—just get up and leave the house. That'll make it clear to her, he said. And, oh, yes! he said never, *never* let your wife know how much money you have, never. (p. 60)

When George begins to protest that he could not follow this advice, Mr. Webb concludes by saying that "I took the opposite of my father's advice and I've been happy ever since" (p. 60).

Contrary to their husbands, Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb have different reactions on the day of their children's wedding. On the morning of her son's wedding, Mrs. Gibbs freely admits that she has been crying all morning. She sums up her feeling in the following statement:

I declare, Frank, I don't know how he'll get along. I've arranged his clothes and seen to it he's put warm things on,—Frank! they're too young. Emily won't think of such things. He'll catch his death of cold within a week. (p. 53)

She characterizes weddings as "perfectly awful things. Farces,—that's what they are!" (p. 53). Yet despite her misgiving, she does admit that "people are meant to go through life two by two. 'Tain't natural to be lonesome" (p. 54). In contrast, Mrs. Webb appears less emotional and more concerned with the more practical aspects of a wedding, such as sewing and packing. However, right before the ceremony is set to begin, Mrs. Webb expresses the following frustration:

Oh, I've got to say it. You know, there's something downright cruel about sending our girls out into marriage this way. I hope that some of her girl friends have told her a thing or two. It's cruel, I know, but I couldn't bring myself to say anything. I went into it blind as a bat myself. (p. 76).

Echoing Mrs. Gibbs' sentiment, Mrs. Webb concludes her statement with "The whole world's wrong, that's what's the matter" (p. 76).

Both George and Emily, like their parents, have different views on getting married. Although each has looked forward to this day, they each have last minute fears and frustrations about the future. On the morning of his wedding, George comes downstairs and announces "Only five more hours to live" and the stage directions indicate that he "makes the gesture of cutting his throat, and a loud k-k-k" sound (p. 56). By this comment he is suggesting that by entering marriage he will be losing his freedom, which is a common message that society passes



onto men about to enter a marriage (Lindsey, 1997). Although Emily is not seen on the morning of the wedding, her mother does explain that during breakfast, Emily said "I can't eat another mouthful, and she put her head down on the table and *she* cried" (p. 76).

Prior to actually beginning the wedding ceremony, the characters are allowed to have one last moment to explain how they feel. In this highly theatrical scene, George, Emily, Mrs. Gibbs, and Mr. Webb all talk, but the other characters, who are in the church to attend the wedding, appear frozen until this moment has passed. George gets nervous first, and he tells his mother, "I don't want to grow old. Why's everybody pushing me so?" (p. 77). But when his mother reminds him that he is a man now, George quickly pushes aside his fears about his future and is bright and cheerful about getting married. In a similar outburst to George's, Emily tells her father she hates George and she really does not want to get married. Mr. Webb then initiates the following conversation:

Mr. Webb: I'm giving away my daughter, George. Do you think you can take care of her?

George: Mr. Webb, I want to...I want to try. Emily, I'm going to do my best. I love you Emily. I need you.

Emily: Well, if you love me, help me. All I want is somebody to love me.

George: I will, Emily. Emily, I'll try.

Emily: And I mean for *ever*. Do you hear? For ever and ever. (p. 80)

Emily's previous confidence in herself is now gone, and she reaches out to George based on need and her desire to be loved. Thus, with all fears aside, Emily and George enter into a traditional marriage and begin their life together with George as the provider and Emily as dependent housewife.

## Communication Patterns

As with the Behavior Characteristics category, all applicable examples in this category occur in Acts I and II. Only a few notable examples of traditional male and female speech patterns emerge during the analysis of this play.

As far as traditional female communication traits are concerned, a few examples are found in the play. First, in a short scene between Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Gibbs, Mrs. Webb explains to Mrs. Gibbs how to get her husband to take her to Europe on a vacation. As she suggests, "Just keep droppin' hints from time to time—that's how I got to see the Atlantic Ocean, y'know" (p. 20). This approach to getting something is an indirect method and suggests that a woman is better served by hinting around as opposed to directly presenting her wish. Second, the women in the play are associated with the act of gossiping—an activity that annoys their husbands (p. 39 & p. 41). Third, as Mrs. Webb acknowledges in her monologue prior to Emily's wedding, women of that day did not discuss sex. The proper avoidance of discussing sex that restrains Mrs. Webb, even though she feels guilty about it, will probably keep Emily's friends from talking about it as well. Fourth, when Emily is with George she feels the most comfortable when she uses a traditionally female speech pattern. Initially, during the scene when she and George both discover that they "were meant for one another," Emily employs a masculine speech pattern (p. 62). She is blunt, direct, and harsh with George. She forcefully says,

I don't like the whole change that's come over you in the last year. I'm sorry if that hurts your feelings, but I've got to—tell the truth and shame the devil. [...] Well, up to a year ago I used to like you a lot. [...] And then you started spending all you time at baseball...and you never stopped to speak to anybody anymore. Not even to your own

family you didn't...and, George, it's a fact, you've got awful conceited and stuck-up, and all the girls say so. (p. 65)

The moment that Emily says these things, she regrets being so bold and begins to cry and to apologize to George. As they continue their conversation, Emily changes to a more feminine pattern and uses her words to encourage George and to be supportive of his decision not to attend agricultural college. From that moment on, Emily changes from the girl who wanted to make speeches all her life to a more genteel young woman on the eve of fulfilling her dream to become George's wife and live on his farm.

### Sources of Power

In *Our Town*, power or the struggle for power is not an issue for the characters. The characters seem content with their power or their lack of power; none of the characters try to change their situations.

In Grover's Corners, the wives acknowledge their husbands as the heads of the households, and they work to uphold that tradition. They turn decisions like how much allowance to give the children over to the men, along with any disciplinary action that must be taken with the children. Although Mrs. Gibbs believes that people at least once in their lives "ought to see a country where they don't talk in English and don't even want to," she will go to her grave never getting to leave because her husband does not share her desire to travel, and she will not go against his wishes (p. 21). As the play takes place prior to the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the women of the town were not allowed to vote, and they did not participate in the governing of the town. Although Emily is a bright and conscientious student, she is not encouraged to go to college.

The men of the town are granted access to institutional power that comes from education. Only the men in the town are educated—Doc Gibbs went to medical school, and Mr. Webb also makes a reference to attending college (p. 60). Additionally, Joe Crowell, before getting killed in the war, also attended college (p. 9). George, even though it is well established that he is a mediocre student, is afforded the opportunity to go to college if he wishes. As Cardullo (1998) noted, George, the "dimwitted" yet "kindhearted" young man, is the senior class president, while Emily is the secretary-treasurer (p. 7).

The play also provides a hint that the town itself is arranged by a class-based system. The town is arranged according to a preference for Protestant, Anglo-Saxon values and beliefs. All the families with that background are grouped in the center of town, and the Stage Manager explains that "Polish Town" and the "Canuk families" live "across the tracks" (p. 4). Additionally, the "Catholic Church is over beyond the tracks," while the mainstream Protestant churches are right in the center of the town. Professor Willard describes the heritage of the preponderance of the town as "English brachiocephalic blue-eyed stock" (p. 22). Although not a major theme in the play, the play does subtly suggest those at the top of the racial ladder, i.e. white European descendants, control power in the town.

### Physical Appearance

In the Physical Appearance category, there is only one significant reference applicable to gender behavior. After having a brief conversation with George when he first tells her of his plans to be a farmer and to take over his uncle's farm, Emily inquires of her mother, "am I good looking?" to which Mrs. Webb answers, "Yes, of course, you are. All my children have got good features; I'd be ashamed if they hadn't" (p. 31). Emily, however, is not satisfied with her mother's response, and she rephrases the question: "What I mean is: am I *pretty*?" (p. 31). Her

mother assures her that she has "a nice young pretty face" (p. 31) and again that she is "pretty enough for all normal purposes" (p. 32). Emily is worried that she will not be pretty enough "to get people interested" in her—ultimately, she is concerned that she is not pretty enough to keep George interested in her. Although Mrs. Webb is reticent to discuss her daughter's appearance, she proudly shared with Emily that she was the "prettiest girl in town next to Mamie Cartwright" (p. 32).

#### Additional Observations

In considering *Our Town* as a whole and as explained previously, the play is not necessarily a play about life in America at the turn of the century; however, the everyday lives of the characters convey the larger theme. Therefore, because the family setting was used to explore a larger message, *Our Town* was included in this chapter as opposed to Chapter 4, which contained plays set strictly in a family setting in order to explore relationships and the dynamics within those relationships.

But the actions of the characters and the careful detail with which the setting is depicted cannot be ignored and is the subject of much debate. As suggested by Goldstein (1965), the characters in the play participated in activities that allowed Wilder to convey the "notion that these New Englanders...[were] authentic representations of the entire race" (p. 102). If Goldstein's suggestion is accurate, then this play has determined that the gender behavior of the characters is a universal action for all of society. In that case, the women in society will forever be following the domestic route while the men will always be the providers.

Siebold (2000) decided that the characters in the play held a universal quality about them. He described Emily as the epitome of the "typical American girl" who followed a predictable path of development into womanhood (p. 44). Furthermore, Siebold suggested that "Wilder

relates that Emily's adult life was a success: she was a competent mother of her first child, a fine wife, and she and George created a reasonably loving life together" (p. 44-45). Siebold, however, when he discussed George, labeled him as the representing the typical male moving into his manhood. He did not include any discussion of George pertaining to the type of father or husband he was. George's worth as a human was attributed to his reaching manhood, and contrary to Emily, his success was not tied to how good or how bad a husband and father he was.

Another view that often is attached to *Our Town* is that it is merely a nostalgic look at a more perfect and simple society, but this view ignores the fact that Grover's Corners is a stifling environment for those who reside there. As argued by Bunge (1999), "the parents of Grover's Corners repeatedly [undermined] their children's confidence and imagination" (p. 359). She characterized the town as a place where change came slowly and was resisted at all costs. As evidence of her premise, Bunge noted that the parents quickly criticize their children's ambitions and that George readily agrees to give up a college education because it would take him away from Emily and Grover's Corners. In summary, Bunge concluded that "what most critics see as a golden community in fact consists of people terrified of change who not only stifle themselves, but give no signs of confidence or hope in others" (p. 360).

From a slightly different perspective, Porter (2000) surmised that Wilder, through the crafting of the play, was creating an American myth. He suggested that Grover's Corners "[resembled] no real town on hill or in valley; it [corresponded] to an ideal whose model exists potentially in the attitudes of every American" (p. 71). In light of Porter's theory then, the characters in this play live out their gender roles, which propagates the notion that women should remain at home and only men are suited to work outside of the home. As a further comment along this same line, Bigsby (1982) observed that

[Wilder] ignored the demeaning realities of city life which so obsessed his contemporaries, offering instead a determinedly white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant version of American history and myth. In reaching for the permanent and the constant he chose to ignore the immediate and the tendentious. His characters are, on the whole, well fed, invulnerable to the economic realities which determined the contours of possibility for so many Americans. (p. 272)

In closing, Bigsby said, "Certainly in *Our Town* [Wilder] wrote a play which for many was the clearest dramatic statement of American values" (p. 272).

### Summary of Research Questions

The gender behavior in *Our Town* follows a very traditional pattern—the women are in charge of the homes and the men earn a living away from the home. Both the Gibbs and the Webbs have model families that smoothly operate when each family member fulfills his or her designated duties. The characters do not behave as if they are limited by their gender roles, and they do not attempt to take on additional roles beyond their gender role assignment. Gender role behavior follows a very specific pattern for the both the men and the women, and those patterns are opposite in nature.

Emily Webb is the only character to exhibit any behavior that is uncharacteristic for her sex. As established, she is a good student, and she enjoys public speaking. No one encourages her to attend college to develop her academic talents or to expand her knowledge in order to obtain employment. Upon completion of high school, Emily settles down to being a wife and eventually to becoming a mother. She changes from an independent girl who helped George with his algebra homework into a dependent woman looking for someone to love her and take care of her. She seems to have no regrets about the life she has chosen. Her only regret when

she looks back on her life after her death in childbirth is that human beings do not enjoy and truly appreciate what it means to be alive and have the precious gift of life.

### *Funnyhouse of a Negro*

Adrienne Kennedy's first play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, was completed in a drama workshop conducted by the noted playwright Edward Albee, and Kennedy won an Obie Award in 1964 for the play (Stascavage, 1990). However, Kennedy's work was often overlooked because her early plays were produced in the early 1960s, "which saw the emergence of the realistic propaganda and protest plays of such black artists as [Edward] Bullins and [Amiri] Baraka" (p. 181). Kennedy's work was often at odds with philosophical intentions and public nature of her black, male counterparts, thus the critics and the public eclipsed her work.

For her day, and even by contemporary standards, Kennedy's work was original but whose meanings were elusive to some critics. Wilkerson (1992) described Kennedy's style of writing as "imagistic," and her works were often "short and intense" (p. 68). Wilkerson further elaborated on Kennedy's writing by characterizing her work with the following description:

The individual's struggle with self and internalized social and cultural forces is the focal point of most of her plays. Writing from the inside out, as it were, Kennedy's works are autobiographical and surrealistic, and project on the stage an interior reality. (p. 70)

Kennedy's works "combined the poetic with the grotesque," and the plays were often autobiographical in nature (Stascavage, 1990, p. 181). Shinn (1990) noted that while some writers "revealed the psychic reality of their settings, Kennedy [reversed] the process by concretizing the psyche" (p. 156). In short, Kennedy, "tapped into and fed the stream of a national mythic consciousness," and she reflected "the many diverse cultures that comprise" this



country (Stascavage, 1990, p. 184). The critical observations about Kennedy's work are true of *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, and the position of black women in society is a major theme in the play and that makes this play applicable to this study.

*Funnyhouse of a Negro*, a one-act play, dramatizes the final moments prior to the suicide of the main character, Sarah. The incidents from her life that Sarah selects become vitally important because Sarah has those incidents as pivotal moments that forever shaped her personality and determined her fate. The play takes place in Sarah's apartment but symbolically, her room has become the inner recesses of her mind. Sarah, a black college student majoring in English, wants to be white. She has a white, Jewish boyfriend named Raymond, and she only has white friends. She has a large statue of Queen Victoria in her room, and Sarah spends much of her time in conversation with the statue. She despises her father, who was a missionary in Africa. He raped Sarah's mother because she refused to have a physical relationship with him, and Sarah is the product of that night of forced intercourse. Sarah blames her father for her mother's descent into madness, which ultimately causes Sarah's mother to be institutionalized. Sarah refuses to see or to speak to her father, and she was told that he committed suicide after Patrice Lumumba, a political activist in Africa in the 1960s, was murdered in the Congo. However, Sarah believes that she killed her father by bludgeoning him in the skull with an ebony mask. The play comes to an abrupt end when Raymond, and her landlady, Mrs. Conrad, finds Sarah's body swinging from a noose in her room.

Sarah, like her mother before her, is suffering from madness, and her personality has split into four distinct characters. Those characters are the Queen Victoria Regina; the Duchess of Hapsburg, who serves as a lady in waiting to Queen Victoria and as a character in her own right; Jesus, who is depicted as a hunchbacked dwarf with yellow skin; and Patrice Lumumba. All four

of these characters speak for Sarah, and she will, on occasion, speak for herself. The play is a retelling of Sarah's story from the point of view of her selves combined with a few other brief scenes. The selves, in telling Sarah's story, repeat many of the same lines of dialogue with only a few minor changes.

The only two characters in the play who are not products of Sarah's mind are Raymond and Mrs. Conrad. Mrs. Conrad tells Sarah's story from the point of view of an outsider; she has overheard Sarah ranting in her room, and Mrs. Conrad finds amusement in passing on Sarah's story as idle gossip to her friends. Raymond interacts with Sarah in one scene, and he is drawn as a mean and unsympathetic lover. According to Raymond, after Sarah's body was discovered, he explains Sarah's father did not commit suicide but is living across town and is married to a white woman. Additionally, his final characterization of her is that she was "a funny little liar" (p. 567). Because Sarah is dead and cannot speak for herself at this point in the action, these two less than compassionate characters had the last word; whether or not they spoke the truth about Sarah or her past was immaterial because they represented the voices of reality in the play (Singh, 1998).

Even though *Funnyhouse of a Negro* is a short play, gender, combined with race, were relevant themes in the work. However, because of the nature of the play, all the gender categories were not applicable. Behavior Characteristics, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance were the only categories that contained useful information. Given that much of the dialogue of this play is presented as monologues, Communication Patterns were not discernable in the text.

## Behavior Characteristics

The behavior characteristics of the characters in this play on the surface portray a very traditional lifestyle, but it is a lifestyle that brings destruction to all the members of the family. Throughout the play, men are the aggressors, and they are something to be feared. Mothers, maternal and nurturing, are adored despite their shortcomings or demanding ways. For both Sarah and her father, their mothers suffered enormously from their marital relationships, and both marriages eventually killed the women.

In putting together the pieces of her life from the stories told by her different selves, Sarah's mother was a light-skinned African-American woman, and her father was a dark-skinned African-American man. Sarah's mother was an English major in college, and her father was either a social work major or an English major. In Sarah's mind, her father is domineering and aggressive, and she often believes that he is stalking her. To suggest this aggressive behavior, loud knocking is heard at various points during the play, and as Queen Victoria says at the beginning of the play, "It is my father. He is arriving again for the night. He comes through the jungle to find me. He never tires of his journey" (p. 562). Each time knocking is heard, whatever character is speaking for Sarah refers to the knocking as meaning that Sarah's father is coming to harm her even though it is presumed that her father is dead.

Sarah has violent memories of her father because of what her mother said about her husband. As the Duchess of Hapsburg tells Raymond, "He haunted my very conception. He was a wild black beast who raped my mother" (p. 564). When Sarah's parents first married, they lived in New York and all was well with the marriage until they moved to Africa. As the story is told by Patrice Lumumba, "Then they went to Africa where my mother fell out of love with my father. [...] She spent her days combing her hair. She would not let him touch her in their

wedding bed and called him black" (p. 565). She became very withdrawn and preferred to spend her evenings outside among the night animals. Sarah's mother lapsed into madness after the rape, and

She lies on the bed watching strands of her own hair fall out. Her hair fell out after she married and she spent her days lying on the bed watching the strands fall from her scalp, covering the bedspread until she was bald and admitted to the hospital. Black man, black man, my mother says, I never should have let a black man put his hands on me. (p. 564)

As a consequence of the brutal treatment of Sarah's mother and her eventual death, Sarah will now have nothing to do with her father. According to the Duchess of Hapsburg, after losing his wife, Sarah's father "got mixed up in politics, was revealed and is now devoting his foolish life to the erection of a Christian mission in the middle of the jungle in one of those newly freed countries" (p. 564).

Whereas Sarah shunned her father, her mother shunned Sarah. Thus, Sarah never had any maternal care or love. Sarah's mother could not come to terms with the nature of Sarah's conception; therefore, she would not and could not acknowledge Sarah. In spite of her mother's lack of affection, Sarah "clung" to her mother, and in a child's fantasy world, Sarah remembers that she "wove long dreams of her beauty, her straight hair and fair skin and grey eyes, so identical to mine" (p. 565).

Sarah's selves provided additional information about Sarah's father's past. Her father "hated his father and adored his mother" (p. 565). Again, through the voice of Patrice Lumumba, it is discovered that Sarah's father's mother did not want him to wed Sarah's mother: "I DON'T want you marrying that child, she wrote, she's not good enough for you" (p. 565). His mother "wanted him to be Christ" and to "save the race" by returning to Africa (p. 565). As a point of

reference about his childhood, Sarah's father observed his mother's mundane routine: "At dawn he watched her rise, kill a hen for him to eat at breakfast, then, go to work down at the big house till dusk, till she died" (p. 565).

As a result of her past and her ensuing madness, Sarah seeks outlets for her life. Although she has an occasional job as a librarian, she spends most of her time "preoccupied with the placement and geometric position of words on paper" (p. 563). Sarah has also tried to seek comfort in relationships with others, but as she explains,

I try to give myself a logical relationship but that too is a lie. For relationships was one of my last religions. I clung loyally to the lie of relationships, again and again seeking to establish a connection between my characters. (p. 563)

A brief scene with Raymond and the Duchess of Hapsburg demonstrates that Sarah looks to Raymond to be her protector, while she casts herself in the dependent role. Their scene together opens with Raymond standing and the Duchess sitting and "clinging to his legs" (p. 564). A few lines later, when she fears that her father is coming, she shouts, "hide me" while "clinging to his knees" (p. 564). But Raymond is not willing to be her protector; he, instead, scolds her and accuses her of treating her father cruelly. Barnett (1997) defined Raymond's actions in this scene as sadistic because he "tortures Sarah's selves with coldness" (p. 376).

### Sources of Power

Throughout the play, the message is repeated that there is power in being white and no power in being black. Sarah wishes to be white, and she constructs a life to emulate what she thinks of as white, cultured society. She wants to live in rooms "with European antiques and my Queen Victoria [statue], photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books, a piano, oriental carpets, and to eat my meals on a white glass table" (p. 563). In her writing, she imitates the work of

Edith Sitwell, a white poet. Sarah, in choosing the manifestations for personality, selects a prominent symbol of white power in England—Queen Victoria. As Sarah explains, "Victoria always wants to tell me of her whiteness. She want to tell me of a royal world where everything and everyone is white and there are no unfortunate black ones" (p. 563). Barnett (1997) described the duality of Sarah's relationship to Queen Victoria by noting that sometimes Sarah only talked to Queen Victoria, while at other times Sarah became Queen Victoria. Likewise, the Duchess of Hapsburg also suggests the ruling power of a white family, but as noted by Barnett, was an "odd choice for a female figure of power" because although the Duchess of Hapsburg was beautiful and commanded a great deal of power, she was "childless, miserable, and ultimately insane" (p. 379). Sarah takes on a white persona as an "embankment to keep me from reflecting too much upon the fact that I am a Negro" and to indulge her infatuation with white values and customs (p. 563).

However, Sarah does not find inner peace from these fantasies. Sarah's manifestation of Jesus symbolizes her quest to become white and the futility of that quest. Jesus, who connotes male gentleness and who, as the major figure in the Christian religion, has the power to save, is portrayed as a deformed character who does not have the power to save people as Sarah wished that he did. As Jesus proclaims, "Through my apocalypses and my raging sermons I have tried to escape him, through God Almighty I have tried to escape being black" (p. 566).

In addition to the power that is afforded to being white, the play also brings out the power of men, but this power is not the same power as being white—masculine power is not what Sarah aspires to have. Sarah envisions her father as Patrice Lumumba, and through this character black men are presented as vicious and cruel, and they are forces that bring death and destruction to black women. According to Barnett (1997), in the self of Patrice Lumumba, Sarah "[combined]

her aggressions and her affections toward her father and toward her African heritage. In terms of Sarah's sanity, Lumumba [became] a failed projection" (p. 378). Just like her father, Patrice Lumumba could not save Africa, and he cannot save Sarah from herself because he cannot relieve her pain. The Duchess of Hapsburg explains this view to Raymond when she says,

Yes, yes, the man's dark, very dark-skinned. He is the darkest, my mother is the lightest.

I am in between. But my father is the darkest. My father is a nigger who drives me to misery. Any time spent with him evolves itself into suffering. He is a black man in the wilderness. (p. 564).

Sarah's father took her mother's sanity just as he is taking hers. Thus, by being a black and female in a white and male world, Sarah is invisible. Only through death can Sarah end her tormented life.

### Physical Appearance

In examining the appearance of the characters in the play, to be white is to be attractive and to be black is to be ugly. Sarah describes her appearance in the following manner: "In appearance I am good-looking in a boring way; no glaring Negroid features medium nose, medium mouth and pale yellow skin. My one defect is that I have a head of frizzy hair, unmistakably Negro kinky hair" (p. 563). Sarah yearns to "become a more pallid Negro" like the ones she sees "on the covers of American Negro magazine" (p. 563). As the Duchess of Hapsburg explains, Sarah's mother "looked like a white woman, hair as straight as any white woman's" (p. 562).

Hair becomes a symbol throughout the entire play. Both Queen Victoria and the Duchess of Hapsburg are described as characters with "[heads] of frizzy hair" (p. 562). All of Sarah's selves, just like Sarah's mother, are losing their hair, and the stage directions and the dialogue in

several places explains that their hair falls out from the crown of the head first. By the end of the play, Sarah's selves are almost completely bald, and by association, so is she. By losing her one feature that she associates with being black, Sarah hopes she can move beyond her race, but she cannot.

### Summary of Research Questions

Throughout *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, both gender and race are predominant factors that determine the fate of the characters. Although Sarah assumes no traditional gender roles such as wife or mother, she is dependent and passive in her actions. Her father is described as a failed breadwinner and is aggressive, while her mother is passive and not capable of any nurturing qualities. The race of the characters is coupled with their gender, and to be black is associated with being less than human and less than acceptable in the society. Sarah, and to a large extent her parents, are confined by race, and Sarah feels limited by her gender and her race. Her efforts to change her race render her insane.

In evaluating the patterns of gender, the play does cast gender as opposing and opposite forces. The play expresses the notion that behavior associated with the male sex is something to be feared and avoided by women. Overt male behavior robs a woman of her identity and her sanity.

### *Fefu and Her Friends*

Although born in Cuba, Maria Irene Fornes has been living in the United States since she was 15, and she became an American citizen when she was 21 (Gilbert et al., 1994). Written in 1977, *Fefu and Her Friends* is Fornes' best-known and most often performed play.



Fornes' work has appealed to the critics because of its original presentation style and terse dialogue. Svich (1999) suggested that Fornes' writing and staging techniques worked together to give the "productions a feeling of being constantly on the edge" (p. xxiii). Bottoms (1999) suggested that Fornes deftly incorporated a "minimal and controlled" style of writing in order to achieve her desired stage effects (p. 56). In *Fefu and Her Friends*, Fornes addresses the place of women in society through an inventive staging technique and through a cast of eclectic characters.

The play takes place in Fefu's upper-class home and is supposedly set in 1935 in New England. She has invited her friends, Cindy, Christina, Emma, Paula, Cecilia, Sue, and Julia over to her home to rehearse a skit that they are performing for a charity benefit. During the course of the afternoon, each woman's personality and situation comes into focus through various conversations and encounters they have with each other. Cindy, who only drinks liquor in drops, asks lots of questions although she rarely understands the answers. Christina, who understand the answers better than her friend Cindy, clearly has limits that control her behavior, and although she likes Fefu, she would not want to act like Fefu. Emma is flamboyant in dress and mannerisms, and she likes to be the center of attention whenever she is in the room. Paula has a wonderful sense of humor, and she tried to have a relationship with Cecilia but that affair has now ended. Cecilia is quiet and reserved, and she often regrets her relationship with Paula failed. Sue, another character with a sense of humor, has a very creative spirit but is content with her limited lifestyle. Julia is in a wheelchair after a freak accident; she witnessed a hunter kill a deer and was immediately struck down and paralyzed.

Fefu is in a loveless marriage with a man named Phillip. In an effort to keep their relationship going, they have a game in which Fefu takes a shotgun loaded with blanks, aims at

him, and pulls the trigger. Upon hearing the shot and regardless of what he is doing, her husband falls down as if he were killed by the shot. They repeat this bizarre ritual several times a day. Her husband, who loads the gun, has threatened to use real ammunition one day instead of blanks, but it is a chance Fefu is willing to take and continues the game. However, Fefu admits to Julia that she needs Phillip and would be lost without him.

Although all the characters think that Fefu is strange, Julia is the most concerned of all the characters about Fefu's future. Julia believes the fate that has befallen her will also come to Fefu. Julia, in a long monologue, describes how she was once an outgoing and headstrong woman. Her paralysis is her punishment for her haughty spirit, and she sees the same future in store for Fefu. In the final moments of the play, Fefu exits the house with her shotgun, and a shot is heard. She enters the house holding a dead rabbit that she just killed; Julia, who is in the center of the living room in her wheelchair when the shot rings out, puts her hand to her forehead, feels blood trickling from a wound, and then dies.

Although this play takes place in a home, the work was not included in Chapter 4 for two reasons. First, the house is a symbolic venue for the play; it is a place where these women come together, and with the notable exception of Fefu and Phillip, domestic relationships are not a prominent focus of the play. As it will be explored, all the characters are either victims of society's rules that govern the behavior of women, or they have seen the consequences to other women for breaking those rules. Setting the play in the home underscores this theme. Second, this play has a non-traditional staging requirement that further enhances the symbolic nature of the setting. Part I takes place in a main room of the house, and the audience watches the action from the auditorium in a traditional fashion. Part II happens in four places: the lawn, the study, the bedroom, and the kitchen. The audience is divided into four groups, and they move from

room to room. The four scenes are performed simultaneously, and when each scene is completed, the audience proceeds onto the next room until the entire audience has seen all four scenes. The audience returns to the auditorium to view Part III.

Gender attitudes and gender behavior were the central points in *Fefu and Her Friends*. Therefore, the four gender trait categories, Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance, provided keys to unlock how gender behavior affects the lives of the characters in the play.

### Behavior Characteristics

All of the characters in the play exhibit or understand traditional gender behavior characteristics, but very few of the characters are living in traditionally prescribed gender roles. Fefu is the only character who makes it clear she is married, and none of the characters make any references to having any children. Even so, they are all subdued by a set of behaviors they are supposed to follow because they are women. Fuchs (1999) divided the women in the house into three categories: "the more conventional heterosexuals, the lesbians, and the three androgynous women, whom Fornes develops as figures with mythic imaginations" (p. 89). The conventional women, Cindy, Christina, and Sue, according to Fuchs, lent order and balance to the worlds of Fefu, Emma, and Julia, while Cecilia and Paula added an element of diversity.

Fefu's opening line, and the opening line of the play is "My husband married me to have a constant reminder of how loathsome women are" (p. 584). This opening line characterizes Fefu's marriage to Phillip and in a larger sense characterizes the plight of women in the play. Phillip, according to Fefu, constantly reminds her of the above sentiment, and in the face of this comment, Fefu laughs at Phillip (p. 584). As described earlier, Fefu and Phillip have a barbaric game that they play: "I shoot and he falls. Whenever he hears the blast he falls. No matter

where he is he falls. One time he fell in a puddle of mud and his clothes were a mess" (p. 598). When her friends comment on the bizarre nature of the game, Fefu honestly says she and Phillip always "go to extremes," and she believes if she could not have this game of shooting her husband with blanks, then she "might shoot him for real" (p. 586). But for her seemingly callous attitude toward her role as a wife, Fefu admits to Julia near the end of the play the reality of her marriage:

He's left me. His body is here but the rest is gone. I exhaust him. I torment him and I torment myself. I need him, Julia. [...] I need his touch. I need his kiss. I need the person he is. I can't give him up. (p. 598)

Although she may act as a cold and uncaring wife, it is evident that Fefu has a deep emotional connection with Phillip—a dependency on him which suggests that she could not survive without him in her life. Furthermore, Phillip's attitude was a dominant force that molded Fefu and guided her actions (Worthen, 1999).

Aside from her relationship with Phillip, Fefu is a mixture of masculine and feminine traits. She admits to several masculine traits. For example, she says, "I don't take enough care to be tactful" (p. 584). Some of her friends know she used to participate in the masculine pastime of hunting (p. 587). Furthermore, Christina describes her as "adventurer" (p. 590). Fefu leaves her guest on a whim to go and fix the upstairs toilet, and when her friends are amazed she does her own plumbing, she immediately precedes to explain just how she fixed the apparatus (p. 586). Just as she readily displays what are considered masculine traits, she can also immediately display feminine traits. She arranges the party at her home, and she organizes the lunch (p. 588). When she realizes Christina likes to lick ice cubes, acting as the perfect hostess, she immediately

dashes off to the kitchen to fill an ice tray and add sticks so Christina will have something to hold onto so her fingers do not get cold while she enjoys her ice (p. 586).

A prominent theme that emerges in the play is the value society gives only to men and denies to women. Upon looking out the door and seeing her husband, her brother, and the gardener, Fefu makes the following observation about the differences between men and women:

I still like men better than women.—I envy them. I like being like a man. Thinking like a man. Feeling like a man.—They are well together. Women are not. Look at them. they are checking the new grass mower...Out in the fresh air and the sun, while we sit in here in the dark...Men have natural strength. Women have to find their strength, and when they do find it, it comes forth with bitterness and it's erratic...Women are restless with each other. They are like live wires...either chattering to keep themselves from making contact, or else, if they don't chatter, they avert their eyes...like Orpheus...as if a god once said "and if they shall recognize each other, the world will be blown apart." They are always eager for the men to arrive. When they do, they can put themselves at rest, tranquilized and in a mild stupor. With the men they feel safe. The danger is gone. That's the closest they can be to feeling wholesome. Men are muscle that cover the raw nerve. They are the insulators. The danger is gone, but the price is the mind and the spirit...High price.—I've never understood it. (p. 586)

Farfan (1997) labeled Fefu's desire to be male a strategy for coping with her painful marriage; however, Fefu was not comforted by her strategy because it was "ultimately as self-destructive and ineffectual as a strategy of resistance to women's subordination within patriarchal cultures as Julia's hysteria" (p. 446).

Christina shares this longing to be like a man that Fefu so aptly expressed. Christina adds to Fefu's comments by saying, "I too have wished for that trust men have for each other. The faith the world puts in them and they in turn put in the world. I know that I don't have it" (p. 586). However, Christina, unlike Fefu, lacks the confidence in her abilities; Christina sees power and strength in Fefu while in herself, she sees an "ultimate conformist" who is subdued by the "fear of being disrespectful or destroying something" (p. 590). She is unable to live the life she envisions.

Standing in contrast to Fefu, who is full of life and eager to participate in life, is Julia. In a wheelchair after a bizarre hunting accident, Julia is no longer able to walk, and she now suffers from seizures and hallucinations. Fefu describes how Julia used to be to Christina: "She was afraid of nothing...[...] She knew so much. She was so young and yet she knew so much" (p. 587). But now, Julia is a shadow of her former self; she is frail, weary, and probably near death.

Julia believes that her current physical state is attributed to being too bold as a woman, and she was ultimately punished for not acting like a proper woman. In her hallucination in Part II, Julia describes the torture that her nameless, faceless, supposedly male captors heaped on her:

They clubbed me. They broke my head. They broke my will. They broke my hands.

They tore my eyes out. They took away my voice. They didn't do anything to my heart because I didn't bring my heart with me. They clubbed me again, but my head did not

fall off in pieces. That was because they were so good and they felt sorry for me. The judges. You didn't know the judges?—I was good and quiet. I never dropped my smile.

I smiled to everyone. If I stopped smiling, I would get clubbed because they love me.

They say they love me. I go along with that because if I don't...(With her fingers she

*indicates her throat being cut and makes the sound that usually accompanies that gesture.)* (p. 591)

Julia confesses that she was punished because she "was getting too smart" (p. 591). In the world Julia now inhabits she believes she is constantly watched, and her conversations are monitored. Should she attempt to warn any other woman of her fate, Julia's captors will kill her. Ironically, Julia's hallucination about pain and suffering, coming in Part II, happened simultaneously with Paula's description of the pain of ending a relationship with Cecilia, Cindy's story of a nightmare involving a physically abusive man, and Fefu's confession to Emma that she is in constant pain (Farfan, 1997). Although all the women, to one degree or another, speak of pain, only Julia has translated her own pain into a debilitating physical paralysis brought on by an external force that is real to her.

Julia, to reinforce her status as a lowly woman, is forced by her captors to repeat what she calls her "prayer" (p. 592). The following is an excerpt from her prayer that characterizes the supremacy of men over women:

The human being is of the masculine gender. The human being is a boy as a child and grown up he is a man. Everything on earth is for the human being, which is man. To nourish him.—There are evil things on earth, and noxious things. Evil and noxious things are on earth for man also. For him to fight with, and conquer and turn its evil into good. So that it too can nourish him.—There are Evil Plants, Evil Animals, Evil Minerals, and Women are Evil.—Woman is not a human being. She is: 1—A mystery. 2—Another species. 3—As yet undefined. 4—Unpredictable; therefore wicked and gentle and evil and good which is evil.—If a man commits an evil act, he must be pitied. The evil comes from outside him, through him and into the act. Woman generates evil

herself,—God gave man no other mate but woman. The oxen is good but it is not a mate for man. The sheep is good but it is not a mate for man. The mate for a man is a woman and that is the cross man must bear. [...] (p. 592)

In addition to repeating her prayer, Julia must believe the words she is saying or her captors will physically strike her. Although Julia is hallucinating when she speaks these lines, the message of the prayer is pivotal to the theme of the subservience of women. Julia, characterized by her paralysis and fragile mental state, is the symbolic embodiment of the repression of women.

Worthen (1999) had this to say about the Julia's prayer and the theme of women envying a man's ability to think and to feel: "As Julia's coerced 'prayer' suggests, to be subject to this representation of the feminine is to resign humanity, [and] independence..." (p. 71).

Julia is the connection between Fefu and the future, and she knows this, and she is afraid for Fefu. Julia "whimpers" in a low voice her fear for Fefu, "Oh dear, dear, my dear. They want your light my dear. Your precious light. Oh dear, my dear" (p. 592). Fefu knows that Julia is hiding something from her, but Julia refuses to tell Fefu anything about her future. Fefu, as she indicated to Emma in the garden, confesses that she is in constant pain—an indescribable feeling that is not physical or emotional (p. 589). Julia interprets Fefu's pain as the first sign that the captors are coming for her. In their final moments together, Julia offers her own prayer for Fefu, much as a priest would offer a blessing to a spiritual seeker. Julia says,

May no harm come to your head. [...] May no harm come to your will. [...] May no harm come to your hands. [...] May no harm come to your eyes. [...] May no harm come to your voice. [...] May no harm come to your heart. (p. 599)

When Fefu leaves the room with her shotgun and fires a shot, Julia, "speaking front," says, "I didn't tell her anything. Did I? I didn't" (p. 599). Upon Fefu's entrance with the dead rabbit,



Julia dies. Her death, taken as a literal action, symbolizes her fate for not conforming, and given Julia's fear for Fefu, condemns Fefu to the same fate if she does not change her behavior.

Although Julia's life is the most extreme punishment for nonconformity, the women remember a school friend who also did not conform to traditional behavior. Emma recalls the following example of the fate of Gloria Schuman who demonstrated intelligence:

And Gloria Schuman? She wrote a psychology paper the faculty decided she didn't write and they called her in to try to make her admit she hadn't written it. She insisted she wrote it and they sent her to a psychiatrist also. [...] After a few visits the psychiatrist said: Don't you think you know me well enough now that you can tell me the truth about the paper? He almost drove her crazy. They just couldn't believe she was so smart. (p. 598)

Paula ends this conversation by pointing out in those days they were young, thereby suggesting that the women have all learned from these examples and are wiser to the ways of the world.

As a final point in this section, no male characters have speaking parts in the play. There are three men outside the house, Fefu's husband, Phillip; Fefu's brother, John; and the gardener, Tom (p. 585). The women are inside the house, and the men walk around on the outside. The men act as symbolic guards for the house. They never enter, but all the women in the house know of their presence. The men are there as a constant reminder of the pressure that society places on women to conform to traditional standards of behavior. Although all of these women have "left the house" to attend college, it is through education that they learned some of the "truths" about how they should behave if they were to be seen as acceptable women.

## Communication Patterns

As with the behavior characteristics, the women in the play discuss what happens when they speak too much or go against society's norms for women. For example, when the women are reminiscing about some of their schoolmates, Sue reminds them of Susan Austin and the circumstances surrounding her fate:

I was terribly exhausted and run down. I lived on coffee so I could stay up all night and do my work. And they used to give us these medical check-ups all the time. But all they did was ask how we felt and we'd say "Fine," and they'd check us out. In the meantime, I looked like a ghost. I was skin and bones. Remember Susan Austin? She was very naïve and when they asked her how she felt, she said she was nervous and she wasn't sleeping well. So she had to see a psychiatrist from then on. (p. 597)

In short, the women learned early in life that to tell the truth about their circumstances was not always an advisable action to take. Likewise, Julia's death at the end of the play can be interpreted as a punishment for talking too much about the true nature of her condition.

A prominent theme in the play that relates to this category is the lack of true communication between the women—or the inability to get beyond surface chatter into meaningful discourse. They try to express themselves, but they pull away before a thought is completed or, if a thought is completed, the other character fails to make meaningful any response at all. For example, when Fefu and Emma are in the garden and Fefu is telling Emma about her awful and indescribable feelings of pain and before Emma can respond, Fefu says, "How about a little lemonade?" (p. 589). She then leaves the room to get the beverage. Another example is when Paula and Cecilia are in the kitchen, and Paula is explaining the nature of the

problem with their affair. She says, "I speak and you don't understand my words" (p. 593). They are interrupted, and they never have another opportunity to fully resolve their tension.

In reality, the women throughout the play speak to each other as Fefu characterized women in her long musing in Part I when she said that women "were restless with each other" and that they are always "chattering to keep themselves from making a connection" (p. 586). Fefu is most like a "live wire" because she flits from room to room and conversation to conversation without finishing what she started. The entire play is made up of short and dense conversations that present a variety of ideas, but none of the conversations are ever finished and few of the ideas are discussed or debated. Thus, a manic quality emerges that defines the nature of the characters' conversations.

### Sources of Power

Power is a dominant theme in the play. The men, who never speak, are never seen, and are constantly referred to as "they," hold all of society's power over the women. Fefu's long commentary about envying men in Part I supports the overall thesis that men are the power-players in society, while women are held at bay. Worthen (1999) characterized the women as victims of the "authority of the absent male" and that they all "share Julia's invisible 'scar,' the mark of their paralyzing subjection to a masculine authority that operates on the 'imaginary,' ideological plane" (p. 70). Indeed, all the women to some degree or another are "paralyzed" because none of the characters in the play are attempting to change the power structure; they all seem to be content with the status quo. And the women, for the most part, have learned to adapt their behavior so as not to incur punishment or any further loss of status.

Power on a smaller scale is demonstrated in Fefu and Phillip's tumultuous marriage. Both Fefu and Phillip struggle to have power over the other one. Phillip's notion that women are

"loathsome" initiates the power struggle, and Fefu counters by shooting at him at random times during the day. However, Philip has threatened to put real bullets in the gun without Fefu knowing it as a tactic to make her nervous, so he is the keeper of the power in their game and in their marriage (p. 586).

### Physical Appearance

For this category, only two references in the play are applicable. Both examples address how women are viewed in light of their physical appearance and how women are judged by their appearance.

The first reference to physical appearance is when Sue mentions Julie Brooks and her fate when they were in school. Sue explains that Julie was a beautiful girl, and

At the end of the semester, they called her in because she had been out with 28 men and they thought that was awful. And the worst thing was that after that, she thought there was something wrong with her. [...] She was just very beautiful so all the boys wanted to go out with her. And if a boy asked her to go have a cup of coffee she'd sign out and write the name of the boy. None of us did of course. All she did was go for coffee or go to the movie. She was really very innocent. (p. 598)

As with the other cases that the women discuss from their school years, again, Julie is punished for her honesty and for assumed promiscuity.

In her hallucination, Julia explains that her captors have rules for how women display their bodies in order for their bodies to be pleasing and not revolting to men. Julia explains that according to her judge, a

women's entrails are heavier than anything on earth and to see a woman running creates a disparate and incongruous image in the mind. It is anti-aesthetic. Therefore, women

should not run. Instead they should strike positions that take into account the weight of their entrails. Only if they do, can they be aesthetic. [...] He said that a woman's bottom should be in a cushion, otherwise it's revolting. (p. 591)

As noted by Worthen (1999), these ever-present males have recast Julia's identity "at the interface of the body itself, where the masculine voice materializes itself in the woman's flesh" (p. 70).

#### Additional Observations

One interesting image that Fefu uses at the beginning of the play to prove a point to Christina and Cindy deals with worms under a rock. As Fefu explains,

You see, that which is exposed to the exterior...is smooth and dry and clean. That which is not...underneath, is slimy and filled with fungus and crawling with worms. It is another life that is parallel to the one we manifest. It's there. The way worms are underneath the stone. If you don't recognize it...(Whispering.) it eats you. (p. 585)

The concept of two worlds existing in parallel states is analogous to the condition of the women in the play (Fuchs, 1999). The men were outside—they were the smooth rock, while the women lived inside—underneath the rock.

#### Summary of Research Questions

For the most part, the female characters in *Fefu and Her Friends* do not take on the roles of wives or mothers, but they are still expected to live by a strict set of gender-driven behaviors. They stay in the house, and none of the women speak of holding any job. They recall example after example of their friends acting counter to acceptable behavior, and all those women paid a price.

Julia and Fefu are the only characters who step outside gender-dictated behaviors in the play. Julia at one time was outgoing and inquisitive but is now punished for that behavior. Confined to a wheelchair, she must espouse the "truth" about the evils of women. She must never speak of her fate, or she will face the consequences of that action. Fefu is still the woman whom Julia used to be, and it is possible that she will suffer the same fate as Julia for stepping outside of traditional boundaries.

Although men are not visible characters in the play, they are still a force in the play. They are characterized as independent and aggressive. They hold the power of society, and they have a freedom of behavior that the women do not have. The men are the ones who punish the women for improper behavior.

Even though gender is discussed as a more universal phenomena in this play, gender is still presented as a pattern, and men and women have opposite and different gender patterns to follow.

### *spell #7*

Ntozake Shange wrote *spell #7* in 1979, and it was her third dramatic piece. As an artist, her sense of purpose was very clear. She devoted herself to "the creation of an authentic African-American theatrical aesthetic. In working against the constructs of Eurocentric thought, she is forced to reach deeply into her psyche for a unique form of expression" (Pinkney, 1992, p. 6). Shange's writing uses no capitalization as well as non-traditional spelling and punctuation, and her dialogue often resembles poetry in style, form, and tone. All of her theatre pieces incorporate song and dance as methods of communicating intrinsically. As summarized by Pinkney, Shange portrayed life in a "highly emotional and idiosyncratic manner," and as a writer

she explored "finding objective means to project subjective ideas, while avoiding the obvious imitation of existing styles" (p. 6). Although *spell #7* is largely concerned with racial prejudice in society, gender roles and attitudes are also a theme in the play.

Through the use of a narrator who weaves the action together, *spell #7* combines discussion scenes with short skits performed by the cast of characters. The narrator of the story is lou, a black magician. He is a second-generation magician, and his purpose in the play is to create a safe haven where the remainder of the characters are free to speak their minds, make their points, and be themselves. At times, lou is a part of the action and at times he is separate from the action. He turns a simple bar into a place where "magic stays you can let yrself in or out" (p. 874). When alec, dahlia, eli, bettina, lily, natalie, ross, and maxine are all in the bar, they incorporate the acting training technique known as role-playing, and they become different characters in order to enact a variety of stories for the audience. All the stories the characters enact or the discussions they have all characterized the African-American experience in the 1970s—especially what it is like to be black and in the entertainment industry.

Most all the characters are employed in the entertainment industry. Alec is a very frustrated man, and he is angry about his low status as a black actor. In contrast to alec is ross who is in a relationship with natalie, and he rejects any part that he considers beneath his skills as an actor. Two characters, eli and lily, work in the bar where all the entertainers spend their free time. The only non-entertainer is eli who is a poet; lily wants to be an actress. Dahlia is a singer and a dancer who works with bettina. Like alec, bettina is angry because of the shortage of good roles for black women. Natalie works as an actress but she struggles to find consistent work that will support both her and ross. Maxine is the voice of experience; she has been working in the business longer than any of the others, and they give her the respect she commands and deserves.

As an industry characterized by extreme prejudice, black entertainers are relegated to playing a limited variety of stereotyped characters. These stereotypes are all seen in the opening of the play because the members of the acting company are dressed in "tattered fieldhand garb, blackface, and [with the] countenance of stepan fetchit when he waz frightened" (p. 867). The frozen company members, on lou's command, come to life

with a rhythm set on a washboard carried by one of them/ they begin a series of steps that identify every period of afro-american entertainment: from acrobats, comedians, tap-dancers, calindy dancers, cotton club choruses, apollo theatre du-wop groups, til they reach a frenzy [...] (p. 867)

After this opening number, lou waves his arms and the stage goes black. When the lights come up, the characters, shedding their opening clothes, are in eli's bar, and lou's spell is in place. All the characters try to make sense of the world in which they live and work by moving into and out of other roles. They talk about the types of parts that they play or the ones that they are denied access to playing; they discuss their pay and how to make more money to pay the rent. Maxine acts out the story of fay who goes into Manhattan to have an evening on the town. Lily dreams of being famous and brushing her long, "rapunzel tresses" (p. 872). Natalie becomes sue-jean who gets pregnant, has a son named "myself," and then kills her baby. The play ends with a lengthy scene by lily who takes on the role of a white woman, and the scene is finished by maxine who delivers a monologue about how she came to an understanding of what it meant to be black in a white society. In the end, lou "turns off" his spell for a while, and the characters must return to the real world.

In *spell #7* gender and race were relevant themes in the work. However, because of the nature of the play, all the gender categories were not applicable. Behavior Characteristics,



Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance were the only categories that contained useful information. The traits in the Communication Patterns category were not discernable in the text because this is a highly symbolic play; the characters are not engaged in very much dialogue in the traditional sense. Most of the action is presented through pantomime, monologues, dance, and narration. Not enough traditional dialogue existed in the play to analyze the conversations based on the perimeters of this study.

### Behavior Characteristics

All of the characters in the play, either as themselves or as the additional characters they temporarily take on, are all aware of gender role behavior; however, these characters deal not only with traditional gender behavior; they must also deal with racial behavior.

Only Ross and Natalie are in a relationship, and the relationship has a mixture of traditional and non-traditional gender role behaviors. When the characters are arriving at the bar, Ross and Natalie are in the corner counting pennies because they did not get paid at work. As Natalie explains, "i had to go around wit my tambourine just to get subway fare" (p. 869). Natalie is the breadwinner in their relationship because as Ross explains, "i'm not playing the fool or the black buck pimp circus/ i'm an actor not a stereotype/ i've been trained. you know i'm a classically trained actor" (p. 877). Whereas Ross can maintain his integrity as an actor by refusing to accept work he deems to be inferior to his talents, Natalie is left to work at whatever job is available, and she is "tired of having to take any & every old job to support us/ & you get to have artistic integrity & refuse parts that are beneath you" (p. 877). For Ross, his defiance is based on the premise that "we arent gonna get anyplace/ by doin every bit part for a niggah that someone waves in front of my face" (p. 877). Although his point is noble, as Natalie points out "we arent gonna live long on nothin/ either" (p. 877).

In order to secure their immediate future, ross wants natalie to take a job on the road. natalie objects to his demand for two reason. First, she knows that if she leaves, ross will be unfaithful to her with a variety of aspiring female actors. However, he freely admits that he will engage in that behavior whether she is on the road or not. He wants her to take the job so they will have financial security, and infidelity, for him, is a part of his nature and irrelevant to the conversation. Second, natalie understands that in ross's view, she is less important than he is, both as a person and as an entertainer: "you mean/ i shd understand that you are the great artist & i'm the trouper" (p. 877). He never refutes her conclusion. As bettina intrudes and tells ross, "there is nothin niggardly abt a decent job. work is honorable/ work!" (p. 877). But, she is told to stay out of their affairs. As their personal conversation blends into another monologue, their relationship issues are never resolved leaving the impression that they will continue living as they are now.

Although ross receives little criticism for not accepting the traditionally masculine role of the provider, eli, on the other hand, does. In addition to being the bartender in lou's magic world, eli is a poet. He offers the following monologue that characterizes his position:

people keep tellin me to put my feet on the ground  
i get mad & scream/ there is no ground  
only shit pieces from dogs horses & men who dont live  
anywhere/ they tell me think straight & make myself  
somethin/ i shout & sigh/ i am a poet/ i write poems  
i make words cartwheel and somersault down pages  
outta my mouth come visions distilled like bootleg  
whiskey/ i am like a radio but i am a channel of my own

i keep sayin i write poems/ & people keep askin me  
what do i do/ what in the hell is going on?  
people keep tellin me these are hard times/ what are  
you gonna be doin ten years from now/  
what in the hell do you think/ i am gonna be writin poems [...] (p. 871)

As a poet, eli lives with the frustration of having an unacceptable job in the eyes of society. He should have gainful employment in order to support a family and secure his future, and people judge his chosen profession of a writer is unacceptable.

Proper gender behavior is also demonstrated in two of the characters whom maxine and natalie portray. The men initiate these stories, and they are the narrators for the scenes, while the women depict the actions. Maxine plays the character of fay, a mother from Brooklyn who wants to go out on the town for an evening, because her children are "in carolina" and her husband, big eddie, "wuz away" at an unspecified location (p. 870). When she leaves her home, fay feels guilty about wanting to take an evening for herself, and even though her children are away, she "off the voices" that told her she should be at home (p. 870). However, fay's world is limited by her domestic duties, and her only topic of conversation is her children (p. 871). She is looking for a world where she can have a good time and meet famous people, but she only finds a world beyond her home where she is treated like a prostitute. Natalie's story is about sue-jean who wanted to be a mother: "she had always wanted a baby/ never a family/ never a man/ she had always wanted a baby/ who wd suckle & sleep a baby boy who wd wet/ & cry/ & smile" (p. 872). Sue-jean only had one friend, ray, the bartender at an establishment that she frequents, and one night, sue-jean seduced ray in order to have a baby. When she became pregnant, sue-jean

stopped going to the bar, began eating canned food, started knitting booties, and started "goin to church wit the late nite radio evangelist" (p. 873). She became the image of a traditional mother:

sue-jean waz a gay & gracious woman/ she made pies/ she baked cakes & left them on  
the stoop of the church she had never entered just cuz she wanted/ & she grew plants &  
swept her floors/ she waz somebody she had never known/ she waz herself with child/ &  
she waz a wonderful bulbous thing (p. 873)

When her child was born, sue-jean named him "myself," and then things began to change. She became despondent: "you always wanted him to sleep/ or at the most nurse/ the nites yr dreams were disturbed by his cryin" (p. 873). She tried to overcome her feelings and adapt to life as a single mother, but life was more difficult than sue-jean had expected, and she missed the feeling of being pregnant. She killed myself by slitting his wrists, and she drank the baby's blood and waited "to have the feeling of myself living in her womb once again" (p. 873). Eventually sue-jean "forgot abt the child bein born/ & waz heavy & full of her life/ with 'myself'" (p. 873). Both of these sad tales are the only depictions of motherhood in the play, and motherhood in one instance is combined with insanity. Neither fay nor sue-jean finds any comfort in motherhood or in the world beyond maternal activities.

In addition to the individual references to gender behavior as outlined in the previous examples, the play also looks at gender behavior from a broader perspective. The broader issue of the behavior of women is more directly tied to race and how black women are supposed to act when compared to white women. At the beginning of Act II, the entire cast creates a scene of men and women interacting in a bar. The men, playing the customers in the bar, are looking for interesting companions for the evening, and as lou explains, "everybody in the world/ european & non-european alike/ everybody knows the black woman from there is not treated as a princess/

as a jewel/ a cherished lover" (p. 875). As a rejoinder to lou's observation, the women know in a situation such as the one they are describing, the black women will "sit & sit & sit" by themselves (p. 875). If black women read or speak proper English, they know they will be treated as strange objects because they do not conform to the commonly held stereotype they are illiterate. A little later, natalie continues to characterize the image of black women; she describes them as "a strange sort of neutered workhorse," and as an afterthought, adds, "which isnt too far from reality" (p. 878). However, as a point of contrast, natalie characterizes white women as women who "wake up thinking how can i survive another day of this culturally condoned incompetence" (p. 878). Continuing with her thought, as she fanaticizes about being white, she adds, "& everytime i attempt even the smallest venture into the world someone comes to help me/ like if i do anything/ anything at all i'm extending myself as a white girl/ cuz part of being white is being absent" (p. 878). Thus, to be a black woman or a white women is to live in silence; however, the silence for a black woman comes from the notion that they cannot learn, while being silent for a white woman is a cultural expectation.

### Sources of Power

Even more so than in the Behavior Characteristics section, the Sources of Power examples are tightly tied to the issue of race. None of the characters, male or female, have access to the traditional power sources.

Even though men are traditionally given power based on their occupations, none of the characters, male or female, draw any satisfaction or prestige from their occupations, and a major theme of *spell #7* is an examination of the racist undertones of the entertainment industry. The setting of the play makes this theme immediately clear from the beginning. The opening scene

depicts all the characters in traditional, black caricature costumes. Additionally, the stage directions indicate the following prop that is visible at the beginning of the play:

there is a huge black-face mask hanging from the ceiling of the theater as the audience enters. in a way the show has already begun, for the members of the audience must integrate this grotesque, larger than life misrepresentation of life into their pre-show chatter. slowly the house lights fade, but the mask looms even larger in the darkness. (p. 867)

The mask is used to symbolize the generations of black performers who were reduced to a life in the minstrel shows. When he wants to invoke his spell of freedom and safety, lou makes the mask disappear.

When the characters are assembled in the bar, as current entertainment professionals, they discuss their unequal status to white entertainers. As previously noted, ross feels indignant about the roles he is offered, and as he explains, black people "actually dont exist unless we play football or basketball or baseball or soccer/ pélé/ see they still import a strong niggah to earn money" (p. 877). For the women, the situation is not much better. For example, lily desires one good part, which lou suggests could be the parts of "lady macbeth or mother courage" (p. 869). But as eli points out that will never happen because "how the hell is she gonna play lady macbeth and macbeth's a white dude?" (p. 869). Others women like bettina are reduced to always playing prostitutes, and as she notes, "if that director asks me to play it any blacker/ i'm gonna have to do it in a mammy dress" (p. 869). After playing the character of fay, maxine sums up how they all feel about performing:

aw ross/ when am I gonna get a chance to feel something like that/ I got into this business  
cuz I wanted to feel things all the time/ & all they want me to do is put my leg in my face/  
smile (p. 871)

Again, the setting of the play is important; lou creates an environment where the characters can express themselves and indulge their creative sides because the conditions outside the bar reduce them to portraying limited or minor characters—if they work at all.

But the lack of power extends beyond the entertainment industry. Being black is a powerless position, and to be black and to be a woman is to be barely visible in society. In several examples, the women are the ones who are ignored and left by the wayside. For example, fay is given no status beyond a prostitute when she leaves her home, and ray leaves sue-jean laying in the corner in the "sawdust & whiskey stains" after their physical encounter. Additionally, lou says, "the whole world knows that nobody loves the black woman like they love farrah fawcett-majors. the whole world dont turn out for a dead black woman like they did for marilyn monroe. [...] the worldwide un-beloved black woman is a good idea" (p. 874).

One scene in the play compares black women to white women. When natalie is role-playing as a white woman, she says,

being a white girl by dint of my will/ is much more complicated than i though it wd be/  
but i wanted to try cuz so many men like white girls/ white men/ black men/ latin men/  
jewish men/ asians/ everybody. So i thought if i waz a white girl for a day i might  
understand this better/ after all gertrude stein wanted to know abt the black woman/  
alice adams wrote *thinking abt billie*/ joyce carol oats has three different black characters  
all with the same name/ i guess cuz we are underdeveloped individuals or cuz we are all  
the same/ at any rate i'm gonna call this thinkin abt white girls/ cuz helmut newton's

awready gotta book called *white women*/ see what i mean/ that's a best seller/ one store i passed/ hadda a sign said

WHITE WOMEN SOLD OUT

it's this kinda pressure that forces us white girls to be so absolutely pathological abt the other women in the world (p. 878)

The double meaning of the sign in the bookstore and her observation that white women are expected to follow a "culturally condoned incompetence" leads natalie to the declaration that "it is overwhelming. i'm so glad i'm colored" (p. 878). Even though being a black woman means being ignored by society, the point is made that at least they, unlike white women, can be true to themselves.

Maxine's monologue provides the final point about the fact that black people have no power in a white society. She talks at length about her childhood and her eventual loss of innocence about the way the world truly is constructed. As a child, no one paid much attention to maxine; she says, "yet no one around noticed me especially. no one around say anything but a precocious brown girl with peculiar idea" (p. 878). As she narrates,

like during the polio epidemic/ i wanted to have a celebration/which nobody cd understand since iron lungs & not going swimming waznt nothing to celebrate. but i explained that i waz celebrating the bounty of the lord/ which more people didnt understand/ til i went on to say that/ it waz obvious that god had protected the colored folks from polio/ nobody understood that. i did/ if god had made colored people susceptible to polio/ then we wd be on the pictures & the television with the white children. i knew only white folks cd get that particular disease (p. 878)



Maxine interprets an absence of black faces in television as a positive sign and not as a characterization of a racist society that excluded black children because they were black. As maxine admits, as she grew into adulthood her "world got smaller" (p. 879). As she learned the truth about society and about people in her race, she started buying gold jewelry to symbolize her pain with the reality of society. She also purchased a piece of gold whenever a member of her race did something to disappoint her. As she concludes, "no one understands that surviving the impossible is sposed to accentuate the positive aspects of people" (p. 879).

As a concluding point, there is no end to the internal conflicts of these characters. Eventually the spell will be broken, and all the characters will return to their daily lives and personal struggles. Although all the characters end with a self-identity affirming chant, "colored & love it/ love it/ bein colored," there is no closure or hope for a different future. Timpane (1990) affirmed that this ending provided a "communal starting point for a large number of possibilities"; however, he postulates that the epiphany did not change anything and found the ending of the play shallow and lacking.

### Physical Appearance

There are three relevant points from the play in the Physical Appearance category. First, in the scene when all the characters are pretending to be in a bar, the favorite "pick-up line" of the men is "aw babee/ you so pretty" (p. 875). While the men believe their line works because they are telling the women what they think women want to hear, the women find their strategy laughable. Second, during that same scene, maxine talks about a man who gave up his place in the front of the bus line to come and talk to her. She makes this observation about the man, "but as the night went on i noticed this yng man waz so much like the other yng men from here/ who used their bodies as bait & their smiles as passport alternatives" (p. 875). Her observation is

unique in that women are usually associated with using their physical bodies to get what they want, and here maxine notes this quality is masculine. Third, in the scene where natalie envisions life as a white woman, she says, "i can assume since i am white girl on the streets/ that everyone notices how beautiful i am/ especially lil black & caribbean boys/ they love to look at me" (p. 878). Additionally, the one feature that natalie likes about being white is her hair, which she can "fling" whenever the notion strikes her (p. 877). As in other places in the play, the white, female standard of beauty is treated as superior to black, female features and appearances.

#### Summary of Research Questions

The characters in *spell* #7 do not fall into gender role portrayals, with the exception of ross and natalie. None of the characters are married or have children; they are responsible for their own survival. Only ross and natalie are in a relationship, and natalie is the breadwinner for the couple. When the female characters enter into the role-playing scenes, they assume the characters of mothers. Although nothing is known about what type of mother or wife she is, fay is ineffective away from her traditional domestic environment. Even though she immerses herself in domestic chores like knitting and baking, sue-jean is an abysmal mother who easily took the life of her child when childcare was more involved than she expected.

The characters are limited both by their gender and their race. They are denied the best parts in the shows, and they are expected to be happy just having work. The women are especially ignored—having to be content to smile and dance or play the prostitute.

The setting itself is a viable force within the play because in the magical place that lou conjures up, the characters are free to be themselves and to vent their frustrations without consequences. They are there to support one another. Consequently, the characters are freer to

comment about the reality of society instead of having to hide behind a "mask" of expected gender and racial behavior.

The play does draw a distinction between male and female gender behavior. None of the men, for example, judge Ross for his confessed philandering or his refusal to work. Only the women protest his actions. As it is developed in the play, the women, as a group, recognize the invisibility of women, both black and white, to be full partners in society.

### *Fool for Love*

Sam Shepard's play *Fool for Love* was written in 1983, and it was the only play that Shepard had written that focused on a male and a female lead instead of his usual pattern of two male leads with women becoming only minor, undeveloped characters. Normally, women in a Shepard play were "merely 'stage property,' present only to uphold the privileged male performance" (Hall, 1993b, p. 150). As Mottran (1984) noted, May was Shepard's "only fully developed and significant female character" in his work to that date (p. 155).

Aside from his traditional neglect of women in the majority of his full-length plays, Shepard was credited with attempting to create a new American mythology. His characters were often aimless cowboys or aging rock stars, and Shepard combined the "myths, traditions, and pop culture of the Western world to convey themes such as the decay of the American dream and the modern family, the aimless search for personal identity and roots, and the failure of myths to alleviate the suffering of a directionless, mechanized civilization (Steinke, 1993, p. 73). In a similar light, Schuler (1990) attributed to Shepard the creation of

a new American antihero: the disenfranchised cowboy who searches in vain for a range that has long since vanished; the round peg who refuses the square hole of middle-class,

corporate America; the last true iconoclast who rejects bourgeois values of home, family, and stable career; the sensitive male whose erratic and often violent behavior can best be understood as a futile gesture of revolt against an increasingly complex, incomprehensible universe. (p. 221).

In the world of a Shepard play, the women were traditionally attracted to the protagonist's "rough-hewn vulnerability," but with *Fool for Love* the image of the needy woman began to break down (p. 222).

*Fool for Love* is set in a "low-rent motel room on the edge of the Mojave Desert" in an unspecified year (p. 692). The room belongs to May, who works at a local restaurant. Eddie has come to visit May to convince her to come away with him and to move back into his trailer. Eddie and May have a combative relationship that often disintegrates into physical violence. As Eddie and May talk about the past, it becomes apparent this scene has been played out between them before. During their times apart Eddie and May have had other companions, and these companions affect the current action of the play. Eddie's most recent girlfriend, identified only as the Countess, shows up in the hotel parking lot and shoots Eddie's truck and eventually returns and sets his truck on fire. She is never seen in the play. May's new love interest, Martin, who does physically appear in the play, becomes an instrumental pawn in May and Eddie's cyclical relationship, and he facilitates the bulk of the dialogue that leads to the play's climax.

May is not interested in going away with Eddie for several reasons. First, she hates the loneliness of her life with Eddie, who is gone on the rodeo circuit for months at a time. Second, she knows Eddie has been involved with another woman since May last saw him, and she is jealous. Third, May is trying to make a life for herself by getting a job and a new boyfriend.

Eddie draws Martin, through a physical confrontation, into the argument he and May are having. Eventually, Martin becomes privy to the entire story of May's and Eddie's past. May and Eddie are related—they have the same father. Their father lived part-time with Eddie's mother and part-time with May's mother. His dual life was kept secret from the women for many years. When Eddie's father takes him with him one night to see May's mother, May and Eddie meet, fall in love, and become inseparable. They continued their relationship after finding out the truth about their mutual father. Now, many years later they are connected by a deep love and repelled by as deep a hate. They now relive this scene over and over again because they cannot stay apart from each other. In the final moments of the play, Eddie goes out to check on his burning truck, but May knows that he is gone. She begins to pack her suitcase to move to some other hotel in some other town to wait for Eddie's return.

In addition to May, Eddie, and Martin, another character is present. He is identified as the Old Man, and he "exists in the minds of May and Eddie," and they often have a three-way conversation (p. 692). He is a specter who sits quietly in a rocking chair at the extreme front of the stage. As their father, he is interested on making sure when Eddie and May re-tell their story they are accurate with the details. He accepts no fault for his children's current situation, and he says that he did nothing wrong by loving two women. He lives by the philosophy that if he believes something in his mind, then it is true. In his mind, his love for two women just happened that way. He cannot accept any responsibility for Eddie's mother's suicide, and he barely even acknowledges that it ever happened. He favors Eddie over May and is as combative with them as they are with each other.

The four gender trait categories, Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance, contained pertinent information for investigating

the gender roles and behavior of the characters in *Fool for Love*. However, gender behavior takes a sideline position to the characters' situation. These characters interact and bang into each other not because they are fighting the desire to live according to prescribed gender roles but because they are trapped by a circumstance that has corrupted and changed their very souls to the point that any relationship they enter into is tainted and will eventually be destroyed.

### Behavior Characteristics

As established, May and Eddie have a combative and violent relationship born of hate and love. The barren desert and sparsely furnished hotel room symbolize the emotional toll that their relationship has had on their individual souls. In this stark room, Eddie demonstrates the most traditional gender behavior characteristics, while May vacillates between female and male characteristics.

Eddie, who works the rodeos, is an aging cowboy. He is rough, rugged, and aggressive in his behavior. He tracks down May, and he wants to be her protector. He repeatedly tells her, "I'm not goin' anywhere. [...] I'm not gonna' leave. Don't worry. I'm not gonna' leave. I'm stayin' right here" (p. 692-693). He finally admits, "May, I'm tryin' to take care of you. All right?" (p. 693). During the miles that he drove to find May, he worked out a domestic plan he wants May to agree to. He describes his vision for her: "May, I got everything worked out. I been thinkin' about this for weeks. I'm gonna move the trailer. Build a little pipe corral to keep the horses. Have a big vegetable garden. Some chickens maybe" (p. 694). When May reminds him of all of the times in the past that he abandoned her, he yells, "I'm gonna' take care of you, May. I am. I'm gonna' stick with you no matter what. I promise" (p. 694). In an effort to prove to May that he is now a worthy provider, he proudly boasts, "I've been real good. I have. No hooch. No slammer. No women. No nothin'. I been a pretty boring kind of guy actually" (p.

698). In spite of his plans and his account of his reformed behavior, May, still angry over his affair with the Countess, does not believe Eddie's words. He makes one more attempt at coercing her to come with him; he explosively says,

I came all this way to get you! Whatsa' matter with you! I came all this way to get you!  
Do you think I'd do that if I didn't love you! Huh? That bitch doesn't mean anything to me! Nuthin' I got no reason to be here but you. (p. 700)

May, however, remains resolute in her decision to avoid his trap of domestic bliss.

May knows Eddie, and she provides additional information about his personality, and this information defines Eddie by traditional male traits. As May flatly explains, Eddie is following his traditional pattern of trying to win her back. As she reminds him, "Why are you going through this whole thing again like you're trying to impress me or something. Like we just met. This is the same crap you laid on me in high school" (p. 698). When Eddie discovers that May is supposed to be going on a date, he immediately assumes that her date is a "twerp" (p. 696). Eddie's idea of manliness is simple according to May: "Anybody who doesn't half kill themselves fallin' off horses and jumping on steers is a twerp in your book" (p. 696). When Eddie gets belligerent about her new boyfriend, May says, "Why is everything a big contest with you? He's not competing with you. He doesn't even know you exist" (p. 696). In short, Eddie, according to Bank (1989) was attempting to coerce May with a "macho" attitude and belief system about love (p. 230).

May is not interested in being a partner in Eddie's domestic vision, but a part of her still desperately clings to Eddie. May's physical actions at the opening of the play suggest her conflicting feelings for Eddie. For Eddie's first few lines, May "sits on the edge of the bed facing [the] audience, feet on [the] floor, legs apart, elbows on [her] knees, hands hanging limp and

crossed between her knees, head hanging forward, face staring at the floor" (p. 692). When Eddie offers to go and get May something to eat, she "suddenly grabs his closest leg with both arms and holds tight, burying her head between his knees," and a few seconds later, she "squeezes tighter to his leg" (p. 693). But her signs of dependency on Eddie are brief; soon after the above display, she tells him, "I don't need you" (p. 693). Eddie seems shocked at May's independence, and May counters his surprise with "Yeah. What'd you think. I was helpless?" (p. 694). May does not intend to be a part of Eddie's domestic bliss:

I hate chickens! I hate horses! I hate all that shit! You know that. You got me confused with somebody else. You keep comin' up here with this lame country dream life with chickens and vegetable and I can't stand any of it. It makes me want to puke to even think about it. (p. 694)

May, having lived in Eddie's domestic vision in the past, has little regard for that life; it is a lonely and isolated life for May. As she tries to explain to Eddie:

What do you think it's like sittin' in a tin trailer for weeks on end with the wind ripping through it? Waitin' around for the butane to arrive. Hiking down to the Laundromat in the rain. Do you think that's thrilling or somethin'? (p. 694)

When they were living together the last time, Eddie brought May French fashion magazines, but they did little to relieve the boredom. Even though she physically clung to Eddie at the opening and when he leaves the tiny hotel room for a few seconds and she is panicked until he returns, May is resolute in her decision not to leave with Eddie, and she gains strength and stature throughout the play. This transformation led Hall (1993b) to conclude, "May challenges the Old Man's, Eddie's, and our culture's stereotypical representation of women. Through the course of



the play, May changes from a silent, marginalized object of male desire to a speaking subject" (p. 115).

May's new boyfriend, Martin, stands in contrast to Eddie's abrasive behavior. Martin makes a very bold and chivalrous entrance into the hotel room because he thinks that May is in trouble; according to the stage directions,

Martin crashes onstage in the darkness. [...] Martin tackles Eddie around the waist and the two of them go crashing into the stage-right bathroom door. [...] May rushes to [the] light switch, flips it on. [...] Martin stands over Eddie who's crumpled up against the wall on the floor. Martin is about to smash Eddie's face with his fist. (p. 701)

But this burst of bravado is Martin's last. He is meek and gentle and semi-intelligent. He is a forgetful maintenance man, who now finds himself in the middle between May and Eddie.

Martin and Eddie approach relationships with women from different angles. For their date, Martin had planned to take May to the movies, and he and Eddie have the following exchange about the impending date:

Eddie: What're you gonna' go see, Martin?

Martin: I can't decide.

Eddie: What d'ya' mean you can't decide? You supposed to have all that worked out ahead of time aren't ya?

Martin: Yeah, but I'm not sure what she likes.

Eddie: What's that got to do with it? The guy picks the movie. The guy's always supposed to pick the movie.

Martin: Yeah, but I don't want to take her to see something she doesn't want to see.

Eddie: How do you know what she wants to see?

Martin: I don't that's the reason I can't decide. I mean what if I take her to something she's already see before? (p. 702)

Whereas Eddie would have the evening planned out according to what he wanted and how he wanted things to be, Martin, on the other hand, takes May's feelings and desires into account, thus he appears as a weak man in Eddie's eyes. Hart (1989) defined Martin as merely a "an outsider to facilitate exposition" (p. 218). But it is Martin's gentle nature as evidenced in the above conversation that, unbeknownst to him, makes him the perfect choice to hear Eddie and May's confession.

As a concluding point to this section, the play discusses gender roles in the two families and suggests that the past creates the present for the characters. For each of his two families, the Old Man was often an absent parent and spouse. As Eddie explains, "He'd disappear for months at a time. [...] This went on for years" (p. 704). Neither Eddie's mother nor May's mother ever questioned the actions of her husband; they remained silent to this form of cruelty. May's mother finally decides to end the mystery; as May says, "She kept hunting him from town to town. Following little clues that he left behind, like a postcard maybe, or a motel on the back of a matchbook" (p. 706). When May's mother finally finds the Old Man, she and May peer into the window of Eddie's house, and they see the domestic image of the Old Man with his other family: "It was just exactly supertime and they were all sitting down at the table and they were having fried chicken" (p. 706). Hart (1989) noted the importance of the father's past actions on the characters' present conditions, and she concluded that "paternal control and manipulation frames the play and determines the onstage action" (p. 219). Furthermore, she recognized that "Eddie has 'inherited' his father's proclivity for disappearance" as evidenced by his relationship with May (p. 219).

## Communication Patterns

Eddie and May exhibit traditionally male communication patterns throughout the play. They are both blunt and direct with each other, and they say whatever is on their minds, regardless of the impact of the words. They both curse throughout the play, and they openly discuss sex in bawdy terms or in graphic detail. As with other things in their relationship, May and Eddie use words as a form of torment against the other person; verbal assaults are a power that each uses to gain an advantage over the other.

The culmination of Eddie's hunt for May is the telling of their story about their sordid past and their father's lecherous behavior. The tale is the climax to their meeting in the hotel room, and they both know that the story must be told. Having Martin as a witness to the tale enhances the story and transforms the tale into a confession that consummates their relationship and begins the cycle again.

The Old Man participates in the action the most during the telling of the tale. He wants to ensure the tale is told correctly, which is a version that is most kind to him. When May begins to explain about Eddie's mother's suicide, the Old Man makes a fervent appeal to Eddie, "Stand up! Get on yer feet now, goddammit! I wanna' hear the male side a' this thing. You gotta' represent me now. Speak on my behalf. There's no one to speak for me now! Stand up!" (p. 707). But Eddie refuses to defend his father's actions.

Interestingly, May is the voice of reality in the play, while the men cling to manufacturing and then to verbalizing illusion. May is a realist in that she will not allow herself to be conned by a fancy picture of a rosy future that Eddie would like her to accept. An example of this trait as cited by Wilson (1987) was when May tried to explain to Eddie that her feelings for him were now hate not love; May accurately described her feeling for Eddie as opposed to

his denial of the truth and insistence of on way he wants things to be. Additionally, when Eddie begins to narrate their tale, May does not allow his voice to be the only one that is heard; she comes in and makes sure that her mother's and Eddie's mother's stories are heard (p. 706). She will not allow their voices to remain silent even though that is what Eddie and the Old Man try to do.

In contrast to May's words of reality, both the Old Man and Eddie live in a world of illusion. For instance, near the beginning of the play, the Old Man explains to Eddie that he is married to Barbara Mandrell just because he thinks so; if he thinks it then it is real. As he explains to Eddie, "That's realism" (p. 695). Eddie invokes a similar point of view in his twisted definition of lying. As he tells Martin, "Lying's when you believe it's true. If you already know it's a lie, then it's not lying" (p. 703). The circular nature of Eddie's reasoning befuddles Martin. As concluded by DeRose (1992), the entire play was based on the notion that to "acknowledge illusion" was to "control it" thereby making illusion into reality (p. 117).

### Sources of Power

Power in this play does not come from traditional sources. However, power and the use of power to subdue another individual are basic parts of the play. Most often power takes the form of physical violence—especially for Eddie. May, by contrast, blends physical violence with the traditional female power base of sexuality.

Power is gained and exhibited by physical displays between the characters. They repeatedly slam the doors, bang the walls, and hit each other both in emotional frustration and in order to instill fear and intimidation in the other person. The stage is built to enhance the violence of the characters by increasing the sounds of their physical combat. According to the stage directions, "The door is amplified with microphones and a bass drum hidden in the frame

so that each time an actor slams it, the door booms loud and long" (p. 695). As addressed by Podol (1989), violence and the depiction of violence was a common and recurrent theme in Shepard's work, and in this play, the staging devices heightened the sounds of a violent action and created "additional tension in the audience" (p. 156). The amplification devices and the physical nature of the characters worked together "to draw attention to the claustrophobic environment of the setting" (p. 156). Additionally, Podol noted that the dramatization of violence that was inherent in this play helped to clarify the emotional states of the characters.

May exercises her power over Eddie first by using her charm as a woman, which will then climax with a violent action. She threatens to kill Eddie and his former lover the Countess in a violent and cruel manner. She says,

I'm gonna' kill her and then I'm gonna' kill you. Systematically. With sharp knives. Two separate knives. One for her and one for you. (*She slams wall with her elbow. Wall resonates*) So the blood doesn't mix. I'm gonna' torture her first though. Not you. I'm just gonna' let you have it. Probably in the midst of a kiss. Right when you think every thing's been healed up. Right in the moment when you're sure you've got me buffaloed. That's when you'll die. (p. 693)

In keeping with her threat to seduce Eddie before killing him, Eddie and May embrace in a soft and tender kiss just moments later, and she looks at him and smiles and "then suddenly knees him in the groin with tremendous force. Eddie doubles over and drops like a rock" (p. 695).

Whereas May uses planning and forethought when getting at Eddie, all Eddie can do is use his brute strength. When May leaves the hotel room for a brief second, Eddie exits and returns with May slung over his shoulder (p. 699). When the Countess is outside shooting up Eddie's pickup truck, Eddie wrestles May, in a show of excessive force, to the ground and pins

her there (p. 700). When Martin decides he should leave the hotel room, Eddie blocks the door, and then when Martin goes to escape out the window, Eddie "runs to him and catches him by the back of the pants, pulls him out of the window, slams him up against the stage-right wall, then pulls him slowly down the wall as he speaks" (p. 703). Needless to say, May and Martin stay in the hotel room, and they do not try to leave again.

In addition to the physical means, Eddie also uses three props to instill fear and intimidation in May. First, Eddie brings a ten-gauge shotgun into the room under the pretense of cleaning it (p. 696). He sits on the bed and begins to attend to his weapon while he and May argue over his presence. When the shotgun does not sufficiently scare May, Eddie leaves and returns with two steer ropes. He "spins the rope above his head in a flat horn-loop, then ropes one of the bedposts, taking up the slack with a sharp snap of his right hand. He takes the loop off of the bedpost, rebuilds it, swings and ropes another bedpost. He continues right around the bed [...]" (p. 698). As they begin to talk about Martin, Eddie threatens to "nail his ass to the floor," and he "ropes [a] chair downstage, right next to May. He takes up the slack and violently drags the chair back toward the bed" (p. 699). As one final show of strength, Eddie puts his spurs on his boots to show Martin, when he arrives, that he is a "nice," "sensitive," and "civilized" guy yet showing his intentions of doing physical harm to Martin if he needs to (p. 699).

Yet, for all of his show of force, Eddie's threats have little impact on May whereas they work on Martin. Although May confines herself to the hotel room, May understands that Eddie's displays are a part of their ritual. Martin is totally dominated by Eddie. When Eddie commands Martin to sit, he sits (p. 705). Martin stands when Eddie tells him to, and Eddie forces Martin to listen to the tale (p. 705).

## Physical Appearance

The Physical Appearance traits were the least evident in this play. Although in the previous section, May is able to use her femininity to seduce Eddie into a tender moment prior to kicking him, Eddie never comments on her physical appearance. At the beginning of the play May is plainly dressed and rather disheveled in appearance. After one of her trips to the bathroom, she returns with pantyhose, high-heeled shoes, a red dress, and a hairbrush. As the stage directions explain, she begins to change her clothes and fix her hair, and, "she gradually transforms from her former tough drabness into a very sexy woman" (p. 695). However, Eddie is unaware of her physical change. When Eddie and May see each other for the first time, he describes a connection that held them both, but this connection was not a physical one. As he says,

She's just standing there, staring at me and I'm staring back at her and we can't take our eyes off each other. It was like we knew each other from somewhere but we couldn't place where. But the second we saw each other, that very second, we knew we'd never stop being in love. (p. 705)

The lack of attention to the character's physical appearance speaks to a connection that transcends their physical selves and is a testament to the obsession that plagues their souls.

The only woman in the play who is described in terms of her beauty is May's mother. She is described by both May and Eddie as "a real pretty woman with red hair" (p. 705 & p. 706). Even the Old Man remembers May's mother's hair, but curiously, nothing is ever mentioned about Eddie's mother's appearance.

### Summary of Research Questions

The gender behavior of the characters in *Fool for Love* is a mixture of traditional and non-traditional traits, and the masculine and feminine traits are explained as opposite in nature. Eddie is the dominant and aggressive male, but he needs May to participate in the destructive cycle that connects them, and he needs her to conform to the image of the dependent and domestic woman. He wants May to live with him in a husband and wife setting, but from past experience, he knows that the arrangement will only be temporary at best. May, at times, can project the image of a dependent woman, but she eschews Eddie's plans and is living a life of independence. The urge to live following prescribed gender roles does not keep bringing May and Eddie together; their tormented past and incestuous relationship bonds these two together for life. Although they have other lovers, they are destined to play out their cycle; consequently, they will be forever tormented.

Gender is a side notion in this play. Although some of their characteristics are attributed to the traditional boundaries of gender behavior, each character, but especially May, has learned to use whatever means are necessary in order to ensure survival—both physically and emotionally. They use their learned behaviors as a suit of armor against the next enactment of their desperate and personal drama.

### *How I Learned to Drive*

Paula Vogel's 1997 drama *How I Learned to Drive* is a poignant view of child molestation and its far-reaching and long-term effects on the victims. As described by Nouryeh (1999), Vogel's play uncovers "the psychological legacy of incest hidden by family ignorance, embarrassment, and denial" (p. 49). The play focused on the trauma of the abuse on the central



character, which forced the "audience to confront the difficulties of the character's healing process" (p. 49).

Through a variety of theatrical techniques including flashbacks, a chorus to represent a variety of characters, and monologues, *How I Learned to Drive* explores Li'l Bit's relationship with her family and narrates the story of her sexual molestation by her Uncle Peck. The play, set in Maryland, covers the years 1962 to 1991, and the plot is presented in a non-chronological sequence. All the characters in the play, except for Li'l Bit and Peck, are played by a chorus of actors. All the scenes are reenactments of Li'l Bit's past as she comes to terms with what happened to her and seeks resolution to the long-term issues that a childhood of abuse has heaped on her adult life.

Li'l Bit comes from a broken home and is surrounded by a variety of strange relatives. Her mother, Lucy, who got pregnant in high school, was married only for a brief time to Li'l Bit's father. Li'l Bit and her mother live with their Lucy's parents. Li'l Bit's grandfather is a licentious old man who constantly makes fun of Li'l Bit's large breasts and her desire for an education. Li'l Bit's aunt, Mary, is married to Peck, and she cannot admit to herself or to anyone else that her husband has a problem. The most unique feature about this family is their propensity to assign family members nicknames that are descriptions of the individual's genitalia. For example, the grandfather is "Big Papa"; Lucy is "the titless wonder"; and Li'l Bit's cousin Bobby is "B. B." for "blue balls" (p. 1752-1753). While the other characters were assigned their monikers later in life, Li'l Bit's name came to her just after she was born. As she explains, the family was excited to have a female born into the family, and they all gathered around to see "just the little bit" between her legs (p. 1753).

Through a variety of scenes from the past, the play lays Li'l Bit's troubled life out for the audience. Li'l Bit's uncle took advantage of her beginning when she was 11. In addition to his physical violations, Peck conned Li'l Bit into posing for semi-pornographic photographs from the time she was 13. Li'l Bit, who developed a womanly figure at an early age, did not fit in well in middle school and high school, and she endured many cruelties inflicted upon her by her classmates because of her physique. In contrast to her lack of social skills with her peers, she was an exceptional student. When she was 16, Peck taught her to drive a car, and they celebrated her getting her driver's license by going to a restaurant where Peck buys her several martinis. Li'l Bit is awarded a scholarship to college and that ends the abuse; however, Peck attempted to continue their relationship by sending her love letters and gifts. She sees him on her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, and after a conflicted inner struggle, she ends the relationship after Peck tells her he wants to marry her. She never sees him again. Li'l Bit gets expelled from college for poor grades. She then proceeds to have a string of dead-end jobs before finally managing to return to school and become a teacher. By the time she is 40, Peck has died from alcoholism, and she is ready to face the truth of her past and begin to put the pieces of her life back together.

Because of the subject matter of the play, gender behavior became secondary to the larger issue of child sexual abuse. However, the play had several relevant features in the Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Source of Power, and Physical Appearance gender categories, and the attitudes about gender behavior as expressed by the characters was a contributing factor to what happened to Li'l Bit.

#### Behavior Characteristics

The gender roles in Li'l Bit's family are divided along traditional lines, and the play presents a clear dividing line between what men and women do, and the dividing line is based on

standards that define appropriate male and female behavior. Li'l Bit acts as a receptor of information about male and female relationships.

Lucy teaches her daughter a valuable lesson for living—how to drink like a lady. The monologue, entitled "A Mother's Guide to Social Drinking," presents straightforward information about how drinking is different for a lady than for a gentleman and addresses how a lady can drink in public and still keep her wits and her virtue. The lesson is divided into three sections. Section one addresses general drinking etiquette and the kind of drink to select. Prior to ordering her first drink, a lady should always see there is bread on the table, and she should eat bread with extra butter during the course of the evening. Lucy cautions to avoid all "*ladies'* drinks" including pink ladies, slow gin fizzes, white Russians, and mai tais just to name a few (p. 1755). She advises to "avoid anything with sugar, or any thing with an umbrella. Get your vitamin C from *fruit*. Don't order anything with Voodoo or Vixen in the title or a sexual position in the name [...]" (p. 1755). Instead of these potentially lethal drinks, a lady should "drink like a man; straight up or on the rocks, with plenty of water in between" (p. 1755). A lady should never get "sloppy" drunk only "tipsy and a little gay," and she should sip her drink while engaging in fascinating conversation. His glass should be empty when a lady's drink is three-fourths finished. But the most important thing to remember is to "stay with one drink all night long, like the man you came with" (p. 1755). Lesson two covers what to do at the table and what to do if too much alcohol is consumed. A lady's drink should never be left unattended on the table to avoid a drink becoming spiked with a "mickey." Should intoxication overtake a lady, then she should go outside for some air or splash water on her face. As Lucy explains, "Don't be afraid to dunk your head if necessary. A wet woman is still less conspicuous than a drunk woman" (p. 1756). If the situation is drastic, then a lady should go into the nearest stall and

induce vomiting to correct the situation. Lesson three summarizes the events and adds a measure of insight for her daughter. Lucy proudly claims that "Thanks to judicious planning and several trips to the ladies' loo, your mother once out-drunk an entire regiment of British officers on a good-will visit to Washington!" (p. 1756). However, as one last note of caution, Lucy adds the following disclaimer:

As a last resort, when going out for an evening on the town, be sure to wear a skin-tight girdle—so tight that only a surgical knife or acetylene torch can get it off you—so that if you do pass out in the arms of your escort, he'll end up with rubber burns on his fingers before he can steal your virtue. (p. 1756)

Ironically, this monologue is interspersed throughout the scene where Peck takes Li'l Bit to a restaurant after she gets her driver's license, and he encourages her to have several drinks with her dinner. She follows the advice to the best of her ability, but Li'l Bit still ends up intoxicated even though she ate bread and ordered dry martinis.

Li'l Bit also learns about sex and marriage from her mother. Lucy often expresses bitter sentiments about men. For example, she tells Li'l Bit that "men only want one thing," and "once they have it, they lose all interest. So Don't Give It to Them" (p. 1758). Because men act like children most of the time, Lucy suggests to Li'l Bit that there is "just one thing a married woman needs to know how to use—the rolling pin or the broom. I prefer a heavy, cast-iron fry pan—they're great on a man's head, no matter how thick the skull is" (p. 1759). As a capstone to this lesson, Lucy explains that women are the driving forces behind the advancement of the men in a civilized society: "They'd still be crouched on their haunches over a fire in a cave if we hadn't cleaned them up! [...] Looking at those naughty pictures like boys in a dime store with a dollar in their pockets!" (p. 1759). Yet for all of her negative remarks about men, Lucy wants to teach

Li'l Bit about the beauty of sex and the joys of an orgasm, and she does not want her daughter to have to learn the intimate details about such things in the streets. However, in contrast to the detailed lesson that she gave about how to drink, all she tells Li'l Bit on the subject of sexual relations is "don't be scared. It won't hurt you—if the man you go to bed with really loves you. It's important that he loves you" (p. 1760).

Li'l Bit also learns about men and marriage from her grandmother. As Lucy describes, her mother was "a child bride" and was "a married woman [...] who still believed in Santa Claus" (p. 1758). Lucy's mother defends her actions by citing that in her day 14 was "a grown-up woman" and that her marriage was a perfectly legal union. Instead of a frying pan, the grandmother prefers a broom as her weapon of choice against her husband. In describing her relationship with her husband, she says that her husband "is ruled by only two bosses! Mr. Gut and Mr. Peter!" (p. 1759). The grandmother's marriage is based on a simple dictum that she apparently learned very early: "Your grandfather only cares that I do two things: have the table set and the bed turned down" (p. 1758). While she seemed to have no interest or gain any enjoyment from sexual intercourse, the grandmother describes her husband's desire for sex as insatiable; he required it every morning and every evening and often came home during lunch for food and for sex (p. 1758). She never explained sex to either of her daughters; she sent them to the priest to learn about sex instead of explaining it herself. She does not think that Lucy should be open with Li'l Bit about sex, and she reproaches Lucy for her instructions to Li'l Bit. She insists that Lucy should tell Li'l Bit that sex "hurts. It's agony! You think that you're going to die! Especially if you do it before marriage!" so that Little Bit will not be inclined to engage in such behavior (p. 1760). As an extra emphasis to her point, the grandmother tells Li'l Bit, "You

bleed like a stuck pig! And you lay there and say, 'Why, O Lord, have you forsaken me?!'" (p. 1760).

An additional lesson that Li'l Bit learns from her mother and her grandmother is the shame that her mother's pregnancy brought to the family. Lucy's mother places all the blame on her daughter, and the "tale" of her daughter's misbehavior, with her grandparents favorite line, "You Made Your Bed; Now Lie On It!," has become a traditional family story that gets repeated much to Lucy's chagrin (p. 1761). As Lucy remembers, all her mother ever told her was "A girl with her skirt up can outrun a man with his pants down!" (p. 1761). Ironically, Lucy uses similar words when she and Li'l Bit talk about Peck taking Li'l Bit on a trip to the beach:

Li'l Bit: Just because you lost your husband—I still deserve a chance at having a father!

Someone! A man who will look out for me! Don't I get a chance?

Female Greek Chorus (as Mother): I will feel terrible if something happens.

Li'l Bit: Mother! It's in your head! Nothing will happen! I can take care of myself. And I certainly can handle Uncle Peck.

Female Greek Chorus (as Mother): All right. But I'm warning you—if anything happens, I hold you responsible. (p. 1772)

And with that simple statement, Lucy sealed Li'l Bit's fate at the age of 11 by holding her daughter responsible for the actions of an adult. Furthermore, she cut off any chance that her daughter would come to her and tell her about the abuse. Ironically, according to Meiselman (1990), many mothers of sexually abused daughters "set up" their daughters—consciously or subconsciously—just as Lucy did to Li'l Bit (p. 45).

Li'l Bit's grandfather also teaches her about gender behavior. The grandfather establishes his archaic beliefs very early in the play in a scene that Li'l Bit informs the audience is called "a

typical family dinner" (p. 1753). After several comments about Li'l Bit's large breasts, he comments that he does not know why she is adamant about attending college because "What does she need a college degree for? She's got all the credentials she'll need on her chest" (p. 1753). In addition to his comments at the dinner table, Li'l Bit's grandfather has his own story that he is proud to tell about how he selected his wife:

I picked your grandmother out of that herd of sisters just like a lion chooses the gazelle—the plump, slow, flaky gazelle dawdling at the edge of the herd—your sisters were too smart and too fast and too scrawny— (p. 1758)

Throughout her formative years, Peck is always around to instruct Li'l Bit to the ways of the world and to give her different information from what the rest of her family tells her. For example, Peck always does the dishes after a meal. One Christmas, when Peck is doing the dishes, Li'l Bit asks why he does this because she has never seen a man do the dishes. He replies, "I think men should be nice to women. Women are always working for us. There's nothing particularly manly about wolfing down food and then sitting around in a stupor while the women clean up" (p. 1767). Another example is when he is preparing to photograph Li'l Bit, he explains to her that "Girls turn into women long before boys turn into men" (p. 1765) and that he values her, not only for her body, but in contrast to her grandfather, he appreciates her "wonderful mind" (p. 1766). But the biggest lesson that Peck teaches Li'l Bit is how to drive a car like a man. As Peck explains,

I don't have any sons. You're the nearest to a son I'll ever have—and I want to give you something. Something that really matters to me.

There's something about driving—when you're in control of the car, just you and the machine and the road—that nobody can take from you. A power. I feel more myself in my car than anywhere else. And that's what I want to give to you.

There's a lot of assholes out there. Crazy men, arrogant idiots, drunks, angry kids, geezers who are blind—and you have to be ready for them. I want to teach you to drive like a man. [...]

Men are taught to drive with confidence—with aggression. The road belongs to them. They drive defensively—always looking out for the other guy. Women tend to be polite—to hesitate. And that can be fatal. (p. 1762)

As part of his driving lessons, Peck explains to Li'l Bit about the inner workings of the motor, how to properly adjust the seat and the mirrors, and how to place her hands on the steering wheel in the nine o'clock and three o'clock positions for maximum control.

In addition to explaining the difference between male and female drivers, Peck also explains to Li'l Bit why cars are referred to as "she." In his opinion, a car is a female because when "you close your eyes and think of someone who responds to your touch—someone who performs just for you and gives you what you ask for—I guess I always see a 'she'" (p. 1762). After Peck's comment, Li'l Bit tells the audience that she "closed [her] eyes—and decided not to change the gender" (p. 1762). This veiled remark that would suggest homosexual tendencies is the second such comment in the play, and although not always an outcome of sexual abuse, some women who were victims of incest or molestation do turn to asexual or homosexual lifestyles as adults (Everstine & Everstine, 1989; Forward & Buck, 1979).

Peck's wife, Mary, provides an interesting look at marriage and her role as a wife. Mary describes her husband as "a good man," and she feels fortunate to be his wife (p. 1767). She



acknowledges he is a generous provider, and he helps around not only their house but at the neighbors' homes as well. As Mary acknowledges, Peck is a decent and hardworking man, and this polite and quiet demeanor was a common trait of sexual molesters (Forward & Buck, 1979). She realizes that her husband has problems, but, "Men in his generation were expected to be quiet about it and get on with their lives" (p. 1767). When Mary senses that her husband is "having a bad spell," she takes care to "discuss a new recipe, or sales, or gossip—because I think domesticity can be a balm for men when they're lost" (p. 1767). As for the relationship between Peck and Li'l Bit, Mary is jealous and dislikes her niece very much; Mary is just counting the days until Li'l Bit leaves for college. Then, she believes that Peck will come back to her. By her uninvolved attitude, Mary, just like Lucy, enables the abuse to take place.

One final lesson in gender behavior for women is what Li'l Bit learns at school, or as she subtitles the scene "The Anthropology of the Female Body in Ninth Grade—Or a Walk Down Mammary Lane" (p. 1763). A boy in Li'l Bit's class was pretending he was having trouble breathing, and when she went to see if he was alright, she walked right into the joke—he was "allergic" to the foam rubber he thought was in Li'l Bit's bra. When she became angry, her female classmates criticize her: "Rage is not attractive in a girl" and "Get a sense of humor" (p. 1763). At a school sock-hop, Li'l Bit learns men stare at women with large breasts, and when she complains to her friends, they say "You know, you should take it as a compliment that the guys want to watch you jiggle. They're guys. That's what their supposed to do" (p. 1764). Li'l Bit, not happy with their explanation, says,

I guess that you're right. But sometimes I feel like these alien forces, these two mounds of flesh have grafted themselves onto my chest, and they're using me until they can "propagate" and take over the world [...] Or maybe someone's implanted radio

transmitters in my chest at a frequency I can't hear, that girls can't detect, but they're sending out these signals to men who get mesmerized, like sirens, calling them to dash themselves on these "rocks"— (p. 1764)

However, her friends are "staring at her in disbelief" until one of them finally says, "You are the strangest girl I have ever met" (p. 1764). Just as Li'l Bit finds little understanding at home, she gets the same treatment at school.

### Communication Patterns

Much of the play develops from monologues and sketches from Li'l Bit's memory, so most of the traits in the Communication Patterns category were not applicable except for one brief example. In Mary's monologue, she discusses that Peck is often haunted by troubles, but he is from the generation that taught men to be silent and stoic. She explains, "The men who fought in World War II didn't have 'rap sessions' to talk about their feelings. Men in his generation were expected to be quiet about it and get on with their lives" (p. 1767). Thus, Mary copes with his moods by keeping silent or by discussing domestic trivia. In this case, Peck is following the culturally prescribed notion that men are silent about their feelings and their problems. This silence leads to his abuse of Li'l Bit and ultimately leads to his death from alcoholism and depression.

### Sources of Power

Given the nature of this play and its intense subject matter, the power that is manifested in this play does not come from the traditional sources for any of the characters, yet the play, at its very center is about the power that Peck has over Li'l Bit and her powerless feelings to keep the molestation from happening.

From the time that Li'l Bit was born Peck held all the power. As he reminds her, he literally held her in the palm of his hand: "I held you, one day old, right in this hand" (p. 1753). As she grew, he continued to hold her in his grasp. In order to have some sense of control over what is happening to her, Li'l Bit has a "line" that Peck is not supposed to cross, and she often reminds him of this line (p. 1752, p. 1757, p. 1766, & p. 1767). However, he has crossed this line. In order to cope with the events as they were happening, Li'l Bit engaged in "dissociation," which is the separation of the mind from what is happening to the body in order to get through the experience (Meiselman, 1990, p. 45). And as Li'l Bit summarizes after the scene that detailed when her abuse began, "That day [when she was 11] was the last day I lived inside my body. I retreated above the neck, and I've lived inside the 'fire' inside my head ever since" (p. 1772).

Li'l Bit does make a pact with Peck that gives her some power to mold his actions. She agrees to meet with him on a daily basis to talk. In exchange for allowing him to spend time with her, he must promise not to drink (p. 1768). She intuitively feels that he needs someone to talk to, and she needs someone, too. She puts herself in harm's way in order to keep Peck sober. Although her actions seemed strange, according to Pendergast (1993), a common trait among victims of sexual molestation was to make themselves available "in order to maintain the relationship and all of the attached benefits" the victims believed they were getting (p. 5). In Li'l Bit's case, Peck was the only man in her life who did not make fun of her, and he listened when she talked to him. As noted by Pendergast, when the victim invited the behavior, enormous guilt would follow, and this was the case with Li'l Bit. Furthermore, a victim's guilt was enhanced by the recognition of her body's response to the physical stimulus provided by her attacker—the encounters, on the physical level, induced pleasurable sensations. When Peck makes his last

visit to see her on her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, he wants them to rekindle what they had together, and according to the stage directions, Li'l Bit is trapped in a state of confusion, characterized as "half wanting to run, half wanting to get it over with, half wanting to be held by him" (p. 1770).

As a final note in this section, Mary attributes Li'l Bit as having the ability to hold a power over men—especially her husband. She describes Li'l Bit as "sly," and believes that Li'l bit "knows exactly what she's doing; she's twisted Peck around her little finger and thinks it's all a big secret" (p. 1767). Mary is content to wait until Li'l Bit is done manipulating her husband; she will be the one waiting on the couch when Li'l Bit is gone. Mary is attributing a power to Li'l Bit that she does not have, and often the victim of sexual abuse was blamed for what happened and labeled as "sexually aggressive" (Everstine & Everstine, 1989, p. 6).

### Physical Appearance

All of the references in the play that address the traits in the Physical Appearance category are related to the objectification of women. As referenced earlier, the members of Li'l Bit's family all have nicknames that refer to their genitalia. For Li'l Bit, the ramifications of this objectification are severe. She is not given any other name in the play except for Li'l Bit. Even though she requests that Peck not call her "Li'l Bit" anymore, she never reminds him of her name, and he disregards her request as if she did not mean it anyway (p. 1752). Additionally, Li'l Bit is constantly under attack for her large breasts. Her grandfather finds it amusing to make comments like "If Li'l Bit gets any bigger, we're gonna haveta buy her a wheelbarrow to carry in front of her" or "five minutes before Li'l Bit turns the corner, her tits turn first" (p. 1753). She endures the same type of abuse when she is in middle school; all the boys want to dance with her, not because they like her as a person, but because they want to see her chest move. In order

to enhance the theme of the sexual objectification of women, during the sock-hop scene, the stage directions indicate the following sound effect:

Over the music there's a rhythmic, hypnotic beeping transmitted, which both Greg and Peck hear. Li'l Bit hears it too, and in horror she stares at her chest. She, too, is almost hypnotized. In a trance, Greg responds to the signals and is called to her side—actually, her front. Like a zombie, he stands in front of her, his eyes planted on her two orbs. (p. 1764)

Like the boys in her class, Peck is also attracted to her breasts, and he likes photographing her in a tank top. Although she agrees to the photo session if Peck will keep the pictures all to himself, Peck has other plans. He wants her to have a professional portfolio so they can submit her pictures to *Playboy* magazine. Li'l Bit is horrified he would want other people to see the pictures, but as he explains, "Wait—Li'l Bit—it's nothing like that. Very respectable women model for *Playboy*—actresses with major careers—women in college—there's an Ivy League issue every—" (p. 1766). As a result of feeling so disgusted by all of the attention her body has brought her, especially her breasts, as an adult woman Li'l Bit has "never known what it feels like to jog or dance. Any thing that... 'jiggles.' I do watch people on the dance floor, or out on the running paths, just jiggling away. And I say—good for them" (p. 1773).

#### Additional Observations

Because of the subject matter of this play, several additional points need to be explored. These points will clarify some of the material that was presented earlier and provide for a more complete analysis of *How I Learned to Drive*.

The first point is a more detailed look at the metaphor of driving and its use throughout the play. The entire play is organized around the motif of driving. All of the scenes have titles

that refer to driving, such as "Safety First—You and Driver Education," "Shifting Forward from First to Second Gear," or "You and the Reverse Gear." Additionally, the scenes are introduced by a male voice reading the titles of the scene over a loudspeaker. Cars, the love of cars, and how to fix cars are associated with traditional male behavior, and Li'l Bit recognizes this. The opening to her initial driving lesson begins as follows:

Li'l Bit: 1967. In the parking lot of the Beltsville Agricultural Farms. The Initiation into a Boy's First Love.

Peck: Of course, my favorite car will always be the '56 Bel Air Sports Coupe. Chevy sold more '55s, but the '56!—a V-8 with Corvette option, 225 horsepower; went from zero to sixty miles per hour in 8.9 seconds.

Li'l Bit (*to the audience*): Long after a mother's tits, but before a woman's breasts;

Peck: Super-Turbo-Fire! What a Power Pack—mechanical lifters, twin four-barrel carbs, lightweight valves, dual exhausts—

Li'l Bit (*to the audience*): After the milk but before the beer:

Peck: A specific intake manifold, higher-lift camshaft, and the tightest squeeze Chevy ever made—

Li'l Bit (*to the audience*): Long after he's squeezed down the birth canal but before he's pushed his way back in: The boy falls in love with the thing that bears his weight with speed. (p. 1761)

As the dominant image in the play, cars symbolize the masculine power and control—forces that dominate Li'l Bit's life.

However, in addition to the love of cars, Peck used his car for his first moment with Li'l Bit and subsequently, his car became their most common meeting place. In a reflective moment

about her past, Li'l Bit recalls her college days when her only comfort was to get intoxicated and drive. As she remembers, "I would speed past the churches and the trees on the bend, thinking just one notch of the steering wheel would be all it would take, and yet some...reflex took over. My hands on the wheel in the nine and three o'clock position—I never so much as got a ticket. He taught me well" (p. 1754). Her brief mention of suicide in the above quotation, along with her abuse of alcohol, were two common outcomes in adults who were victims of childhood sexual abuse (Everstine & Everstine, 1989). The final scene of the play has Li'l Bit getting into her car, and Peck is in the back seat, symbolizing that Li'l Bit may be beginning to heal, but she can never forget what he taught her in that car.

Although cars and driving are the significant metaphors in this play that help Li'l Bit organize her memories and talk about her past, a unifying theme of the entire play is the inability to communicate manifested most often by silence. As a culture, contemporary American society is only now coming to terms with and talking about sexual molestation and incest. It was for many generations a silent crime with silent perpetrators and silent victims. Li'l Bit's world is made up of that silence. Silence is required and agreed to by Li'l Bit and Peck about their relationship, and that silence allows the abuse to continue throughout her childhood years. Her mother and her aunt both hold her responsible for her actions. Her aunt even chooses to keep silent when she knows that her husband has a deep-seated problem. Peck holds to a silence about his life in South Carolina and his experiences in World War II. Li'l Bit, as an adult, is bound by silence because after Peck died, she cannot question him: "Who did it to you, Uncle Peck? How old were you? Were you eleven?" (p. 1771).

### Summary of Research Questions

The gender roles of the characters in *How I Learned to Drive* are in keeping with the traditional mode, and the characters' behaviors are in line with their designated roles. Li'l Bit's grandparents have a traditionally based marriage—she does the cooking and cleaning, and he works outside the home. Their marriage is based on his mandates that keep his wife confined to the home, and she acts in accordance with his wishes by keeping him fed and by satisfying his sexual needs without regard for her own pleasure. His chauvinistic attitude is unapologetically displayed for all the family to hear. Lucy, although not married during the scenes of the play, has been married, and she is acting in the role of mother throughout the entire play. The only marriage that is different is Peck's and Mary's. He is the traditional breadwinner, but he also does domestic chores around the home. All of these characters are confined to their roles, regardless of how unhappy they may be in those roles.

The play presents a world that is sharply divided between what men can do and what women can do. The traits are opposite in nature, and they follow a traditional pattern. Women are expected to be bright and flirtatious with men, and they are expected to not engage in behavior that is deemed "unlady-like." If a woman, like Lucy, for example, does get "in trouble" she will be reminded of *her* mistake for the rest of her life. No comment is ever made about Lucy's former husband sharing any of the responsibility for the pregnancy. Additionally, Li'l Bit's schoolmates echo the same sort of behavior that her mother has instilled in her. However, none of the behavior guidelines could protect Li'l Bit from what happened in her life. She is ill-equipped to handle what happens to her both as a child and as an adult.



### Common Themes

As with the other plays in this study, common themes among the plays emerged as result of the analysis. For these plays, some of the themes relate back to a theme in Chapter 4 or Chapter 5, or new themes emerged from these plays.

First, as noted in Chapter 4, women are often silent in their homes, and that theme is expressed in several of the plays in this chapter. Although they do not seem to complain, Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb in *Our Town* are silent wives who defer to their husband's judgements. In *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Sarah is silenced by insanity, but she also feels a sense of silence as a black women in a white society. In *Fefu and Her Friends*, the characters are free to speak their minds inside Fefu's home; they understand that they are expected to maintain a degree of silence when they are in the company of men. Julia, by her paralysis and eventual death, is the symbolic representation of the silence of women. In *spell #7*, the characters are held in silence by their race, and it is only through illusion that they are free to speak their minds. This is the only play where men as well as the women are silenced. In *How I Learned to Drive*, Li'l Bit's entire childhood is characterized by silence, and her grandmother's marriage is also dominated by husband who requires very little from his wife, and voicing opinions is not a requirement.

The only character who tries to break free from the silence is May in *Fool for Love*. Like Carol in *Oleanna*, May grows stronger and more articulate as the play progresses. Additionally, like Carol who is silenced in the end by physical violence, May is doomed to eventually end up repeating her story again and again and is thus rendered as silent as she was at the beginning of the play.

A unique theme that emerges in this group of plays is the treatment of gender and gender behavior as a universal theme. *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *spell #7*, and

*How I Learned to Drive*, to one extent or another address how women and men act from a larger perspective. Gender, then, becomes a relevant issue as opposed to an ancillary force that restricts and binds the characters to a prescribed set of behaviors. Consequently, punishment for failing to adhere to the prescribed behaviors becomes more intense for the characters—Sarah commits suicide; Julia dies; black women become invisible; and Li'l Bit's world is tormented by a sexual predator.

### Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed analysis of *Our Town*, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *spell #7*, *Fool for Love*, and *How I Learned to Drive*. Each play was examined based on the four gender categories of Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance. After the analysis of each play, several emergent themes that united all the plays were presented. All six plays were set in symbolic settings, and the variety of settings, from the home to the mind, were represented. The predominant gender characteristics were centered on male and female behavior both in the family, in the private mind, and in the public world.

## CHAPTER 7

### GENDER WITH REGARD TO THE LITERARY TIME PERIOD AND THE SEX OF THE PLAYWRIGHT

This chapter addresses the remaining research questions that are a part of this study. The first section examines if there are any differences in the gender portrayals in the plays designated as Modern and those designated as Postmodern. The second section investigates if the sex of the playwright had any bearing on his or her portrayals of gender. A brief conclusion ends the chapter.

#### Gender and Modernism

The plays in this study designated as plays were written during the Modern period are *Trifles*, *Moon for the Misbegotten*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Death of a Salesman*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Votes for Women*, and *Our Town*. In all of these plays, gender and the gender portrayals take on a very traditional flavor. The female characters, for the most part, are confined to their homes, and the men worked outside of the home. The only Modern play that looked at women outside of the home is *Votes for Women*.

The female characters have two different outlooks on their situations. In several of these plays, the female characters are content with their positions inside their homes. They may not always be happy with their circumstances, but these female characters did not seek to change their domestic situations. These characters and plays include Josie, in *Moon for the Misbegotten*, Linda in *Death of a Salesman*, Lena and Ruth in *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lady John, Mrs. Heriot, and Mrs. Freddy in *Votes for Women*, and Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb in *Our Town*. Other

female characters are trying to change their conditions. These characters and plays include Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie*, Beneatha in *A Raisin in the Sun*, and Vida and, to a lesser extent, Jean in *Votes for Women*.

Of these who are trying to change their positions, their courses of action differ. Amanda is trying to achieve "independence" for her daughter by arranging a marriage that will provide Laura with a secure future, and by association, Laura's husband will provide Amanda security in the coming years. Thus, she is not looking to change her position or her daughter's position by moving out of the out of the home; she only wishes to make the home more stable. Beneath, on the other hand, wants a career, and she is trying to get out of the ghetto by getting an education, but as discussed, her plans are in jeopardy. The only character in any play who works to change the system to improve the overall conditions for women is Vida in *Votes for Women*. She is the least traditional of any female in that she is actively doing something and not merely talking. As noted, Jean would like to be like Vida, but she will more than likely end up married to Stonor and pursuing her quiet domestic life.

Both Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale in *Trifles* are unique in that they changed the course of events within the plot of the play, but their action probably did little to change their circumstances as individual characters. They altered the murder investigation by conspiring to hide evidence, and although they learn about themselves in relation to the position of other women, they will go back to their respective farms and their lives as separate individuals.

The male characters have two different outlooks on the world. In contrast to the static position of most of the female characters, some of the male characters in the plays are questing for something more than what they have. These characters and plays include, Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*, Willy and Biff in *Death of a Salesman*, and Walter Lee in *A Raisin in the Sun*..

Other male characters are satisfied with their positions and do not want to change things. These characters and plays include, Henderson, Peters, and Hale in *Trifles*, Stonor, Lord John, and Greatorrex in *Votes for Women*, and Doc Gibbs and Mr. Webb in *Our Town*.

In only two of these plays, race or class acts as an impacting force on the characters. Race is a dominant force in *A Raisin in the Sun*, and class is a central force in *Votes for Women*. In both of these plays, the race or the class of the characters is as much a factor as gender in hindering the mobility of either male or female characters.

Only two of the plays could be described as feminist plays—*Trifles* and *Votes for Women*. In both of these plays, gender and the status of women are central issues in the plays. Therefore, the playwrights composed plays that highlighted the plights of the female characters, and on a larger scale, the plays drew attention to the situations of women in general.

In looking at Modernism as an historical time period that was characterized as a world-view in this study, two points can be made about the plays with respect to their relationship to the time period. The Modern plays in this study to a certain degree still retain the Victorian mindset that governs how a woman should behave and how a family should be structured even though the Modernists touted their goal of breaking with past traditions. *Our Town* is perhaps the clearest example of this observation because of the play's strict attention to detail that focused on the daily lives of the characters and because of the Stage Manager's remarks that call attention to the domestic achievements of the female characters. In keeping with the Modernist's belief in the value of the individual, the Modern era plays have several characters who are working to become more realized characters, and there are women such as Vida and Beneatha who enter into this struggle along side of Tom, Willy, and Walter Lee.

### Gender and Postmodernism

The plays in this study designated as plays written during the Postmodern period are *Fences*, *Uncommon Women and Others*, *Oleanna*, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *spell #7*, *Fool for Love*, and *How I Learned to Drive*. Gender in these plays, in contrast to the Modern plays, takes on an expanded focus. Only one play, *Fences*, is confined to the home, and two plays are focused on characters outside of the home: *Uncommon Women and Others* and *Oleanna*. More of the Postmodern plays are in settings designated as symbolic, and these plays are *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *spell #7*, *Fool for Love*, and *How I Learned to Drive*.

For the play set in the home, *Fences*, although it has the appearance of presenting gender in a traditional manner, is different from the Modern era plays with a similar setting. Rose is a much more astute character than her predecessors were. She discusses how she came to be a woman trapped by the domestic role, and she enumerates the personal ramifications of her situation on her life. Finally, she is the only female character to do anything about her situation. She does not outright leave Troy, but by stripping him of his marital rights and privileges under the roof that they share, she effectively shuts off his power. By the way she will raise Raynell, Rose will try to guarantee Raynell will not be so easily pulled into a marriage where she will lose her identity.

The same expanded view of gender as seen in *Fences* is also applicable to the plays set outside the home. In *Uncommon Women and Others*, many of the female characters at Mount Holyoke College are frustrated by gender behavior guidelines, and they understand society's gender attitudes influence how they live their adult lives. Because the play presents women in all types of situations from career-driven, non-marrying women to family-focused, mothers-to-

be, the play suggests that women have options for their futures, but they must choose between two paths. In *Oleanna*, women still face issues of access to higher education and equitable treatment in that arena. Carol struggles to be understood by John because he is blinded by his patriarchal domination—his supremacy, as well as the supremacy of his academic predecessors and present colleagues, has never been challenged. The violent ending to the play symbolizes how threatening Carol's position is to the established norm. The traditional audience reaction to cheer when Carol is beaten perhaps suggests although her message may have been good, her approach diminishes the legitimacy of her words and negates her entire argument.

In the remaining Postmodern plays, gender as a theme gains importance. In *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, and *spell #7*, gender becomes a prominent theme that the characters discuss. In *Fool for Love*, May rises in stature and prominence throughout the play, and she fights the traditional image of the silent and submissive woman even though she cannot maintain her position. *How I Learned to Drive* examines how gender, when presented as hard and rigid rules that govern behavior, appears to be archaic in nature but is still a belief system that is passed down from one generation to the next. The prescribed behaviors do nothing to help a little girl cope with the harshest and most devastating of all crimes, sexual molestation.

In contrast to the Modern period plays, more of the Postmodern plays address race as an important factor that dominates the lives of the characters. *Fences*, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, and *spell #7* all characterize race and gender as combined forces that create barriers that hold back the characters. In *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *spell #7*, the plays suggest that for black women the plight is worse for them because they fight an almost invisible status in society. However, *Funnyhouse of a Negro* is the only play in the study to suggest that male gender behavior is harmful to women and is a power that can destroy women.

In contrast to the Modern period plays, more of the Postmodern plays can be considered feminist in nature. These plays include *Uncommon Women and Others*, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *spell #7*, and *How I Learned to Drive*. These plays focus almost exclusively on women, and they explore the mixed messages that white women receive about gender behavior, and/or they address the invisibility of black women and their suggested inferiority when compared to white women in society.

In looking at Postmodernism as an historical time period that was characterized as a world-view in this study, four points can be made about the plays with respect to their relationship to the time period. The plays in the Postmodern period describe a discontented feeling with society at large, and many of the characters, such as Troy, Rita, Carol, Sarah, lou, and Li'l Bit, are able to articulate the sources of their dissatisfaction. Additionally, the Postmodern plays in this study are in keeping with the Postmodern focus on the Other or the need to give voice to the society's overlooked. In order to achieve this goal the Postmodern plays either allow characters to represent a less common point of view such as with Ruth, Rita, Carol, Sarah, Fefu, maxine, or Li'l Bit, or the plays tackle controversial subject matters such as racism or sexual molestation. However, while several of the plays, such as *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *spell #7*, and to a lesser extent *Oleanna*, address the need for social change and reform, none offer a suggestion for how to change society. Truly, several of the Postmodern works do address what Postmodern philosopher Richard Rorty said of the nature of civilization, "The oppressed must always realize that they are fighting the way previous generations have described things" (cited in Linn, 1996, p. 61). Troy, Rose, Rita, Kate, Carol, Sarah, alec, natalie, maxine, Fefu, Julia, May, and Lucy, Mary, and Li'l Bit are all fighting how race and gender were defined in the past. They are striving, sometimes successfully and



sometimes not, to change the view of both forces for their present and their future. The one Modern character who is ahead of her time is Vida because she sought a change not only in the law but also in the accompanying philosophy of her day, which would change how women were perceived and described.

### Gender and the Sex of the Playwright

The following plays in this study were written by females: *Trifles*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Votes for Women*, *Uncommon Women and Others*, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *spell #7*, and *How I Learned to Drive*. The following plays in this study were written by males: *Moon for the Misbegotten*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Our Town*, *Fences*, *Oleanna*, and *Fool for Love*. In examining this list, the more traditional gender portrayals of women who are confined in the home are written by the male playwrights while the female playwrights are writing the more inventive plays with the more risky themes. Additionally, only the female playwrights have written plays that can be deemed as feminist in tone and theme: these plays are *Trifles*, *Votes for Women*, *Uncommon Women and Others*, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *spell #7*, and *How I Learned to Drive*.

On an individual level, several of the plays have characters or address issues about gender that could only come from a woman's perspective. For example if *Votes for Women*, had been written by a man, then Vida would have been punished for her past wrongs instead of being made stronger by them (Stowell, 1992). Likewise, *Trifles* has a unique perspective on marriage and the position of women in marriage that would suggest that a woman could only have written the play. In comparison to O'Neill, Glaspell's most immediate contemporary, her work differed in thematic concept with regard to the place of women in the dramas. As history proved, her

work lay forgotten until recently while O'Neill's work grew in reputation over the decades. A woman who was familiar with the situation on a female college campus could only have written *Uncommon Women and Others*. Additionally, plays such as *Funnyhouse for a Negro*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *spell #7*, and *How I Learned to Drive* that use gender issues as a basis for writing suggest a feminine vantagepoint. Although it is possible for a male to write from this perspective, none of the plays in this study bear out this observation.

More of the male playwrights had female characters who were silent victims of male authority. Linda in *Death of a Salesman* and the wives in *Our Town* best epitomize this observation. Likewise, Carol in *Oleanna* and May in *Fool for Love*, even though they are given the capacity to develop a stronger voice throughout the play, are punished by a reduction in stature by the end.

Two male playwrights, however, do bring strong women to light and articulate a point of view that would traditionally be associate with female writing. Tennessee Williams and August Wilson both created strong women who can explain their position. Amanda is different in that she has been the sole supporter of a family for many years, but she still clings to a traditional marriage structure. Unlike Amanda, Rose is given the trait of honest self-reflection. Rose is the only female character in any of the plays who is able to talk about why her marriage turned out the way it did, and she is the only character able to move beyond her situation.

### Conclusion

In examining both the literary time period and the sex of the playwright with regard to the portrayal of gender in the plays selected for this study, both factors were relevant in considering how gender is defined and demonstrated. There were differences in the Modern plays and the

Postmodern plays with respect to how gender is characterized. Likewise, the sex of the playwright also determined how gender was discussed and displayed in the plays.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine how gender roles are described and defined in a selection of Modern and Postmodern plays. The plays were selected for this study based on the input of four theatre professionals, and all the plays were deemed representative examples of the periods defined as Modernism and Postmodernism. Although this study was most concerned with the roles of women as expressed by the female characters and the feminine voice, a complete gender study is grounded in an evaluation of both the masculine and feminine points of view. Therefore, male characters as well as the female characters were analyzed. The study was based on four research questions. Two of the questions were designed to facilitate an exploration of the types of gender roles and behaviors that were presented by the characters in the plays. Two questions focused on considering if the time period or the sex of the playwright was a factor in the presentations of gender. All the plays were analyzed based on four gender categories, Behavior Characteristics, Communication Patterns, Sources of Power, and Physical Appearance, and the plays, in order to facilitate analysis the plays were divided into three groups based on the settings of the plays. A chapter was devoted to each group of plays. Literary critics provided additional information, when available and relevant to the topic, and in the case of one play, psychologists and psychiatrists provided additional material.

This chapter presents the findings of this study and then draws several overall conclusions. The study findings are presented by chapter and then by encompassing themes and conclusions. The final section of this chapter makes recommendations for further study.

#### Study Findings—Chapter 4

The plays that were analyzed in this chapter were *Trifles*, *Moon for the Misbegotten*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Death of a Salesman*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Fences*. All the plays in this chapter were set in the home, and all the plays were focused around activities and relationships a family environment.

Susan Glaspell's play *Trifles* presented characters who were drawn along very specific gender lines, and the characters had respective duties based on their positions in the home. All the female characters were the domestic caretakers while the males worked at other occupations. The gender behavior patterns were drawn in very opposing patterns throughout the play. Marriage, through the descriptions provided by Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters about John and Minnie Wright, was depicted as a stifling and oppressive environment for a wife. The only gender behavior that was non-traditional was the women's covert action of hiding the evidence that would seal Minnie Wright's fate.

Eugene O'Neill's play *Moon for the Misbegotten* contained several characters who followed traditional gender behavior patterns and one character who did not follow those patterns. The male characters' behaviors were in keeping with traditional images, but Josie was a mixture of male and female traits. Although she assumed the role of wife and mother on the farm, she was strong and assertive in her mannerisms. The play did present gender in opposite patterns, but the characters' behaviors did not always follow the patterns. Josie wanted to be a wife, but she will not be allowed to enter into such a union; Jim robs her of the chance. Consequently, she becomes strictly a maternal figure for him, and the play leaves the audience with the impression she will be revered for her maternal compassion.

Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie* also presented characters who were a blend of traditional male and female gender patterns, but the play took a slightly different approach from *Moon for the Misbegotten*. Amanda used male behavioral traits if that was what the situation demanded, but she preferred using traditionally female traits. Her life did not match her expectations of a supportive husband to compliment her domestic skills; therefore, as a single parent she was forced to play both parental roles. Amanda wanted her children to grow up and follow a traditional male and female behavior pattern. Unlike the view of marriage presented in *Trifles* that described a life of dependency for women, Amanda wanted her daughter to have the independence that came from having a home of her own. Tom, having been forced into the provider role, was unhappy in that position, but he was tortured by guilt when he abandoned the family and his familial responsibilities. The play presented gender roles as opposite patterns, but the play also suggested that strict adherence to gender roles was stifling to the individual and that behavior characteristics were often the result of a given situation.

Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* displayed, on the surface, the picture of the ideal family and its accompanying gender roles; Willy worked to provide the income to support his wife who stayed at home to care for their two sons. Just beyond the surface was a family that was crumbling, and the characters were unhappy and misguided. Additionally, the Willy's motivation to achieve the American Dream hinged upon his family and his career living up to a rigid set of expectations. For Linda, confined entirely to the domestic position her entire life, the consequences were the harshest because after Willy's death she had no resources or skills to help her create a life of her own. As an additional comment on women's roles in society, the remaining women in the play were employed in strictly female occupations, and the men treated them with little respect.

Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* introduced the characters as adhering to strict gender roles within the family, and the behaviors followed a defined and articulated pattern. Beneatha, however, was a notable exception. Even though Lena and Ruth were traditional wives, they worked outside the home by doing domestic work for other families. Walter Lee also worked outside the home. A struggle existed in the home between Lena and Walter Lee over who was the actual head of the household. During the course of events, Lena relinquished the role to her son when she realized the personal pain her leadership was causing him. Beneatha was the only female character to aspire to a career and a life without a husband, but in the end, her goals and aspirations were in jeopardy. Although Walter Lee did not get to pursue his goal of owning a business, he is granted leadership status in the family. Beneatha may lose her dream so that her family can maintain ownership of their home.

August Wilson's play *Fences* concentrated on a family that was arranged around the traditional gender roles for men and women, and the characters' gender behavior followed a distinct and traditional pattern. Troy was the provider, and Ruth stayed home to maintain the household and to raise their son. Unlike the other plays in this chapter, Troy and Ruth both described the limitations and the consequences for rigid gender roles. Troy, like Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*, felt overwhelmed by his responsibilities, while Ruth gave up a part of herself to please Troy. Troy was the only male in this chapter to suffer any type of loss for his overly aggressive behavior, and Ruth came to an understanding and acceptance of why her marriage turned out as it did.

In summary, all of the women in the plays were confined to the home, and they all made sacrifices for the men who were dominant forces in the homes. The women lived lives silenced by the men, and, except for Beneatha and Rose, they were isolated from any companions. The

male characters were considered the focal points of the plays because of their dominant actions and personalities. Some of the plots were about the men's search for identity like Tom, Jim O'Connor, Willy, Biff, Walter Lee, and, to a lesser extent, Jim Tyrone and Troy. These characters wanted to be understood and validated by society and by those closest to them. Their triumphs or travails were the centerpieces of plays while the women's stories were asides to the larger narratives.

### Study Findings—Chapter 5

The plays that were analyzed in this chapter were *Votes for Women*, *Uncommon Women and Others*, and *Oleanna*. All the plays in this chapter took place in an environment other than the home, and the plays addressed the behavior of characters when they function in the world beyond the home.

Elizabeth Robins' play *Votes for Women* showed characters who fell predominantly into traditional behavior patterns that were governed by the sex of the character. Vida was the notable exception to the traditional behavior. While other characters in the play demonstrated or discussed proper female behavior, Vida was living and functioning as an independent person. She will never marry, and she devoted her life to helping women overcome their oppressed positions. Although the major characters in the play were from society's upper class, the lower class women were also expected to limit themselves to the home, or if they had to work outside the home, they should do so quietly and without protest. The speeches at the women's suffrage rally, and the accompanying hecklers, reinforced the expectation that women, regardless of class, were not to be involved in issues such as the need to vote. The play defined and discussed the opposite and unequal patterns that existed in society that determined male and female behavior.



Wendy Wasserstein's play *Uncommon Women and Others* displayed a vast array of women's roles and gender behaviors. Some of the female characters, like Kate or Muffet, were career-minded, while others, like Samantha and Leilah, pursued marriage. Even in the midst of examining female characters who were exploring a world supposedly not limited to marriage, child rearing, and strict female behavior, gender was presented as a pattern that followed traditional boundaries. Furthermore, society, as represented by the voice of the College president and demonstrated in the premise behind the Gracious Living course, sent mixed messages about gender behavior expectations. On the one hand, they were instructed in how to act as ladies, yet on the other they received the message that they could do anything they wanted in the world. This final message, however, was tempered with the notion that that they would not be sacrificing their femininity in the process of becoming a career-focused woman until they married and settled down into a life of domesticity. As a result of the conflicting messages, the characters either formed lives at extreme ends of the spectrum (Kate, Samantha, and Leilah), or they fell into indecision somewhere in the middle (Muffet, Holly, and Rita).

David Mamet's play *Oleanna* drew very sharp lines for the behavior of men and women, and the play sent a message about what happens when men and women step beyond the traditional gender behavior boundaries. John was empowered both by his role as head of his household and his career as a college professor. Carol was limited by her status as a woman in his class and in the university; her inarticulate speech and meek behavior epitomized the nature of a sheltered woman. Although John and Carol experienced a shift in power and a change in behavior characteristics from the strong to the weak or vice versa, Carol cannot maintain her newly acquired position and cannot wield her power to accomplish constructive change in the system. In essence, her demise was his as well.

In summary, the female characters in these plays struggled to face a world filled with discrimination. Some won while some lost. The plays supported the notion that society created a stereotyped image of women who pursued dreams beyond a home and motherhood as being repressed, matronly, or dull. Additionally, several female characters, like Muffet, Holly, and sometimes Kate, were conflicted about not being mothers and wives, while Vida was not conflicted on a personal level but endured overt or covert condemnation for her choice. The men in these plays attempted to hold onto the status quo and preserve their power. This effort was seen on the civic, personal, or professional levels, and in all the cases, the men had something that the women wanted to have or wanted to participate in.

#### Study Findings—Chapter 6

The plays that were analyzed in this chapter were *Our Town*, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *spell #7*, *Fool for Love*, and *How I Learned to Drive*. All the plays in this chapter took place settings that are symbolic in nature, and the settings were used in the playwright's exploration of larger themes.

Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* presented a very traditional image of both a family and the gender behaviors of the family members. The gender behavior that was depicted in the play followed a strict pattern for females and males that was opposite in nature. The Webbs and the Gibbs were model families with working fathers, obedient children, and domestic mothers. Unlike the traditional image of the family that crumbled in *Death of a Salesman*, the characters in *Our Town* were perfectly content to remain in their roles. Emily Webb, who at the beginning of the play was imbued with some non-traditional female behavior characteristics, by the end of the play changed her behavior to be in keeping with society's norms. Although Wilder's

intentions were to use the setting of a quaint town to open up a larger theme, often his theme was lost because the nostalgic look at the American family overshadowed his larger message about life and living.

Adrienne Kennedy's play *Funnyhouse of a Negro* combined race, gender, and gender behavior as predominant factors that determined the fate of a character. Sarah's mental stability was declining, and the play explored her last moments before her suicide. She was neither a mother nor a wife, and she did not aspire to either role. Her self-image was fractured and distorted over her rage at being black and female in a white and male world. She abhorred her father and was afraid of him, and she transformed into a symbol of the evil, masculine power in the world. Sarah's mother ignored Sarah her entire life, and Sarah watched how marriage destroyed her mother. Gender behavior was not depicted in a straightforward manner in the play; Sarah and her selves explained gender behavior through their stories. Aside from the circuitous development, gender behavior was defined based on strict patterns.

Marie Irene Fornes' play *Fefu and Her Friends* also used gender and gender behavior as prominent themes in the play. The male characters in the play were unseen. Their presence was alluded to; thus they were symbolically present in the women's lives and in their dreams, fantasies, and hallucinations. Fefu was the only character who was identified as being a wife, and none of the characters were identified as mothers. The major theme of the play was that women were expected to conform to standards of behavior. Characters who did not conform to accepted behaviors were, as in the cases of the characters' friends in college, punished for unacceptable behavior. Julia was the most extreme example of punishment for the non-conforming woman. She was confined to a wheelchair, had hallucinations, and eventually died. Julia feared that Fefu would be next if she did not change her ways.

Ntozake Shange's play *spell #7*, like *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, combined race and gender as dominant forces that impacted a variety of characters. Only two characters, Ross and Natalie, were in a relationship, and their relationship depicted traditional gender behavior. Two of the female characters, Maxine and Natalie, took on other personas and presented monologues of women who were mothers, and the picture of motherhood was neither happy nor fulfilling. All the characters were limited by their race because they were not considered equals to white entertainers. However, black women, as demonstrated in the skits and monologues, were labeled as invisible in society. The repercussions for the women were to live life in virtual anonymity. Gender was still seen as a pattern with opposite traits and behaviors attributed to the men and the women.

Sam Shepard's play *Fool for Love* presented traditional characterizations of gender behavior, but gender was a secondary factor in Eddie's and May's situation. Eddie used traditional male persuasion tactics to entice May into a domestic lifestyle with him. May, at the beginning of the play, exhibited some traditional dependency qualities, but by the end of the play, she developed into an articulate and strong woman. May's boyfriend, Martin, was a contrasting character to Eddie, and each character typified opposing views about masculinity. Eddie's loud and aggressive version of a man overwhelmed and subdued Martin's version. Like Carol in *Oleanna*, May's sense of power and control of the situation were to be short-lived because she could not maintain her strength and end their pain. Because the characters were bonded by an incestuous relationship that plagued their existence and trapped them in a love/hate relationship, they will always repeat their cycle of emotional torment.

Paula Vogel's play *How I Learned to Drive*, exposed gender and gender behavior as contributing factors in the failed home life of Lucy and her daughter, Li'l Bit. The fractured

home contributed to Li'l Bit's feelings of frustration and abandonment; she reached out to her uncle as a male role model, and he took advantage of her and sexually abused her during her childhood years. The play presented very extreme rules that governed male and female behavior, and gender behavior followed patterns for females and males that were opposite in nature. Lucy's parents, Mary, and Lucy lived by a code that acknowledged male superiority and dominance over women, and the code supported the notion that male behavior was judged by a different set of rules from female behavior. Li'l Bit learned from her relatives and her classmates how to be a submissive and proper woman, but no one taught her the skills necessary to fend off her uncle. She, consequently, spent a lifetime of coping with her past.

In summary, most of these plays presented gender as a dominant force within the play, and gender roles and gender behavior contributed to the situations of the characters. Because gender was now a featured issue, punishment for deviant gender behavior was more intense as seen with Sarah, Julia, May, and to a certain extent, Li'l Bit. On the whole, most female characters were silent or reduced to silence. Additionally, race also was a contributing factor that added to the silence of the female characters as seen with Sarah, maxine, natalie, and bettina.

### Study Findings—Chapter 7

Several points emerged that addressed whether the time period of the play or the sex of the playwright was important with regard to gender portrayals.

The plays written in the Modern period shared several common traits. The female characters were either content with their domestic status even if they were not always happy with their circumstances, or they were trying to change their futures sometimes with success and sometimes without success. Characters who were content included Josie, Linda, Ruth, Lena,

Lady John, Mrs. Heriot, Mrs. Freddy, Mrs. Gibbs, and Mrs. Webb, while the characters who were seeking change included Vida, Amanda, and Beneatha. Several of the male characters, like Jim Tyrone, Willy, Tom, Jim, and Walter Lee, were searching for a part of their personalities or aspiring to new levels, and some like Stonor, Greator, Mr. Freddy, Lord John, Doc Gibbs, and Mr. Webb were content with the status quo. Issues of class or race combined with gender were included as themes in *Votes for Women* and *A Raisin in the Sun*. Although the Modern period was marked by what was then considered revolutionary thoughts and radical actions, many of these plays presented the image of gender and of families in a traditional and at times Victorian light.

The plays written in the Postmodern period also shared several common traits. More of the plays were set in symbolic settings or settings away from the home. The female characters took on a diversified range of roles such as working women, single women, married women, and mothers, and they exhibited both traditional and non-traditional gender behavior traits. In the one play set in the home, *Fences*, the female voice was a stronger and a more articulate voice than any of her dramatic predecessors. Gender became a major theme in more of the plays, such as *Fefu and Her Friends*, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *spell #7*, and *How I Learned to Drive*, and issues of gender roles and gender behavior were major messages instead of mere observations made as asides to the play's other focus. In keeping with the Postmodern tradition, the characters were more diverse in ethnicity and in background, and the plays were devoted to the less heard voices that spoke about racism, prejudice, discrimination, and sexual molestation. Although the plays may not have presented answers for changing the future, they addressed the need to change traditional ways of thinking and acting.

In considering the gender of the playwright, male playwrights wrote the most traditional plays with respect to their gender portrayals, such as *Our Town* and *Death of a Salesman*, and the women took on more controversial themes, while creating a more diversified range of roles for the female characters. Some of the harshest attacks on female characters and some of the most silent female characters were written by men, such as *Death of a Salesman*, *Fool for Love*, and *Oleanna*. However, both male and female playwrights created male characters who were oppressive, loud, or wretched. Only the female playwrights wrote plays with all female casts, and they were the only playwrights to recognize gender as a major force in the characters' lives. Tennessee Williams and August Wilson, in their creations of Amanda and Ruth respectively, were the two male authors who created strong and articulate women, and even though their female characters were not in the best of circumstances, they could speak for themselves and understand the natures of their situations.

### Overall Conclusions

All of the gender trait categories used for defining traditional male and female behavior were evident in most of the plays in this study. The only exceptions were no Physical Appearance traits were found in *Oleanna*, and the nature of the writing in *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *spell #7* made the traits in the Communication Patterns category irrelevant. Thus, gender behavior was defined based on a variety of descriptors derived from research in the social sciences, and then those attributes were applied to pieces of literature. For the most part, the characters exhibited the traits identified by the researchers.

The plays for this study were divided into chapters based on the setting of the play in order to organize the voluminous amounts of relevant data and in an effort to synthesize the

information into applicable themes. However, looking at the plays as a whole unit, regardless of setting, produced some interesting conclusions as well. Of the 54 female characters in all the plays, 28 were in the traditional roles of wife and/or mother, while 10 worked in a profession. The remaining 16 were in undefined roles. Of the 36 male characters, 28 were in the breadwinner capacity for a family, while 8 were not. There were no males who took on what would be defined as non-traditional roles; Peck, in *How I Learned to Drive*, was the only male character in any of the plays to do any domestic work. None of the males who were unmarried or not in a breadwinner capacity were criticized for their status. The only possible exception to this observation is Biff in *Death of a Salesman* because he criticized himself for not being married or having a productive life.

The adherence to female/domestic and male/breadwinner created situations where the characters were limited in the actions that they took, and their actions were determined by their roles. These limitations, and the characters' abilities to recognize limitations, were spread along a continuum. On the one hand, the characters in *Our Town* did not see any limitations for their situations, and they accepted their positions. The characters' futures, actions, and places in society were determined by their sex. In plays such as *Moon for the Misbegotten* and *Death of a Salesman*, the characters, male or female, failed to notice the limitations of their situations; the characters were held in place, but they did not verbalize this condition. They accepted their situations but there was a sadness about the characters, and this sadness separated them from the happiness brought on by blind acceptance as found in *Our Town*. They did not attribute their final situations to how they were defined as men and women in a family setting, but as the information in the analysis of these plays suggested, the characters were caught in a gender bind. In *Trifles*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Fool for Love*, and *Fences*, the characters



recognized that there were limitations to being held in rigid roles, but the limitations were explored only in the home setting. The sex of the characters placed them in situations they dealt with in the only manners that they could, and they were stuck in their situations. The degree to how articulate the characters were about their situations varies from play to play, and Troy and Ruth were the only characters who explained how their roles as a husband and a wife contributed to their problems. Additionally, in *A Raisin in the Sun*, race also acted a limiting factor on the characters by keeping them confined to only certain kinds of work outside of the home; the characters were more articulate about the effects of race than they were of gender. In *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *Uncommon Women and Others*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *spell #7*, *Oleanna*, and *How I Learned to Drive*, the characters recognized their limitations within their situations; however, in this last group the notion of the limitations expanded from the intimate and the personal to a larger social concept. In the plays that addressed race as a limiting factor for the characters' situations, race and gender were equally addressed. Finally, *Votes for Women* was the only play to address fully the limitations of gender roles, and Vida was the only character in any of the dramas who could fully explain the larger consequences of limited gender role behavior. She was the only character who wanted to change not only her situation but also the situation for all women.

As an outgrowth of the limitations, consequences developed for the characters. The consequences for the characters varied from play to play and were individual responses or evaluations of the circumstances. Some characters were able to talk about these consequences and some were not. Vida, in *Votes for Women*, embraced her position, and in her mind, she accepted she would have a life of solitude. The other characters in the play passed judgement on her lifestyle, and they saw consequences where she saw none. In *Trifles*, Minnie's situation led

her to commit murder for which the consequences were grave, but because Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters accepted some responsibility for Minnie's quandary, and by sympathizing with her situation, they concluded their actions would lessen her consequences in a legal sense. Because the characters willingly accepted their positions, *Our Town* was the only play where there were no consequences for the characters' actions within their prescribed gender roles. In *Moon for the Misbegotten*, because Jim did accept Josie as anything but a maternal entity, she was left unfulfilled as a person. She stoically accepted her future. Tom, in *The Glass Menagerie*, suffered for abandoning his breadwinner responsibilities—a situation he did not create but was forced to deal with because of his mother's notions of what men should do in a domestic situation. Likewise, Amanda has faced a marriage she did not expect, and she was left to cope the best way she could. By the end of the play, she accepted her situation and was left to carry on without Tom as she did when her husband left. The characters in *Death of a Salesman* suffered enormous consequences because they were confined by their positions in the family; Willy was destroyed by his desire to follow the American Dream, and he brought his wife and children down with him. Linda, because she was confined to the home and held by the image of a wife, had few skills that enabled her to function beyond her front porch. Beneatha, in *A Raisin in the Sun*, endured criticism and misunderstanding from her family and her boyfriend because she did not fit into the traditional notion of a woman; she may not be able to fulfill her goal of being a doctor because of what her family expected her to do for them. In *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Sarah, as a result of feeling hatred toward her race and her sex, paid with her sanity like her mother before her. Because *Uncommon Women and Others* presented a variety of women in varying circumstances, the consequences for the characters differed. Mrs. Plumm was denied the career she wanted and married a man she did not love because of the expectations of her family.

Samantha, although claiming that she is happy in her marriage, perpetually felt intimidated by others, while Rita and Holly were both trapped in states of indecision. Kate sacrificed personal relationships because she could not find a balance between her career and her private life. The consequences for the characters in *Fefu and Her Friends*, in most cases, was a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the position of women in comparison to men; they saw other women in their past suffer consequences for not following the prescribed feminine behaviors, so they adapted their lives to avoid such repercussions. Fefu discussed her feelings but is trapped because she could do nothing to change the situation. Julia was the only character to suffer both physical and mental problems because she perceived that she violated gender behavior rules. All the characters in *spell #7* suffered consequences for being black in a white society, but the female characters dealt with extra consequences for being female—they were made to feel less important. Additionally, the play spoke to a general consequence for white women; the black women saw white women as sacrificing their integrity because society expected them to act incompetently. May, in *Fool for Love*, directly addressed the consequences for living with Eddie; she described living in a domestic situation as being a life filled with great loneliness and isolation. She was unwilling to accept this position. May could not maintain her position of strength around Eddie, and even though she resolved not to follow Eddie, she was not able to rid herself of him either. *Oleanna* presented the harshest consequence for the characters. Their power and their pursuit of a goal destroyed them both. John ultimately punished Carol for her willingness to challenge his authority, but for John, the victory was hollow and came with a price. In *How I Learned to Drive*, the grandmother did not see the limitations to her circumstance; therefore, she could not see she was deprived of a life beyond the kitchen and the bedroom. In as much as Lucy wanted to move beyond her situation, she could not because she

was bound to follow the strict gender roles she learned as a child. Only Li'l Bit seemed to have any capacity to move beyond the gender barrier of two generations, but she had other, far greater issues to deal with in her life.

All in all, the female characters suffered more and deeper consequences than the male characters. Almost all the women did not get something that they want, or their efforts to change their situations resulted in physical harm, emotional instability, or death. John, in *Oleanna*, and Troy, in *Fences*, were the only two male characters to lose their status as a result of their situations. Both John and Troy brought on their own fates, and they are responsible for their ultimate situations. However, neither one understood nor admitted fault.

Turning from the specific analyses of the plays to broader concepts, most researchers agreed gender was a concept viewed in terms of opposite characteristics—a trait identified as male will have its opposite identified for the female. All the plays in this study depicted gender in terms of concrete and opposite patterns. For example, the female characters in *Trifles* were not allowed to participate in the murder investigation because of the perceived notion that suggested that a woman lacks interest and understanding of things beyond the domestic; Josie, in *Moon for the Misbegotten*, was reminded by her father that should curb her "rough" and manly tongue if she was get to a husband. Peck in *How I Learned to Drive* was bound by the cultural norm that men were silent about their feelings and their problems. The most pronounced depiction of gender as opposite patterns came in *Fefu and Her Friends* when Fefu explained why she envied men; she wished she was a man because men were calm and solid compared to the flighty nature of women. Gender behavior, then, either implied by actions or discussed in dialogue, fell into behaviors that were acceptable for men and those that were acceptable for

women. These characters were not free to act or to react based on their personal motivations or feelings. Their behavior was conditioned or controlled by cultural expectations.

Several of these plays, *Votes for Women*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Our Town*, *Death of a Salesman*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Fences*, and *How I Learned to Drive*, had parents or parental figures and children, and in all of these plays, gender behavior was passed down from one generation to the next. The gender behavior was sometimes directly demonstrated, but more often, proper gender behavior was discussed in the dialogue. This pattern presented gender as a legacy and was a concept that parents felt was important to pass onto their children. The notion that gender behavior was a legacy underscored how important gender behavior was and suggested how gender roles became entrenched in society's psyche.

In keeping with the notion that gender behavior was prescribed for females and males, females who moved out of the traditional realm of behavior were often feared or eventually punished for their behavior. Lipman-Blumer (1984) summarized that "women who seek to equalize the female/male power relationships seem particularly menacing, and therefore, easily become the primary targets of male anger" (p. 95). This thought was supported by some of the plays in this study. Vida, in *Votes for Women*, did not incur physical injury or encounter overt male anger, but she will spend her days repeating her story and defending her chosen lifestyle among her peers. Julia, in *Fefu and Her Friends*, was, if only in her mind, a victim of this male anger. She attributed her paralysis to her overly "masculine" nature, and she feared the same fate for Fefu who also exhibited masculine traits. Although not physically harmed in any way, May, in *Fool for Love*, could not maintain her outspoken manner; the Old Man felt threatened by her presence and wanted Eddie to silence her voice. Carol, in *Oleanna*, was the ultimate victim of male anger because she was physically beaten for her show of force.

This study echoed Colmenero's (1999) study of gender in mass-market paperback novels. She concluded, "Where gender is concerned, the archetype for women, while changing, remains more limiting than for men," and on the whole the novels in her study adhered to traditional gender typing for the characters (p. 167). Although based on a different genre of literature, this study supported Colmenero's observation that gender roles and their accompanying behaviors for women remain static and focused on the domestic environment. Most of the female characters were wives, and some, like Minnie Wright, Amanda, Fefu, Rita, and Mrs. Plumm, were exceedingly unhappy. When the characters were not wives, as with Vida or Kate, they were scrutinized, criticized, and even stereotyped in pejorative terms.

As explained in Chapter 1, the symbolic interaction theory of gender was the sociological framework for this study. The symbolic interaction view suggested that socialization of people into society was a lifelong process that integrated people's behavior to the norms of society. The theory also posited that people's understandings of their roles or their behaviors in general could change if society presented enough evidence to support the change. In looking at these plays, the roles for men and women were still defined largely by traditional standards. None of the plays that were selected for this study upheld any female characters who did not suffer or pay some type of price for their actions. Although contemporary society espouses equality for all, none of the plays supported that view. Even in a play such as *Uncommon Women and Others* where female characters were shown as career women, they still questioned themselves; Kate's boyfriend sent her to a psychiatrist to "cure" her career-focused persona. This same notion was seen in *Fefu and Her Friends* when the vague and imposing authority figures sent the women's friends be "fixed" for deviant behavior. If the symbolic interaction premise that people can change their understanding of their actions within their roles if given support from external

sources is true, then very little support for changing what constitutes traditional male and female behavior was be found in these plays.

Two examples, *Our Town* and *Death of a Salesman*, presented the most traditional views for family structure and gender role behavior. These plays, probably more than any other plays on the list, are upheld as "classics" and "masterpieces" of American theatre. In particular, these two plays defined women by what they did at home, and the women did not move away from the home. Although the family structure in *Death of a Salesman* was proven to be a façade because the family ends in ruins, the notion of what a proper family "looked" and "acted" like was upheld in *Our Town*. As with the *Leave It To Beaver* image of a family, *Our Town* will live on as "proof" of what a typical family is like and that it is possible to achieve that family harmony and perfection.

On a larger, philosophical scale, this study upheld Dekovan's (1999) observation that Modernism was "a masculine movement" even though the feminist agenda was a philosophical "preoccupation" during the movement (p. 126). According to Ozieblo (1990), Glaspell's work was lost for many years because of the male perspective that dominated so much of American literature; this same perspective propelled O'Neill into the mainstream while leaving Glaspell behind. Ironically, this observation was carried over into the plays of the Postmodern era. Other black, male writers often eclipsed Adrienne Kennedy's work in the 1960s (Stascavage, 1990). Fornes' work was also criticized for her lack of male protagonists, and one critic of *Fefu and Her Friends* identified Phillip as the main character because of a lack of comfort with not having a male character as the focal point of a drama (Bindu & Kurian, 1996).

As a final point, the connection between race and gender cannot be overlooked. As with other traits, the influence of race became more pronounced in the later plays. *A Raisin in the*

*Sun*, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *spell #7*, and *Fences* all addressed race and its effects on the characters in the plays. However, the characterization of black women in the Modern period and the Postmodern period changed drastically, which indicated a profound loss of stature and voice. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the race of the Younger family kept them in the ghetto and blocked them from well-paying jobs, but the characters all held to a common set of values. Beneatha refused to be limited by her race, was doing well in school, and was proud of her heritage. Walter Lee made a few disparaging remarks about black women that characterized them as less important and less intelligent than black men. By the time *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *spell #7* were written, the position of black women has decreased dramatically. These plays posited that black women were invisible within society because of racial stereotyping and gender discrimination, and Shange's *spell #7* repeatedly emphasized this point by having female characters discuss their status—a sad acceptance of their position resounded in natalie's words. *Fences* presents a tempered view of black women and ideas of race in general. Ruth, Troy, and Bono all acknowledge there is racism in society, and Troy fought to end some of the discrimination at his place of employment. However, Ruth acknowledged for a black woman, the chances at a decent life were less than for a black man, but she carved out a niche for herself and made a life in the face of personal disaster.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

As with many studies, one study opens the door for future research into the topic. This study was no exception to that premise.

The purpose of this study and the research methodology could be applied to a different selection of plays in the Modern and Postmodern periods. This new study would be valuable



because comparisons of emergent themes and overall conclusions could be made between the two. Furthermore, a study designed as this one could also be applied to other dramatic periods such as the plays of ancient Greece, the Medieval period, the Renaissance, or the Restoration period. A study conducted under different time periods could lead to information on how gender behavior was characterized at other times in recorded history.

One consideration in conducting a study with different plays is to alter the methodology for selecting the plays for study. The plays in this study were selected based on the premise that they are or could be taught in a college classroom because of their publication in anthologies. Another approach that could be taken would be to select plays that won Tony Awards or some other similar public award. This avenue for play selection would provide plays that were mainstream in appeal, were popular with the critics and the viewing public, and were publicly recognized for their achievements. A comparison could be made then, between gender and gender role behavior in award winning plays and plays included in anthologies.

Along these same lines, none of the plays included in this study were musicals and most were not considered comedies. Another interesting study would be to analyze the gender behavior and gender roles of the characters in plays that are musicals or in plays that are identified as comedies.

Another interesting study for a group of plays could focus on how gender behavior is passed down from one generation to the next in plays that contain parents and children. As noted, the legacy of gender was a common theme of almost half of the plays in this study. By examining another groups of plays with a focus on the theme of gender legacy then perhaps it would be possible to see if this theme was common only to the plays in this study or if the theme existed as a tangible factor in other plays.

As an outgrowth of this study, more critical attention needs to be paid to several of the female playwrights. Secondary material on Robins, Wasserstein, Kennedy, Shange, and Vogel was limited in scope and quantity, and in the cases of Robins, Shange, and Vogel hardly any material existed. Glaspell and Fornes were the female authors with the most resource material. Vogel is the most contemporary of the playwrights, and this could account for the limited resource material. However, when compared as a whole to the male playwrights, the female playwrights lacked the breadth and depth of scholarship of the males' works.

A final additional study that could be developed based on the findings of this study is to study female reactions and responses after viewing or reading a selection of plays. This study could focus on how women view the female characters in the plays that they see or read. In other words, the study could analyze if female audience members notice and/or respond to the gender behavior and gender roles that the female characters are portraying.

#### Other Recommendations

As noted by the lack of critical material, some of these plays could be in danger of being overlooked by future generations. Without a true commitment to diversity, *Trifles* could be lost again. *Votes for Women*, *spell #7*, or *How I Learned to Drive* could easily be lost in the decades to come. To allow plays to be forgotten because of a predisposed disdain for plays that are different from the "standard" works of the day would be a tragic loss for students of the future and for society. When societies of the past are studied, often all that remains are their works of art, and to lose any piece of that history because of a bias for male authors over female authors would be tragic. If the tenets of Postmodernism are alive and well in this current age, then

listening to the voice of the Other requires that the view of what is traditional and acceptable be expanded and not left as an unchallenged predilection.

As the world becomes a more diversified society, how gender is presented in a wide variety of media is important. Many of these plays are taught in classrooms both in this country and abroad, and given the nature of women in these plays, the messages that are sent about gender and gender role behavior deserves to be discussed. If these plays are taught with only the male characters in mind, then a wealth of information will be lost, and the notion that women should not move out of the kitchen for fear of reprisals will be perpetuated. Therefore, instructors who teach these and other pieces of literature should always be mindful of gender and the subtle ways that gender behavior is presented and allowed to go unchallenged.

Finally, society will be done a great disservice if the voices of women are silenced either by ignoring the plays of the past or by forgetting to discuss the impact of gender roles in all situations. As noted by several of the plays in this study, the consequences for women who do not conform to traditional modes of behavior are cruel and viscous. Women are still judged everyday in corporate settings and in the halls of higher education by their conformity or lack of conformity to a prescribed set of standards. To continue in this practice limits all.

In closing, Bentley (1967) described the essence of drama when he said, "The achievement of all great drama is precisely the spanning of *both* sides of man's nature, the spiritual and the physical, the intellectual and the emotional" (p. 64). Truly, great drama also includes the exploration of both sides of a woman's nature as well, and as demonstrated by the female characters in this study, they have a great deal to say to those who are willing to listen.

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## APPENDIX A

## APPENDIX A

### Films Analyzed in Hart (2000)

<i>And the Band Played On</i> (1993, Roger Spottiswoode)	<i>The Living End</i> (1992, Gregg Araki)
<i>As Is</i> (1986, Michael Lindsay-Hogg)	<i>Longtime Companion</i> (1990, Norman Rene)
<i>Boys in the Side</i> (1994, Herbert Ross)	<i>Love! Valour! Compassion!</i> (1997, Joe Mantello)
<i>Breaking the Surface: The Greg Louganis Story</i> (1996, Steven Hilliard Stern)	<i>Men in Love</i> (1989, Mac Huestis)
<i>Chain of Desire</i> (1992, Temistocles Lopez)	<i>A Mother's Prayer</i> (1995, Larry Elikann)
<i>Chocolate Babies</i> (1996, Stephen Winter)	<i>On Common Ground</i> (1992, Hugh Harrison)
<i>Citizen Cohn</i> (1992 Frank Pierson)	<i>One Night Stand</i> (1997, Mike Figgis)
<i>The Cure</i> (1995, Peter Horton)	<i>Our Sons</i> (1991, John Erman)
<i>An Early Frost</i> (1985, John Erman)	<i>Parting Glances</i> (1986, Bill Sherwood)
<i>Gia</i> (1998, Michael Cristofer)	<i>Philadelphia</i> (1993, Jonathan Demme)
<i>Grief</i> (1993, Richard Glatzer)	<i>A Place for Annie</i> (1994, John Gray)
<i>The Immortals</i> (1995, Brian Grant)	<i>The Ryan White Story</i> (1989, John Herzfeld)
<i>In the Gloaming</i> (1997, Christopher Reeve)	<i>Something to Live For: The Alison Gertz Story</i> (1992, Tim McLoughlin)
<i>It's My Party</i> (1996, Randal Kleiser)	<i>Under Heat</i> (1994, Peter Reed)
<i>Jeffrey</i> (1995, Christopher Ashley)	<i>World and Time Enough</i> (1995, Eric Mueller)
<i>Jerker</i> (1991, Hugh Harrison)	
<i>Kids</i> (1995, Larry Clark)	

## APPENDIX B

## APPENDIX B

### Films Analyzed in Turner (1996)

<i>My Darling Clementine</i> (1946)	<i>Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid</i> (1969)
<i>Red River</i> (1948)	<i>Little Big Man</i> (1970)
<i>Winchester 73</i> (1950)	<i>McCabe and Mrs. Miller</i> (1971)
<i>High Noon</i> (1952)	<i>The Outlaw Josey Wales</i> (1976)
<i>Shane</i> (1953)	<i>Tom Horn</i> (1980)
<i>The Searchers</i> (1956)	<i>The Long Riders</i> (1980)
<i>Rio Bravo</i> (1959)	<i>Pale Rider</i> (1985)
<i>The Alamo</i> (1960)	<i>Silverado</i> (1985)
<i>The Magnificent Seven</i> (1960)	<i>Dances with Wolves</i> (1990)
<i>Ride the High Country</i> (1962)	<i>Unforgiven</i> (1992)
<i>The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance</i> (1962)	<i>Wyatt Earp</i> (1994)
<i>A Fistful of Dollars</i> (1964)	<i>Bad Girls</i> (1993)
<i>Hombre</i> (1967)	<i>Posse</i> (1993)
<i>The Wild Bunch</i> (1969)	<i>Tombstone</i> (1994)
<i>True Grit</i> (1969)	

## APPENDIX C



## APPENDIX C

### Novels Analyzed in Barnett (1991)

<i>The Groves of Academe</i> (1951, M. McCarthy)	<i>A Journey to Shalin</i> (1971, J. McConkey)
<i>Pictures from and Institution</i> (1952, R. Jarrell)	<i>Endzone</i> (1972, D. DeLillo)
<i>The Spire</i> (1952, G. W. Brace)	<i>Gate of Heaven</i> (1975, R. M. McInerny)
<i>Pnin</i> (1953, V. Nabokov)	<i>Klynt's Law</i> (1976, E. Baker)
<i>The Stones of the House</i> (1953, T. Morrison)	<i>Entertaining Strangers</i> (1977, A. Gurney)
<i>Silas Timberman</i> (1954, H. M. Fast)	<i>Going Blind</i> (1977, J. Penner)
<i>The Searching Light</i> (1955, R. L. Schribner)	<i>The Professor of Desire</i> (1977, P. Roth)
<i>A Friend in Power</i> (1958, C. Baker)	<i>A Man in Charge</i> (1979, M. Philipson)
<i>Purely Academic</i> (1958, S. Barr)	<i>A Certain Slant of Light</i> (1979, M. Bonanno)
<i>The Dollar Diploma</i> (1960, G. Mann)	<i>Unholy Loves</i> (1979, J. C. Oates)
<i>The Small Room</i> (1961, M. Sarton)	<i>Death in a Tenured Position</i> (1981, A. Cross)
<i>A New Life</i> (1961, B. Malamud)	<i>The Dean's December</i> (1982, S. Bellow)
<i>The Long Gainer</i> (1961, W. Manchester)	<i>Mickelsson's Ghosts</i> (1982, J. Gardner)
<i>Elizabeth Appleton</i> (1963, J. O'Hara)	<i>The Class</i> (1983, E. Segal)
<i>The President</i> (1964, R. V. Cassil)	<i>The Breaks</i> (1983, R. Price)
<i>Stonor</i> (1965, J. Williams)	<i>Sweet Death, Kind Death</i> (1984, A. Cross)
<i>The Fires of Arcadia</i> (1965, G. B. Harrison)	<i>The Elcholo Feeling Passes</i> (1985, F. Barton)
<i>Giles Goat-Boy</i> (1966, J. Barth)	<i>Opening Nights</i> (1985, J. Burroway)
<i>The Department</i> (1968, G. W. Brace)	

*With Faith and Fury* (1985, D. B. McKown)

*Professor Romeo* (1989, A. Bernays)

## APPENDIX D

## APPENDIX D

### Preliminary List of Plays

#### Modern Period

<i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, The Glass</i>	<i>Rachel</i> (Angelina Grimke Weld)
<i>Menagerie</i> (Tennessee Williams)	<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (Lorraine Hansbury)
<i>Death of a Salesman</i> (Arthur Miller)	<i>Riders to the Sea, Playboy of the Western</i>
<i>Endgame</i> (Samuel Beckett)	<i>World</i> (John Milton Synge)
<i>Juno and the Paycock</i> (Sean O'Casey)	<i>Trifles</i> (Susan Glaspell)
<i>Major Barbara</i> (George Bernard Shaw)	<i>Votes for Women</i> (Elizabeth Robins)
<i>Moon for the Misbegotten, Desire Under the</i>	
<i>Elms, The Emperor Jones</i> (Eugene O'Neill)	

#### Postmodern Period

<i>The Beauty Queen of Leenane</i> (Martin	<i>Funnyhouse of a Negro</i> (Adrienne Kennedy)
McDonagh)	<i>The Homecoming, The Caretaker</i> (Harold
<i>Dancing at Lughnasa, Translations</i> (Brian	Pinter)
Friel)	<i>How I Learned to Drive</i> (Susan Vogel)
<i>The Death of the Last Black Man in the</i>	<i>M. Butterfly</i> (David Henry Hwang)
<i>Whole Entire World</i> (Suzan-Lori Parks)	<i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, Fences</i> (August
<i>Dutchman</i> (Amiri Baraka)	Wilson)
<i>Fefu and Her Friends</i> (Maria Irene Fornes)	<i>The Man in the Case, Uncommon Women</i>
<i>Fool for Love, True West, Buried Child</i>	<i>and Others</i> (Wendy Wasserstein)
(Sam Shepard)	<i>Master Harold and the Boys</i> (Athol Fugard)

*'Night, Mother* (Marsha Norman)

*Oleanna* (David Mamet)

*Our Country's Good* (Timberlake  
Wertenbaker)

*spell #7* (Ntozake Shange)

*The Strong Breed* (Wole Soyinka)

*Top Girls, Cloud Nine* (Caryl Churchill)

*Travesties, Professional Foul* (Tom  
Stoppard)

## APPENDIX E

## APPENDIX E

### Letter to Panel Members

Dear Panel Member's Name:

First, let me thank you for taking your time to help me with this portion of my dissertation.

My dissertation is a textual analysis of Modern and Postmodern plays, and the analysis examines the theme of gender and gender roles of the characters. Through this focus on gender, especially of female characters, I am interested in uncovering messages that these plays send about gender behavior, and on a larger scale, what cultural attitudes about are reflected about gender.

Although I am most interested in the portrayal and representation of the female characters, the study will also include an analysis of male characters. The following research questions guide this study:

**Research Question 1:** What gender roles do the female characters have in each play?

Sub-Question A: Once described for the characters, do the identified gender roles fall into the “traditional” realm of the domestic role or are the characters taking on roles outside the domestic sphere?

Sub-Question B: Do the characters’ gender roles determine their situations, and are the female characters’ situations limited by their gender?

Sub-Question C: Are there consequences for the female characters as a result of their gender role assignments or for their actions within their gender roles?

**Research Question 2:** Are there differences in gender portrayals of the characters in the plays that are designated as Modern or Postmodern?

**Research Question 3:** Do the plays cast the female and male genders using certain patterns and are the gender patterns polar opposites?

**Research Question 4:** Does the gender of the playwright make any difference in the portrayal of gender in the characters that he or she creates?

The primary assumption of this study is that the plays selected are credible examples of the drama from the Modern and Postmodern periods. Given that there is always debate surrounding beginning and ending dates for literary periods, for this study, the period designated as Modernism covers 1900 to the late 1950s and the Postmodern period begins in the early 1960s and continues until today.

A preliminary list of plays for this study was compiled using the following methodology. Six drama anthologies, published between 1991 and 2001, were consulted in order to gather authors and titles. All the plays on this list meet the following basic criteria:

- The plays and/or authors must be listed in at least one anthology
- The plays were written between 1900 and 2000.
- The plays must be written in English to avoid working with translations.
- The plays must contain at least one character that is designated as female by the playwright.

As you look at the list, I need you to answer the following questions:

1. Are there plays that are designated as Modern that should be Postmodern or vice versa?
2. Of the list of Modern plays, pick five that you feel best represent the Modern period. Provide a brief justification.
3. Of the list of Postmodern plays, pick five that you feel best represent the Postmodern period. Provide a brief justification.
4. Are there any authors and/or plays that you feel best represent the Modern and Postmodern periods that are not included in the preliminary list? Provide a brief justification.

The panel consists of four individuals that are all practitioners in the field of theatre, and all panel members will be responding to the same questions. I will condense the responses, and the consensus of views will determine the plays that will be used in the study.

You may respond via email or regular mail; my addresses are at the top of page one of this letter. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at work.

Again, thank you for helping me during this final stage of my program.

Sincerely,  
Bonny Copenhaver



## APPENDIX F

## APPENDIX F

Dr. Robert D. Funk's Response—Responded in an electronic mail text format

1. Are there plays that are designated as Modern that should be Postmodern or vice versa

LOOKS OKAY TO ME

2. Of the list of Modern plays, pick five that you feel best represent the Modern period. Provide a brief justification.

3. Of the list of Postmodern plays, pick five that you feel best represent the Postmodern period. Provide a brief justification.

4. Are there any authors and/or plays that you feel best represent the Modern and Postmodern periods that are not included in the preliminary list? Provide a brief justification.

Bonny, In all my studies in theatre we have never used the term Postmodern. We always referred to these plays as Contemporary.

### **Modern Period**

Eugene O'Neill      A Moon for the Misbegotten - one of O'Neill's great plays This one in my opinion has his strongest female lead.

Arthur Miller      Death of a Salesman - Pulitzer Prize and NY Drama Critics' Circle Award winner

Tennessee Williams      The Glass Menagerie - best American Play of 1944-45

Lorraine Hansbury      A Raisin in the Sun - considered a classic African-American play written by an African-American Woman.

### **I would add to this list**

Thornton Wilder      Our Town - Pulitzer Prize winner Regarded as one of the best examples of stylized dramaturgy developed by an American.

### **Contemporary Period**

Sam Shepard      Fool for Love - another of America's greatest contemporary writers. This play has a strong woman's role in it.

August Wilson      Fences - 4 Tony Awards and NY Drama Critic's Circle Award for best play America's greatest contemporary African-American writer

David Mamet      Oleanna - strong female role by one of America's greatest contemporary

playwrights

Wendy Wasserstein      Uncommon Women and Others - powerful American woman writer  
Play was selected for the PBS Theatre in America series.

**I would add to this list**

Mark Medoff              Children of a Lesser God - Tony award for best play of 1979-80. A  
powerful play dealing with a woman who is hearing impaired.

Brian Friel                Dancing at Lughnasa - An extremely powerful Irish play which won  
many awards and good reviews in Ireland, England, the USA and around the world, by one of  
Ireland's most celebrated playwrights.

HOPE THIS IS WHAT YOU NEED.

BOBBY

## APPENDIX G

## APPENDIX G

### Ms. Amanda Aldridge's Response

DATE: June 20, 2001  
TO: Bonny Copenhaver  
RE: Dissertation Play Selection  
FROM: Amanda Aldridge

#### Question 1:

*Are there plays that are designated as Modern that should be Postmodern or vice versa?*

I believe that the following is more representational of Postmodernism than Modernism:  
Endgame

I believe that the following are more representational of Modernism than Postmodernism:  
Dancing at Lughnasa  
The Beauty Queen of Leenane

#### Question 2:

*Pick five Modern plays you feel best represent the Modern period.*

Death of a Salesman  
Glass Menagerie  
A Raisin in the Sun  
Dancing at Lughnasa  
The Beauty Queen of Leenane

I have chosen these plays based on the following important characteristics of modernism:

1. The rejection of tradition and authority in favor of reason and natural science.
2. Characters are shaped by their heredity and environment, as often seen in naturalistic plays.
3. Individuals hold the power to affect their situations.

#### Question 3:

*Pick five Postmodern plays that you feel best represent the Postmodern period:*

Endgame  
The Homecoming  
Cloud Nine  
Our Country's Good  
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead

I have chosen these plays based on one or more of the following important characteristics of postmodernism.

1. A rejection of the power of the individual.
2. Self-reference.
3. The sarcastic parody of western modernity.
4. Man cannot rely on the laws of science and nature.

Question 4:

*Are there any plays that you feel best represent the Modern or Postmodern periods that are not included:*

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead

## APPENDIX H

## APPENDIX H

### Dr. Dennis Elkins' Response

#### Responses for Textual Analysis Bonny Copenhaver: Themes of Gender and Gender Roles of Characters By Dr. Dennis R. Elkins

Of the list of plays provided to me by Ms. Copenhaver, the following is in response to which Modern and Postmodern plays I would recommend she examine for her analysis:

Based upon the delineation given, I have no questions regarding the plays having been divided by categories of Modern and Postmodern. I would, however, suggest that Amiri Baraka's play, *Dutchman*, be placed under the category of Modern and, perhaps, Beckett's *Endgame* be placed under Postmodern. I feel that Baraka's treatment of the African-American male is more closely akin to that found in *A Raisin in the Sun* than perhaps *Master Harold...or Fences*. I would also argue that the realism in Baraka's play is more similar to the American realism of the 1960's. Also, I would be more comfortable placing Beckett in with the Postmodern period because he is often seen as a playwright who was the pivotal point in Western Theatre that took the step from Modern to Postmodern.

My list of five Modern plays would include *Major Barbara*, *Desire Under the Elms*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Trifles*. I cannot decide upon a fifth play because I am unfamiliar with either *Votes for Women* or *Rachel*. But my decision on the preceding four plays is based upon the author's treatment of their female characters, the different types of female characters found in each play, the style of the play in which they are found, and the background of the playwright. The playwrights, Shaw, O'Neill, Hansberry, and Glaspell offer four distinctly different playwrights writing from four very different social/economic and geographical standpoints. Their female characters are also differentiated by their social/economic and geographic backgrounds. Also, I feel the women are clearly defined—even with an understanding of how far Shaw could realistically define his female characters. From a chronological perspective, Shaw to Hansberry would give a definitive break in the time line between Modern and Postmodern. (If I could, I would have included Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* or *The Children's Hour*).

My list of five Postmodern plays would include *spell #7*, *Cloud Nine*, *Oleanna*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* and *How I Learned to Drive* (alternates would be *Fool for Love* and *Dancing at Lughnasa*). Again, for many of the same reasons I chose the four from the Modern period, I found these to be the most representative of the Postmodern period providing an array of social/economic and geographical standpoints. Of the playwrights from which I had to choose, I have listed three women and two men, one of which is African-American and two are non-American. Also, their characters are multi-dimensional—distinctive and believable.

I would have included other plays from some of these authors, such as *The Real Thing* or *Arcadia* from Tom Stoppard instead of *Professional Foul*. But the earlier communiqué regarding the selection process explained why Stoppard's better plays were not on the list. I hope my list has been helpful. Should you require further information, do not hesitate to contact me.



## APPENDIX I

## APPENDIX I

### Peer Debriefers' Formal Verification

Date: January 22, 2002

To: Dissertation Committee

From: Tami R. S. Penley

Note: During the past three semesters, it has been my privilege to serve as peer debriefer for Bonny Copenhaver as she works to complete her dissertation.

During that time, Ms. Copenhaver and I have met on several occasions to discuss her background research for the project, her play selection process, the development of research methodologies, and her initial findings. As peer debriefer, I have read both her preliminary research and the results of that research as it developed.

## APPENDIX J

## APPENDIX J

### Auditor's Formal Verification

To: Bonny Copenhaver  
From: Jon P. Harr  
Subject: Dissertation Audit  
Date: January 28, 2002

Please accept this auditor's letter of substantiation for inclusion in your doctoral dissertation. In conducting the audit for this study, I have read all chapters of the dissertation, with particular attention paid to Chapter Three (Research Methodology) and Chapter Eight (Conclusions and Recommendations). I also carefully reviewed all materials provided as a part of the audit trail for this study. In particular, I reviewed the Data Analysis Notebooks (containing your reflective journal, critical essays, and textual information for the each of the plays examined in the study) and original source material (the plays selected for the study).

The dissertation was written in a clear, concise manner. The methodology for this study (textual analysis) was well documented and was appropriate for this study. Based on my review of the study described above, I conclude that the observations and conclusions made are reasonable and are supported by the materials examined and the textual analysis conducted.

Sincerely,

Jon P. Harr, Ed.D.

## VITA

### BONNY BALL COPENHAVER

Education:	Public Schools, Johnson City, TN East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN; English, B. A., 1989 East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN; English, M. A., 1991 East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN; Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Ed. D., 2002
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Publications and Presentations:	Ball, B. (1991). <i>An exploration of narration in two novels by Stephen Crane: Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and Red Badge of Courage</i> . Unpublished master's thesis, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN. Ball, B. (1994). Putting magic in the classroom. <i>Tennessee English Journal</i> , 5, 20-22. Copenhaver, B. (1999). <i>Sometimes it's not what we say but how we say it: Gender and communication</i> . Presentation, State Meeting, American Association for Women in Community Colleges, Volunteer State Community College, Gallatin, TN
Honors and Awards:	Alumni Return to the Classroom for a Day Recipient, East Tennessee State University, 1997 Nominee, Distinguished Faculty Award, Northeast State Technical Community College, 1999