

PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN AND AGGRESSION ILLUSTRATED THROUGH
CARYL CHURCHILL'S *TOP GIRLS*, MARIA IRENE FORNES'S
FEFU AND HER FRIENDS, AND SHEILA CALLAGHAN'S
THAT PRETTY, PRETTY, OR; THE RAPE PLAY

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Abstract

of

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This thesis focuses on women and aggression through different types of verbal abuse and some physical abuse. Within Western Culture physical abuse is examined more closely due to unawareness and difficulty proving verbal abuse. Additionally, the trait of aggression has been focused on male to female abuse. Using two plays written by women with all women characters moves the idea of aggression from a male problem to a human one to include female aggression in the equation. The first chapter begins with social and psychological theories that coincide with verbal and physically abusive behaviors. *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill is used to illustrate how verbal abuse is used particularly within the family dynamic. Control and manipulation are discussed as a form of verbal abuse using *Fefu and Her Friends* by Maria Irene Fornes. The last play *That Pretty, Pretty, or; The Rape Play* by Sheila Callaghan examines violence between the genders focusing on aggression in women.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BEHAVIORS ASSOCIATED WITH ABUSE

Ignorance does not justify oppression. It only makes it possible.
~Patricia Evans

Currently, Western culture's social awareness concentrates on human and individual rights regarding physical abuse, but not all forms of abuse do bodily harm. Verbal abuse uses words as weapons replacing physical assaults. Since it is more difficult to detect, verbal abuse receives less attention given that violence occurs in the mind rather than on the body. As with other forms of abuse, verbal abuse is used to dominate another person. In her book *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*, Patricia Evans writes:

The main reason for not being able to readily recognize verbal abuse is because it is built into our system where people have the need for power over a person such as one-upmanship, putting down, intimidating or hard selling a person. (23)

Built into our social structure, verbally abusive dialogue goes unrecognized since the information, created beliefs, and roles have become the norm. While some forms of verbal abuse are more recognized than others, both men and women use aggressive dialogue in daily life. This thesis illustrates aggression in women through verbally abusive language and physical violence by the examination of three plays Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, Maria Irene Forné's *Fefu and Her Friends*, and Sheila Callaghan's *That Pretty Pretty; or, the Rape Play*.

Men are considered sole aggressors in abusive relationships. According to Deborah Capaldi of the Oregon Social Learning Center, “Still, the newest finding challenges the feminist belief that ‘it is men only who cause violence’. That is a myth” (Minaker and Snider 760). Western culture focuses on physical violence and tends to deemphasize discussions about women and aggression due to the concept of the patriarchal social structure. Although most physical assaults follow verbal assaults, the use of verbal abuse as violence receives even less consideration. Shining the light on women and their use of aggressive behaviors, which include verbal assaults, broadens the subject of violent relationships in the search to alleviate the problem. Since Western culture accepts the idea of general characteristics for each gender, assigned as typical behaviors explaining differences between genders, women are left out of the equation, particularly the aggressive quality assigned to men. For example, according to Social Role theory:

...gender roles are evident in social expectations that women should be communally oriented and primarily concerned with the welfare of others, whilst men should display more ‘agentic’ characteristics such as independence and assertiveness. (Martin, Gray, and Adam 43)

Women are defined stereotypically as the care-takers, nurturers, compassionate, emotional, and collaborators of the two sexes while men are defined as independent, assertive, the bread-winners, emotionless, and powerful. The duality model lends itself to assigning each gender specific character traits, but “The forces of gender are far more complex than a simple male-female dichotomy suggests. Many variations exist, shaped

by culture, geography, class, sexual orientation, and individual personality” (Tannen 167). Realistically, many variations mixing both masculine and feminine characteristics exist in both genders. The responsibility for women lies in accepting the existence of traits considered negative such as aggression alongside positive ones such as independence. Abusive behaviors come from the need for power and control learned from a patriarchal social structure. Many women striving for equality have claimed these characteristics for their own. The female characters discussed throughout this thesis illustrate different ways these traits may be portrayed towards society. For example, Marlene in *Top Girls* internalizes the idea that women should remain single without children in order to be successful.

In a patriarchal social structure, male characteristics, such as, independence, aggressiveness/assertiveness, and emotionlessness are acceptable and associated with power, while female traits, such as, co-dependence, feelings/intuition, and collaboration are inferior in comparison, and therefore, often suppressed. According to Nancy Potter stereotypical male traits are more valued in Western culture than the feminine counterparts:

The development of masculinity necessarily entails the devaluation and subordination of femininity and things female within the sex/gender system characteristic of Western cultures. But masculinist attitudes and values can be internalized by those ‘biologically female’ as well; since what is male is taken to be the standard of humankind, and what is female is devalued, women too learn to devalue what is marked as female. (66)

The suppression of all things feminine creates denial that each person, male or female, authentically embodies both types of characteristics. By suppressing the feminine, aggression becomes more prominent in the search for power. Power and control are driving forces behind the use of aggressive tactics to influence others. Underneath power and control are several drivers pressing the need for coercive tactics used by people in relationship to others.

The gender polarity model uses male characteristic traits as the normal measure in patriarchal society creating an automatic deficiency of feminine characteristics. For example, in Callaghan's *That Pretty Pretty; or, The Rape Play* the gender roles are constantly being inverted illustrating the struggle for power by portraying the opposite stereotypical gender traits. The gender polarity model overlooks traits for individuals due to extremes. For example, men are emotionless, making women the opposite with feelings. *That Pretty, Pretty; or, The Rape Play* uses stereotypical traits of each gender creating caricatures of the characters with little depth of each sex rather than layered people with both traits coexisting simultaneously within an individual. Psychologist Carol Tavris writes in reference to Hare-Mustin and Marecek:

Hare-Mustin and Marecek argue that both extremes overlook the complexities of people's lives. Men are not wholly autonomous; they depend on others to keep their households and businesses running, to make sure they get to the doctor, to raise their children, to provide love and moral support. Nor are women wholly selfless in their devotion to others; many derive satisfaction, power, and

sense of achievement from managing their families and homes, having close friendships, caring for those they love, and raising children. (Goodchilds 96)

Stereotypical ideals about men and women constrict change as both gender roles continually evolve. Additionally, people are more complex than the measurement used in the polarity model which creates a simplistic view of human behavior.

The use of stereotypes for genders leaves unexplored areas of human behavior due to the fact that once a trait is assigned explorations tend to lay heavily on one gender, rather than viewing human nature as a whole. Since there are few substantiated differences between men and women, behaviors cannot be explained by using the polarity model, which measures on an either/or scale. According to Tavis, “in spite of countless studies that have failed to pin these qualities down and keep them pinned” (92). Since men and women have many of the same needs and desires, the few differences between genders have little or no impact on personality traits or behaviors. Additionally, continuing to base the gender issue on failed assumptions leaves out social issues that need to be addressed by both genders, particularly in regards to aggression. According to Tavis:

For example, some studies of physical aggression report that females, in not behaving as aggressively as males, are *opposite* from them, that is, ‘unaggressive’ or ‘submissive’. But these studies do not find that women are submissive...By describing the women’s behavior as the opposite of the men’s, researchers not

only are mistaken; they also lost critical information about *female* aggressiveness.” (95)

One driving force behind women using force is the automatic devaluation of feminine traits that women are born with that are not valued in patriarchal society. The devaluation of all things feminine contributes to aggressive behaviors exhibited by women due to the anger from the feelings of being somehow deficient. The character of Fefu in *Fefu and Her Friends* illustrates how a woman may desire to be a man since they are valued in Western society, attacking women in the process. The aggressive behavior Fefu displays is not based on her gender, but rather learned through experiences.

Through traumatic events or social norms people tend to live in the past, creating stories about themselves through the perception of others, which then become truths they believe about themselves. Throughout *Top Girls* the characters tend to live through the stories assigned to them through social learning, allowing the judgments of other people to define them. According to Eckhart Tolle:

This illusionary sense of self is what Albert Einstein, who had deep insights not only into the reality of space and time but also into human nature, referred to as an optical illusion of consciousness. That illusory self then becomes the basis for all further interpretations, or rather misinterpretations of reality, all thought processes, interactions, and relationships. Your reality becomes a reflection of the original illusion. (28)

The illusion becomes an internal story, and when triggered, people may use aggressive language to defend themselves against it since they believe the tale to be true. In reality, the other person's perception may not be true, but the victim lives through the opinion of that person. People defend themselves from these perceptions of the truth or believe the illusion, creating resentment and anger, therefore, triggering the use of verbal abuse.

Any violence experienced or witnessed during childhood causes people to protect themselves using verbal abuse. Angie in *Top Girls* is consistently being verbally abused; hence, she uses aggressive language to express herself as protection and to gain power. According to John D. Byrnes, a leading management trainer in aggression:

Events, situations and objects are the stimuli that color the aggressor's perception. A deeply-resented boss, a recent firing, a pressure-charged work environment or a weapon hidden in a pocket—all these are triggers which may bend and distort an incoming verbal communication. (43-44)

Traumatic experiences during childhood or adulthood trigger aggressive behavior thus distorting the perception of a situation or verbal messages. When a person is reminded of the event, feelings emerge such as helplessness, fear, or failure, forcing them to protect themselves from a possible threat. Through their fear, a flight or fight decision is made. Aggression comes from people attempting to assert themselves toward the threat they perceive. Most of the time, the perceived threats happen due to one or more of the person's needs not being met, prompting them to do whatever it takes to maintain the status quo of the situation. When a person is triggered, there are several ways they

automatically defend themselves, by choosing behaviors that worked in the past, which becomes one of their defense mechanisms.

If a person gets triggered by an event or message, they unconsciously move into a self-protecting behavior (defense). In *Top Girls*, Marlene and Joyce trigger each other constantly, forcing each woman to be on the defensive and ready to protect themselves from the other's attack. The trigger is something that the person believes defines them, learned from these stories of childhood, leading to ego defenses. According to psychologist Guy E. Swanson:

Ego defenses ward off accusations that we make against ourselves. We charge ourselves with threatening social ties that we want to sustain; we accuse ourselves of corruption, disloyalty, lack of character, bad faith. Ego defenses enable us to see ourselves as deserving respect in spite of our feelings to the contrary. (86)

Examples of defenses are denial, projection, rationalization, repression, and reaction formation. Perceiving they are the victim, a person counteracts the stories, with ego-defenses, by automatically reacting to the stimulus through learned behaviors. The last example, reaction formation, is the development of aggressive behaviors, and verbal abuse falls under this category. Most people use socially acceptable defense behaviors in order to protect themselves. Verbal abuse is a form of aggression used often due to its seemingly less violent nature. Aggressive behaviors are triggered by the combination of past experiences and a deficiency in needs and desires.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Wants, each individual seeks five levels of needs: physical, security, affection and affiliation, esteem, and self-actualization (Figure 1.1). Since women are consistently being oppressed from the patriarchal measurement system, the women within the plays strive to meet the self-esteem need. Due to beliefs about feminine characteristics such as intuition being undervalued, the characters are triggered into defensive mode for protection and struggle to meet this need. Each need works as a building block, requiring each level to be sufficiently met before the next can be obtained. Samuels describes Maslow's hierarchy of needs model:

He postulates that once the physiological needs are reasonable well satisfied, although not completely, then the attention of the individual focuses upon the next level of needs, the safety needs. These include a sense of order, predictability, justice, and security. Once this set of needs is reasonable well under control, the next level of needs up the hierarchy emerges as the focal set, the belongingness and love needs. When these needs are satisfied sufficiently, the individual concentrates upon the next level up, the esteem needs, which include both self-esteem and esteem from others. Finally, when each of these preceding sets of needs are met reasonably well, there emerges a focus upon the self actualization needs, the fulfillment of the individual's potentials to grow intellectually and emotionally, to develop into a full and generous human being. (3)

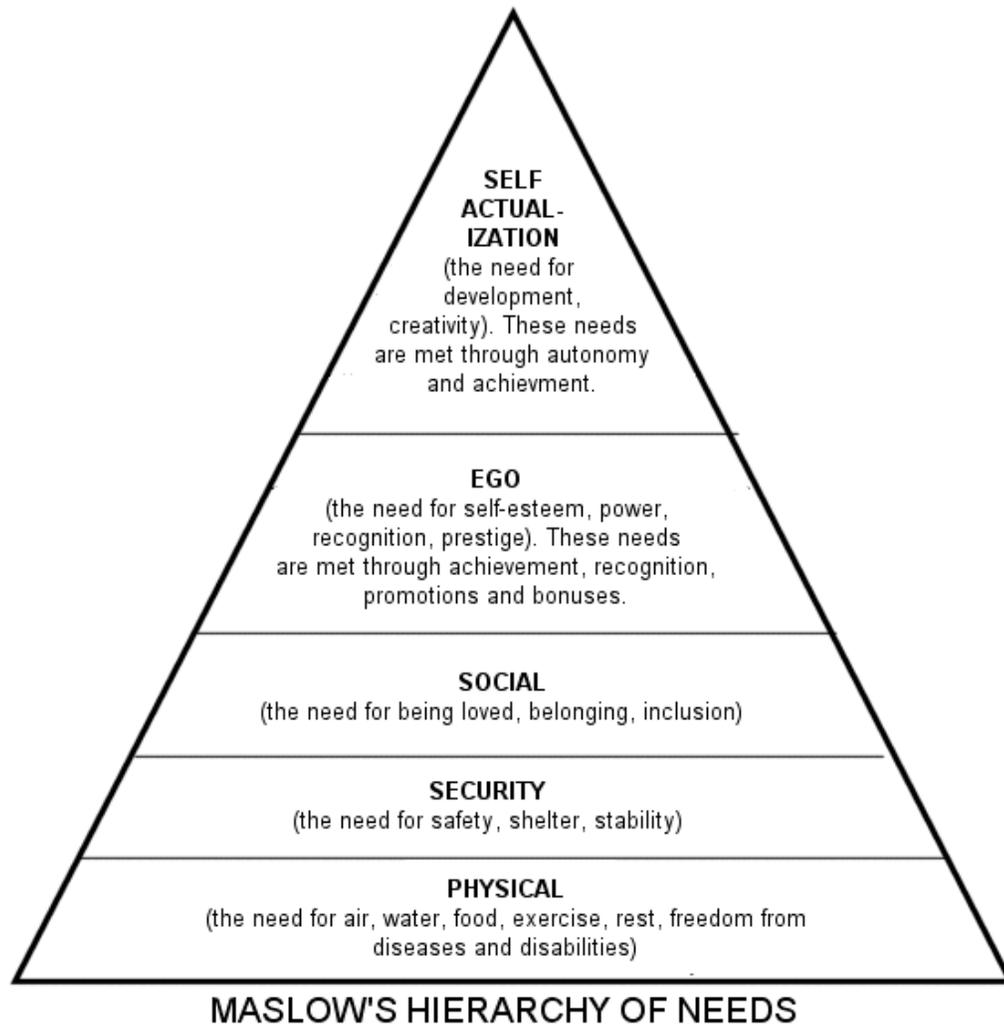


Fig. 1. The base of the pyramid reflects basic needs for survival. As the pyramid continues towards the top, the needs evolve into subjects such as self-esteem and power.

Once sufficiently met, a person moves up to the next level. At different points in a person's life there may be lack in one area or another. If a person experiences any lack of these needs in their lifetime, perceived threat of the loss can trigger a reaction to any situation. According to Samuels, "...aggression may be seen as a stimulative-drive, but one that is almost certain to be triggered" (46). Any perceived threat can trigger aggression as a protective measure. Since many times men are seen as the enemy, due to past oppression, women are often triggered by the particular behaviors they exhibit. Since feminine traits are perceived as insufficient, women have a lowered self-esteem creating more sensitivity towards male dominant behavior and further triggering anger that often leads to aggression. According to Nancy Potter, "The persistent devaluing of things female prevents researchers from pursuing important questions and addressing mental-health problems that manifest themselves more frequently in women's lives" (67). Arguably, constant devaluation of one specific trait or characteristic may create lower self-esteem, and women are born into circumstances of full devaluation due to the attitudes towards all things feminine. Even though the ego need may be sufficiently met, a perceived threat constantly exists for many women, triggering aggressive protective behavior. Due to these constant perceived threats, in order to gain self-esteem, women must first gain power.

All forms of abuse are different ways to exhibit power over another person. All the characters exhibit verbal abuse and even physical aggression in their search for power. The need for power over another comes from the patriarchal social structure, causing a need to one-up the other person as means to influence them. In *Top Girls* and

Fefu and Her Friends, the main characters target females as their victims, since they view it as easier to gain power over them. Women also tend to believe they are the “weaker” sex, buying into the patriarchal rhetoric they grow up with. Due to the inversions in *That Pretty Pretty, or; The Rape Play*, the women not only attempt to gain power over the other women, but they, in many ways, successfully gain power over the men within the play. When these women are in power, echoes of patriarchal thought reverberate throughout the play signifying women are no longer oppressed but have become oppressors themselves. In *Powerholders*, David Kipnis describes power between two people:

From this perspective, the focus is on the interaction between two parties, the powerholder and the target person, in which the target person’s behavior is given new directions by the powerholder. That is, power is said to be exercised when changes occur in the target person’s behavior that can be attributed to the powerholder’s influence and that serve the powerholder’s interests or intentions.

(9)

Therefore, in an abusive situation, the person with power uses aggressive force, either verbal or physical, to influence their victim. The abuser exhibits the most power in the relationship, and the victim becomes the target. These roles constantly shift depending on the situation. Even a person consistently seen as the victim can become the abuser, which often triggers more aggressiveness from the powerholder, becoming a battle of wills without resolution. This often leads to someone getting hurt in the process.

A more specific form of power discussed within this thesis postulates the belief that a person shapes outcomes for others to avoid their own feelings of powerlessness. The power used by the perpetrator turns into controlling behaviors affecting personal relationships. According to Kipnis:

In essence, the powerholder derives satisfaction from perceiving that he has shaped outcomes for others, either because he derives enjoyment from these activities or because such activities allow him to avoid feelings of weakness and loss of control. (18-19)

Being the “lesser” sex, women need power in order to avoid the belief they are weak, a principle pressed upon them from birth. Learning to gain power through patriarchal male dominated characteristics, the women within the plays attempt to mold their surroundings in different ways, but always in an attempt to gain the ultimate goal of advancing their own power. The person holding the power wants control over the outcome of a given situation, thus attempting to direct the victim.

Control attempts to bend another person to meet the abusers needs. Fefu persistently attempts to control her friends and family, bending them to her will in order to get her needs met. Starting with a type of verbal abuse pattern often leading to physical acts of violence, if the abuser does not dominate, then he/she may change tactics on impulse, confusing the victim. People that need control often create roles for others according to what they want, disregarding the other person’s thoughts, beliefs, or choices. In her book *Controlling People*, Evans writes, “When people encounter controlling behavior, they often feel ‘erased’, as if, to the perpetrator, they don’t exist. In

relationships, particularly, this kind of behavior sets the state for all kinds of abuse” (5). Through assaults, the controller disregards the person they are interacting with, and the target becomes a shell to be manipulated into whatever the abuser chooses their role to become. According to David Kipis, controllers need to constantly reexamine their approach:

Depending upon the strength of the original need that aroused the motive to influence others, a reexamination of the resources that are available, and the strength of the restraining forces in the field, the powerholder may decide either to abandon his influence attempt, to modify his original needs, or to persist in invoking different means of influence. (34-35)

Manipulators constantly need to readjust to the intended target of their control. If the person resists, the controller may need to modify their behavior, which could lead to frustration, eventually spilling into aggressive behaviors such as verbal abuse. The strong desire to get wishes met and the level of resistance fuels aggression.

On the whole, aggression is defined as physical acts rather than mental attacks. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis I would like to broaden the definition of aggression. According to physiologist Greenwald, “Harming behavior, that is, can be deliberate and purposeful (guided by the self system), but it can also be emotional and impulsive (controlled outside the self system)” (Sulus 167). Most of the aggressions addressed throughout the plays are emotional and impulsive due to the fact that the aggression illustrated by the abuser is triggered from an outside resource, the victim.

Many situations within the text of the plays I examine are socially acceptable and not overt acts of aggression, but still should be considered aggressive behavior harming another person, with or without intention.

Conventionally, violent acts are defined by physical means rather than verbal. Extending the idea of violence beyond a physical nature into verbal abuse, I look towards mind control to further explain different types of violent behaviors. According to Joost Meerloo:

The rape of the mind and stealthy mental coercion are among the oldest crimes of mankind. They probably began back in prehistoric days when man first discovered that he could exploit human qualities of empathy and understanding in order to exert power over his fellow men. The word 'rape' is derived from the Latin word *rapere*, to snatch, but also is related to the words to rave and raven. It means to overwhelm and to enrapture, to invade, to usurp, to pillage and to steal. (13)

Verbal abuse translates into violence through the raping the mind of another person in order to influence them to meet the abuser's needs, equaling physical violence. Invading another person's individual rights in order to steal or degrade their choices creates a type of mind rape that perpetuates violence. Putting verbal abuse in the world of violence illustrates the importance of becoming socially aware of the situation. Socially accepting the idea of degrading another person for a powerholder's own design reinforces

oppression by continually having the need for someone to be in power over another person.

According to the *Brown Dictionary of Verbal Abuse*, the basic definition of verbal abuse is, “any statement of disapproval which is undeserved and which tends to cause lasting emotional and social scars” (1). Some of the results from verbal abuse include low self-esteem, feelings of shame and guilt, avoidance of eye contact, and a tendency to be overly passive. Women and children are most often the victims of verbal abuse, since they have the least amount of power in Western society. In one study, approximately one-third of women reported verbal abuse in childhood and 39% had experiences in their adult relationships (Counseling Center 2). Most abusive people were victims, since women experience the victim position more often, it would be safe to conclude that women pass aggressive behaviors to their children, perpetuating oppression and inequality rather than relieving it.

The most recognizable pattern of verbal abuse is degradation, sometimes used with more aggression than other forms, which includes, name calling, ridicule, intimidation, or insults. Degrading abuse can shape beliefs and perceptions about others or the self often blending with rejecting verbal abuse. In *Top Girls*, Joyce calls Angie several names including “stupid” shaping Angie’s perception of herself into not being smart. Rejecting verbal abuse devalues a person; the pattern rejects other people’s perceptions and beliefs. Rejecting another person includes not listening or ignoring another person’s needs. If one person rejects another, often they attempt to gain approval for their own ideas through exploiting or corrupting patterns. This pattern is socializing

another person to accept particular ideas or behaviors. The ideas or behaviors can be against the victim's perspective or legal boundaries of the law.

When a person does not provide care or concern in a sensitive or responsive manner, the verbal abuse pattern is called denying emotional responsiveness. When Joyce and Marlene have arguments, they attack one another until Marlene starts crying, Joyce attempts to stop Marlene from expressing herself which denies the emotion Marlene exhibits. The abuser becomes uninvolved or detached from the situation. By doing this, they are ignoring the other person's needs emotionally or physically. The most threatening type of verbal abuse, terrorizing, is ongoing intimidating behavior displayed by the abuser that causes fear within the victim, and it can have elements of coercion by intimidation which may slip easily into physical violence. All patterns may lead to isolation of the victim, keeping a person isolated from the outside world. A pattern may be used singularly, but more often they are intertwined, creating a web of confusion for the victim since all the patterns are attempts to control and manipulate another person.

People needing control of their surroundings often use verbal abuse, taking an aggressive form of abusive language or manipulation. Manipulators often use harsh language in order to win the debate or argument. In order to stay in control, the women within the plays need to win the arguments that arise, since their loss of power relies on them being wrong. Deborah Tannen writes, "The argument culture urges us to approach the world—and the people in it—in an adversarial frame of mind. [T]he best way to discuss an idea is to set up a debate" (3). The person that needs control over another

person turns a conversation into conflict, creating a debate. The Abuser attempts to punch holes in the other person's argument, trying to convince the victim to take his or her side. Once the victim questions their own thoughts, the abuser becomes the reasonable person, and the victim tends to believe the abuser's version due to lowered self-esteem, succumbing to the manipulator's needs. Like physical violence, all verbal abuse patterns are learned behaviors from a person's environment.

Most of the time, abusive people, at one point in their own lives, either experienced abuse or witnessed it themselves. The mimetic theory states people who experience violence in their lives will be more likely to perpetuate violence on others. According to a study by Carlton Craig and Ginny Sprang:

Trauma exposure can produce shame and guilt, which in turn may increase powerlessness, enhance vulnerability, and increase the risk for re-victimization and/or identification with the perpetrator.

The mimetic theory posits that violence is generated through scapegoating and mimetic desire, which is the desire to imitate the actions of others whom a victim either admires or views as powerful.

(296)

Men have power, therefore, mimicking these patriarchal traits, women gain power within the social structure. Additionally, according to the mimetic theory, those with less power copy the family members they view as in control. *Top Girls* illustrates three generations of women copying each other's aggressive behaviors allowing a view of the mimetic theory in action.

Another prevalent abuse theory, the Walker Theory, describes the cycle of violence. Most of the arguments have an ebb and flow creating this cycle within all the plays, but it is most prevalent in *Top Girls*. Marlene and Joyce have a standard beginning and end to each argument, then revitalizing the same argument to make another point.

According to Alyce LaVillette author of *It Could Happen to Anyone*:

Walker's cycle of violence theory describes a recurrent sequence of behaviors typical in battering relationships: (a) *Tension-Building*—A phase in which minor incidents of violence may occur along with a build-up of anger; (b) *Acute or Battering*—A phase in which the major violent outburst occurs; and (c) *Honeymoon-respite Phase*—a phase in which the batterer woos his wife. (32)

In verbally abusive relationships the same theory applies; however, it looks slightly different. In the tension building phase, a statement said by one party would trigger the other person. Once the victim responds in a defensive manner, the abuser pushes back using words until it escalates into the acute battering phase between the two people who throw verbal punches instead of physical ones. Once the battering desists, an apology follows until the next tension building phase happens, moving towards another verbal battering. In verbal abuse, many situations have a definite abuser and victim, but both people are involved to some extent in the abuse if the victim responds with insulting words towards the first attack. The Walker Theory illustrates abusive behaviors in relationships between men and women. Using verbal abuse, relationships can extend beyond the intimate bonds of marriage into different types of associations.

The three plays in this thesis push boundaries of women's roles through language and actions, and the use of women in traditionally male dominated roles helps illustrate the sameness of the genders through postmodern theatre. According to the *Longman Anthology of Drama and Theatre*:

Postmodernism has fostered various approaches to dramatic theory and criticism. Among the most prominent is *deconstructionist criticism*, which 'constructs' new meanings through the 'deconstruction' of old ones based on (arguably) erroneous perceptions of language and ideologies imposed by older hierarchies. (Greenwald, Schultz, and Pomo 1461)

Each play deconstructs the linear plot of Realism in different ways taking a critical view of this type of theatre and social issues. By viewing the plays through the critical lens of verbal abuse, I extend the criticism towards our language and social structure, challenging the viewpoints of aggression and gender issues in the Western patriarchal social structure.

In chapter two, I examine *Top Girls*, illustrating verbal abuse perpetuated by women taking on patriarchal characteristics, and the continuation of the cycle of violence through women passing aggressive behaviors to the next generation. In chapter three, I investigate *Fefu and Her Friends*, concentrating on control and manipulation; additionally, I investigate low self-esteem amongst women triggering the need for control over their environment. In chapter four, I examine the polarity model of gender in relationship to violence and aggression through *That Pretty, Pretty; Or the Rape Play*. In

chapter five, I argue the following three points: first, verbal abuse is a viable form of aggression that needs further examination in relationships; second, women perpetuate violence and the polarity model lends itself to assuming women are unaggressive; and third, both men and women, victim and abuser, have a responsibility in dealing with violence and the continuation of it. Placing the sole responsibility on men, even though we are in a patriarchal social structure, does not resolve the issue of aggression.

Chapter 2

RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE IN CARYL CHURCHILL'S *TOP GIRLS*

*In childhood they were our gods, but even gods do not define us.
Patricia Evans~*

Considered a leading feminist text since its London debut in 1982, *Top Girls* explores ideas about women using postmodern theatre conventions by expanding beyond traditional formats, such as Realism, to challenge social ideology. The postmodern format used by Churchill lends itself to several different interpretations and possible lenses, but even so the main critical viewpoint has been feminism. The author of *Top Girls*, Caryl Churchill, writes, "If someone says 'a socialist playwright' or 'a feminist playwright' that can suggest to some people something rather narrow which doesn't cover as many things as you might be thinking about" (xxi). In this chapter, I examine the characters of Marlene, Joyce, and Angie to illustrate their aggressive behavior, using verbal abuse as the main lens, while also exploring other avenues of family violence. Falling outside the feminist definition due to its stereotypically male trait, aggression in women becomes a sidebar to violence rather than a part of it. Expanding on Churchill's belief that her play could extend beyond the particular lens of feminism, verbal abuse exemplifies the responsibility of violence being a human problem, and not gender specific.¹

Top Girls is a postmodern non-linear play, moving from present into the past, about Marlene and her climb up the corporate ladder at the Top Girls Employment

¹ Verbal abuse references aggressive language towards another person with or without intention. For the purpose of this thesis violence is both physical and verbal.

Agency. Recently promoted, Marlene brings together several women from history and literature to celebrate with her over dinner. Through her imagination, these women of the past share their histories in the present.² Monday morning at the office, Marlene interviews a prospective client Jeanine. During the second act the scene changes to a small country town in England. Marlene's niece Angie and her friend Kit play in the front yard until Joyce, Marlene's sister, calls them inside. Switching back to the London office, Angie drops by to visit Marlene; while there the wife of a colleague, Mrs. Kidd, interrupts their conversation to defend her husband against the promotion he lost to Marlene. The last part of the play takes place at Joyce's country home one year in the past. Angie overhears the two sisters' argue during Marlene's unexpected visit and find's out Marlene is her mother.

As the play progresses it becomes more aggressive, and the use of several postmodern theatrical conventions helps illustrate this effect. One convention of postmodern theatre Churchill uses in *Top Girls* is double casting. The women that portray the historical and literary characters in the beginning are converted into supporting characters throughout the rest of the play, becoming Marlene's victims of verbal abuse. The use of overlapping dialogue creates interruptions between characters speeding up the pace of the conversations. The interruptions and speed illustrate that the women communicate by not listening. This leads to abusive language, primarily due to the fact that the women are attempting to prove their point, instead of believing the

² The women playing historical and literary figures in the first act are double cast to play supporting characters throughout the rest of the play. The fictional and literary figures are: Joan of Arc, Lady Nijo, Isabella Bird, Griselda, and Dull Gret.

validity of the other person's perception. The shift from the city where Marlene advances her career to her family roots in the country allows the audience to understand her desire for excellence within her profession and the necessity for power over others in order to maintain control. The flexibility of time slowly fills in reasons for Marlene, Joyce, and Angie's abusive behavior.

In *Top Girls*, the main character, Marlene, represents stereotypical traits associated with male characteristics reinforcing patriarchal ideology.³ She uses verbally abusive language towards the other women in the play and holds an attitude of contempt for housewives.⁴ Marlene shows her negative attitude towards the women around her holding different view points by the unconstructive nature of their conversations. Marlene also uses aggressive language towards her sister Joyce, thus creating an abusive relationship. Unlike Joyce, the play illustrates Marlene's verbally abusive behaviors within familial relationships and daily relationships at work.

While Marlene asserts her power within her position and relationships, her sister Joyce maintains dominance in her home through her daughter Angie. The use of verbal abuse reminds Angie of Joyce's control. Feeling out of control, Angie needs to exert her own power, choosing her friend Kit as her victim.⁵ The mimetic theory of abuse states people mimic learned behaviors from violence they experienced or witnessed during

³ Examples of stereotypical patriarchal gender traits are power, aggression, emotionless, authoritative, independent, and bread-winner.

⁴ Traditional roles for women references taking care of the home, husband and children.

⁵ Abusers choose people with less power as their victims to exert their control, and Angie being sixteen chooses her less powerful friend Kit at the age of twelve.

childhood.⁶ *Top Girls* illustrates two generations, starting with Marlene and Joyce. The two sisters then pass on their verbally abusive language to Angie. Additionally, Angie's willingness to use physical violence creates another dimension to her abusive behavior. Learning their behavior from their parents, Marlene and Joyce mimic the role models they grew up with, and even though their parents are not active characters in this dramatic work, they leave a strong impression on their daughters.

According to Walker's Theory, abuse is cyclical, starting with the triggering phase, moving to the battering phase, and ending with the apology phase.⁷ For example, Joyce reminds Marlene about her irresponsible act of abandoning Angie, triggering Marlene into having to justify her actions, leading to the second phase of battering.⁸ During the battering phase words are used as weapons attacking the intended target. Once the argument starts between the two sisters, Marlene verbally attacks her sister, and her sister reciprocates until one of them relents in some way. The two sisters enter the honeymoon phase which starts with an apology, leading to a reprieve, until triggering the next attack. The combination of childhood trauma and the need for power leads Marlene, Joyce and Angie down a path of using verbally abusive language frequently to relate with other people.

⁶ The mimetic theory states people that experienced or witnessed abuse copy the behaviors perpetuating the cycle of violence.

⁷ Walker's Theory of Violence illustrates the cycle of violence, triggering, battery, and apology. The cyclical nature of the theory posits another abusive situation will eventually arise unless the cycle is broken.

⁸ Triggers change from person to person depending upon the experiences in their lives. Once a person becomes triggered they use self-protecting behaviors (ego defenses), for example, rationalization or aggression.

Any violence Joyce, Marlene, or Angie experience or witness during childhood triggers them into protecting themselves using verbal abuse. Reminded of a traumatic event through the language the other person uses, the women employ verbal abuse to protect themselves, and through these traumatic events the women experienced, they create their individual stories, living through their past experiences rather than basing their response towards present situations.⁹ Marlene, Joyce, and Angie either defend themselves from these perceptions of the truth, or believe the illusion, creating resentment and anger, triggering the use of verbal abuse. Since Marlene, Joyce, and Angie have deficiencies within their needs hierarchy, they use verbal abuse in order to exert power so their requirements are obtained. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Wants states each person seeks to actualize five levels of needs during their lifetime.¹⁰ From the onset of the play, Marlene's social needs are not being met, which is exemplified through her promotion celebration when she gathers people within her imagination.

In the beginning of the play, Marlene imagines several women from history and literature to celebrate her promotion, and only these created friends are present to keep her company. The language she uses shows how she supports and listens to them. I examine the scene taking the women out of Marlene's imagination and basing them in

⁹ As children people create stories about themselves based on what others tell them, taking in the information, processing it, and allowing the story to become part of them. Self-protecting behaviors are derived from negative stories about the self.

¹⁰ Maslow's five levels of needs are: physical, security, social, ego, and self-actualization. Each person requires that each level be met sufficiently before moving to the next. The diagram is referred to as the needs pyramid or hierarchy pyramid.

reality, given that she views the women she interacts with on a daily basis as inferior, particularly those with traditional values:

JOAN. And you find work for people.

MARLENE. Yes, an employment agency.

NIJO. Over all the women you work with. And the men.

ISABELLA. And very well deserved too. I'm sure it's just the beginning of something extraordinary.

MARLENE. Well, it's worth the party[...]

MARLENE. We've all come a long way. To our courage and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements

(13).

Marlene views the historical and literary figures as her contemporaries due to the fact that each broke from traditional women's roles in their own time. She considers herself their equals, since she is currently breaking down stereotypical ideals about women. Due to the equality she feels, her language questions and supports these women, unlike her tone when speaking with other people in her life at work and home. Towards the end of the celebration Marlene becomes angry when the conversation turns to the subject of men. Marlene expresses her frustration with men in general, which is rerouted from unresolved anger towards her abusive father. Additionally, from Marlene's perspective about traditional roles, women that hold these positions are weak, subjecting themselves to the whims of their husbands'. Through her need to stay in control and distaste for traditional women's roles, she becomes verbally abusive towards other women in the play.

Marlene's work week begins on her first day following her promotion when a woman named Jeanine comes into the office requesting "Top Girls Employment Agency" help her find a position:

JEANINE. I'm saving to get married.

MARLENE. Does that mean you don't want a long-term job?

JEANINE. I might do.

MARLENE. Because where do the prospects come in? No kids for a bit?

JEANINE. Oh no, not kids, not yet.

MARLENE. So you won't tell them you're getting married?

JEANINE. Had I better not?

MARLENE. It would probably help. (9)

Even though Jeanine has the experience and knowledge for a loftier position, Marlene decides to place her in an assistant position. Marlene persists in asking questions about Jeanine's personal life, which exhibits how women can perpetuate the same stereotypes and values as their male counterparts. In the power position, Marlene does not give credence to Jeanine's experience, basing her opinion on Jeanine's personal values. Through her language, Marlene tells Jeanine any traditional values she believes should not be mentioned if she wants to be successful, creating a situation in which Jeanine can no longer make choices. Placing Marlene in the male role within the play suggests that women who desire children and marriage have no place in the workforce. Additionally, when entering the workforce, a lower clerical position works best, even though they may

be qualified for a more prominent role. Here, women striving to become equal actually perpetuate inequality amongst women by upholding patriarchal beliefs about women and their careers. Additionally, Marlene's unwillingness to listen assumes Jeanine does not belong in a powerful position considering she wants to get married. Hence, she continues the stereotype that women should hold assistant positions extending their care taking from the home to the workplace. Marlene continues degrading women that insist on maintaining a traditional construct throughout the day, even touching outside the job realm with a fellow employee's wife, Mrs. Kidd.

Mrs. Kidd approaches Marlene, because she believes her husband should have received Marlene's promotion. Consequently, she attempts to persuade Marlene to give up the promotion so her husband can take his rightful place within the company:

MRS. KIDD. It's me that bears the brunt. I'm not the one that's been promoted. I put him first every inch of the way. And now what do I get? You women this, you women that. It's not my fault. You're going to have to be very careful how you handle him. He's very hurt.

MARLENE. If he doesn't like what's happening here he can go and work somewhere else.

MRS. KIDD. Is that a threat?

MARLENE. I'm sorry but I do have some work to do.

MRS. KIDD. Miserable and lonely. You're not natural.

MARLENE. Could you please piss off? (58-59)

As the conversation between Marlene and Mrs. Kidd comes to a close, they both become abusive. Neither one listening to the other, but when Mrs. Kidd makes a character assessment that Marlene is “unnatural,” (59) Marlene returns the barb with a more belligerent “piss off”. The excerpt illustrates how people start to become belligerent towards one another when needs are not being met. Mrs. Kidd would like to discuss her husband and Marlene wishes to get back to work. When neither obtains their individual desire from the conversation, they both stop listening and start throwing verbal punches. Marlene ends the conversation since she is more aggressive than Mrs. Kidd. Both women deny each other their emotions and refuse to acknowledge the others’ viewpoint. They demonstrate this by not listening to one another, consequently, no attainable understanding or resolution can result. If Marlene listened to Mrs. Kidd, it would validate her even though Mrs. Kidd would not be obtaining the result she desired. Mrs. Kidd would have value in Marlene’s eyes as a human being. Marlene’s need to win arguments along with her aggressive communication style also creates tension in her relationship with her sister Joyce. The sisters continually argue with no resolution about past mistakes.

When Marlene goes to visit her sister Joyce, they discuss several issues, including Marlene’s distaste for her sister’s role as a housewife. Their argument revolves around their mother and the need to convince the other of their individual viewpoint:

JOYCE. You are very lucky then.

MARLENE. Fucking awful life she's had.

JOYCE. Don't tell me.

MARLENE. Fucking waste.

JOYCE. Don't talk to me.

MARLENE. Why should I not talk? Why shouldn't I talk to you? /

Isn't she my mother too? (78)¹¹

Marlene exposes her attitude towards traditional roles and reveals her belief that her mother wasted her life by tending to Marlene's father and two kids. Marlene confirms her beliefs about Joyce by stating, "Fucking waste", suggesting that tending house like their mother, Joyce wastes her life. In order to win the argument, Marlene chooses harsh words, demeaning Joyce's choices. She attempts to prove her point without giving a second thought to the beliefs of her sister, rejecting Joyce as an individual. Through her anger, Marlene justifies her own choices and in the process alienates other women.

Being abusive carries consequences, and for Marlene she becomes isolated from family with no friends. Instead of being surrounded by friends and family, Marlene celebrates her promotion alone. Her abusive behavior stunts her relationships with the people around her and never allows mutual respect and intimacy to enter into her connections. When people push others away, fear of something deep within themselves creates patterns, including forceful language, that may not work in everyday life. For Marlene, aggressive language separates her from others, contributing to the evidence that this pattern does not work in her life, although she continues to use it since the pattern serves her in her search for power. At a young age Marlene learned that an aggressive communication style worked to gain power from her parents, consequently it became her

¹¹ Caryl Churchill uses the forward slash (/) to represent quick overlapping dialogue.

default behavior since the style has been a normal part of her life. Furthermore, the “stories” Marlene continues to believe about herself were learned from childhood, which prompts her to use abusive language for protection and which disconnects her from people, leading to her seclusion. Her defense mechanism creates hostility in her relationships, especially with Joyce. Although Marlene pushes Joyce away, Joyce shares responsibility in the separation with her own aggressive behaviors. Joyce is verbally abusive towards her daughter Angie and Marlene. The language used in conversation with Marlene is defensive at times, which progresses the argument rather than diffusing it. Joyce, like Marlene, needs to maintain power and control, exhibiting her authority towards Angie through verbal abuse.

Joyce calls for Angie to come into the house when she and her friend Kit are playing outside. Angie ignores her request. When Joyce becomes more aggressive, she finally relents by responding:

JOYCE. You there Angie? Kit? You there Kitty? Want a cup of tea?[...] Fucking rotten little cunt. You can stay there and die.

I'll lock the door[...]

KIT. Angie, let's go.

JOYCE. She's not going till she's done her room.

KIT. It's starting to rain.

JOYCE. Come on, come on then. Hurry and do your room, it's wet, Come on. We'll look up the time in the paper[...]Hurry up, Angie. You'll spoil your dress. You make me sick. (37-44)

In addition to the harsh language, Joyce threatens to lock the door, prompting Angie to respond. The dialogue becomes progressively more hostile as Joyce's frustration builds, which is shown through her use of the word "cunt" (37). After Angie answers and lets her mother know she wants to go into town with Kit, Joyce tells Angie she cannot go until she cleans her room. At the end of the argument Joyce adds "you make me sick" (44) continuing the verbally abusive dialogue and sending negative messages to Angie, even after the conflict ends. The spoken threat to lock the door is an example of terrorizing verbal abuse. Joyce instills fear into Angie by telling her she no longer belongs in the home. At this point in the play Angie knows Marlene abandoned her at birth, and the only father she knows, Joyce's husband, left. The statement of Angie not belonging actually makes room for her to begin a negative story about being alone through abandonment. The harsh tones and messages from Joyce solidify Angie's beliefs about rejection, which is illustrated through her relationship with her friend Kit. Throughout the play, Joyce continually uses verbal abuse towards her daughter in order to maintain control.

When Joyce realizes Angie called Marlene and invited her over, she chastises her. At times verbal abuse sounds superficial, but examining the meanings underneath the surface exposes the threat:

MARLENE. You didn't tell your mum you asked me down.

ANGIE. I wanted it to be a surprise.

JOYCE. I'll give you a surprise/ one of these days.

ANGIE. I thought you'd like to see her. She hasn't been here since

I was nine. People do see their aunts. (71)

On the surface, Angie wanted to see her aunt Marlene. Knowing Joyce would not want Marlene to visit, Angie decided to go behind her mother's back, hoping she would not be reprimanded once Marlene shows up unannounced. Needing to sneak an invitation illustrates that Angie lives in fear of Joyce since she cannot communicate her need to see Marlene to her mother. Marlene's presence prompts Joyce to use a veiled threat, "I'll give you a surprise one of these days" (71) instead of punishing Angie. The vague words Joyce speaks create a sense of the unknown, leaving Angie to guess the meaning. Given Joyce's abusive behavior towards her daughter, the words give an ominous tone, creating fear for Angie.

Angie is able to communicate her desires and express her thoughts when Marlene visits. For example, in the same conversation, Angie brings up the idea of going to America. She admires Marlene, and in order to impress her, Angie expresses her desire to take the trip. Later in the evening, Joyce tells Marlene that Angie will be an average woman like herself. Since Joyce believes Angie will grow up to be a typical woman, following in her footsteps as a traditional housewife, she determines Angie's future by discouraging her to dream:

ANGIE. [...]They go on Concorde and Laker and get jet lag. Will you
take me?

MARLENE. I'm not planning a trip.

ANGIE. Will you let me know?

JOYCE. Angie, / you're getting silly.

ANGIE. I want to be an American. (75)

Instead of listening, or encouraging Angie, Joyce cuts her off and dismisses Angie as “silly” (75). Joyce stops listening to Angie’s nonsense, which invalidates her desires and takes away a supportive, nurturing, and caring environment. Without encouragement, Angie will become exactly what Joyce decides she will be, “an average woman” with no hope of being something different than the expectations placed upon her. At sixteen, Angie already shows signs of abusive behavior due to the beliefs about herself through her experiences with Joyce.

Interacting with her young friend Kit, Angie starts their conversation by keeping a secret from her. When Angie finally discloses her secret, she tells Kit she wants to kill Joyce. As the conversation continues, Angie exerts power over Kit:

ANGIE. Out here. In the dark. What if I left you here in the dark all night?

KIT. You couldn’t. I’d go home.

ANGIE. You couldn’t.

KIT. I’d / go home.

ANGIE. No you couldn’t, not if I said[...]

ANGIE. You don’t know what I heard. Or what I saw. You don’t know nothing because you’re a baby.

KIT. You’re sitting on me.

ANGIE. Mind my hair / you silly cunt. (35-36)

Angie threatens to leave Kit in the dark alone holding her against her will. Using threatening language, Angie becomes more violent convincing Kit to do her bidding. Angie keeps Kit physically in place when language does not work. The language used along with physical abuse controls Kit, and Kit cannot protect herself from Angie, so she must depend on Angie for her safety. To keep herself safe, Kit allows Angie to degrade and physically assault her not wanting to encourage Angie's anger into a more violent fit. When Kit points out Angie's violent behavior, Angie responds by calling Kit a "cunt" (37). She uses the same word she mimicked from Joyce as a weapon for her own desires.

Kit tells Angie her mother believes she is unnatural for having a friend so young. The negative hearsay feeds into Angie's beliefs about herself, fueling anger, and prompting Angie to use more violence. Angie responds to the conversation by attacking Kit verbally at the same time grabbing her arm to twist it:

KIT. My mother says there's something wrong with you playing with someone my age[...]She says you're a bad influence. She says she's going to speak to your mother.

ANGIE. Say you're a liar.

KIT. She said it to me.

ANGIE. Say you eat shit. (39)

When Kit tells Angie her mother thinks "there is something wrong" with her, Angie immediately responds with anger and attempts to coerce Kit into saying exactly what she wants, simultaneously physically abusing her. When the approach does not work, Angie changes her tactic with an apology choosing another manipulative way to force Kit into

telling her what she wants to hear.¹² Two forces trigger Angie's behavior: first, Angie needs to hear Kit state her mother's wrong because she needs someone on her side; second, Angie fears Kit will stop being her friend; consequently, she uses force to keep Kit from being able to make a choice. Instead, Angie makes the choice for Kit so she will stay rather than abandoning her like Marlene and her father, leaving Angie alone. The force Angie exerts on Kit becomes apparent when Kit decides to defend her against Joyce.

When Kit speaks to Joyce, the understanding of Angie and Kit's relationship comes to the surface. Kit and Angie want to go out, but Joyce wants her to clean her room before departing. While Kit waits for her friend, Joyce speaks to her about the girls' age gap referring to the unnatural state of the relationship, resembling the conversation Kit had with her own mother:

KIT. I'm old for my age.

JOYCE. And Angie's simple is she? She's not simple.

KIT. I love Angie.

JOYCE. She's clever in her own way.

KIT. You can't stop me.

JOYCE. I don't want to.

KIT. You can't, so.

JOYCE. Don't be cheeky, Kitty. She's always kind to little children.

KIT. She's coming so you better leave me alone. (43)

¹² Often an abuser needs to change tactics in order to get what they desire.

Angie's success in controlling Kit becomes realized considering that Kit will do anything for her. The conversation between Joyce and Kit becomes a struggle as neither one is listening to the other. When Kit states "I love Angie" (43), Joyce's responded with "She's clever in her own way" (43), this illustrates that they are not even in the same conversation instead they throw words back at one another to make their own point without acknowledging the other's position. The environment through coercion Angie created in their relationship gives Kit a tool to use against Joyce. In Kit's world view, Angie holds all the power, and she knows to use her as a threat. In the end, no matter what Angie may say or do to Kit she remains loyal to Angie, not fully understanding she's in an abusive situation. Angie does not have awareness around the violence she uses because she grew up around Joyce and Marlene who use verbal abuse, instilling the belief that aggression is normal behavior.

Marlene and Joyce similarly grew up in an abusive household. Through the dialogue, the abusive nature of their parents' relationship illustrates how Joyce and Marlene learned their own behaviors. Joyce passes the behavior to Angie, creating a picture of the family's cycle of abuse and explaining how verbal abuse gets passed from one generation to the next:

JOYCE. You say mother wasted her life.

MARLENE. Yes I do. Married to that bastard.

JOYCE. What sort of life did he have?/

MARLENE. Violent life?

JOYCE. Working in the fields like an animal. / Why?

MARLENE. Come off it.

JOYCE. Wouldn't he want a drink? You want a drink. He couldn't afford whisky[...]

MARLENE. She was hungry because he drank the money./ He used to hit her.

MARLENE. I saw him one night. I came down.

JOYCE. Do you think I didn't?/[...]

MARLENE. I knew when I was thirteen, out of their house, out of them, never let that happen to me,/ never let him, make my own way, out. (84-85)

Marlene and Joyce witnessed violence by their father towards their mother. According to the mimetic theory, in order to pass along violent behaviors, a person does not have to physically be involved but be a witness to it.¹³ The example of Marlene and Joyce's parents is a physical act, but most of the time verbal abuse comes before physical episodes; therefore, a part of their lives as children revolved around verbal violence. The beginning portion of their argument creates the tension building phase within the cycle of violence. When the women speak to each other, they use verbal abuse to communicate, as they switch roles between abuser and victim at different junctures of their argument. Not wanting to become a victim herself, Marlene decided to leave home and forge a new life in the city. Due to the behaviors Marlene witnessed from her father, she became the

¹³ “[T]he mimetic model of violence draws from social learning theory, which suggests that victims learn from modeled behavior” (Craig and Sprang 396). Therefore, the victim either witnesses or is subjected to the violence modeled by the abuser.

abuser by copying him since he held the power. As a consequence, in order to have control she must become aggressive or end up powerless like her mother and Joyce. Conversely, Joyce followed her mother's path of housewife, and when her husband left, she needed to run a household on her own. Since her only model of power came from her father, she uses the same aggressive behavior. Seemingly in control, both women turn out to be aggressive women and victims. The belief that only men perpetuate violence prevents Marlene and Joyce of being aware of their own abuse or victimization by other women. The aggressive behavior translates into independence rather than the destructive trait it is. Both women have become what they detest without realizing the damage they have created in their lives and for those around them.

Joyce and Marlene's continual argument revolves around unresolved issues, keeping the two women in the past and not moving their relationship forward. A part of their conversation revolves around Marlene leaving as a teenager and abandoning her child. Marlene and Joyce attack one another instead of sharing their emotions about the choices they made. Continually justifying their actions, rather than accepting responsibility for their deeds, they fail to heal their relationship:

JOYCE. You could have lived at home. / Or live

MARLENE. Don't be stupid[...]

JOYCE. You was the most stupid, / for someone so clever you was the most stupid, get yourself pregnant, not go to the doctor, not at all. (80)

After Joyce tells Marlene she could have stayed home, Marlene automatically pushes back never explaining her position. Instead, she responds by telling Joyce "don't be

stupid” invalidating her opinion. Needing to regain control of the conversation, Joyce replies by telling Marlene she’s “the most stupid” (80) and brings up the pregnancy, attempting to win the argument. Neither woman ever gains control of the argument; instead, they attempt to one-up the other by their individual righteousness. The need for control over the conversation places a wedge in their connection, continuing their struggle, rather than being able to move forward with their relationship.

The push to win the argument continues until Marlene breaks down and cries, forcing the argument into the honeymoon phase. For Marlene, in order to win the argument, she must give up. As long as Marlene needs to justify her choices rather than her feelings, these two women will continue arguing the same points due to their own individual anger and resentment about the situation:

MARLENE. I was afraid of this. I only came because I thought you wanted...I just want...

JOYCE. Don't grizzle, Marlene, for God's sake. Marly? Come on, pet. Love you really. Fucking stop it, will you?

MARLENE. No, let me cry, I like it. (81)

Once Marlene starts to cry, Joyce becomes more supportive and nurturing, calming her down. Although the women have entered the apology phase, Joyce continues being abusive by attempting to force Marlene to quit crying. Joyce requests Marlene to discontinue her feelings, which disregards her emotional state. Marlene turns towards her sister and states “let me cry” (81), asking permission to express herself. Inevitably, because there was no resolution to the argument, there will be another one; as a result, the

make-up period is a prelude to another dispute. The sisters' relationship relies on resentment; however, due to the fact they both desire a connection, their bond continues.

Women who use aggressive language may also use verbally abusive language towards other women. In their book *Language and Gender*, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet state:

Of course, whether such covert repositioning is indeed accomplished depends on many factors: the woman whose anger and verbal abuse targets others (other women) are not responsible for the inequities that enrage her is not engaging in feminine politics, no matter how much she draws attention to her disavowal of certain traditionally 'feminine' positions. (182)

Marlene and Joyce, engaging in an aggressive argument, do not employ an understanding towards women. Instead, they have further created a gap between the traditional role and the new definition of woman, which includes entering the work force. Both women are infuriated with their positions in life, through their choices and the positions they felt obliged as women to assume. This anger translates into both women attacking one another. The aggressive stance they assume only further oppresses women since they are not only debasing a woman's traditional role but criticizing choices which women are striving to claim. Marlene believes in order to live within a male dominated social structure, she needs to fight harder and give up desires of family in order to be successful. Due to the fact that Marlene left Angie behind when she chose to leave, Joyce feels forced into the role of housewife, and she chooses to believe she had no choice but to

raise the child and settle down with a husband. They blame the patriarchal social structure for their failures or given circumstances, yet instead of modifying their own behavior, they mimic the patriarch value system they despise.

Marlene tends to target other women, but all the women within the play create aggression toward each other since male characters are discussed and not physically represented within the play. Both Marlene and Joyce have prominent roles at home and work, and neither woman takes responsibility for the violence they perpetuate. Whether they are the abuser or the defender, verbal abuse is used to gain control of any given situation, fueling aggression rather than alleviating it.

Joyce, Marlene, and Angie copy the world by using aggressive behaviors towards those with less power. Their hostility only perpetuates violence and continues a cycle that appears endless, as they pass their behaviors to the next generation. Angie utters the last word of the play: “frightening” (87). Growing up in a world of violence where her opinions are invalid, Angie looks towards a bleak future. She also foresees a continuing world without choice for women. Marlene and Joyce continually combat each other rather than supporting the different roles for women. The attitude continues a set construct for women with no room for choice. These two women cannot accept differences, but they expect men to acknowledge the equality they do not even share for each other. For Angie, the dark future hovers with no end to the cycle, and she can only see oppression and violence in it.

Chapter 3

CONTROL AND MUNIPULATION IN *FEFU AND HER FRIENDS*

The Control Connection substitutes for connection to self.

~Patricia Evans

In a patriarchal social structure, gender character traits are measured from a male perspective, making feminine traits undervalued, even to the women that supposedly portray these traits.¹⁴ Through the social structure, male traits become the desirable measurement. Many women strive for the same characteristics as their male counterparts to be considered worthy enough for equality with men. As a consequence women have taken on different caricatures such as the “career woman” or “mother”, and their characteristics tend to reflect social expectations around the stereotypical roles.

According to scholar Beverley Byers Pevitts, “This exterior appearance of woman can be readily compared to the image woman has been made into—the commercial view of the world (provided by men) which women re-create images already created for them” (Jenkins 304). Since female characteristics are not valued in a patriarchal social structure, men have constructed images for women with the expectation that she will step into the role to fulfill masculine needs. Through the belief that women’s characteristics, for example collaboration, is undervalued women have also constructed new images for themselves by choosing to follow male stereotypical traits such as aggression in order to gain power within the patriarchal social structure. The character Fefu in Maria Irene Fornes’s *Fefu and Her Friends* struggles with needing power. She finds her home a

¹⁴ Examples of stereotypical male traits are power, independence, bread-winner, and in control of his emotions. Examples of stereotypical female traits are collaboration, feelings, intuition, and co-dependence.

place where she can exert her influence over everything and everyone in it. To remain in control she must direct her surroundings, which leads Fefu down a path of manipulative behavior and verbal abuse in order to express her authority.¹⁵

Man strives to obtain power in Western culture, with a “survival of the fittest” mentality. Influence becomes imperative for continued existence, due to the fact that power leads to survival, and many times the attempt to rule creates abuse. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli writes:

Therefore one must be a fox in order to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten off wolves[...]But one must know how to colour one’s actions and be a great liar and deceiver. Men are so simple, and so much creatures of circumstance, that the deceiver will always find someone ready to be deceived. (74-75)

Required traits to maintain power in Western culture, manipulation and aggression contribute to the patriarchal values of control and influence for individuals. Therefore, oppressed persons must learn these traits to survive. These characteristics, often seen in powerful people managing governments or companies, enter into ones’ personal life, suppressing others. In this chapter, I explore aggressive tactics used by the character of Fefu to gain power in her life, affecting her self-esteem, and her relationships with others.

Written by Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends*, takes place in one day at Fefu’s home during the 1930’s. Like Churchill’s *Top Girls* Fornes’s play features and all

¹⁵ Verbal abuse is any statement that degrades or takes choices from another person, and manipulation is one form of verbal abuse discussed throughout this chapter.

woman cast of characters. Fefu begins conflict with the first visitors, Cindy and Christina. The conflict sets the tone of the play and introduces character traits of Fefu. In particular, her aggressive manner becomes important because Fefu propels the plot forward with her attempts to control her surroundings. After the first conflict amongst the women, Fefu pulls out a shotgun and shoots at her brother, justifying the shot to her friends as a game she and her brother play. In the second act, the women go to different rooms of the house, where they tell their individual stories, giving insight into each woman's psyche and her relationship with Fefu.

The split to different rooms allows Fornes to give these women individual voices, expanding on stereotypical ideas of being female. Switching between self-flagellation and self-respect for Fefu creates a fuller picture of the person rather than a caricature of a woman. These two halves of Fefu creates struggle for control. The seemingly benign language throughout the play makes the ending when Fefu becomes violent more severe in comparison. The short dialogue between longer lines and monologues creates a quicker pace leaving no room for argument when Fefu issues her orders. The intimacy created in the second act by having scenes rotate throughout the theatre rather than a proscenium stage, invites the audience to discover themselves in the characters. Viewing the play through the lens of verbal abuse and aggression continues to expand on the ideas Fornes set forth with her play. Revealing that women are not part of a community, but are competing with each other to form their own identities and gain power within the patriarch.

People use verbally abusive language for many reasons. Most of the time aggression is fed through several factors intricately woven together through a lifetime of messages from the self and other people. Fefu, being born a woman, enters the world with lowered self-esteem since females are inferior to men according to patriarchal standards.¹⁶ Psychologists McKay and Sutker describe self esteem as:

Self-esteem is composed of two things: a belief and a feeling. The belief is a judgment about your overall worth, a summary evaluation of your traits, habits, and abilities. The feeling is a core sense of being good or bad. At its worst, the feeling can be so painful, so acid-etched, that it can make you run a way from many of life's challenges. (1)

Women born into Western society are judged as substandard due to the patriarchal beliefs surrounding their inferior traits, eroding self-esteem. Fefu alludes to this through her desire to be male and the internal pain she feels through her struggle of self-discovery. At the end of the play, Fefu argues with her friend Julia and says, "I don't know, Julia. Every breath is painful for me. I don't know" (58). Once Fefu stops trying to control others, and focuses her questions on herself, she finds herself in physical pain. The anger she feels due to the changes happening in her life is so painful that she runs from her issues by focusing her fury towards the people that surround her. Additionally, continually striving to be male, Fefu constantly erodes her self-esteem through criticizing

¹⁶ Patriarchal standards are stereotypical male traits.

herself for being a woman, deeming herself powerless; consequently, it becomes necessary for her to use force through verbally abusive tactics to gain control.

Fefu, in *Fefu and Her Friends*, illustrates the power of believing she can shape the outcomes of those around her. Through her own feelings of weakness, Fefu controls her friends.¹⁷ Another layer for Fefu's aggressive behaviors comes from needs not being met. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, power and self-esteem are linked under ego¹⁸. In order to achieve the needs of the ego, the other pieces of the hierarchy need to be met, working as building blocks; one personal need cannot exist without the previous part being sufficiently met. Due to Fefu's husband leaving, her feelings of not being loved escalates, which takes away self-esteem. These missing pieces translate into Fefu needing to control others rather than claiming her own power. The need for control propels Fefu into exhibiting behaviors of manipulation and aggressive language. A form of verbal abuse, manipulation does not necessarily involve forceful language but often leads to it. Attempting to control others creates violence within Fefu's relationships with friends and family because the abuser attempts to suppress another's individuality and desires.¹⁹

¹⁷ The Oxford dictionary defines power as, "the ability to do something, influence or control, right or authority, or strength or force.

¹⁸ Maslow's hierarchy of needs states five levels: physical, security, social, ego, self-actualization. Each level is a piece of a person's needs, if one is not met then the others cannot become realized (see Figure 1.1 Chapter 2). The hierarchy of needs is for the individual, and when they are not meeting these needs the person seeks out others, once this happens a person can become forceful in getting what they desire.

¹⁹ For the purpose of this thesis violence is described as physical and mental.

Being a woman and not fully in control, Fefu's main source of power comes from manipulating others through language.²⁰ Manipulation as verbal abuse does not take physical power but a quick mind, being able to change tactics on a moment's notice to get desires met on the hierarchy of needs model.²¹ By changing someone's mind or getting people to do what she wants, Fefu receives power, therefore, equating her to male domination and becoming the "man" she desires to be. In her book *Stereotypes and Roles*, Susan A. Basow writes, "Still, masculine traits are culturally supported more than feminine traits and are associated with power and control" (7). Power and control are culturally supported male traits and Fefu uses manipulation in her attempts to control others.

As a woman in Western culture with little or no power, Fefu attempts to control her friends, family, and herself. According to Patricia Evans, "To control is to act to effect an outcome, generally by means of restraint, physical or verbal, with regard to self, others, or the world around one" (112). The language Fefu uses exhibits control towards her friends. Since Fefu does not reveal information about herself, what she does not state reveals the control she places on her own self-expression. Fefu keeps her feelings and fears to herself, not allowing anyone close enough to see her pain until the end of play, hanging onto the patriarchal ideal that emotions show weakness. Once Fefu opens herself to her friend Julia, her fears surface, and she becomes verbally and physically aggressive, revealing deep resentment and anger. It would appear Fefu is out

²⁰ The Oxford Dictionary defines manipulation as, "control or influence someone unscrupulously."

²¹ Manipulating people requires changing tactics when necessary in order to get the desired outcome of the abuser.

of control with her expression of emotion, but she actually fulfilled her authentic self. Fefu awakened her suppressed femininity which creates room for acceptance of herself, and takes away the need to control others, so she can begin stepping into her own personal power.

Even though Fefu seemingly controls her home, she feels powerless for two reasons. First, she cannot force anyone to meet her missing social need including her husband. Second, being a Westernized woman, Fefu realizes men are in control which suppresses her desires. This leads to her longing to be a man. These combined traits create a person that manipulates friends and family to gain control to feel powerful. In reality she cannot affect tangible outcomes due to the fact that sometimes things are out of a person's control, hence, leaving her powerless. According to psychologist Ellen J. Langer:

Control is also often equated with power. But in fact control is not equivalent to power...Power is the ability to effect tangible outcomes...Control, on the other hand, is a more intrapsychic variable and is less concerned with the current state of the external world. The need for control remains stable although aspects of the environment that threaten that perception of control are likely to change with experience. (15)

When the people in Fefu's home differ from her perception of what they should do, she becomes more aggressive, and in the process, she harms others by creating conflict giving verbally abusive wounds to her friends. Fefu can control her own behavior, yet she leaves those choices to the men around her. Rather than making them herself, she

places herself in the victim role since life happens to her rather than choosing her own path, continually lowering her self-esteem.

When a person wanting control and power fails, they create stress thus lowering their self-esteem, and due to lack of mastery over others, they become helpless.

According to Langer:

The polar opposite of mastery is helplessness. Evidence indicates that the perceived lack of mastery is often stressful when acute, and severely debilitating when chronic. The perception of this independence between one's actions and their outcomes has been called learned helplessness.

Central to this perception is the belief that one cannot influence the production of positive events. (32)

Manifesting good things for Fefu seems impossible, since her life appears to be falling apart due to the fact that her husband is leaving her. The helplessness she feels drives Fefu to control her friends, and the weaker she feels the further she pushes. In order to feel the opposite, powerful, Fefu controls her home. The feeling of helplessness also contributes to Fefu's idea of being crazy, driving her to control other's to the point of becoming aggressive.

Women in Western culture tend to uphold masculine traits, leading to controlling and aggressive behaviors due to the fact that feminine traits are unacceptable. According to Nancy Potter, "Still, masculine traits are culturally supported more than feminine traits and are associated with power and control. In contrast, feminine traits are associated with powerlessness and being controlled" (7). Therefore, Fefu must exhibit masculine traits of

power and control by manipulating her friends. Through her attitude towards feminine traits, she shows contempt for “loathsome” women, disregarding other women’s desires of femininity, which leads to women oppressing other women.

Two friends, Cindy and Christina, arrive at the house and Fefu immediately begins with a shocking statement, setting the tone of her behavior, and beginning the first argument:

FEFU. My husband married me to have a constant reminder of how loathsome women are.

CINDY. What?

FEFU. Yup.

CINDY. That’s just awful.

FEFU. No, it isn’t.

CINDY. It isn’t awful?

FEFU. No...It’s funny—And it’s true. That’s why I laugh.

CINDY. What is true?

FEFU. That women are loathsome. (7-8)

Fefu disguises her verbally abusive statement about women by attempting to create a joke out of the words. By calling the idea intriguing, she shifts the perspective from degrading to an interesting topic for discussion. When Cindy challenges Fefu, responding with “she didn’t feel loathsome” (8), Fefu changes her tactic by excluding her friends from all women when it became clear Cindy disagrees. When Fefu states she finds the idea exciting even though it’s repulsive, Cindy disputes her again. This forces Fefu to switch

her approach to an entirely new topic, and asks Cindy if she finds worms repulsive and interesting. When Cindy agrees to the idea, Fefu gains compliance for her original idea about women being loathsome. Continually changing her approach and confusing Cindy, Fefu gains agreement to the debate. Fefu continually makes outrageous claims in order to create anger amongst her friends throughout the day.

Creating chaos in her home, Fefu forces a topic until her friends start getting angry. When the focus of the conversation turns toward her personality, she defends herself by saying she does not get angry. Christina points out the fact that she makes everyone else angry around her. Sending her friends into frenzy keeps Fefu from having to express her own feelings of anger:

FEFU. You see?—There are some good things about me.—I'm never angry, for example.

CHRISTINA. But you make everyone else angry.

FEFU. No.

CHRISTINA. You've made me furious.

FEFU. I know. And I might make you angry again. Still I would like it if you liked me.—You think it's unlikely.

CHRISTINA. I don't know.

FEFU. ...We'll see. I still like men better than women [...]. (14-15)

Through Fefu's perception she received an acceptable reaction from Christina thus tolerates a fuming Christina without needing to further push her friend. The anger appears funny and ridiculous to Fefu, which gives another reason to state in her argument

she “likes men better than women” (15). While the women react exactly like Fefu wants, she also wants them to like her. Putting Christina on the spot she requests her to like Fefu since she would not want her friends to dislike her in any way, given that the results would further take away the social need.²² When confronted, she denies Christina’s anger, and when Christina states she is furious, Fefu responds with “I know” (15) continually attempting to create confusion for the other person in the conflict, and to obtain the status quo. When Christina responds she does not know if she likes Fefu, Fefu accepts this and continues her argument. Since Christina responded with maybe, it remains possible that Fefu can make her friend angry and liked at the same time. After Fefu resolves the issue to her satisfaction, she takes another jab at the women by her final statement going back to verbal abuse, still liking men more than women, continuing to explain her position. Fefu’s manipulation not only contains words but actions to get her friends to do her bidding.

After dinner, Fefu goes to do the dishes, but the women tell her they will do them, and move toward the kitchen. Fefu tells them to fill up the sink, and a fight amongst the women breaks out to find out who gets stuck with dish duty:

PAULA. Truce!

SUE. Who’s the winner?

PAULA. You are. You do the dishes[...]

FEFU. O.K. Line up. Start doing those dishes.

²² Social need is above security and below ego. Fefu’s security comes from her home, and her security is in jeopardy because her husband is leaving her. Without those two patterns of needs not being met Fefu cannot continue up the hierarchy to ego for a strong sense of self. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (See Figure 1.1, Chapter 2).

JULIA. It's over[...]

FEFU. I won. I got them working.

JULIA. I thought the fight was over who'd do the dishes.

FEFU. Yes[...]

JULIA. They forgot what the fight was about.

FEFU. We did?

JULIA. That's usually the way it is. (51-52)

Fefu volunteers for the dishes knowing her friends would override the decision, but she then filled the sink herself, never intending on doing the work. Once the fight breaks out, she chooses all the women as losers and lines them up for dish duty. Without actually asking for help, Fefu was able to get the women to do exactly what she wanted them to do by creating conflict around the dishes. Fefu includes herself in the fight even though she starts it by volunteering to do the work. Julia's last remark sends the message to Fefu that she understands what she is doing. At the same time Julia does not feed into Fefu's manipulative behavior, stopping Fefu from further controlling Julia. This sends Fefu in another direction, which turns more aggressive.

Faking paralysis, Julia, confines herself to a wheelchair, which limits her reactions unlike the rest of Fefu's friends. Watching her friend, Fefu fears she is going crazy like Julia, and lashes out at her by attempting to force her to fight back:

FEFU. [...]I look into your eyes and I know what you see. It's death.

Fight.

JULIA. I can't [...]

FEFU. What is it you see!

JULIA. You want to see it too?

FEFU. No, I don't. You're nuts, and willingly so.

JULIA. You know I'm not.

FEFU. And you're contagious. I'm going mad too.

JULIA. I try to keep away from you[...]

FEFU. You have no courage.

JULIA. You're being cruel.

FEFU. I want to rest, Julia [...] I lose my courage when you look at

Me [...] Fight!

JULIA. I have no life left.

FEFU. Fight, Julia. (59-60)

Fefu continues to push Julia to “fight” (60) and when she refuses Fefu pushes her out of the wheelchair. Julia denies Fefu her desire to join together in the fight. Fefu cannot force her friend to comply and therefore loses control of the situation, reacting in an aggressive manner. The beliefs Fefu acknowledges about what Julia saw reflect her own inner vision of herself, and through her perception she is weak like Julia. Speaking the fears brings credence to them, showing weakness, and Fefu struggles to not only control her friend but herself by ignoring turbulent feelings caged inside her. Fefu's loss of courage, weakness, and fear of descending into madness do not fit into her ideal self, given that it does not fit into the “man” she strives to mold herself into. Fefu appears out of control, seeing as ignoring her needs and denying herself creates anger, which leads to

abusive behavior towards others. The only person Fefu can control and claim power over is herself, but she gives her own power to the men in her life.

After the first argument with the women, Fefu grabs a shotgun and shoots it at her brother; she explains there were no bullets just blanks in the gun. She justifies her actions through the explanation of the blanks, yet in the past he threatened to put bullets in the gun one day. By playing the game Fefu allows her brother to have power over her choices:

FEFU. He told me one day he'll put real bullets in the guns. He likes to make me nervous [...] That's the way we are with each other. We always go to extremes but it's not anything to be upset about.

CHRISTINA. You scare me.

FEFU. That's all right. I scare myself too, sometimes. But there's nothing wrong with being scared...it makes you stronger.—It does me.—He won't put real bullets in the guns.—It suites our relationship...the game, I mean. If I didn't shoot him with blanks, I might shoot him for real. Do you see the sense of it? (13)

Fefu's belief of her ultimate control over her home and the people in it leads to the belief her brother would never go against her expectations. Ultimately, the game becomes a power struggle between the siblings, and Fefu gives the upper hand to her brother by allowing him the authority to make the choice between blanks and real bullets. The unknown creates fear for Fefu, and she believes being fearful in daily life makes her stronger. This comes from a patriarchal social structure and the need to toughen up and

become aggressive. Fefu proves she cannot control everything when she takes a shot in the dark at the end of the play.

After her argument with Julia, and feeling out of control, Fefu grabs the shotgun and takes a shot in the backyard, stating “I enjoy betting it won’t be a real bullet! You want to bet!” (61). Playing the game she and her brother created, and believing her brother would never put a bullet in the shotgun gives Fefu a sense of security and some of her power back. When she shoots into the backyard, she finds out her brother finally replaced the blanks with a real bullet. Dropping to the ground she realizes she killed a white rabbit, “I killed it...I just shot...and killed it...Julia...” (61). The white rabbit signifies Fefu’s loss of control and power. Additionally, killing the rabbit illustrates Fefu’s vulnerability, something she refuses to show other people. In this moment, allowing other people to see her helplessness makes Fefu powerful since bravery comes from being herself and allowing others to understand her present truth. Fefu feels helplessly out of control after killing the rabbit due to the fact she gives her choice to her brother. Taking the shot in the dark took away the chance to choose. Through her helplessness Fefu breaks down and cries, accepting her femininity by showing her emotions. The death of the rabbit becomes the death of her control, making room for change in her life. Through the acceptance of herself increasing her self-esteem and meeting the ego need. When the needs on Maslow’s Hierarchy are met, there is no longer a need for Fefu to become aggressive in order for her desires to be met. It is the deficiency of needs that triggers Fefu into using her socially adaptive behavior of control through manipulation.

Chapter 4

GENDER POLARITY AND AGGRESSION IN *THAT PRETTY, PRETTY, OR; THE RAPE PLAY*

*In a 'let's-pretend' world, it is no wonder there is war.
~Patricia Evans*

According to social norms and cultural beliefs, women are unaggressive and men are aggressive, which continues the stereotype that the sexes embody contradictory traits. This line of reasoning oppresses women since the measurement is based on male patriarchal characteristics. In addition, using the gender polarity model as a lens to compare the sexes ignores aggression in women.²³ According to Dutton, Nicholls, and Spidel:

As a result, until very recently, political correctness and concerns that reports of female perpetrated abuse might decrease funding and other sources of support for female victims of partner violence have successfully silenced publications of such findings and, unwittingly, prevented progress in successfully preventing and treating this widespread public health issue. (Buttell and Carney 2)

Ignoring the issue of female violence, whether the perpetrator is defending herself or initiating the behavior, continues relationship violence rather than easing it. Concerns about women losing support from wounds sustained from abuse stops men from getting

²³ The gender polarity model lends itself to an either or dichotomy. For example, men are aggressive, therefore, women are unaggressive.

help when they are the victims. Additionally, due to the constraint that man should be able to physically defend themselves causes embarrassment when reporting spousal abuse by women. This idea does not take into account that most men when being attacked by a woman may not defend themselves due to abuse and their own moral laws.

Discontinuing the belief that there are significant differences between genders would help to alleviate the problem of relationship violence.²⁴ In chapters two and three, I illustrated different ways in which women may be aggressive. Within this chapter, I examine Sheila Callaghan's *That Pretty, Pretty, or; The Rape Play* for the similarities of women and men using aggressive tactics, and issues of the polarity model when dealing with the sexes.

That Pretty, Pretty, or; The Rape Play is a non-linear play without a traditional plot. The play begins with two women, Agnes and Valerie, and a man, Rodney, entering a hotel room from a night of partying. The first scene culminates in Valerie shooting Rodney. The next scene mimics the first one with two men entering a hotel room, Rodney and Owen, with a woman, Agnes, ending with the ultimate demise of Agnes. The action and dialogue echo each other since both genders commit the same violent act and use the same language.²⁵ After these two scenes, each subsequent scene illustrates different ways the four main characters interact and communicate with each other. The set of the following scene switches from the hotel room to a restaurant where the two couples meet for dinner. The next scene moves to Rodney and Owen in their home,

²⁴ In this thesis, relationship violence includes life partners, friends, co-workers, and any connection a person makes in their lives.

²⁵ Violent acts include physical and verbal aggression.

where the sexes are inverted since the two men are expecting a child. The dialogue echoes sentiments normally spoken by women. Transitioning the play into a hospital setting, Valerie, Agnes, and Owen meet and continue their aggression towards each other. The play ends with Owen coming onto the stage as the author of the play, and he answers questions relevant to its meaning.

While each scene connects the characters, each one can stand on its own, giving a particular message and building meaning for the play as they are linked. The quickness from each scene increases the tension as the story unfolds. Additionally, the dialogue alternates between brief dialogue and longer monologues which slows down the action and leaves room for the characters to reflect. Throughout the play, Jane Fonda appears in scenes to comment upon the action or ask questions. A convention in *That Pretty, Pretty, or; The Rape Play* inverts the sexes, and this illustrates the shared traits that are normally separated by gender category through the use of the polarity model. According to Adams, “There is yet another contradictory fact: it turns out that there is little gender difference in the aggressive behavior of individual humans when that behavior is carefully analyzed” (Bjorkqvist and Niemela 20). Both men and women perpetuate violent behavior; however, within the polarity gender construct, men are aggressive and women are unaggressive. This play exposes aggressive behaviors by both genders with deep anger driving the character’s actions.

The violent scenarios throughout the play are driven by intense anger, creating a gender war. Due to the oppression of women, much emphasis is placed on feminine constructs, but men also have social constructs to adhere to. According to Thomas:

This assumption of equal or symmetrical gendering, supposedly inscribed in the phrase 'not less' above, would obviously evacuate the feminist argument that the social and symbolic process of gendering sexed bodies maintains unequal and asymmetrical relations of power. Masculinity studies and the 'turn to gender' are thus charged with perpetuating rather than interrogating the reproduction of male dominance. (Gardiner 61)

When men create studies, about their own gender, it is assumed they are attempting to perpetuate male dominance. Continued accusations towards men from women create resentment, resistance to change, and the need to keep their hold on power. While these forces drive resentment, fear, and anger for men, women can be viewed through compounded past oppression.

Women carry a history of oppression with them, creating the need for power since they want freedom and need to resist tyranny. According to Brave Heart, "*Historical trauma* is cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the life span and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences" (Bussey and Wise 127). Over generations trauma is passed through the wounds sustained from the previous one. This continues today, creating frustration and anger. The rage presented within the play becomes the product of this oppressive history. With women pushing to change their own social construct, men are left with lingering questions about their place in the social structure.

That Pretty, Pretty, or; the Rape Play takes away all social constructs created for each gender, illustrating the war between the gender, and fuels the aggression.

Underneath all the aggression is a fear of the unknown. What are the roles each gender is supposed to play? In particular, what is the male role if women are entering into their sphere? These constructs are being disrupted, and the more women push towards equality, the more men come back with an aggressive stance to keep their power. Dismantling the gender constructs leaves room for stepping over boundaries that have been in place for generations, leaving not separate sexes but human beings that make choices to fit their lives rather than adhering to a set of expectations.

Women perpetuate just as much aggression as men within Western culture. This is normally justified as defensive aggression or not reported by men since it is a taboo for them to be victims, particularly in personal relationships. According to Duncan, Nichols, and Spidel:

As our discussion demonstrates, female perpetrated abuse in intimate relationship is at least as common as male abuse, often extends to the same degree of severity, can result in serious negative outcomes for male and female victims, and seems to reflect a common set of back ground causes. (Buttell and Carney 24)

Ignoring violence among women does not help the victim or the abuser. Women striving to stop male aggression leave out women's responsibility of continuing violent behavior.

The aggression within the play illustrates the manifestation of women's violent behavior equaling that of men.

That Pretty, Pretty, or; The Rape Play illustrates warfare between the genders.

As stated in previous chapters, men and women share many of the same traits, and the characters violent behaviors are not gender specific. The first two scenes within the play examine the similarities between the sexes and their mirrored cruel behaviors.

The following scenes are juxtaposed to show the similarities, as previously discussed, these two scenes follow one another within the play. Both scenarios end in the murder of one gender committed by the opposite one. Having both sets of genders speak identical language laced with the same attitude employs a human nature that is the same rather than polar opposites as typically perceived in Western culture. Figure two compares both sets of dialogue to illustrate the similarities in the language:

Prologue	Scene I
<p>VALERIE. For the blog... <i>Valerie aims the camera at Agnes. Agnes giggles and begins to strip.</i></p> <p>RODNEY. You girls aren't really sisters, are you...</p> <p>AGNES. We came out of the same womb...</p> <p>RODNEY. You're wild. You are wild.</p> <p>VALERIE. Are you two ready to kick it or will I stand here like a douche bag? <i>Agnes begins to take off her bonnet.</i></p> <p>RODNEY. Leave the bonnet on... <i>Beat. Valerie reaches into her purse and pulls out a gun...</i></p> <p>RODNEY. Wait. <i>Valerie shoots Rodney in the head. Blood hits the wall on the floor.</i></p> <p>AGNES. GROSS. Gross gross gross gross get him off me... <i>Valerie helps get Rodney off Agnes. They roll him onto the floor.</i></p> <p>AGNES. You're kind of harsh sometimes. Get one for the blog. <i>Valerie shoots a picture of the dead Rodney.</i></p> <p>AGNES. Should I get in it too?</p> <p>VALERIE. Yeah...pose a little. <i>Agnes starts to remove the bonnet.</i></p> <p>VALERIE. Keep the fucking bonnet on. <i>Valerie begins snapping photos of Agnes in various poses with the dead Rodney. (80-81)</i></p>	<p>OWEN. For the blog...</p> <p>AGNES. You guys aren't really brothers, are you...</p> <p>RODNEY. We came out of the same womb...</p> <p>AGNES. You're wild. You are wild.</p> <p>OWEN. Are you two ready to kick it or will I stand here like a douche bag? <i>Rodney begins to take off her bonnet.</i></p> <p>AGNES. Leave the bonnet on...</p> <p>AGNES. Wait. <i>Owen shoots Agnes in the face. Then he pulls a machete from his coat and hacks at her...</i></p> <p>RODNEY. GROSS. Gross gross gross gross get her off me... <i>Owen helps get Agnes off Rodney. They roll her onto the floor.</i></p> <p>OWEN. I may cut the sledgehammer.</p> <p>RODNEY You're kind of harsh sometimes. Get one for the blog. <i>Owen poses with his cigarette in his mouth, one hand in a thumbs up, the other pointing to Agnes's genitals.</i></p> <p>RODNEY Should I get in it too?</p> <p>OWEN. Yeah...pose a little. <i>Rodney starts to remove the bonnet.</i></p> <p>OWEN. Keep the fucking bonnet on. (83-84)</p>

Fig. 2. Comparison of the dialogue in the first two scenes of *That Pretty, Pretty; Or The Rape Play*.

During the second scene, Callaghan adds more violence from male to female, but both scenes echo each other in the heinous crimes committed. The addition of further violence perpetuated by the men in the play creates room for the women to justify their brutal behavior. Generational oppression gives the women a reason for the participation in the gender war within the play. However, the fact remains each gender committed aggression with no apparent reason. The genders are at war, which becomes more apparent later in the play. The play never provides reasons for any of the violence, and the cruel acts happen during the conversation with no apparent trigger. During the play, examples of actions imposed by men and women on each other become the prompts for aggression, fueling the war.

After the murder scenes, Agnes, Valerie, Owen, and Rodney enter a restaurant scene for dinner. The two couples have their dinner, and when their Jell-O dessert arrives, the women turn over the table and start to wrestle in the center. After awhile, this turns into a pillow fight, with the women aggressively hitting each other, until one becomes more violent than the other thus ending the battle while the men watch. Once the conflict is over, Jane Fonda approaches Owen for an explanation:

JANE FONDA. Why are you doing this?

OWEN. I don't know.

JANE FONDA. Pathetic. Wipe that down. Jell-O everywhere. That was your dessert. I made it.

OWEN. I'm I'm. She's just...arrrrgh. You know? I mean, how can I even/ try to.

JANE FONDA. Shhht!

OWEN. This isn't easy for me. (86)

The women are performing for the men according to their desires, and since men view women as objects with less power, Owen and Rodney do not understand why they want to view the women fighting. The scene alludes to voyeurism towards women as being normal, adhering to the definition of the "male gaze." According to Case, "The concept of the male gaze asserts that representations of women are perceived as they are seen by men. Here, the term 'men' represents the male subject in capitalist patriarchy" (Chinoy and Jenkins 342). Men grow up within a construct that states women are of a lower status, and are to be treated as objects rather than people. The same message is also sent to women, and consequently, the female characters in the play go along with the fight to please the men. Owen does not understand his need to view the women fighting since the "male gaze" is expected of him. In the last line of the scene, Owen states it is not easy to view the women, which illustrates that he is uncomfortable with the situation, and has the feeling that there is something wrong with it, but the set construct he must live within drives his need to "gaze." Given that women have historically been treated in this manner fuels anger which leads to aggressive behavior. In the historical setting, all men are the enemy even if they never commit a crime. Men have the same type of attitude towards women, but it comes from women "fighting" for equality.

Both Owen and Rodney sit in front of the television set when Jane Fonda enters onto the screen and starts screaming. Towards the end of the monologue, Valerie and Agnes join her in their rant as the men stare on, not listening. During the monologue the

three women are aiming their abuse towards all men, even though Rodney and Owen are two of the population. Jane Fonda starts the monologue and the two other women join her part way through:

MEN. YOU THINK YOU CAN DO WHATEVER
 YOU WANT WITH ME, THINK AGAIN. YOU THINK THAT I'M
 SO DELICATE? YOU THINK YOU HAVE TO CARE FOR ME?
 YOU THROW ME TO THE GROUND. YOU THINK I
 BREAK?[...]YOU THINK I NEED A MAN TO SAVE MY LIVE. I
 DON'T NEED A MAN![...]THESE MEN CAN GO FUCK
 THEMSELVES! THESE MEN ARE LEECHES. THESE MEN ARE
 CHEATERS. THESE RAPISTS, THESE POLITICIAN, THESE WAR
 MONGERS. THESE FAGGOTS, THESE SOLDIERS, THESE
 IMPREGNATORS[...]ALL I WANTED WAS A MAN WHO COULD
 BE A MAN A MAN WHO WOULDN'T CRY A MAN WHO WOULD
 LET ME DRINK A MAN WHO WOULD FIGHT FOR MY
 HONOR[...]I'M AN AUTONOMOUS PERSON! I'M AN
 INDEPENDENT PERSON! I AM FRANK AND DIGNIFIED![...]I
 DON'T ACTUALLY WANT MEN TO BE ELIMINATED! I JUST
 SAID THAT SO YOU WILL RESPECT ME! I'LL SAY ANYTHING
 YOU WANT AND DO ANYTHING YOU WANT JUST SO YOU'LL
 RESPECT ME![...]I AM NOT CONFLICTED! I KNOW EXACTLY
 WHO I AM! I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I WANT! (90-92)

The monologue begins with accusations towards all men for the same transgressions. The aggressive language used degrades the entire sex, but is also filled with contradictions. While Jane states she is independent and does not need a man, all the women end the monologue claiming they do. Additionally, the women state they will do anything for a man to get respect, which does not revere women or the individual. Through their flexibility they lose self-respect since the women will become anything for the men, even giving up their own personality. The women accuse the men of being “war mongers”, yet they are eliciting a battle between the genders with their harsh language and accusations. The last part, “I’m not conflicted” (92) becomes ironic within the rest of the monologue, since the women cannot even decide if they want a relationship with a man let alone be equal to them. Equality would mean being on the same level and viewed with the same traits, including aggression. As a consequence the genders would be measured through the same lens which means taking responsibility for their individual actions. In the context of the monologue, women willing to change for men continues the idea of being less than men, but during the monologue the women change their mind, basically stating they are better than men. Neither idea illustrates a desire for equality due to the fact the choices are to continue the status quo or convince everyone that women are actually superior. The latter idea does not eliminate dominance. It switches the power towards women, which continues the idea that one needs to be “better” or more powerful than the other. Rotating the more powerful gender from a patriarchy to a matriarchy will only switch the oppressed. Additionally, the language illustrates the two sides of women, to live within untraditional roles such as going to work, or to stay within

the home. Since the women are conflicted about who they are and their roles, they leave the men confused, which is illustrated by the men not listening to the monologue. The men stop listening to the women since they have probably heard the rant before.

In the play, Callahan inverts the sexes by placing words normally associated with women into the mouths of Rodney and Owen. Owen is struggling with his emotions, and expresses his feelings by communicating with Rodney at the end of the scene:

OWEN. [...]I feel strange.

RODNEY. About what?

OWEN. I don't know.

RODNEY. Can I do something?

OWEN. Hit me in the face. Get me angry, get me all riled up.

RODNEY. Fist or palm? [...]

OWEN. Am I blushing.

RODNEY. Yes.

OWEN. One more.

OWEN. Okay.

RODNEY. You happy?

OWEN. Yeah.

RODNEY. Jubilant?

OWEN. Yeah, yeah. Thanks. I love you baby. I love you. I love you so much. I want to have a baby. Can we have a baby? I want a baby that looks like you. I want him to have your funny

little nose, your eyelashes. I want to make a person who is a product of our love. Can we do that, baby? (87)

These words coming from a man seem strange and out of the ordinary. If a woman had spoken them, they would appear endearing. Having the men speak emotional language illustrates how the construct of being male does not allow room for nurturing or emotions. Although feelings are a part of being human, in Western culture men must abstain from actually expressing them if they wish to be perceived as a “man.” The play brings to the forefront that both men and women are aggressive, but filled with emotion which brings together the two separate dichotomies within the gender polarity model.

In one of the scenes, the play portrays Owen and Agnes in an abusive relationship, but switches the stereotypical language between the genders and the roles:

AGNES’S VOICE. Owen? Are you crying?

OWEN’S VOICE. I have a cold

AGNES’S VOICE. I wanna talk to you...

OWEN’S VOICE. I need to finish this, Agnes.

AGNES’S VOICE. Remember when we were kids and I rode my garage door to the top and let go and fell on the asphalt sideways and broke my leg, and you wouldn’t stop screaming at me? [...]

OWEN’S VOICE. Kind of...

OWEN’S VOICE. You shouldn’t hit me, Agnes.

AGNES’S VOICE. I know.

OWEN’S VOICE. You should never hit me.

AGNES'S VOICE. Because it emasculates you.

OWEN'S VOICE. Because it is tedious and it's UGLY. (84)

Switching the dialogue lessens the impact and creates uncomfortable humor. It is the stereotypes presented in the scene that becomes important since the words are supposed to be stereotypical male and female language. The four characters in this play represent each gender (two male and two female), and this dialogue juxtaposed with the speech the women give stating that all men are aggressive adds to the ironic humor since it is the woman being abusive. The scene expresses women's anger towards men. Using the stereotypical dialogue becomes an accusation from the women rather than justified revenge towards men, which shows the false logic the women use as an excuse for the gender war.

Owen is writing the play and along with Rodney they toss each other ideas about the outcome for the women:

RODNEY. Are you like a feminist?

OWEN. I want to write a movie my mom will be proud of. My mom is a strong fucking woman, homes. Every time one of her ex husbands dumps on her, she takes it like a pro. Chin up. Pure class [...]

RODNEY. Right on.

OWEN. She's my hero, man. And you know who her hero is?

RODNEY. No clue.

OWEN. Hanoi. Fucking. Jane.

RODNEY. Traitorous commie bitch. Full circle, dude! [...]

RODNEY. [...]but she loved him so much she did it anyway. That's one special female.

OWEN. Dignity, man. 'Don't fuck with me. I'll do what you want, but don't fuck with me.' It's about self-respect. (90)

From the beginning of the scene Owen claims he wants to “make his mother proud,” but the women he writes about are murderers. They stand up against injustice, but not without consequences. In order to fight, they must become aggressive and go against their own moral compass. The mention of Jane Fonda illustrates how the men feel about “strong women” since she was outspoken yet ends up being called a traitor. Additionally, they state that the women will do anything for the men and praise them, and then right after state it is all about self-respect, therefore, they are stating men respect women that are strong, but do not go against what men expect of them. The language within the play continually contradicts itself due to the fact that neither men nor women know what roles they are supposed to “play”. Through anger the argument becomes illogical, and the over the top attitude starts to become ridiculous amongst the layered male stereotypes.

Towards the end of the play, Valerie, Owen, and Agnes come together with violence in their minds. Valerie is in the hospital when Agnes enters to kill Valerie. After a while Owen enters the room, and the scene ends with him raping Valerie and killing her:

VALERIE. Oh Agnes...you must get out of here before it's too late...

AGNES. But what about you?

VALERIE. I know I won't get out alive. I've made my peace.

VALERIE. Don't cry for me, my dear sister...

AGNES. You don't understand...I came here to kill you...

VALERIE. What do you mean?

AGNES. All those years you were sleeping with my husband...I swore I would get revenge...but then we formed the resistance...and I believed we were working toward something much bigger...but then the resistance fell apart...we are losing the war, Valerie...all around us is in ruins...nothing but despair and heartache [...]

VALERIE. Go on. Pull the trigger [...]

OWEN. You two ladies thought you could defeat us with your little 'resistance'. Well we've had you in our sights for a long time. And payback is a total bitch. I advise you to watch carefully, Agnes. I'm going to rape you now, Valerie.

OWEN. [...] What I do here today, I do for the good of my country, my people, and all mankind. (92-93)

Both Agnes and Owen are aggressive in their positions. For Agnes, once she felt the resistance was over, she claimed war on her own gender through Valerie, continuing aggression not only towards men but women. Owen refers to the women starting the war between the genders, and he is seeking revenge for the power play the other sex has

made. The scene ends with him perpetuating violence, continuing the loop of men oppressing women by committing rape prompting women to fight back aggressively to win “equality”. The paradox of the play point to the fact that men and women are equal in their aggression whether it be verbally or physically abusive.

In the last part of the play, the character of Owen steps onto the stage as the writer, answering questions for the audience. Callaghan’s voice steps into the script through Owen in order to create meaning from the chaotic nature of the scenes. An audience member asks Owen about the violent representations of his characters and he replies: “Well I wouldn’t say I have a ‘bleak’ outlook on life, per se. But I do think humans are a pretty cruel bunch...As I see it, I’m not creating reprehensible characters, I’m merely giving voice to the unspoken” (93). In his assessment, Owen attests that his view of the world is not bleak but realistic since through his perception “humans” are violent including women. Rather than segregating the women from the men, he includes them within a human spectrum on an equal level. Additionally, Owen states he is giving voice to the “unspoken”, which contains two possible meanings. The first unspoken truth is that he is giving voice to the fact that women are as capable of being aggressive as men. The second unspoken truth is the war between the genders. These two subjects are taboo due to the feminist fight for equality. By giving voice to these issues, he hopes to bring the subject into the open so they can be discussed and hopefully come to a resolution. Furthermore, as long as society continues to look at women on unequal levels they can not be equal. Owen continues equating men and women through the last line of the play, “That’s kind of you to say. But honestly? I don’t think of them as ‘female’

characters. I think of them as people. I'm an observer of the human condition, irregardless of gender. I'm 'gender blind' as they say" (93). Instead of human he uses "gender blind". Owen views the women and men along equal measures. He shares the harshness of both gender realities without attempting to gain sympathy for either one. Through the play Owen illustrates the issues both genders face. Furthermore, he discusses the human qualities that are not supposed to be discussed, which are emotions for men and aggression for women. When people are thwarted from discovering themselves as individuals, and wishes to step out from under social gender constructs, they are being oppressed.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION: WOMEN AND AGGRESSION

Since freedom powers our individuality, allowing us to define ourselves and to create meaning, our freedom to choose is godlike.

~Patricia Evans

The three plays I chose for this thesis were written by women from three different representations of Western culture, British, North American, and Latina/o perspectives. The main characters are considered strong female representations, yet they all have patriarchal personalities, and not what is considered stereotypical feminine traits. In order for women to be strong, they need to adopt stereotypical male patriarchal characteristics given that feminine traits are devalued in Western culture. The most prominent attribute of all the characters is aggression, which presents itself mainly through verbal abuse.

Several aggressive tactics are used by the women characters, with particular emphasis on verbal abuse. The awareness around physical abuse is prominent in Western culture, therefore, for that reason I chose to concentrate on verbal abuse, due to the fact that there is less discussion. Verbal abuse is a more socially acceptable form of abuse that happens more often than physical violence. According to Patricia Evans:

We are aware of politically and economically repressive systems that are maintained by physical force. We are less aware of psychological repression. This repression is maintained by verbal manipulations and coercion. I believe, therefore, that even as we act to advance the cause of physical freedom at many levels and in many arenas, we may also act to

recognize and free ourselves from this less obvious, yet all too pervasive, form of control. Repressive systems perpetuate themselves as long as they remain unrecognized. (15)

People mimic the world around them learning from their parents or other authority figures. The idea of repeating what we know continues the cycle of violence. All the women characters in *Top Girls* learn their aggressive behaviors from the people around them, and their cycle will continue with Angie unless she steps forward to change the way she interacts with people. For Marlene and Joyce, the most important thing for each sister is to make the other agree with her perception of the world. In order to win a fight, Western culture nurtures aggression, and the behavior is acceptable even though the outcomes remain unhealthy for victims. Since it does not take physical prowess, both men and women can be verbally abusive.

Due to the fact that women report husband abuse when they are victims, there is very little discussion around the victim's responsibility. The goal is not to take away from the violence perpetuated by the abuser, but to bring awareness around the victim's accountability. Most physical abuse follows a pattern of verbal abuse, and during the argument both parties are involved, throwing words back and forth which may trigger more violent episodes. An example of this is when Mrs. Kidd and Marlene are arguing. Both women choose not to listen to the other. If Marlene acknowledges Mrs. Kidd, and responds in a compassionate way, Mrs. Kidd would have been heard and acknowledged, and most likely stop attempting to coerce Marlene since there was nothing Mrs. Kidd could do to change the situation for her husband. This type of resolution can only come

from fully communicating. Due to the unawareness of the different ways verbal abuse presents itself, many victims do not realize they are being verbally abused, and many abusers are not aware their words violate the people within their relationships. For example, when Angie and Kit argue within the play, Kit threatens to go home exhibiting manipulation through verbal abuse. The threat triggers Angie into escalating the verbal abuse to physical violence. The conflict begins with verbal abuse that ends in physical aggression which is how the victim and abuser feed each other. In order for a victim to be powerful in the relationship, the victim must recognize the damage of their words, or the abusers, and respond to the attack so the argument can be diffused. According to Evans, "If you can become aware of the anger attack the moment it starts so that you can stop it or get away immediately you may break the pattern of being caught by the abuser's words" (150). In Western culture, not engaging in an argument is judged as passive, but walking away gives both parties time to think about their next response which may alleviate violent episodes. Due to the fact that when people engage in conflict they often are attacking rather than communicating to resolve the issue.

Blame gets shifted back and forth between people in a relationship rather than accepting responsibility for their own behavior, leading to justification rather than solution of the issues. For example, Marlene, Joyce, and Angie in *Top Girls* could blame their life experiences to justify their own behaviors, whether it is the other women in the play or the patriarchal figure for Marlene and Joyce. But when does their behavior become their choice? Another example is in *That Pretty, Pretty, or; The Rape Play*, since the women blame men for all their confusion and aggression. The women choose to

enter into conflict with men, yet, justify it with the fact that historically women have been oppressed. According to Tannen, “The argument culture is both a product of and a contributor to this alienation, separating people, disconnecting from each other and from those who are or might have been their leaders” (25). We have lost our sense of community and the idea that as human beings we live in this world together rather than on opposing teams of male or female. The characters in *That Pretty, Pretty, or; The Rape Play* continually attack one another and blame each other rather than attempt to communicate and solve issues. In a patriarchal social structure, the only acceptable form of emotional expression for men is anger. Open dialogue includes emotions from both sides, and the honest discussion of issues. Rather than battling on male terms, women can actually teach another way to be instead of submitting to the patriarchal idea of resolving conflict.

Socially, we look towards the construct of gender to define particular characteristics and roles. For example, the role of nurturer is stereotypically the woman’s role and the man sets the rules of the home including determining punishment for the children. There was a time in history when women taking care of the home and men going to work were necessary, but as women’s roles have expanded in Western culture, the measurement becomes obsolete. Even so Western culture still bases gender roles and characteristics on a now archaic ideal. Rather than redefining roles with the expansion, women must find a way to be fully responsible for work and home rather than sharing the responsibility of the home between partners. Upholding these ideas creates a power struggle between the genders to the point that in order to maintain control over their lives

women adopt stereotypical male traits. Even though Fefu has outside interests her sphere remains the home while her husband goes to work in the traditional manner. Instead of nurturing those around her, Fefu manipulates for power thus blurring the line between male and female characteristics. Furthermore, Joyce is supposed to be the housewife, but her use of verbal abuse does not nurture Angie, instead she uses the home to control her daughter which becomes oppressive. As long as Western culture continues to view gender through the polarity model, the oppressive nature will continue to thrive since the genders will continue to fight for power. With each role there are certain characteristics that each gender is supposed to infuse into the world around them. This perception oppresses people due to the fact that expectations are placed upon the individual that not all members of the same gender can uphold since it is not who they are.

As long as we measure characteristics on a binary scale of good/bad or male/female, men and women cannot be equal since the measurement sets up inequality. Perceiving that male traits are superior to female traits, or judging them as either negative or positive, continually keeps people from who they are. Moving into a human scale rather than remaining in a polar male/female scale accepts each individual has traits that uniquely make up who they are. Inverting the sexes in *That Pretty, Pretty, or; The Rape Play* displays the stereotypes as characteristics that can be switched so men are emotional and women are aggressive. The reason the idea presented on stage alienates the audience is because it goes against Western culture stereotypes. Additionally, the play makes no comment on whether either of these traits are innately good or bad; they just exist within the play. As long as one gender needs to be in power over the other, abuse will remain

prevalent in Western culture. Simply changing from a patriarchal to a matriarchal power structure switches the dominant and the oppressed, and does not relieve the core issue of relationship violence. We may not be able to rid the world of all the violence, but by the individual understanding her self and how to engage in conflict in a healthy assertive way, she can claim power over her own actions. Right now there are a set of preferred characteristics based on patriarchal ideals which creates a devaluation of feminine traits. Equality is about viewing aggression on the same level without justifying it, and it also means that feminine traits and masculine traits are equally important and that examples of assertiveness, compassion, emotion, and independence are all equally needed within the human spectrum.

Most of the time aggression is due to anger not based on gender, and there are several aspects that feed into the resentment for each individual depending on their experience. Since these experiences trigger violent episodes, all three plays give evidence to explain the characters motivation and the need for power without having to justify the actions. While all the women are different with many triggers, they all share one in common and that is their shared belief about the patriarchal social structure.²⁶ Women with little or no power become angry and resentful towards men that hold their livelihood in their hands. For example, the women in *That Pretty, Pretty, or; The Rape Play* were able to justify their murder due to the fact that they were only killing men who were anti-abortionists. This provides a type of acceptance since it reminds women of the

²⁶ Triggers change from person to person depending upon the experiences in their lives, and when needs are not met. Once a person is triggered they exhibit self-protecting behaviors, for example, rationalization or aggression.

historical trauma they have endured. The reality is that no matter how they justify their actions, they are still committing an aggressive act which goes against standards set for women through a patriarchal society. According to Adams:

There is yet another contradictory fact: it turns out that there is little gender difference in the aggressive behavior of individual humans when that behavior is carefully analyzed. The most careful analysis I know is that of Averill who required subjects to keep daily questionnaires on when, why, and how they became angry or were the target of another's anger. Contrary to popular belief, he found practically no difference between men and women. The only difference he found, that women tend to cry more often than men, is one that can be explained quite simply by strong child-rearing pressures in our culture against crying by little boys. (20)

Accepting that women are aggressive and men have a myriad of emotions is to rid the social structure of the duality model moving from a black and white worldview into one with different perceptions and combinations of traits. This also allows for roles the individual chooses rather than expectations placed on them by social constructs.

Western culture is set up in binary opposition, meaning that debates and argument about different belief systems are argued until there is a deemed winner and loser.

According to Tannen, "In the argument culture, criticism, attack, or opposition are the predominant if not the only ways of responding to people or ideas" (7). Most issues are set up to pit perceptions against each other, even in our personal lives. Marlene moves

within her world with the perception that women need to shift from the home into the work force. While many of the women around her want both or continue a traditional construct. This automatically sets up opposition and the conflict surrounds proving one side right and the other antiquated and wrong, therefore, many of the arguments within *Top Girls* are about this debate, and do not leave room for both to co-exist. Within relationships, much of the time there is a winner and a loser to the argument, and through anger people start attacking each other since each believes their side to be right. In order to “win” one person needs to be more aggressive than the other; the need for power over another person starts the attacks which create an abuser and a victim. Compassion and support are considered feeble, yet, people desire to be heard for their own thoughts and ideas. The system of male/female, aggressive/complacent, winner/loser, continually sets up a system that is right and wrong rather than a supportive and collaborative environment to discuss issues and solve problems. Since our social networks at home, work, and political parties are set up in opposition, it lends itself to intimate relationships working in the same way. Relationships become a power struggle rather than a collaborative and nurturing environment to help each other through life. *That Pretty, Pretty, or; The Rape Play* illustrates the ultimate conflict between the genders by setting up a debate that must have a winner and loser, which only ends in continual violence with no vision to end it.

The gender war symbolizes the fight for one gender to be more powerful than the other. By using the gender polarity model, a person is born with aggression or nurturing skills, and can only exist within the sex we socially deem fit. In actuality, men and

women gain their traits through learned social behaviors and beliefs about themselves. For example, since Owen and Rodney express their emotions they are determined by the women to be “unmanly”. This reference through the play suggests that these two men are not normal. As children young boys and girls go through many similar experiences, and these incidents create their stories.²⁷ When people grow and experience life, the general population’s ideals of defining men and women, at times adds to the construction of self, but are not necessarily true about who the person is or wants to be. All the characters within the plays are expressing deep seeded anger that comes from societal norms. Since many people go through similar circumstances, men and women build their perceptions from the same world, and therefore, have the same needs and triggers.²⁸ True equality between men and women can only happen when society views people through the lens of human rather than separate genders. Comparing how people behave, rather than how men and women are supposed to act, the fight to prove who is best is only creating tension and confusion subjecting everyone into a war they never signed up to fight.

In *Top Girls*, Marlene pays a high price for her success, since she ends up possessing patriarchal characteristics to reach male standards. By doing this she illustrates how women segregate from each other rather than combining to create a sisterhood or community of women. According to Merrill, “Churchill shows that success by patriarchal, capitalist standards is exploitive, whether the owners and strivers are male or female” (Randall 73). Exploitive standards call for aggressive behavior for survival,

²⁷ Stories are created beliefs about the self that leads to different types of self-protecting behaviors.

²⁸ According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs men and women need to fulfill several layers of desires: physical, security, social, ego, and self-actualization.

and Marlene is willing to exploit herself by giving up much of the traditional definition of womanhood. This stance provides her with power; at least the definition of control by patriarchal standards, therefore, Marlene is not necessarily a strong woman character, but a warning to women. Stating an aggressive characteristic separates women by oppressing those that do not comply with a patriarchal ideal. Churchill set up the play as a warning to women, which is illustrated through the last line “frightening” (87).

Fefu, in *Fefu and Her Friends*, is presents in many ways opposite of Marlene, yet they share indifference for women that are not attempting to embody male characteristics. Maria Irene Fornes sets the tone of the play from the beginning with Fefu challenging the other women. Fefu states she dislikes women and wants to be a man, she immediately separates herself from the other women in the play. According to Deborah R. Geis, “As they applaud Emma’s speech, the other women share the sense of being a community of listeners...who have much to give to one another. Such a community is transgressive, and it is capable of generating enormous power” (298). The challenge to the other women in the beginning of the play does not set up a sense of community, but conflict. While there are spots within the play that show a type of community it does not illustrate a sisterhood. Actually it is the opposite since Fefu spends the play attempting to gain power over her friends, which is not conducive to a collaborative community.

The playwright of *That Pretty, Pretty, or; The Rape Play*, Sheila Callaghan, seemingly pulled together a bunch of scenes with no point. Viewing the play through a specific lens gives shape to what appears to be a play filled with chaos. According to McCarthy, “[A]n interesting seminar, presenting shallow survey of ideas instead of finely

observing the depths of a focused subject” (1). In order to make sense out of the loudness of the dialogue, looking from the bigger picture moving into the smaller scenes within the play allows a flexibility to create meaning. Callaghan presents her words as, “...images and ideas, sometimes pausing to recall how she arrived at this particular spot in the conversation” (Hart 28). The chaotic nature of the play adds to the aggression presented by both genders. The over the top, ironic, and humorous language is used to shock the audience into an uncomfortable state. Perhaps the unease is seeing oneself in a play filled with so much anger. Theatre reflects the world that we live in, and according to the play the people, while not average, share beliefs about gender with average people adding to the violence people see around them.

Most of the critical writing for *Fefu and Her Friends* and *Top Girls* is through the lens of Brecht and Socialism. Using a psychological lens for the characters allows room for understanding the motivations of the characters. Additionally, this type of lens broadens the scope of viewpoints for the play. Opening areas for a deeper investigation into the minds of these women and how they continue to be socially relevant. Being able to see characters for how they relate to the world is a strong point for theatre, and keeping critical lenses within the same field too extensively underutilizes the potential of plays to fully understand how people can see their own experiences through them.

That Pretty, Pretty, or; The Rape Play was released in February of 2009. So far the reviews state that the play goes nowhere. Viewing the play through a particular lens gives the play a structure that it seemingly lacks otherwise. Sheila Callaghan, through Owen, states what the play is about at then end. The lens used looks at the big picture of

the statement at the end, and filling in the themes by looking at individual scenes. Most plays are linear with themes that also run linear throughout, but this play is created in an untraditional circular motion, therefore, an unconventional critical lens extracts meaning from character interaction.

The psychological looks underneath the dialogue and viewing the language that is used and how it is used. Doing this reveals things about the characters personal lives, their experiences, and how they live in the world. Bringing the traits to the surface for further speculation, and to see how the people are reflected in people's lives. Understanding the motivations for these characters can further allow people to understand their own motivations for their behaviors. Scholars speak about how theatre reflects the world we live in, but revealing more psychological nuances illustrates how we reveal ourselves in the play to create awareness around social issues.

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