

Drew University
College of Liberal Arts

Slip Like Shadows: An Exploration Through Physical Theatre of Oppressed
Sexuality and Desire in the Women of Tennessee Williams

A Thesis in Theatre Arts

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Bachelor in Arts
With Specialized Honors in Theatre Arts
May 2016

“Oh, I suppose I am sick, one of those weak and divided people who slip like shadows among you solid strong ones. But sometimes, out of necessity, we shadowy people take on a strength of our own.”

- Alma, *Summer and Smoke* (Tennessee Williams)

“Combining knowledge, synthesizing information and fitting things together that do not normally go together can lead to new perspectives on a subject. By fitting things together in unexpected ways that do not normally go together I am allowing for new things to happen.”

- Anne Bogart

“By a peninsula the wanderer sat and sketched
The uneven valley graves. While the apostle gave
Alms to the meek the volcano burst
With sulphur and aureate rocks...
For joy rides in stupendous coverings
Luring the living into spiritual gates.

Orators follow the universe
And radio the complete laws to the people.
The apostle conveys though through discipline.
Bowls and cups fill historians with adorations, -
Dull lips commemorating spiritual gates.

The wanderer later chose this spot of rest
Where marble clouds support the sea
And where was finally borne a chosen hero.
By that time summer and smoke were past.
Dolphins still played, arching the horizons,
But only to build memories of spiritual gates.”

- *Emblems of Conduct*, Hart Crane

Abstract

This paper analyzes the physicality, repressed sexuality and desire, and the presumption of feminine weakness seen in Tennessee Williams' female characters: Alma from *Summer and Smoke*, Catharine from *Suddenly Last Summer*, Blanche from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Myrtle from *Kingdom of Earth (The Seven Descents of Myrtle)*, and Flora from "The Important Thing." This paper also explores the influences in Williams' life on his writing, the societal expectations of mid-19th century women, multiple actresses' perspectives in portraying Williams' women, and the symbolism of Williams' female characters' names. Using sociological insight and the personal experiences of college students peppered across America, this paper then explores the contemporary relevance of these themes of oppression, as perpetuated by the media and through the hookup culture on college campuses. The discussion then strives to understand the purposes of physical theatre, particularly exploring Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's Viewpoints in the context of focusing on the body to express emotion in performance. Further analysis reflects upon the process and product of the performance created in response to this research, *Slip Like Shadows*. The performance strove to unite the stories of Williams' women through an approach of physical theatre. This paper ultimately hopes to expose the issues still facing women surrounding the double standard of expressions of sexuality and oppression.

Acknowledgments

Christopher Ceraso
Lisa Brenner
Caitlin Killian
Patrick McGuinn
Kimani Fowlin

Madeline Lederer
Michelle McQueen
Mikaela Simon
Nycole Nurse
MJ Santry

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I. Introduction

Tennessee Williams once said, “I just have to identify with the characters in some way, or the character is not real. I sometimes wish that my writing was less personal. In recent years I think my outlook became almost like a scream” (Hirsch 7). In the fall of 2013 when I took my first upper level acting course, “Actor’s Lab: Monologues,” I found a character that struck me. The course is designed to develop skills as an actor in choosing, developing, and performing monologues with the intention of using them as audition pieces. Out of the thirteen students in my class that semester, I was one of three who volunteered to go up on the first day. We were told to bring in a monologue from any contemporary play, dramatic or comedic. On that day, I volunteered to go first. I stood in the middle of our classroom stage and announced I would be performing a monologue from Tennessee William’s play *Summer and Smoke*, as the character of Alma. Suddenly the two other students assigned that day laughed and said they also chose an Alma monologue. Our jaws dropped. What were the odds that us three young women would all unknowingly come in with the same monologue from an arguably lesser-known Tennessee Williams play? And from my research at the time, this was not an overdone character from which scores of female artists draw monologues for auditions. Was this a coincidence? What could be the reason the three of us chose Alma to explore and perform?

I began thinking about the reasons I had chosen her. On the surface, we did not have very much in common yet I felt a connection to her. Alma is a Southern belle, like most of Williams’ female characters, and the only daughter of the conservative town reverend living in a Mississippi rectory during the turn of the century through 1916. I am

a liberal Midwesterner and the second of four born to an Irish lawyer father and a Slovenian lawyer mother living in the suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio in the 21st century. Alma has spent her whole life in love with a man who is her polar opposite and does not love her back. As a sophomore in college, I had never been in love. However, as I thought about her personality, I saw many similarities: we are both anxious, perfectionists, and people-pleasers. Alma and I have both struggled with finding our own expression, identity and freedom in our desires, sexuality, and physicality. I was intrigued.

The next semester, the spring of 2014, I took another similarly structured course called “Actor’s Lab: Scenes” where I continued exploring the character of Alma. I made discoveries about Alma that furthered my interest and appreciation for her. I found myself questioning my purpose in life as Alma was questioning her own purpose in life: “Reaching up to something beyond attainment! To me – well, that is the secret, the principle back of existence – the everlasting struggle and aspiration for more than our human limits have placed in our reach” (48). Alma realizes that she must grasp the fire inside her and throw aside the conventions of pride, which had dictated her entire life: “Forget about pride whenever it stands between you and what you must have!” (72). I recognized Alma’s fears as stemming from a life spent focusing on pleasing others and not on pleasing herself. I could empathize with her fear of expressing her desires and sexuality. Despite my 15 years of Irish dancing and acting, I have often felt similarly uncomfortable and unsure in my own body, not realizing my own freedoms as a woman until I broke free of what I had always known and attended college. Fueled by my

curiosity and fascination in our parallels, I knew I wanted to continue pursuing my connection to Alma.

However, before I experienced Alma in my life for the second time, I went to study abroad in London for my fall semester in 2014. I felt my senses awakened by the bright excitement of this historically rich and culturally beaming city. I opened my heart and mind to the theatre culture embedded in the energy of London. As an actress, dancer, and student, I was in a new city ready to make discoveries. This was when I found a type of performance that spoke to me. I went to see a production at The National Theatre called *John* by DV8, a physical theatre group based in London that “relies on pushing its own boundaries and on the constant reexamination of the roles and relationships of men and women in our society. Its policy insists on the importance of challenging our preconceptions of what dance can, and should, address” (Newson). DV8’s work addresses issues like gender, disability, sexuality, politics, class struggles, religion, the pursuit of happiness, and body image. Over the years since forming in 1986, they have created their own hybrid of performance combining verbatim theatre and DV8’s unique way of moving, a combination of pedestrian and aggressive movement. *John*, focusing on the masculinity of movement, is about struggling to accept sexuality and identity. Having never seen this type of performance before, I was taken aback by the freedom and expressiveness of the performance. I found myself constantly thinking about how I could explore such physical theatre myself.

In the summer of 2015, I had an internship in New York City at an Off-Broadway producing theatre called The Play Company. One of my goals that summer, as I had been brainstorming what this thesis could be about, was to try and see a production of *Summer*

and Smoke. I found one being produced at the T. Schreiber Studio and Theatre. I went with several friends and seeing the play come alive opened up questions. Their interpretation and staging of the play was very traditional, essentially exactly what Tennessee Williams calls for in the script in terms of set, lights, costumes, props, casting, and sound. I kept thinking about how interesting it would be to perform Alma's story with a similar approach *John* by DV8 took; this would mean exploring connections between *Summer and Smoke* and physical theatre.

Much of Williams' work is poetic and language-based, often leading up to emotional verbal climaxes. In some of his plays, there are physical eruptions that occur at the end to release the characters from a physical oppression they have battled throughout the play, such as the climactic rape scene between Stanley and Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*; however, we do not see proof of this physical release for Alma. Despite the sexual and spiritual tension, we only see a conversation that changes both Alma and Johnny at the end of the play. Alma is oppressed by her hypochondria and the fears of expressing her sexuality and desires. Alma's divide between body and soul is in direct contrast of how physical theatre strives to unify the two. By examining the body through physical theatre and the soul through Williams' canon, can an amalgamation of the two create a unification of body and soul?

More recently, I had been introduced to a different approach to physical theatre than that of DV8: Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's practice of Viewpoints. Viewpoints serves several functions: it is a form of actor training where movement is explored in time and space, it creates and forms ensemble, it is used to develop a language between creators and interpreters, and it is used in devising and choreographing a performance. In

my initial research, my interest sparked at the idea that Viewpoints can be compatible with any approach to performance. Bogart and Landau state, “Viewpoints is a pathway to unexpected choices not dictated by text, psychology or intention. This does not mean that Viewpoints is incompatible with other approaches to acting, only that it provides an alternative and a compliment” (133). Viewpoints allows the creator to mold the technique for any purpose. This freedom is why I have chosen Viewpoints as my approach. With this opportunity to apply a physical theatre technique to Williams’ approach to theatre, I will explore the disconnect and unity of body and soul within the women of Tennessee Williams, with a particular focus on my inspiration, Alma Winemiller.

Tennessee Williams

“Women have always been my deepest emotional root; anyone who’s read my writings knows that” (Hirsch 8). Williams said this in an exclusive interview with *Playboy* in 1973, describing his own life and writing. Widely considered one of the greatest American playwrights of the 20th century, Tennessee Williams’ understanding and compassion for the female mind and body resulted in some of the most vivid and rich female characters written for the modern theatre. In an interview with Charles Osgood of CBS News, Australian actress Zoe Caldwell discussed her role of Polly in William's *Slapstick Tragedy*: “Tennessee knew everything about women. He did seem to like women, although he liked to have sex with men. His characters, I think, suggested he had a lot of sympathy and compassion for women” (Osgood).

Williams grew up in an oppressively conservative St. Louis with a drunken, disillusioned father and a puritanical mother. Williams’ best friend and confidant was his

sister Rose, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1937 and lobotomized in 1943, leaving him feeling alone in the world. He had a life-long devotion to her, “fuelled as much by guilt for having failed to protect her from her life sentence in an asylum as it was for having escaped a similar fate” (Bak 7). Williams’ family influenced his writing throughout his life, often being the inspiration and basis for characters. When critics claimed he only wrote about his own life, Williams defended his approach: “It is the responsibility of the writer to put his experience as a human being into work that refines it and elevates it and that makes of it an essence that a wide audience can somehow manage to feel in themselves: ‘This is true’” (Clum 162). Reflected primarily in his play *The Glass Menagerie*, the most beloved characters reflect those of his own family, including his semi-autobiographical character, Tom Wingfield. Amanda Wingfield was refashioned from his antipathy toward his suffocating and dissatisfied mother Edwina: “she embodies all the errors and mistakes and misunderstandings that her time could produce” though he recognized she had once had “all the makings of an awfully fine woman” (Hayman 104). Laura Wingfield’s desolation and fears of reality mirrored the sad, disabled life of his sister Rose (Bak 8). Laura, like Rose, is both “physically and spiritually crippled” (Hirsch 36). It seems Williams’ writing acted as an outlet for self-reflection.

In the early years of Williams’ work he found much success, having all of his major plays produced onstage. All of his major plays were made into mid-century motion pictures, transferring his work to a wider audience. He also received a plethora of awards, including two Pulitzers, honorary degrees, and invitations to membership in prestigious organizations. Williams’ writing ranged from plays, novels, screenplays, teleplays, short

stories, one-acts, and poetry. His writing style is often classified as Southern Gothic and his plays are consistently deemed poetic dramas. In David Mamet's eulogy to Williams, he reflected on the impact Williams had on theatre throughout his life; he recounted, "We don't know how to show our love. This was the subject of his plays, the greatest dramatic poetry in the American language" (Griffin 13). Tennessee Williams created a lyricism in his language that is infused with subtle lyrical qualities, including the poetic effects of metaphor, rhythm, onomatopoeia, and assonance. With this heightened sense of language as Williams' main form of expression, I will explore how physical theatre can be used to interpret this language into a unique movement based piece.

Williams' socialist ideals during the movement of social realism in the 1930's and 1940's also had an influence on the way he wrote. Some theatre historians argue that all of Tennessee Williams' work was to make a social commentary, either at the time of the story or the time he was writing. "All of his sexually troubled characters are held to a strict moral reckoning, and their unhappy histories are designed as warnings" (Hirsch 4). However, I will argue that Williams was illustrating society as the main antagonist in much of his writing. Scholar David Savran theorized how Williams "underscored the broadly social foundation for the personal tragedies with which so many of his plays are concerned, pointing out that the individual subject is not an isolated monad but a component of a "society" that insistently "rapes the individual" (Savran 79). Williams' use of society then is as a character itself, the oppressor, contributing to the story and the conflict.

Tennessee Williams, in a 1940 interview with Mark Barron stated, "I try to write all my plays so that they carry some social message along with the story... All of my

one-act plays are about such social groups I ran across in my wanderings” (Bak 33). Between social messages and certain social groups, Williams explored the power society has over the individual and the social constructs that may keep one from finding personal freedom. In exploring the themes and struggles of female oppression, I will reveal how Tennessee Williams’ women are still relevant today.

Williams’ work is a constant dialogue between the sexual and the political. His female characters, such as Alma Winemiller, Blanche DuBois, and Catharine Holly are sexualized beings in an insistently hetero-normative and masculine world. Williams’ female characters exhibit aching contradictions of expressing versus repressing their sexuality and alienating their desires. “Williams destabilization of mid-century notions of masculinity and femininity is accomplished, in part, by his ability both to expose the often murderous violence that accompanies the exercise of male authority and to valorize female power and female sexual desire” (Savran 81). Williams’ gives short shrift to his characters that live in physical denial: “He tends to punish those characters in his plays who try to cling to old-world values, who deny themselves. In his plays, women who attempt to talk of a higher love or spirituality are often knocked off their self-erected pedestals into the arms of a dominant man” (Pike). I will explore Williams’ exposure of sexuality and chastised femininity, with Alma Winemiller as the centerpiece.

Contemporary Relevance

Tennessee Williams’ most vivid characters embody universal truths that remain relatable to an audience or reader today. I will be looking at how the forces that oppress the women of Tennessee Williams still oppress women today. Throughout history, women’s sexuality and desires have been scrutinized under the social microscope. The

double standards for women have persisted despite growing changes and movements towards gender equality in our contemporary world. There is an ongoing debate in both the media and on college campuses surrounding the forces in society that perpetuate the oppression of female sexuality. Examining my experience, including sociological insight and the perspectives of my college peers, I will look at how these double standards present in Williams' work exist on college campuses, particularly perpetuated by the hookup culture. The modern hookup culture, which developed out of the sexual liberation and feminism of the last decade, perpetuates gendered and sexist expectations for young women and men. These expectations create problematic standards that devalue and chastise female sexual expression and female desires, while praising masculinity and prowess. Young women experience judgment from their peers for expressing their sexual freedom, like Myrtle and Blanche. Other young women only view their sexual desires as appropriate when being expressed in some kind of relationship, similar to the views of Alma and Catharine.

My research and performance strives to utilize the work of Tennessee Williams and the genre of physical theatre, specifically Viewpoints, to address issues of female ownership and unity of the body and mind on my college campus, Drew University. Presented to an audience mainly composed of college students, my performance will resonate current issues of sexual expression and societal oppression by linking these Williams' women with the five main female performers in the piece, including myself as Alma.

II. Alma in Tennessee William's *Summer and Smoke*

Tennessee Williams' female characters often exhibit similarities in demeanor and status. In this chapter, I will specifically look at several of his plays and one short story to explore the common themes relating to his female characters. I will first look at Catharine Holly in *Suddenly Last Summer*, Myrtle in *Kingdom of Earth (The Seven Descents of Myrtle)*, Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and Flora in his short story "The Important Thing." Then I will present a detailed analysis of Alma in *Summer and Smoke*, looking at different theories of analysis from theatre historians, Tennessee Williams' own opinions, cultural and societal expectations at the time, experiences of actresses portraying Alma, and my own insight into how his female characters are representing and battling systems of male and societal oppression towards their bodies, desires, and sexuality. The key questions I will address will surround systems of oppression and how these female characters are deprived of control over their own lives.

i. The Women of Tennessee Williams

"Characterization is one of Williams's strongest achievements as a dramatist" (Griffin 15). Williams' characters stand out as some of the most vividly illustrated eccentrics in the American repertoire. Like other writers of Southern Gothic literature, "Williams is obsessed with the social outsider, the character who is unbalanced in extravagant and colorful ways. Edged with sexual hysteria, the work of Gothic writers is intensely theatrical, lushly composed" (Hirsch 15). In many of his plays and stories, the "protagonist is an outsider, misunderstood and suspect by the community" (Griffin 15). We see this ranging from Blanche's need to escape her past for fear of being unwelcome

in society to Alma's shame at her awkwardness being made fun of in her town. Williams, who admits, "I always love my women more than my men" (Hirsch 80), has his female characters go through the biggest struggles, oppression, and devastation. Yet, arguably Williams' gives these same female characters the most complexity, range of emotion, and opportunities for growth. Specifically looking at these women, there are commonalities that emerge as standards in Williams' writing. He exposes how physicality (in voice, appearance, and health) is idealized and criticized, how sexuality and desires are repressed, and how femininity is seen as a weakness in comparison to the masculine ideal. Through these common themes, the female characters Williams depicts are oppressed in their freedoms of expression and control over their own bodies and by extension, their own lives.

Physicality

Apart from Alma, whom I will discuss in detail later in this chapter, there are many examples in the texts of physical idealizations by men and society that drive these women to behave as they do. The term physicality can encompass all the physical aspects or qualities of a person. Williams' female characters are expected to subscribe to appearance and personality ideals. If and when they fail to meet these standards, they are ostracized and condemned by society. In Williams' *Kingdom of Earth (The Seven Descents of Myrtle)*, which opened on Broadway in 1968 to unfavorable reviews, the dying, impotent, closeted transvestite Lot marries former showgirl and prostitute Myrtle on a television show and brings her home the next day to his decaying home on the verge of a flood. His goal is to prevent his illegitimate half-brother Chicken from inheriting his rightful possession of the home. Williams described Myrtle at the beginning of the play

as “a fleshy young woman, amiably loud-voiced” (127). She is in direct contrast to her surroundings; she is colorful and vivacious, making her incompatible with the dark, lonely farmhouse of her dying husband. She is bleached blond who wears a pink turtleneck sweater and tight-checked pants, and “her appearance suggests an imitation of a Hollywood glamour girl which doesn’t succeed as a good imitation” (127). Myrtle’s physical appearance is as bright and loud as her clothing. Alvin Klein in his *New York Times* review of the 2001 production at the Schoolhouse said, “Myrtle is a floozy who dresses outlandishly. She is innocent and she is ditsy. She is a good person and a schemer and she is sexual desire incarnate. She is a Tennessee Williams woman” (Klein). Myrtle has utilized her body and appearance to get her by in life, having worked as both a prostitute and showgirl. She realizes that in order to survive, she must be the object of affection or pleasure for men.

A Streetcar Named Desire takes place in the 1940’s in New Orleans. Williams regarded the play as a clash between the new world and tradition: a “battle between coarse, working-class poker players and fragile Southern belles” (Hayman 101). When the play opened on Broadway at the beginning of December in 1947, *New Yorker* critic Wolcott Gibbs hailed “a brilliant, implacable play about the disintegration of a woman, or if you like, a society” (Gibbs 50). Blanche DuBois is immediately incongruous to the society of the play. Her outsider quality is reinforced throughout the play by her old-fashioned, decorative appearance and colorful, lyrical dialect. In the stage directions, Williams describes her as follows: “She looks as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district” (7), not in the French quarter of New Orleans, which at the time was “slummy and sexually permissive” (Hayman 53). Williams also describes

how “there is something about her uncertain manner that suggests a moth” (7): she is flighty, nervous, delicate, and covered in white clothing from head to toe. To show the turmoil Blanche has gone through, by the end of the play, Williams describes her:

Dressed in a somewhat soiled and crumpled white satin evening gown and a pair of scuffed slippers. She wears a rhinestone tiara in her disarranged hair. A mood of hysterical exhilaration had possessed her and she fancies she hears applause and favorable comments of her old friends at a part at Belle Reve. (88)

Rather than understanding that hysteria was a psychoneurotic conflict and medical disorder, women in the early 20th century were often reduced to colloquially being accused of “hysterics” or “hysterical exhilarations.” Freud had considered hysteria “an exclusively female disease” and classified it as “a disease of women: it is a vision of illness linked to the mode (historically determined) to conceive the role of women. The woman has no power but "handling," trying to use the other in subtle ways to achieve hidden objectives. It is still an evolution of the concept of "possessed" woman” (Tasca, Rapetti, Carta, and Fadda). Many women at this time fell under the classification, by men and society, as being hysterical. This in itself is a form of oppression, deeming women as “possessed” or “manipulative” with their hysterical behaviors. This deprived women of having a voice, for fear their voice would be criticized and devalued. Most of Williams’ characters at some point are described as exhibiting hysterical behavior, lessening them and accusing them of being uncontrollable about their reactions and behaviors.

Blanche’s voice is consistently described throughout the play as “faint” and “hysterical,” she is neurotic, particularly about her attractiveness, and she has poor nerves: “No coke, honey. Not with my nerves tonight” (10). She also has long, emotional arias filled with overwhelming feelings of despair and uncertainty:

I don't know why I screamed! (*Continuing nervously, holding STELLA's hand. STELLA embraces her*). Mitch- Mitch is coming at seven. I guess I am just feeling nervous about our relations. (*BLANCHE and STELLA are kneeling just below and to L. of armchair. BLANCHE speaks rapidly, breathlessly.*) He hasn't gotten a thing but a goodnight kiss, that's all I have given him, Stella. I want his respect! And men don't want anything they get too easily. But on the other hand, men lose interest quickly. Especially when the girl is over – thirty— they think a girl over thirty ought to- the vulgar expression is – “put out”...and– I'm not “putting out”. Of course, he- he doesn't know – I mean, I haven't informed him- of my real age! (57)

Like Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie* and Alma in *Summer and Smoke*, Blanche uses language that indicates an outdated style of manners: “they hold their language up ineffectually, like an umbrella, against the assaults of a stormy reality” (Hayman 112). Her language is lyrical and poetic, continuing to feed into her desperate need to pretend she is far away from reality to escape her past mistakes and avoid her present fears.

It is clear that Myrtle and Blanche, who at first encounter seem to be quite different in style and personality, share similarities that Williams' consistently threaded through his female characters. They both, in appearance, are outsiders in their surroundings. Myrtle is wearing over-the-top, flashy clothing in the countryside and Blanche is stuck in the old genteel Southern apparel that is misplaced in the French quarter. They both have a fading beauty that they are trying to preserve with sex appeal. Myrtle and Blanche are both self-conscious about sex and their own attractiveness. They both have nerves that cause them to be anxious and flighty and often times considered “hysterical”; Myrtle takes pills and Blanche self medicates with alcohol.

Repression of sexuality and desire

“Williams's women desire spectacular males” (Hirsch 11). Often in many of his female characters, there is an inner struggle of expressing one's sexuality and desires: it

is a “mixture of superreligiosity and hysterical sexuality coexisting in a central character” (Griffin 4). Either the woman feels sexually afraid or repressed, or, she is considered crazed, sexually deviant, or loose. These hyperextensions of sexuality make it hard for these women to properly convey their own desires. Instead, “the beautiful, muscled young man is the animate object that ignites the spinsters and the whores” (Hirsch 12).

Williams “celebrates physical beauty and sexual prowess... yet he is compelled to punish his sexual stars” (Hirsch 20-21). We see this punishment for decadence and desire in *Suddenly Last Summer*. Catharine Holly is stripped of her own sexual identity and desires as her cousin Sebastian exploits her body for his own pleasure and experiences with other men. Sebastian is a character that had always used people to get what he wants. When he no longer feels he can use his mother, Mrs. Venable, because she is too old, Sebastian turns to his nubile cousin Catharine who is in love with him. “The unique thing about Catharine is that she yearned for a sexual relationship with a man, her cousin, whom she knew to be weak and strangely perverted” (Blackwell 13). Because of her desire to be close to him, she allowed him to use her. Catharine describes, “We all use each other and that’s what we think of as love, and not being able to use each other is what’s- *hate...*” (30). Catharine admittedly has realized, “I was PROCURING for him. She used to do it, too. No! consciously! She didn’t know that she was procuring for him in the smart, the fashionable places they used to go to before last summer!” (38). Although Sebastian is not explicitly using her body for his sexual gratification, she is being exploited as man bait and therefore stripped of identity and feeling. They both are ultimately punished for his profligacy. Sebastian is brutishly eaten alive by a band of starving, naked children in the blazing Cabeza de Lobo heat and Catharine is sent to an

insane asylum awaiting a lobotomy for telling the story about his death that no one will believe.

In Tennessee Williams' 1945 short story "The Important Thing", nonconformity and repressed desire are explored through the search for the "important thing" in life. Flora is a radical, unusually clever, and eccentric young woman who is an outsider amongst her peers for her sexual ambiguity and her "queerness". Her counterpart is John, a frustrated young man searching for acceptance in society despite his struggle with his homosexuality. John is taken aback by her: "there was no relaxation in Flora, none of the softness and languor which he found physically interesting in girls. He could not imagine her lying passively still and quietly submitting the way he thought a girl should to a man's embrace" (165). A climax occurs when the two are on a picnic studying. John becomes intoxicated and suddenly aggressive as he begins to see Flora as representing the schoolboys who used to mock him. She is "something wild that must be physically subdued and tamed" (Heintzelman, Howard 104). In a moment of lustful urgency to physically overpower her, he forces himself on Flora and rapes her, shattering their bond of intimate friendship and acceptance they once shared. After the assault, John stands still thinking about the things Flora and him are both searching for in life: "He and this girl had been searching for something else. What was it? Again and again later on the search would be made... and perhaps every time a repetition of this, violence and ugliness of desire turned to rage..." (174). Flora is devastated and hurt. She slowly and sorrowfully understands now that she will never belong anywhere unless she conforms to society's expectations of a young woman. But she refuses: "Flora would not accept it, none of the ways and means. The most important part of her was the most pure" (174). Through her

rejection of the norm, Flora's body and sexuality had been objectified and harmed by someone she had trusted; yet, she cannot compromise her integrity to find a safe place in life. She knows that her sexuality, uniqueness, and desires will always leave her feeling alone and despondent in an unwelcoming and violent world.

Perhaps Tennessee Williams most famously dramatic and complex character, Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, is on a journey to find peace and protection in a world that has rejected her. Blanche's expression of her sexuality and desire is alienated and condemned. Blanche was married to a young man named Allan Gray. One day she caught him in a compromising position with an older man and that night on dance floor told him, "I know! I saw! You disgust me!" (68). He ran away from her in the middle of the dance and shot himself in the head. Since that moment, Blanche's sexual desires have been thwarted by guilt over Allan's suicide. Combined with her recent destitution when her family loses their estate Belle Reve, she falls into a life of promiscuity in hopes that she can find fulfillment or satisfaction where she had felt weak before. It is "as if she were trying to succeed with strangers where she had failed with him" (Griffin 49). When she comes to visit Stella, she has been a broken woman desperate to be saved and yet strong in her desires. She pretends to be 'prim and proper' towards Mitch so he wants her. "I want to deceive him just enough to make him – want me..." (57). But when Stanley reveals her past to Mitch, he harshly denies her saying, "You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother" (87). Mitch's rejection reinforces the ideal that women need to be pure and respectable. "Her uncovered sexual identity pushes Blanche over the edge; once again her secret life has been revealed, Blanche stumbles into madness as the ultimate refuge" (Hirsch 33). As the old gentility

of the South is challenged with new innovations and a changing society, Blanche's role as a woman throws her off balance between old ideals and the modern toleration of sexual freedom. However, Blanche destroys herself with being incapable of embracing her sexuality and desires in a world that might allow her to fully experience them.

Feminine weakness compared to men

“It is the women who are sexually aggressive – the men don't have to be. No Williams play is written on the pattern of the traditional heterosexual chase” (Hirsch 12). Williams' oversexed and defenseless female characters are in positions of dependency and inferiority with men that affect the way they interact with others. They may be seen as the sexual aggressor out of a need to cope, survive, or continue living their lifestyle. They are often misused and abused by the men around them as they struggle to find a place of security in life. As biographer and dramatist Ronald Hayman explained, his female characters are “frustrated women with a vaguely artistic sensitivity but without a sufficiently robust willpower to achieve success or even to stand up for themselves” (Hayman). An exception to this notion in Williams' work would be Maggie from *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*, who strives to control her own fate and stands up for her desires when her husband Brick sexually and emotionally refuses her. Yet even Maggie is painfully aware of the fact that she must use her sexuality and femininity to get what she wants: “Way he always drops his eyes down my body when I'm talkin' to him, drops his eyes to my boobs an' licks his old chops! Ha ha!” (23). Williams' female characters are seen as inferior and incapable of independence. Their femininity inherently leads them to being seen as physically, intellectually, and socially weaker than men in society.

In *Kingdom of Earth (The Seven Descents of Myrtle)*, Myrtle is the pawn tossed amongst two brothers: “she is Lot’s new wife who ends up being Chicken’s whore” (Hirsch 91). As Lot is dying upstairs, Myrtle realizes that her survival depends on gaining Chicken’s trust; however, he in turn tells her he is dependent on her. Chicken tells Myrtle that he is not relying on her word, but rather her weakness. She responds, “I’ve always been weak compared to men, to a man. I think that’s natural, don’t you?” (94). Myrtle’s self-esteem and view of herself as a woman has clearly been made inferior her whole life. Although she sees herself as owning her “self-respect an’ decency as a woman!” (66), she simply does not believe she is the equal of a man and therefore capable of resisting or thwarting Chicken’s advances. Chicken, who displays dominance both physically and verbally over Myrtle, constantly puts her in her place. When she becomes hysterical handling a kettle, Chicken tells her, “They’s two ways to stop hysterics in a woman. One way is to give her a slap in the face and the other way is to lay her. Sometimes you got to do both” (71). Myrtle has lived her whole life depending on her sexuality to secure her future and at the end of the play, she has compromised herself because she is not strong enough to say no.

In *Suddenly Last Summer*, Catharine Holly is subject to abuse by the men around her. At a Mardi Gras ball, Catharine finds herself helpless when a man offers her a ride home. She goes with him, but first he drives her to the woods to have sex. When they get back in the car, he tells her he has a pregnant wife and they should keep this tryst a secret. Catharine feels powerless, weak, and abused. She goes home and sits quietly in her house thinking. She decides to go back to the ball to confront the man and she makes a scene on the dance floor:

I rushed right into the ballroom and spotted him on the floor and ran up to him and beat him as hard as I could in the face and chest with my fists till – Cousin Sebastian took me away. – After that, the next morning, I started writing my diary in the third person, singular, such as “She’s still living this morning,” mean that *I* was... “-WHAT’S NEXT FOR HER? GOD KNOWS!” – I couldn’t go out any more. (31)

After telling this story to the Doctor, she becomes hysterical and he sedates her with an injection. It is clear she has been left depressed, heartbroken, and vacant over this incident. She is the victim of a rape: “Stopped! – I said, “What for?” – He didn’t answer, just struck a match in the car and I knew “what for!”” (31). The fact that she is incapable of writing in the first person in her diary is because she does not feel like she is herself anymore. She feels lost and foreign in her own body. When Sebastian tells her, “You’re going to go with me this summer instead of Mother” (32), she places all her energy towards Sebastian to act as an escape and distraction. However, Catharine’s devotion to Sebastian is in no way a healthy, equal relationship. She deeply loved and cared for her cousin Sebastian: “He liked me and so I loved him... The only way he’d accept: – a sort of motherly way. I tried to save him, Doctor” (30). She obeyed his every demand and allowed him to use her to attract other men by wearing a revealing bathing suit. “Always when I was with him I did what he told me” (40). Her fate at the end of the play lays in the hands of another man, Doctor Sugar. Catharine’s femininity, body, and mind are in the control of these men around her. She has been traumatized and labeled insane for her “babblings,” yet she must rely on this man to either save her or lobotomize her.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche relies on men to survive. Her desperation for protection in life makes her believe she is powerless as a single woman. W. David Sievers, a theatre historian and author of *Freud on Broadway*, “attributes her behavior to “sexual anxiety... [H]er almost hysterical drive is to find protection and security””

(Griffin 58). She has used her femininity and sexuality towards men to gain protection and a place to stay, even if it is just for one night. Blanche tells Stella:

I was never hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft- soft people have got to court the favor of hard ones, Stella. Have got to be seductive – put on soft colors... and glow – make a little – temporary magic just in order to pay for- one night’s shelter! That’s why I’ve been – not so awf’ly good lately. I’ve run for protection, Stella, from under one leaky roof to another leaky roof – because it was storm – all storm, and I was – caught in the centre... (60)

Blanche also believes that sex is the only way a man cares for a woman. “Sexuality was one of the few means of gaining power women had at the time” (Griffin 58). Blanche is jaded from her past relationships with men. She has convinced herself that she can just rely on “the kindness of strangers” to get by (102). Her vulnerability has caused her to see sex as something she can use over men to get attention.

People don’t see you – *men* don’t - don’t even admit your existence unless they are making love to you. And you’ve got to have your existence admitted by someone, if you’re going to have someone’s protection. (60)

However, the climactic scene where Stanley rapes Blanche shatters all illusions of sex, romance, and hope she has carried her whole life. She is devastated and mentally unstable at the end of the play: “I’m anxious to get out of here. This place is a trap!” (98). Like Catharine, Blanche has been raped and has found no solace or comfort after the event, particularly from her sister Stella who chooses to not believe her to salvage her marriage and to protect her future child. Blanche retreats into hysteria and is led off by two strangers who will take her to a state mental institution. Similar to Mrs. Winemiller in *Summer and Smoke* and Catharine in *Suddenly Last Summer*, Blanche’s psychotic break signifies that she is too dangerous to thrive in society and thus she must lose her independence. As an unmarried, broken woman of the South, Blanche is now at the

disposal of any man who may come her way. She has no power left in her to fight and no one else fighting for her.

ii. A synopsis of *Summer and Smoke*

Much like *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Summer and Smoke* evaluates the repression of sexuality and desire. *Summer and Smoke* sets up “a delicate female and a sexually expressive male for moral evaluation” (Hirsch 23). The play is set in Glorious Hill, Mississippi at the turn of the century through 1916. Situated in the center of the public square, and the middle of the suggested set in the script, is a fountain in the form of a stone angel. Both life-giving and purifying, the fountain is symbolic of Eternity brooding over the course of the play. On either side of the statue are two interior sets; “one being the parlor of an Episcopal rectory and the other being the home of a doctor next door... there are no actual doors or windows or walls” (5).

Alma Winemiller, the minister’s daughter, has been in love with the boy next-door her whole life. Dr. John Buchanan is wild, outgoing and spends his time drinking, gambling, and womanizing. Williams describes him in the stage directions as “a Promethean figure, brilliantly and restlessly alive in a stagnant society. The excess of power has not yet found a channel. If it remains without one, it will burn him up... he has the fresh and shining look of an epic hero” (7). Alma has strong moral standards and a powerful spirituality; John’s beliefs lie in science and bodily pleasure.

Despite Alma and John’s fundamental differences, they are drawn together. An all-encompassing romance both spiritual and physical *almost* evolves between them, but they come to see one another’s way of thinking too late. Alma’s desires were repressed

throughout her whole life from a fear of her sexuality. When she finally discovers that the physical is just as important as the spiritual in life, John has realized the opposite. In the final scenes, there is “lyricism, symbolism, and emotion rather than action to bring the play to a climax and its surprising though inevitable conclusion” (Griffin 90). Alma’s tension and sexual awakening at the end of the play must be followed by a release. She goes off with a salesman and presumably enters a life of promiscuity.

iii. Williams’ relationship with *Summer and Smoke*

Williams has said that he “identifies more with Alma, the divided heroine of *Summer and Smoke*, than with any of his other characters: “Alma is my favorite – because I came out so late and so did Alma, and she had the greatest struggle” (Hirsch 7-8). Tennessee Williams began writing what would soon be called *Summer and Smoke* in 1944; “Chart of Anatomy” was one of the early rejected titles and *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* would be the title of the rewrite that would not be produced until 1976. Published in 1948 and premiered at the Music Box Theatre that year on October 6th, *Summer and Smoke* received lukewarm reviews. Brooks Atkinson, writing for the *New York Times*, called “the piece a “tone poem” with “the same mystic frustration and the same languid doom” as *Menagerie* and *Streetcar*” (Atkinson). However, most reviews were more unfavorable; John Gassner analyzed “the weakness I have suspected in the author for a long time – an insufficient exertion of intellect” (Gassner). Despite the tepid assessments, the theatre was full every night: “a great many people, I would say about 60% of each audience – practically all women – are more or less – and sometimes to the point of tears – moved by it” (Hayman 126).

Despite any positivity around how *Summer and Smoke* was received, Williams was still unsatisfied. He wrote in his notebook:

So far I have never failed to push a thing through to some kind of completion if I determined that I should. Not even ‘Summer and Smoke’ the whole history of which was fraught with the most abysmal discouragement: abandoned five or six times, I nevertheless picked it up again each time and went doggedly on with it, and the result is a play that is good enough to impress some people – not myself, not many but some – as the best of the four long plays I’ve had presented. Someday, somewhere is the end. (Bak 129)

Williams felt that with his own deep self-reflection found in *Alma*, his ending was too unsatisfying. *Alma* seems more like a fallen than a liberated woman at the end when she suddenly chooses a life of promiscuity. In an attempt to improve the ending, Williams rewrote *Summer and Smoke* years later into a new version called *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*. In the revision, Williams uses less intense characterization and action, particularly between Johnny and Alma. He also has them actually spend a night together at the Moon Lake Casino. It is a “subdued celebration of the flesh” (Hirsch 29), rather than something to be ashamed of. Williams may be suggesting with this newer version that a “union between the soul and body is possible” (Hirsch 29) and that, like himself, a sexual awakening later in life does not necessarily have to ruin the person.

In 1976, the play was produced for public television as part of Theater in America starring Blythe Danner as Alma and Frank Langella as John. With positive reception and backing, the play went on to have its Broadway premiere at the Morosco Theater on November 23rd, 1976 starring Betsy Palmer as Alma and David Selby as John.

Eccentricities received positive reviews, including one from Brendan Gill at *The New Yorker*, describing it as an “ingenious reworking: which actors and actresses will be constantly beseeching producers to put on; what delectable roles it provides” (Gill 134).

Nonetheless, the production closed on December 12th, 1976 after only 8 previews and 12 regular performances.

Despite Williams' personal feelings, many felt that "*Summer and Smoke*, though closer to a medieval morality play than to contemporary American melodrama, was 'purer' in the artistic sense than its rewrite" (Bak 137). In comparing both plays' production history, it is clear that the original story of these characters has found more success. "*Summer and Smoke* receives occasional productions (a Broadway revival in 1996 closed after 52 performances); *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*, Williams' preferred version, has not been seen since its original production" (TACT). Therefore, the original version remains the better known and more produced of the two, living on today in the American repertoire of theatre.

iv. Societal expectations

An analysis of the society at the time period a play is written or the time period in which a play takes may provide insight into why a character acts the way they do. Although social science lacks one definitive interpretation of how a person constructs their own social identity within their society, societal ideals and expectations definitely shape a social climate. A tendency often seen throughout history is that "in times of anxiety, such as the intense and rapid change industrialization brought, there is a resurgence in the enforcement and belief in classical, or traditional, gender roles" (Radek). Women of the 19th century had been expected to exercise "moral influence and insure national virtue and social order. Woman was selfless and sentimental, nurturing

and pious. She was the perfect counterpoint to materialistic and competitive man, whose strength and rationality suited him for the rough and violent public world” (Baker 620).

In the first decade of the 20th century, when *Summer and Smoke* begins, there began a change in industrialization and modernization in America that was affecting the way women were seen in the public sphere. An attempt at resurging the enforcement of traditional gender roles was beginning but would soon be pushed away in hopes that women could gain social status and power. Also at the turn of the century, the perception was that women were more moral than men. “Even though the religious leaders of the day were all male, women were the strongest component of the congregations. This was important because, as in the nineteenth century, women were the ones to uphold morals in the family” (Radek). This is certainly true for Alma. Although her father is the town reverend, she holds herself to maintain a standard of morality, particularly because her mother has not:

ALMA: I have had to manage the rectory and take over the social and household duties that would ordinarily belong to a minister’s wife, not his daughter. And that may have made me seem strange to some of my more critical contemporaries. In a way it may have – deprived me of – my youth... Being a minister’s daughter I have to be more selective than most girls about the – society I keep. (17)

Alma Winemiller, as well as Blanche DuBois and Catharine Holly, allow oppressive expectations to govern their lives; they have lived “alienated from a tenable life within themselves and their societies by their moral illusions of their own purity and innocence” (Griffin 96). Certainly in *Summer and Smoke*, “Williams focuses on a stagnant society that is hostile and unaccommodating to the young” (Pike). There is the notion of convention that Alma has always felt she must adhere to. Convention, “public codes of behavior and systems of meaning that are both culturally constructed and historically

specific” had been extremely important to society during the late 19th to early 20th century (Bailey 6). “Convention looked to a multiplicity of desires, not to love itself. It structured and controlled the manifestation of sexual desire and the desires for security, for status, for a clear role in society – even the desire for love” (Bailey 12).

However, at the end of the play, it is 1916. Dating, sexual expectations, and society were changing and convention had transformed. There were “changes in relations between men and women in the larger society, as women took on new roles in the public world, and ideas about what was appropriate behavior for men and for women shifted gradually or were jolted into new configurations” (Bailey 4). Alma’s opening of her mind at the end of the play may reflect that change in atmosphere, as it became more socially acceptable for women to have control over their love life. Alma’s sense of adhering to society’s expectations of her plays a great part in her personality, her fears, and her actions.

v. A Character Study and Analysis of Alma

Alma Winemiller is an eccentric, high-strung, nervous young woman. “Suffering the consequences of a rigid, puritanical upbringing, Alma, like Williams, idealizes the body and moves from longing for the bohemian life to actual participation in it” (Hirsch 28). Alma lacks a physical vocabulary, and “as a result is both traumatized and turned on by the most casual intimacy - a doctor's stethoscope on her chest, fingers on her pulse, a leg accidentally touching hers on a park bench” (Pike). Williams’ describes her in the stage directions when she first enters at the beginning of the play:

ALMA had an adult quality as a child and now, in her middle twenties, there is something prematurely spinsterish about her: an excessive

propriety and self-consciousness is apparent in her nervous laughter, her voice and gestures belong to years of church entertainments, to the position of hostess in a Rectory. People her own age regard her as rather quaintly and humorously affected. She has grown up mostly in the company of her elders. Her true nature is still hidden even from herself.
(8)

Alma's world consists of social and personal roles forced on her by her surroundings. "In evading her responsibilities and forcing them on Alma, her mother has deprived her of a normal childhood and womanhood" (Griffin 95). Mrs. Winemiller has had a mental break with reality. Alma accuses her mother, "People wonder why I'm tied down here! They pity me – think of me as an old maid already! I'm young. Still young! It's you – it's you, you've taken my youth away from me!" (31). Theatre historian Louise Blackwell theorizes that Alma is one of Tennessee Williams' female characters "who has learned to be maladjusted through adjustment to abnormal family relationships and who strives to break through their bondage in order to find a mate" (Blackwell 9). Blackwell describes Alma as having multiple roles to play in one household. "As a result of being, at once, the daughter of her father and mother, sister and parent to her mother, and social head of the household for her father, Alma has no role that she desires for herself" (Blackwell 10). Her later life decisions may be a result of learning from her mother that a reversal of her life may provide more rewarding experiences.

Physicality

"Alma develops the spiritual side of her nature while remaining ignorant of physical passion; with qualities and deficiencies" (Hayman 106). The entire play surrounds the struggle of Alma to accept her physicality and allow herself freedom of sexual and personal expression. In appearance, Alma is old-fashioned, delicate, and

modest. She carries a fan around for when she feels faint and at the beginning of the play, “she is dressed in pale yellow and carries a yellow silk parasol and a hand-bag” (8). In direct contrast to Alma is the character Rosa Gonzales, the daughter of the owner of the gambling casino, Moon Lake Casino, which is a recurring symbol of pleasure and danger in many of Williams’ plays. Rosa is “dressed in an almost outrageous finery, with lustrous feathers on her hat, greenish blue, a cascade of them. Diamond and emerald earrings” (13). Rosa embodies physical attraction and is the object of John’s passion throughout the play.

Alma has unique, nervous tendencies. “Alma’s odd manner encourages people to laugh at her. She is affected and elaborately genteel” (Hirsch 28). Williams describes her in the stage directions:

NOTE: In Miss ALMA’s voice and manner there is a delicacy and elegance, a kind of “airiness,” which is really natural to her as it is, in a less marked degree, to many Southern girls. Her gestures and mannerisms are a bit exaggerated, but in a graceful way. It is understandable that she might be accused of “putting on airs” and of being “affected” by the other young people of the town... Out of nervousness and self-consciousness she has a habit of prefacing and concluding her remarks with a little breathless laugh... the characterization must never be stressed to the point of making her at all ludicrous in a less than sympathetic way.
(10)

Alma’s heightened dialogue emphasizes her individuality. “Alma’s dedication to the spirit in the first part of *Summer and Smoke* is reflected in her airy speech about the Gulf Wind” (Griffin 14). She reflects the ideals of what Southern society would expect from a young woman possibly decades before her time: elegance, delicacy, modesty, and gracefulness. She is traditional and cautious in both her manner of moving and speaking. When John informs her that he overheard someone doing an impression of Alma, he explains that she has a reputation for “gliding the lily a bit” (16). John says, “You have a

rather fancy way of talking... “Pyrotechnical display” instead of “fireworks,” and that sort of thing” (16). Alma claims it is an unconscious habit as she tries to conceal her hurt. She is criticized in town as different or an “outsider” because of the way she is.

Apart from her appearance and voice, Alma also has “attacks! – of nervous heart trouble” (12). Possibly stemming from a life surrounded by mental illness and hypochondria himself, it is common for Williams’ to write about women with health or mental conditions: Blanche is an alcoholic and sent to a mental institution; Catharine is labeled insane for telling the story about her cousin’s death and sent to a mental institution; Myrtle takes pills for her nerves; and Mrs. Winemiller has had a nervous breakdown. “The hysterical symptoms [Alma] displays - "nervous heart trouble", panic attacks, a tendency towards mental breakdown - were all, Williams believed, indicative of suppressed desires” (Pike). John diagnoses Alma’s heart problems by reducing them to the hysterics of a woman: “You’re swallowing air, Miss Alma... Yes, you swallow air when you laugh or talk. It’s a little trick that hysterical women get into” (12). John embarrasses Alma in this scene, knowing she has no other way of defending herself than laughing it off. She does not have the confidence or ability to stand up for herself against the man she is hopelessly in love with.

Repression of sexuality and desire

“Alma, like Tennessee for so many of his early years, rejects the sexuality that is offered to her, and in the canon of his plays that is the cardinal sin” (Hayman 106).

Alma’s central struggle is her ability to come to terms with her feelings of lust for John Buchanan. She convinces herself that she is intellectually and spiritually connected to him, when in reality, she also wants him physically. After years of being taught to

subscribe to Puritanical views, she is “split between refinery and rapacity” (Hirsch 8). In W. David Sievers’s studies of dramas reflecting Freudian theories, he finds in Alma a “revealing portrait of the hysterical repression of sex into conversion symptoms in the South which to Williams symbolizes the last stronghold of unrealistic, ostrich-attitudes” (Griffin 83). Alma has repressed any of her own desires because of all the duties and responsibilities she has had to adopt. Her surroundings are a mixture of highly conservative ideals, that of her father and the rectory, and crazed sexual behavior, that of John, Rosa, and all who frequent the Moon Lake Casino. This dichotomy of sexual status leaves Alma yearning for John but incapable of expressing it.

In her physical interactions with John, she gradually becomes more open to expressing her desires as the play progresses. At first, John advances on her more. In the stage directions in their first scene, he “leans way back to look up and allows his knees to spread wide apart so that one of them is in contact with Alma’s. The effect on her is curiously disturbing” (15). Alma is clearly uncomfortable with the physical contact but surprisingly likes the attention. Several scenes later when Alma comes at night feeling ill to see John’s father, John insists on attending to her instead. He asks her to unbutton her blouse and as “her fingers fumbling with the buttons on her blouse” she says, “They are just as if frozen!” (40). She is nervous and shaky at the thought of him touching her, suggesting her desire for him but inability of expressing it yet.

When they are at the casino for a night out, she musters up the courage to be the first one to make contact; however, conveniently signifying there is a barrier separating her from actual physical flesh-to-flesh contact, she is wearing gloves. John says, “It’s no fun holding hands with gloves on, Miss Alma” (48). She begins to remove her gloves,

signifying she is opening up more. He leans in to her to lift her veil and she feels faint. She allows him to take her into his arms and kiss her. Their conversation shows that both are at a crossroads for how they each view intimacy and expression of desire:

ALMA. (*In a low, shaken voice.*) Not “Miss” any more. Just Alma.

JOHN. (*Grinning gently*) “Miss” suits you better, Miss Alma. (*Kisses her again. She returns the kiss, then hesitantly touches his shoulders, but not quite to push him away. JOHN continues softly.*) Is it so hard to forget you’re a preacher’s daughter?

ALMA. There is no reason to forget that I am a minister’s daughter. A minister’s daughter’s no different from any other young lady who tries to remember that she *is* a lady.

JOHN. (*Dropping his arms.*) This lady stuff, is that so important?

ALMA. Not to the sort of girls that you may be used to bringing to Moon Lake Casino. But suppose that some day – suppose that some day you – *married*... The woman that you selected to be your wife, and not only your wife but – the mother of your children! (*Catches her breath at the thought.*) Wouldn’t you want that woman to be a lady? Wouldn’t you want her to be somebody that you, as her husband, and they as her precious children – could look up to with very deep respect? (*JOHN makes a gesture of impatience.*)

JOHN. There’s other things between a man and a woman besides respect. Did you know that, Miss Alma?

ALMA. – Yes ...

JOHN. There’s such a thing as intimate relations.

ALMA. Thank you for telling me that. So plainly.

JOHN. (*Moves in close to her.*) It may strike you as unpleasant. But it does have a good deal to do with – (*Makes a mocking bow to her.*) connubial felicity, as you’d call it. There are some women that just give in to a man as a sort of obligation imposed on them by the – cruelty of nature! (*Turns away from her.*) And there you are. (49-50)

Alma understands love and intimacy on terms of giving one’s whole self to another. She emphasizes that sex is not only about the physical pleasure it can bring, but it is about fostering respect, gaining familial intimacy, and about a bonding of two souls. John sees things differently. His stance indicates he believes sex can be shared between two individuals to feed a sexual hunger and a desire for pleasure. The scene and first act ends

with him suggesting they get a room above the casino and Alma accusing him, “You’re not a gentleman!” (51).

In the first scene of the second act, Rosa Gonzales and John Buchanan plan to leave town together. Alma calls John’s father, Doctor Buchanan, to come home because there is a rowdy party happening at the house. Rosa’s father Gonzales is there, drunk and carrying a revolver. Gonzales fires the gun at Doctor Buchanan when he tells them to “Get your swine out of – my house” (57). John blames Alma for his father getting shot and says, “You brought him here to be shot” (59). He then forces her to look at the anatomy chart to confront her rejection of her physical and sexual desires. He is very rough with her as she struggles to look away, but he holds her still as he says:

Now listen here to the anatomy lecture! This upper story’s the brain, which is hungry for something called truth and doesn’t get much but keeps on feeling hungry! This middle’s the belly, which is hungry for food. This part down here is the sex, which is hungry for love because it is sometimes lonesome. (*Releases her arm*) I’ve fed all three, as much of all three as I could, or as much as I wanted. – You’ve fed none – nothing. Well – maybe your belly a little – watery subsistence – but love or truth, nothing but – nothing but hand-me-down notions! – attitudes – poses! Now you can go. The anatomy lecture is over. (60)

John is trying to make Alma realize she has been living in a world that has oppressed her every desire and that it is her choice to live within those constraints. He is telling her that there is freedom in choice and that she denies every desire for truth or love out of her own fear. Alma claims that what is missing from the anatomy chart is the soul:

ALMA. There is something not shown on the chart.

JOHN. You mean the part that Alma is Spanish for, do you?

ALMA. Yes, that’s not shown on the anatomy chart! But it’s there, just the same, yes, there! Somewhere not seen, but there. And it’s *that* that I loved you with – that! Not what you mention. Yes, *did* love you with, John, did nearly *die* of when you hurt me! (60)

Alma cannot solve her conflict in herself just yet. It is not until she finds out the Nellie Ewell, her young music student, is engaged to John that she has her moment of recognition.

In their last scene together, Alma has finally come to the realization that “the body and soul both are necessary to attain eternity, the name of the statue” (Griffin 81). She feels that a new sexual freedom and expression that she has never had before is within her grasp. She tells John, “But now I have changed my mind, or the girl who said “no” – she doesn’t exist any more, she died last summer – suffocated in smoke from something on fire inside her” (72). But this discovery comes too late for her to be united with John. John tells her that he was not in search of what he thought he wanted. “It wasn’t the physical you that I really wanted!” (74). Alma was seeking freedom of physical expression, when John was seeking freedom of his soul. Alma tells him:

You’ve come around to my old way of thinking and I to yours like two people exchanging a call on each other at the same time, and each one finding the other one gone out, the door locked against him and no one to answer the bell! I came here to tell you that being a gentleman doesn’t seem so important to me any more, but you’re telling me I’ve got to remain a lady! (74)

However, Alma does not remain a lady. “Just as John recognizes the insufficiency of mere physicality, she realizes it has been a mistake to reject sexuality, and turns to promiscuity” (Hayman 106). In the final scene, Alma is sitting near the fountain of the stone angel. A travelling salesman comes up to her. She “laughs... in a way different from the way she has ever laughed before. A little wearily, but quite naturally” (79). Alma has a great sense of loss at the end of the play propelling her into a drastic change of lifestyle and mentality. “A finely wrought, sensitive, vulnerable woman here realizes

her true nature too late and veers from one extreme to the other, led by a “stranger” along a destructive path” (Griffin 97).

Feminine weakness compared to men

Alma’s weakness is very much a part of her personality and the way she behaves. Looking at two specific examples in the text where Alma and John address weakness of character, it is clear that one of the main themes of *Summer and Smoke* is weakness transforming into strength. After Doctor Buchanan is shot, Alma and John have an argument:

ALMA. You can’t put the blame on anything but your weakness.

JOHN. *You call me weak?*

ALMA. Sometimes it takes a tragedy like this to make a weak person strong.

JOHN. You – white-blooded spinster! You so right people, pious pompous mumblers, preachers and preacher’s daughter, all muffled up in a lot of worn-out magic! And I was supposed to minister to your neurosis, give you tablets for sleeping and tonics to give you the strength to go on mumbling your worn-out mumbo-jumbo! (59)

John tells Alma that she does not have the right to tell him he is weak. He turns it on Alma and makes her feel inferior and self-conscious for the way she behaves. By doing so, John asserts his dominance and control over Alma, whether it be purposefully or just in the stress of the moment. When Alma visits John at the end of the play, she confesses her love openly. She is a new woman and has the courage to overcome her weaknesses.

She speaks poignantly:

Oh, I suppose I am sick, one of those weak and divided people who slip like shadows among you solid strong ones. But sometimes, out of necessity, we shadowy people take on a strength of our own. (73)

In my opinion, this is one of the most important lines of the entire play. This is Alma's anagnorisis, her moment of recognition, of critical discovery. Aristotle, philosopher and dramatic theorist, defined anagnorisis as the "gaining of the essential knowledge that was previously lacking" (McManus). Anagnorisis is also the moment when a hero, in this case Alma, has insight into a relationship with an antagonistic character. This moment of recognition is certainly one that Aristotle describes. Alma is able to view her relationship with John clearly and admit what she truly desires. She has been repressing her emotions her whole life but finally puts herself out there "unsparingly truthfully, even shamelessly" (73), only to find that it is too late. Over the course of the play, Alma's transition is major. This begs the question: has Alma really overcome the oppression of her desires that have kept her down her whole life, or has she actually fallen from grace?

vi. An Actor's Perspective

To provide more insight into Alma and *Summer and Smoke*, it is interesting to look at the perspective of actresses who have studied and played Alma. Alma is a character that is relatable and a seemingly timeless representation of a woman struggling with her sexual identity. The original Broadway debut of *Summer and Smoke* in 1948 did not measure up to the sensations Williams had created before. The production "with Margaret Phillips as Alma, was not a success, despite a rave review from Brooks Atkinson in *The New York Times*, becoming Williams' first Broadway failure" (DiLeo). However, Geraldine Page revitalized the role of Alma and brought newfound success to the play in the 1952 José Quintero production at the Circle In the Square Theatre in New York City. Page made her reputation as Alma Winemiller, developing a technique that

encompassed “the high-pitched, breathy voice, the peculiar phrasing, the hands to hair gesture” (Hirsch 106-107) that made Alma so unique. Tennessee Williams, originally skeptical of reviving *Summer and Smoke* on Broadway, “approved the production, admiring the “witchery of the staging and the witchery of Geraldine Page,” and the production played to full houses for twelve months” (Hayman 141). Geraldine Page had a bewitching quality about her performance that made Alma neither pathetic nor magnanimous. Page was attune to every human detail of Alma: she was a model example of “post-war America’s new breed of actor, with their concentrated intensity, thrilling spontaneity, and keenly observed attention to human behavior” (DiLeo). Page went on to star in the 1961 movie adaptation of *Summer and Smoke*, directed by Peter Glenville, where her performance was described as conveying Alma’s feelings with “a soft-spoken intensity and expanding candor” (DiLeo). By humanizing Alma, Page allows for an audience to empathize and understand Alma’s character living in a world of oppression and societal expectation.

In 1973, Academy Award winner Eva Marie Saint appeared as Alma at the Kennedy Center. In a one-night-only symposium called “Women of Tennessee,” Charles Osgood of CBS News Sunday Morning interviewed Eva Marie Saint. When asked about Alma and working with Tennessee Williams, Saint describes what it was like to portray Alma’s unique physicality:

Alma was an incredible character to play. Usually when we do roles, we go onto the next part and forget the previous one. Alma stayed with me a long time. She had this way of laughing a little bit before she spoke. She had palpitations, too. One day, John Buchanan, who was a doctor, said to her: "You swallow air and it presses on your heart and gives you palpitations...What I think you have is a doppelgänger, and the doppelgänger is badly irritated" [part 1, scene 1]. That remark terrified

her. Imagine somebody telling you that you have an irritated doppelgänger! (Osgood)

Eva Marie Saint also recounted Williams' brilliance as a writer. She describes his sense of humor in writing his characters, yet how everyone took him very seriously. Saint admits that any actress who has received the privilege of acting in one of his plays is spoiled. "A Williams character has layer upon layer, and I don't care who you are or what age you are, you find something of yourself in the character" (Osgood). Saint worked hard towards conveying the universality of Alma. She understood the disconnect of body and soul Alma battles within herself and in her love for John Buchanan. Saint described, "When he wrote Alma Winemiller in *Summer and Smoke*, Tennessee said he felt the character came right down from his being, and it was easy to put it on paper. John Buchanan was the love of her life, but he didn't love her. She loved his soul, he loved her body, and they never did make it up to each other."

In 2006, a revival of *Summer and Smoke* took place at the Hartford Stage and went on to play at the Paper Mill Playhouse in 2007. Directed by Michael Wilson, long-time film actress Amanda Plummer starred as Alma. Journalist Randy Gener described her performance in a review for *American Theatre*:

That actress, Amanda Plummer, eschewed grotesqueries and sexual hysteria in favor of restraint and awkward vulnerability... A particular strength of the production is that in scaling down the florid Southern mannerisms typically drawn for Alma, Plummer underscores a gentle complexity that makes her Alma less of a pathetic creature. Instead, Plummer stresses the dignity in Alma, whom Williams himself once considered "a graceful cripple." Of course, her Alma still erupts in nervous laughter. She's still dependent on the "little mercies" of sleeping tablets. But Plummer doesn't judge this Mississippi minister's daughter so harshly that she becomes a two-dimensional figure. (Gener 23)

Regardless of being criticized by many for being too old to play Alma, Amanda Plummer confronts Alma's struggle of maintaining her sense of pride and humility throughout her embarrassments. Instead of playing on the stereotypes associated with Alma, she performance challenged Alma's flaws and vulnerabilities, exposing a stronger version of the character who identifies more consistently throughout the play with her line, "Sometimes we shadowy people take on a strength of our own" (73).

Summer and Smoke's London premiere happened nearly sixty years after its Broadway debut in New York City. Directed by Adrian Noble and starring Rosamund Pike and Chris Carmack, it opened at the Apollo Theatre on October 17, 2006. Playwright and critic Neil Norman sat down with Rosamund Pike to discuss Alma. He first describes the play itself as "a tale of thwarted sexual desire and the vagaries of love during one of those long hot summers so beloved of Williams" (Norman). Rosamund Pike recalls:

It's all about young people," she says. "They are all only children. All of whom have been fucked over by their parents - very Larkinesque. It's a hot summer of heaving passions about a man who can fall in love with one woman and screw another. It deals with the first pangs of sexual jealousy. I can relate to all of it. I've had a glimmer of sexual jealousy. I have definitely been ill at ease in the company of someone I wanted to impress. You just take it a bit further. Alma is in her late twenties and it would normally happen in teenage years - Why, why, why doesn't he fancy me? Why? - I can relate to all those situations. (Norman)

Arguably for approaching a role, an actor must find understanding and justification for the way their character behaves, interacts, and operates throughout the world of the play. As character research for her role, Pike traveled to the deep-South. Pike's research went beyond trying to get rid of her prim English vowels; her goal was to go beyond the

stereotypes of the Southern belle and find a deeper sensation of Alma's world if she were to serve the character justice:

I ate hot, greasy fried chicken. There is something about the food in that part of the world that makes you lose your manners: big, succulent prawns, pieces of catfish, oysters in batter. "Put some south in yer mouth" read a slogan in the diners, and that was my aim: to gorge on the language... *Summer and Smoke* is a play about appetites, the sexual appetites of a group of young misfits over one hot summer. (Pike)

Pike's analysis of Alma allows for her as an actress to make the character multi-dimensional. Pike also notes how Alma "thinks she's doing a decent job of hiding her emotions, but in fact she is an open book: inside, there's stomach-thumping jealousy, anger and fear" (Pike). We as human beings often times try to mask our insecurities and emotions. An actor must delve beyond what is on the page to uncover the inner dialogue the character often suppresses. Pike's approach to awaken her senses with the world of the play helps her take the character beyond the expected.

Page, Saint, Plummer, and Pike's portrayals of Alma have spanned the last half-century. Each woman brings her own individuality and intellect to the character. By exploring the approaches of actresses throughout time and commentaries from theatre critics, a wider and clearer understanding of Alma in performance can be drawn. These actresses discuss the realities of bringing Alma's quirky physicality to life. They address the divide of body and soul and how the internalized repression of desire is an ever-present theme throughout the play. Plummer and Pike in particular stress how Alma's story remains relevant today, instilling the realities of Alma's struggle in expressing her sexuality and overcoming her fears in their audiences.

vii. Symbolism of Names

All five of the women explored in this chapter have a unique symbolism to each of their names. In approaching a devised piece with a dance and physical context, symbolism is a tool that can be explored to create movement to embody each character. In *Suddenly Last Summer*, Catharine Holly's name suggests "Holy Catharine". The name Catharine literally means "pure" or "innocent" (Heintzelman, Howard 282). In Catholic tradition, Saint Catharine is one of the most helpful, persuasive intercessory saints in heaven. Catharine Holly shares in the saint's desire to speak the truth: "The truth's the one thing I have never resisted!" (32). Her gift of persuasion is also evident in Dr. Sugar's final hopeful line, "I think we ought at least to consider the possibility that the girl's story could be true..." (44).

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche's "first name means 'white' and whose married name is 'Grey'" (Griffin 44). These correlations to color symbolize themes that are often associated with specific color references: "color symbolism seems to be apparent in how individuals associate colors with things, objects or physical space" (Kaya and Epps). Colors have also come to symbolize human emotions: "the presence of color is so universal" (Evarts 124). Blanche is in pursuit of escaping her darkened past, which was "grey" and clouded with regret, and of cleansing her shame to return to a simpler, purer self. In the Western world, white symbolizes attributes like purity, simplicity, innocence, youth, humility, and delicacy. Beyond her name meaning 'white,' Blanche dresses at the beginning of the play shrouded in all white, aiding in the moth metaphor Williams attaches to her vulnerability. Gray tends to symbolize dignity and sadness. These connections of emotions with color to Blanche's name reinforce the themes she battles with throughout the play.

In “The Important Thing,” Flora means “flower.” It is noteworthy that despite the queerness and ugliness John notes in her, Williams’ often describes her with flower like qualities: “She danced around the quarry like a bright, attractive little monkey on a wire, her green smock fluttering in the wind and her voice constantly flowing up to him, sometimes shrill with excitement and sometimes muted with intense absorption” (171). Williams also describes how “Her skin was the most attractive thing about her. It was very fine and smooth and white...” (173), much like how a flower’s skin is what the eye sees as beautiful. After she is raped by John, Flora lays there as if she is a wilted flower: “She looked almost ugly, her face covered with sweat and grass stain” (174).

In *Kingdom of Earth (The Seven Descents of Myrtle)*, Myrtle derives from the Greek word ‘myron,’ “meaning balm, chrism, ointment” (Ozkan and Guray 160). One of Myrtle’s most important roles in the play is as healer and nurse to the sick and dying Lot. In ancient mythology, myrtle was sacred to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, sex, and beauty: “with its evergreen leaves, elegant white flowers and pleasant perfume, it also symbolized beauty and youth” (Ozkan and Guray 160). Many other cultures around the world reinforce the view that myrtle is a flower associated with beauty, love, paradise, and immortality. Myrtle is a character that values her beauty and uses it as a tool to her own advantage.

In *Summer and Smoke*, Alma embodies a spiritual flesh, rather than a physical one. Williams makes it clear throughout the play that “Alma is Spanish for soul” (50). In giving her this name, Williams’ suggests that Alma is the essence of the soul in her relationship with John Buchanan, while he encompasses the body. The split in Alma between body and soul turns on itself when she realizes that there is more than just

spirituality and intellect to feed a human's soul; the physical and sexual hunger must be fulfilled too.

viii. Resonance Today

This chapter has explored the ways in which females are oppressed in their own worlds. In looking at these female characters in depth, I ask the question: do Williams' women still resonate with an audience today, specifically college students in the United States? Williams' themes and characters are as accessible to this audience as they were when they were first being performed. His plays depict double standards regarding the sexual expectations that existed for his Southern belles in the early to mid 20th century; these double standards still remain oppressive forces today, particularly as perpetuated by the media.

In comparing how female sexuality is both repressed and idealized in Williams' plays and in the media today, it is important to note several modern examples. Miley Cyrus, an American singer, songwriter, and actress who is often criticized as glorifying and glamorizing sex and drugs, is a controversial, outspoken feminist and advocate for gender and sexual equality. During a radio interview in the UK, Cyrus said, "I don't understand the double standard of life. I'm for anybody and everything. I don't care what you want to do in your life, or who you want to be with, who you want to love or what you look like" (Qtd. in Monde). Cyrus promotes women and men to own and embrace their sexuality and desires. Yet, feminists around the world have condemned her self-objectification and self-sexualization in performances, specifically during the 2009 Teen Choice Award's and 2013 VMA's performance with Robin Thicke, as transgressive

rather than liberating. A study published in *Feminism & Psychology* entitled, “‘Polarized’ discourse: An analysis of responses to Miley Cyrus’s Teen Choice Awards pole dance” outlined the media’s reactions to Cyrus’s sexualization. “The Los Angeles Times criticized her for going ‘too far and too low’ and Fox News tellingly headlined, ‘Miley Cyrus Gets Raunchy with a Pole at the Teen Choice Awards, Wins Six Trophies,’ insinuating perhaps that the second clause had something to do with the first. Fox News wrote, ‘It was goodbye ‘Hannah Montana’ at Sunday’s Teen Choice Awards as the once squeaky clean star Miley Cyrus debuted a more adult image with a racy performance in hot pants on a stripper pole!’” (Lamb, Graling, Wheeler 165). On multiple occasions Cyrus has defended her actions: she claimed in a *New York Times* interview, “I’m telling women to be whoever you want to be” (Qtd. in Caramanica). Still, many often see her approach to body acceptance and sexual expression as cavalier, polarizing, and exploitative.

It is beyond the purview of this thesis to analyze and define Cyrus' feminist claims. Rather, my point is to underscore how debates over representations of female sexuality loom large, from Cyrus to celebrities like Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj, and Kim Kardashian to name but a few. Are these sexualized women empowered or degraded? Meanwhile, male pop stars seem only lauded in the media for their openly sexual nature, like Prince, Mick Jagger, Justin Beiber, Jay Z, etc.; moreover, men's sex appeal does not seem related to physical perfection in the same way as their female counterparts. A recent article in the *LA Weekly* on the twenty sexiest male musicians noted, "Physical appearance actually has little to do with sexiness...to give us whiplash he needs to arouse our minds. Whether it's a sidelong glance, the hint of a smile, a swagger that piques our

curiosity or just the way he flicks his cigarette, these musicians make us sweat for more than just their looks" (Haithcoat).

In an interview with *Fresh Air: NPR*, best-selling feminist author Peggy Orenstein discussed pop stars roles in how girls currently express their sexuality. Orenstein claims that pop stars perpetuate the image of "hotness" and the idea that confidence stems from sex: "pop culture and pornography sexualize young women by creating undue pressure to look and act sexy. These pressures affect both the sexual expectations that girls put on themselves and the expectations boys project onto them" (Orenstein). Sexual confidence in a woman connotes power and popularity; however, at the same time, sexually active or appealing women often get labeled as "sluts," such males are called "studs." Such mixed messages create tension and confusion for college age women. From my first hand experience, the double standard on a college campus is embedded in hetero-normative hookup culture. "Hooking up" can be defined as "sexual encounter[s] (that may or may not involve sexual intercourse) between two people who are brief acquaintances or strangers, usually lasting only one night without the expectation of developing a relationship" (Allison, Risman 1193). Sociologists and researchers tie the shift from dating to hooking up to the impact of modern feminism and the sexual revolution. Both of these waves of freedom for women acted in "liberalizing attitudes toward sexuality and increasing support for women's right to sexual pleasure and autonomy" (Allison, Risman 1193).

Paula England, a leading researcher in the sociology of gender and sexuality, has studied what constitutes as a hookup, the implications after a hookup, and the overall gendered perceptions on a college campus. In her lecture entitled "Understanding

Hookup Culture: What’s Really Happening on College Campuses,” England highlights the double standard: “Another way that the culture of hooking up is gendered is the double standard. So when I talk in focus groups, students say women who hook up with too many people are seen as sluts... Men can be seen as man whore and sometimes that’s pejorative, but also male peer groups encourage and sort of give high-fives for action. So, it’s really clear that reputationally, women are being judged by a different standard [than] men” (England 3). Men are being evaluated more positively than women who share the same sexual lifestyle and freedom.

Kathleen A. Bogle, author of “Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus,” conducted a study where most women admitted they saw their sexual activity as appropriate and acceptable only in a romantic relationship: “too much casual non-relationship sex placed women at risk for gaining a negative reputation” (Bogle 114). It is not easy for women to break free of this negative and sexist culture on a college campus. I see college women around me, including myself allowing alcohol, sexualized clothing, and the permission of their male partner to fuel and control their sexual experiences, instead of owning that experience with both their own body and mind. Women are expected to possess an unrealistic duality in expressing yet repressing their sexuality, yet men are free from this expectation.

On April 27th, 2016, I conducted an open interview¹ on my personal Facebook to further explore the perspectives on the double standard in hookup culture on college campuses. I entitled the interview “College Students’ Experiences with the Hookup Culture.” I asked the following:

¹ See Appendix A for entire interview.

² The performance was in the Kean Theatre at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. Performances ran from Wednesday, April 20th through Saturday, April 23rd 2016.

To all of my friends in college (or recently graduated), if you have a minute or four, comment below (or direct message me) any insight or personal experience with the double standard on college campuses surrounding the hookup culture. I am making a claim in my thesis that the hookup culture (typically hetero-normative but not limited to) degrades female sexuality and freedom of expression by evaluating men more positively than women who share the same sexual lifestyle and freedom. What do you see specifically, or have experienced yourself, that relates to this?

I received a variety of responses from college students ranging in class year, gender, sexuality, and university they attend. From the female perspective, every response reinforced the stereotypes, stigmas, and shame women feel when engaging in and observing the hookup culture at their college. A junior at Drew University commented, “basically (as you probably know) i have a (presumably bad) habit of hooking up with random people, and people will totally judge me afterwards. The response is mostly that i should value myself more and not be such a slut.” A senior at Miami University reflected, “I have been called "easy" and a whore in the past (specifically by Ryan) for embracing this lifestyle.” A senior at Bowling Green State University said, “I attend a university with a huge hookup/sex culture where girls are regularly shamed on social media (crush and confession accounts).” A freshman at Drew University confessed, "All of my guy friends, and some of the girls (one in particular) have told me that hooking up with Josh is self-destructive and something I'm doing that's "unhealthy for my emotional being" and can really hurt me. A few of them have called me a hoe for doing that and are incredibly judgmental about the situation and look down upon me every time they find out I've hooked up with him again." A female student who withdrew from Drew University after three semesters due to a multiplicity of reasons commented, “When I entered college this standard continued however I met many other women that had similar experiences and

for the first time I was able to discuss human sexuality within a communal atmosphere. Although there was more freedom to delve into conversations about sexuality, a subconscious standard still remained within the social constructs of my life; men gaining affirmation through their sexual experience and women gaining respect through their abstinence.” These women all share in experiencing a double standard in some way.

From the male perspective, I received fewer responses and most were general observances rather than personal experiences. A senior at Hampshire College stated, "There seems to be a kind of belief that women who have a lot of casual sex are somehow tainted by these habits, and unworthy or incapable of being monogamous." A sophomore at Drew University recognizes that he does not subscribe to the norm on a college campus yet still feels free from judgment: “For expressing my own sexuality, I'm a rare case who is celibate. So I have no fear of judgment or labeling.” This freedom for men to control their sexual expressions does not seem to be experienced by female counterparts. A freshman at DePaul University however recounts not only his observations but personal experience with a double standard too: "As a man I notice that there is a hierarchy in the hookup culture. The higher ‘body count’ a man has then the more masculine or superior he is. If a man is a virgin then he is shamed: he's either ugly or has a small penis... For me I've noticed the double standard when my father compares me to my sister. My father often hints at the fact that he does not mind if I have sex yet he doesn't want to think about his ‘little girl’ have sex with her boyfriend."

The responses lead me to conclude that there is a double standard on college campuses embedded in hookup culture that is similar to the double standard in Williams' writing. Women are being judged by a stricter moral standard than men are. Like in *A*

Streetcar Named Desire when Blanche is deemed “not clean enough” (Williams 87) and in *Kingdom of Earth (The Seven Descents of Myrtle)* how Myrtle is seen as “Chicken’s whore” (Hirsch 91), women today are labeled by degrading words like “slut,” “tainted,” “hoe,” and “easy.” Williams’ women often compromise themselves to be accepted in society and are condemned or ridiculed when they do not. College women today find themselves subject to the judgment of their peers and culture of their campus. Thus, sexuality remains under scrutiny not only in the media but also in everyday life. Similar to the social institutions that carried societal messages in the 1940s, such as magazines, town gossips, newspapers, church meetings, and book clubs, modern media gains even more access towards people’s daily lives. Although the means of society and pressure may have transformed from the mid twentieth century to now, the ends remain the same: there is a need to fit in, to be accepted, to be free to own your sexuality, and to be respected. Women in today’s world are not fully released from these Williams’ characters.

III. Viewpoints and Physical Theatre

“It has been critically acknowledged that the development of what has been loosely termed ‘physical theatre’ has marked one of the most significant trends in dance and theatre since the 1980s” (Sanchez-Colberg 40). In this chapter, I will be exploring Anne Bogart and Tina Landau’s Viewpoints. From my personal experience as well as the creators and practitioners of it, I will reveal how Viewpoints can be used in a variety of ways and manners to find a deep expression and understanding of a character, relationship, and performance. However, I will first investigate the broader definition of physical theatre as a genre. I will examine how physical theatre strives to create its own vocabulary as a visual text in rejection and mistrust of language and to subvert traditional forms of dance, ballet and mime. I will be looking at how physical theatre is described and how transformative different methods can be when applied to a text, subject matter, or idea. In creating my own hybrid form of theatre for my performance piece, I will acknowledge how my goal is not to revolutionize, as many methods of physical theatre strove to do, but instead to be accessible and relatable by expressing emotion through movement for an audience on my college campus.

i. Defining Physical Theatre

Is there such a thing as “physical acting” - or is all acting physical? The term physical theatre can be problematic in that it generalizes a widely varied genre of performance that can range from post-modern performance, devised performance, visual performance, commedia dell’arte, or mime. Inherently, the term places parameters on a genre that has been delineated as specifically subscribing to a hybrid form of theatre and

dance and claims to be something different from a presumably non-physically centric form of theatre. Since physical theatre as a term has been applied to such a diverse range of work, the term itself seems uncodifiable; however, the overarching goal of physical theatre is to communicate and express the intellectual, the emotional, and the ideological through the physicality of the body. “At its simplest, physical theatre is theatre where the primary means of creation occurs through the body rather than through the mind. In other words, the somatic impulse is privileged over the cerebral in the making process. This is true whether the product is an original devised piece or an interpretation of a scripted text” (Callery 4).

Physical theatre strives to put the human body at the center of the storytelling process. Common characteristics that are often found in physical theatre performances include dance, movement, music, text, speech, multimedia, mime, commedia, costumes, and props. “In physical theatre the two-way current between stage and spectator does not operate merely at the level of suspense and empathy, but embraces the visual and visceral’ (Callery 4). Visual elements are highly expressive and descriptive. The actor is actively constructing a visual text through the language of physical theatre. In differentiating between physical theatre and text based theatre forms, Simon Murray and John Keefe in their newest edition of *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction*, explain the differences lying in “the nature of the relationship with pre-existent text (if there is one), the creative – i.e. authoring – role of the actor/performers, and a distinctiveness, rooted in the performer’s body as starting point, in the compositional and dramaturgical strategies employed in the composition of the emerging performance text” (Murray, Keefe 24).

The lack of a conclusive definition of physical theatre possibly stems from the fact that the genre has grown out of many different origins. Elements of physical theatre can be traced back to the origins of Western theatre. Among the Greeks and Romans, the use of text, dance, buffoonery, and other elements was used, specifically as a "short comedy written in prose or verse that portrayed life and consisted, especially among the Romans, of expressive gestures and dance that were more prevalent than the spoken text. The Greek author Lucian describes the *pantomimus* as a dancer who is, above all, an actor" (Lust 8). The success of a pantomime relies on the ability to find truth in performance: "He resembles the orator, and especially the composer of 'declamations,' whose success, as the pantomime knows, depends like his own upon verisimilitude, upon the adaptation of language to character" (Nagler 29). The pantomime also requires a unification of body and soul: "Other arts call out only one half of a man's powers – the bodily or the mental: the pantomime combines the two" (Nagler 29). Although Greek and Roman theatre relied heavily on speech to propel the plot and characters, the physical life of the actors was just as important to ensure that gesture was conveying message to an entire arena of audience. In a contemporary sense, physical theatre traces back "to those ideologies and manifestos which sought to reverse a dualism and hierarchy of word over body" (Murray, Keefe 11). The value placed on the body's capability to create theatrical expression and its own visual lexicon has fueled the work of modern physical theatre dramatists and practitioners.

Different Approaches

When examining physical theatre, it is important to observe different perspectives, theories and approaches to understand the scope of influence and variation

the genre holds. Theatre critic and historian Annette Lust describes the importance of movement in an actor's training and in understanding of their body as a tool. Lust describes physical theatre as "a visual form that expresses emotions, ideas, and character mainly through body movement" (Lust 7). The diverse styles and techniques are used "to develop flexibility, physical coordination, and control, and that provide tools for self-expression and creativity" (Lust 7). Lust also theorizes that physical theatre may be an "extension of mime that seeks a broader, freer vision by embracing other movement theatre genres" (Lust 7). By comparing it to mime, Lust is reinforcing the primary focus of the body and expression through movement, rather than through the voice or language.

Puerto Rican choreographer of dance-theatre Ana Sanchez-Colberg in her performance research entitled "Altered States and Subliminal Places: Charting the Road towards a Physical Theatre" describes how physical theatre is not only defined by "a set of stylistic features of a production which is bodily based, but rather one which extends discursive practices within the relative and tense relationship between the body/text/theatre reality which goes beyond mere representation via the body" (Sanchez-Colberg 40). She goes on to theorize that the body-focus of physical theatre stems from a devaluation of language based "on a mistrust of language to convey the condition of man-in-the world, a language which aims to articulate, and thus contain, universal truths without questioning the material practices which gave rise to that language" (Sanchez-Colberg 41). From that mistrust of language, the role of movement becomes primary. In contrast, looking at how Williams uses language as his primary approach in conveying 'universal truths,' there is a lack of focus on the physical expression of his characters, particularly Alma. Alma's separation of body and soul is reinforced by her reliance on

pursuing richness of mind and soul and her neglect of fulfilling the needs of her body and desires. Sanchez-Colberg mentions the work of Artaud, Brecht, and Ionesco in defining those who successfully deconstructed language in their work. Although these three major influencers of dramatic theory are not designated as working within the genre specifically and differed from one another philosophically, it can be argued that their work is identifiable within the lens of physical theatre as attempting to go through the physical to release the mind.

Antonin Artaud was a French experimentalist theatre artist. Artaud is most influential in his modern drama theory on the ‘theater of cruelty,’ which incorporates many of the qualities of physical theatre. “Artaud’s theatre is one of the phenomenal body, not only because the body is the centre of the *mise en scène*, but also because the function of this body is not to identify layers of signification within operative cultures (i.e. the domain of semiotics) but to aim to discover ‘language beyond words’, a metaphysics of the theatre via an immersion in the physical” (Sanchez-Colberg 43). With Artaud, the body is the center of the theatrical event, “not only because the actor’s body acts as a vessel for the theatrical experience, but also because it aims to create for the audience a sympathetic ecstatic experience” (Sanchez-Colberg 42). In *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud describes the importance of creating a physical language:

The stage is a concrete physical place which asks to be filled, and to be given its own concrete language to speak. I say that this concrete language, intended for the senses and independent of speech, has first to satisfy the senses, that there is a poetry of the senses as there is a poetry of language, and that this concrete physical language to which I refer is truly theatrical only to the degree that the thoughts it expresses are beyond the reach of the spoken language. These thoughts are what words cannot express and which, far more than words, would find their ideal expression in the concrete physical language of the stage. It consists of everything that occupies the stage, everything that can be manifested and expressed

materially on a stage and that is addressed first of all to the senses instead of being addressed primarily to the mind as is the language of words...creating beneath language a subterranean current of impressions, correspondences, and analogies. (Artaud)

Artaud believed the body could express thoughts that words could not. This fundamental emphasis and appreciation for physicality was evident in all of his expressionist and absurdist work.

Bertolt Brecht was a German poet, playwright, and director. His unique theory and practice of theatre has been widely influential. Brechtian methods force a “dichotomy between the self and the language structures in which the self operates” and “by revealing the social construction of language (and therefore its links to ideology) Brecht creates a self-consciousness of what had previously been considered natural, and by doing so creates a split between the body/self and the now objectified language/self” (Sanchez-Colberg 43). By separating the body and language into two separate selves, the body emerges as the center of the world of the play. “Following Brechtian models, the actions on stage are seen as an internalization of external agents impinging on the body”, thus reinforcing how in physical theatre, there is no such thing as movement-for-movement’s-sake (Sanchez-Colberg 46). Movement is reactionary and active. One of Brecht’s most important notions in his vocabulary was *Gestus*, or “the physical gesture which reveals a deeper social truth” (Thomson, Sacks 56). Brecht’s word *Gestus* can be achieved through “the mimicking of social relationships through detailed choices of movement during performance” (Ayers). Essentially, a performer would create movement or attitudes of expression that reflect the character’s situation or social status, while making sure to avoid stereotypical choices. By doing this, an actor approaches a character focusing on physical reactions, not necessarily psychological reactions. A common exercise practiced

in creating ‘gestus’ in rehearsal is called “communicating emotions,” where performers are challenged to create movements and gestures that embody an emotion and compare with one another to determine the clarity and effectiveness of what each conveys (Thomas).

Eugène Ionesco was a Romanian playwright who contributed greatly to the French Avant-garde theatre. Although Ionesco’s work focused mainly on using absurd, meaningless, and repetitive language to deconstruct and devalue the importance of language, his plays stressed similar themes and elements practiced within physical theatre, offering a unique perspective that aids to the commentary of finding new ways to express the human condition beyond traditional language. In Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros*, he focuses on the absurdity of the world through metatheatrical and philosophical means. Ionesco’s characters often were aware of themselves in a play and were intentionally present for a commentary to be made, much like the style of Brecht. Ionesco often comments on the tyranny of language and the ownership of knowledge. *The Lesson* is a prime example of Ionesco showing the exploitation of language as a tool for gaining power: “language loses its value as a form of rational discourse and conventional communication and becomes a weapon – both material and ideological – in the hands of those who manipulate it” (Unruh 134). Much like the Professor in *The Lesson*, Alma in *Summer and Smoke* exercises the pursuit of knowledge as a means to hold power, authority and control in her life. By leading a book club and teaching piano lessons to younger students, she attempts to enlighten and feed her mind while lacking in her pursuit of physical fulfillment. In Ionesco’s *The Chairs*, he employs more physical techniques to convey madness and deconstruction of the mind. This absurdist play has a

visual and aural impact as an old couple reminisces in a room filled with chairs, representing their guests. It is chaotic nonsense throughout the play, filled with pantomime and behavioral movement, ending in the suicide of the old couple as they jump outside a window from sheer bliss and resolve with life.

Aside from the influences of Artaud, Brecht, and Ionesco, other physical theatre practitioners have contributed to the impact of physical theatre as a genre. Some of these include Jerzy Grotowski, Etienne Decroux, Jacques Leqoc, Pina Bausch, Lloyd Newson, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and Anne Bogart. Each of these creators differs in philosophies and approaches but the commonalities are what have defined physical theatre. It is useful to touch on each of them briefly to understand the scope of physical theatre today.

Jerzy Grotowski was a Polish experimental theatre creator and theorist who influenced contemporary physical theatre with his practice. He was the mentor to Eugenio Barba, the leader and founder of Odin Teatret, and admits his primary influence was Stanislavski. Grotowski's work strove to transcend tradition: "those performance practices which escape the potentially numbing literalness of language and the word and which instead embrace a more elusive, visceral, and poetic language of the body, its sounds, and its movement" (Murray and Keefe 172). Grotowski taught movement and vocal exercises, which developed an actor's foundational faculties. "Grotowski was seeking psychophysical strategies leading to the annihilation of one's body's resistances" (Murray and Keefe 171). Grotowski explained that the actor's body in performance must be offered up to the public: "If this body restricts itself to demonstrate what it is – something that any average person can do – then it is not an obedient instrument capable

of performing a spiritual act” (Grotowski). Grotowski’s training as research was extremely physical but worked towards unifying a performer’s “a) voice and movement; b) body and mind; and c) emotions with both psyche and intellect” (Murray and Keefe 172). Grotowski embodied and promoted the foundations of modern physical theatre by focusing on the unity of body and soul and the exploration of the language of the body.

French dramatist Etienne Decroux is deemed the father of corporeal mime, “a technique, which allows the practitioner to learn, through a unique vocabulary how to express theatrically human behavior from its most practical aspects to its more abstract and spiritual ones. It is the art of the thinking body” (Wasson). Decroux’s theatre was highly based on the physicality of an actor and his tradition lives on today as training in many theatrical programs around the world. Jacques Leqoc, another French acting instructor, was known for his influence on mime and physical theatre. His work had a “strong emphasis on improvisational activity at the school that reinforces the central significance of play and students are introduced to physical exercises, masks and popular theatre that reinforce the distinction between playing and being” (Ryan, Ryan). Lecoq also believed in the usage of masks to amplify communication and physical aspects of a performer. Both Decroux and Lecoq strove to connect the body and mind through visual and interpretative approaches.

Pina Bausch was a German modern dance choreographer whose influence on the world of modern dance and physical theatre cannot be overestimated. Bausch’s work reacted to “the abstraction and – some would argue – vacant formalism embodied in the practices and circumscribed by the territories of modern dance” (Murray, Keefe 87). Bausch explored topics of pain, ecstasy, desire, death, sexuality, ethics, power,

entrapment, and redemption “through movement, collaboration, contact, and humour” (Murray, Keefe 88). Bausch’s focus on physicality exposes the pedestrian and ordinary aspects of body gesture and makes them spectacular and sublime. Her work through dance and movement is described as precise, light, athletic, and sensible. Bausch also choreographed by “consciously engaging with Brechtian doctrines of ‘gestus’ and ‘epic theatre’” (Murray, Keefe 90). Bausch redefines ‘gestus’ with contemporary dance choreography and appreciation. Lloyd Newson, the primogenitor of the term physical theatre, admitted that Bausch was his principal influence, describing her as: “Bausch understood that dance and linear narrative weren't always the best vehicles for discussing the human condition” (Wiegand). Bausch certainly outlined her own definition of physical theatre through her work, inspiring modern dance to mix with theatrical elements for a hybrid form of performance, and continued to uphold the goal of discovering a unity of body and soul through performance. Bausch created pieces that could resonate with her audiences; this is one of my major goals in creating my piece.

Australian director, dancer, and choreographer Lloyd Newson formed DV8 Physical Theatre in 1986. Since then, Newson has remained adamant about his work being undefined despite the preliminary definition of physical theatre. Like Bausch, “Newson has regularly returned to social, gender, and sexual orientation issues in his work, constructing and choreographing the physical language of his pieces from the individual with whom he works” (Murray, Keefe 92). In terms of physical syntax, Newson’s choreography and work has explored “daily corporeal behaviours, actions and gestures... and a repertoire of movements through fast and dangerous contact work, far removed from the manners, habits and rituals of the quotidian” (Murray, Keefe 93).

Newson's company DV8 has transformed over the last thirty years. "DV8's work inherently questions the traditional aesthetics and forms which pervade both modern and classical dance, and attempts to push beyond the values they reflect to enable discussion of wider and more complex issues" (Newson). Tim Etchells, a British artist, dramatist, and director, described DV8's early work:

The aesthetic of DV8 in these works is a kind of back to basics of the body... the self here is elusive. Located in the body and desire, but always shifting, disappearing, out of reach; the body observed, the body in struggle, the body blindfolded, the body in exhaustion, the body thrown, the comfort of the catch, the fear of the fall, the rejection of the drop, the body itself as witness, the body as dead weight. (Etchells)

Since then, the work of Newson and DV8 has striven to keep pushing the boundaries and is determined to be "radical and yet accessible" (Newson). In my own approach, I focus more on the accessibility than the radicalism explored by DV8.

Founded in 1959 by R.G. Davis, who studied French mime with Decroux, the San Francisco Mime Troupe (SFMT) has used physical theater in rebellion of society over the course of its existence as both an avant-garde theater and the collective it is now. Inspired by Brecht, Roman theater, satire, and Commedia dell'arte, the San Francisco Mime Troupe does not do simply use silent pantomime: "We mean 'mime' in the ancient sense: to mimic. We talk, we sing, we make a lot of noise. We are satirists, seeking to make you laugh at the absurdities of contemporary life and at the same time, see their causes" (San Francisco Mime Troupe). Their mission is to help audiences understand the disenfranchisement of society by exploring political, economic, and imperialist topics, as well as parodying social conventions: "We do plays that make sense out of the headlines by identifying the forces that shape our lives and dramatizing the operation of these giant forces in small, close-up stories that make our audiences feel the impact of political

events on personal life” (San Francisco Mime Troupe). R.G. Davis coined the term ‘guerilla theater’ as a cultural revolt: “There is a vision in this theater, and it is to continue...presenting moral play and to confront hypocrisy in the society” (Davis 132). Davis and the group’s influence grew as a countercultural practice: “Largely through the Mime Troupe's efforts, widely disseminated by means of national tours, the staging of improvisatory, didactic skits in public spaces became a staple of antiwar, women's liberation, and other social movement protests” (Doyle). When Davis was arrested in 1965 after the SFMT performed in a park without a permit, the government demonstrated their repression over the right of expression. The group’s “resistance and confrontational style, their uniting theater to revolution, and their refusal to be canceled, led to their successful challenges in court” (Barshak 1). The San Francisco Mime Troupe continues to produce political theater and performance art by illustrating social and political issues that resonate with their audiences. Much like the SFMT, my performance piece strives to expose social issues that women face today and invoke self-reflective resonance in my audience.

Similar to my use of Williams’ work, Anne Bogart, the leading practitioner of Viewpoints, uses and deconstructs canonical texts to show their relevance and connections to a modern audience. Bogart is known for directing adaptations of Greek myths, especially those that address war and challenge authority. Some of these examples include three plays that were staged at the Getty Villa in Los Angeles: a 2009 production of Jocelyn Clarke’s *Antigone*, a 2012 production of Jocelyn Clarke’s *Trojan Women* inspired by Euripides, and a 2014 production of *Persians* by Aeschylus and translated by Aaron Pochigian. She is also known for creating and directing plays that explore

American identity, often in collaboration with the playwright Charles Mee. One of these plays was *American Document*, which was initially developed as part of the Public Theater's Under the Radar Festival in 2010. *American Document* is told through well-known text and movement, including excerpts from the Declaration of Independence and Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass." Bogart's work also addresses the fact that creativity can stem from a reimagining of the past:

The quest for originality is vastly overrated and that the creative act does not happen in a vacuum... While it is true that ideas are everywhere, it is the act of processing and connecting ideas together that produces the kind of creative leaps that have impact in the world. It is not enough to copy, transform and combine, it is also necessary to be open to influence, to apply one's personal heat of interest and curiosity to the chosen material, to bring a point of view to the content and to experiment with endless variations. (Bogart)

Bogart has stated that everything she has created has been stolen in some way or another: "The task of an artists, much like that of a scientist, is to re-combine or edit existing materials in order to create something new. Ideas are adapted, extended or improved upon based upon the needs and circumstances of the time. Every work of art contains a recognizable reference to another work and this can be traced historically throughout the development of the arts and sciences" (Bogart). Bogart sees value in combining different ideas together. When adapting Mary Overlie's innovations with Viewpoints into her own system, Bogart found external inputs from her own experience provided new, dramatic results. Bogart admits that the connection of unrelated ideas in creative ways can result in something exciting: "Combining knowledge, synthesizing information and fitting things together that do not normally go together can lead to new perspectives on a subject. By fitting things together in unexpected ways that do not normally go

together I am allowing for new things to happen” (Bogart). This notion of adapting, creating, and molding a new product is why I have chosen Bogart’s method to emulate. In the next section, I will explain Bogart’s acting and directing approach of Viewpoints and how I personally utilized the elements to offer new perspectives on the relevance of Williams’ women, the double standard of females that still exists today, and the unification of body and mind through an exploration of the physical.

From this overview, it is clear that physical theatre has many variations of philosophies, methodologies, and practices; yet the end goal to create theatre that transcends boundaries and cultural differences remains. Physical theatre has often been seen as a theatre of rebellion: this insurgence stems from the need to break free of traditional forms of dance and theatre and discover new methods in exploring the human condition. By tracing the roots of physical theatre from the classical to the contemporary, a wide picture can be drawn of the significance and impact these practices have had on theatre history and how they continually challenge the expected. Out of this potential to break free from traditional approaches, I have chosen to explore physical theatre in my own journey of creation.

Socio-Cultural Contexts

Through theatre, we are invited to “connect to the world beyond, the world brought into the theatre by its audiences, and the histories and other contexts that inform the work in question” (Murray, Keefe 29). Theatre is fueled by culture. Theatre makers create and remake theatre to examine the social and cultural discourses of the world. We must acknowledge that there is meaning behind performance. Audiences should not act

as passive observers, but rather act as collaborators with all those involved towards a common goal of finding purpose and meaning behind something that is created. Physical theatre not only strives for a unity of body and mind from the creators and performers, but from the audience too. Cultural context has influenced the creation and definition of physical theatre by reinforcing the need for an audience to relate to and understand movement of the body. The body holds intrinsic characteristics that have been defined and fueled by changes in society, making our bodies' cultured entities. The body is often an object of judgment and analysis throughout culture, aiding in "the inseparability of bodily experience and cultural meaning" (Csordas 17). If physical theatre focuses on the exploration and exposure of the body, then a discussion on cultural influences must be addressed. Through the lens of physical theatre, "the body as both object and subject, and as something culturally inscribed rather than as physiologically and genetically given, has been central to contemporary theories of identity and within discourses of, for example, feminism, gender, sexuality, consumerism and popular culture" (Murray, Keefe 29).

Physical theatre has taken socio-cultural routes throughout its history that have been influenced by many political, historical, and theatrical movements, such as expressionism, postmodern dance, mime, commedia, symbolism, and fascism. In considering movement and gesture, there are cultural understandings of what something means. "In Bausch's work, an embrace, slap, kiss, or female performer draped around a man's neck like a scarf all speak the social and ideological conditions and specificities which have driven these embodied behaviours" (Murray, Keefe 91). Culture allows performers, interpreters, and audiences to register and understand an accepted code of movement. We understand what a hug, a push, a scowl, or a shrug may signify because of

the meanings placed on those actions in society and in culture. “An actor’s movements, mobility, gestures, facial expressions and postures can be constructed and controlled so as to communicate the meanings which are intended by script, director, and performer” (Murray, Keefe 30). Physical theatre must embrace these influences of human communication in conveying message and meaning. In exploring Viewpoints as my physical theatre approach, I am specifically choosing to work with a method that has not traditionally been driven by socio-political purposes but rather changes a neutral space into an aesthetic space. Since Viewpoints can be used towards creating any kind of performance, I hope to utilize the method to make my own socio-political commentary.

ii. Viewpoints

“Viewpoints is timeless – a system belonging to the natural principles of movement, time, and space” (Bogart, Landau 7). There are many different approaches to physical theatre. Viewpoints is a specific training technique for actors and ensembles to approach the fundamentals of performance and to create movement for the stage. Ultimately using the fundamentals of the practice, I will be creating my own original devised piece inspired by a scripted text. Originally developed by Mary Overlie as an improvisation technique in the 1970’s, Anne Bogart, American theatre and opera director, felt inspired by the Viewpoints and transformed the theory into a more practical approach for performance. Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, as well as other contributors and colleagues, believed in “nonhierarchical art and the use of “real time” activities which were arrived at through game-like structures or task-oriented activities” (Bogart, Landau 4). Their philosophies “rejected the insistence by the modern dance world upon social

messages and virtuosic technique, and replaced it with internal decisions, structures, rules, or problems” (Bogart, Landau 4).

Anne Bogart and Tina Landau’s *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition* provides a guide to the principles of choreography and performance in the methods of Viewpoints. Viewpoints is a “philosophy translated into a technique for (1) training performers; (2) building ensemble; and (3) creating movement for the stage” (Bogart, Landau 7). In approaching the techniques, the overall goal is to “learn to dance with the space, to be in dialogue with a room, to let movement evolve out of our surroundings” (Bogart, Landau 10). Viewpoints is comprised of both Physical and Vocal standards. The Physical Viewpoints include Tempo, Duration, Spatial Relationship, Kinesthetic Response, Shape, Gesture, Repetition, Architecture, and Topography. The Vocal Viewpoints are Pitch, Dynamic, Acceleration/Deceleration, Silence, and Timbre. The concentration of this chapter however surrounds movement and physical theatre; therefore the focus moving forward will primarily be on the Physical Viewpoints and the exercises and composition that can be devised and worked with from them.

Approaching the Viewpoints

In order to understand the basic concepts behind Viewpoints, there are fundamental exercises that Bogart and Landau suggest to begin with as a group. These initial exercises are not only geared towards loosening up the body, but they are also there to prepare the actors to act as an ensemble and to build trust and a sense of awareness. These exercises include Running Stretches, Sun Salutations, High Jumps, Five Images,

Run to Center, Twelve/Six/Four, The Chase, and Peripheral Vision. With this last exercise, Peripheral Vision, *soft focus* is introduced, which is “the physical state in which we allow the eyes to soften and relax so that, rather than looking at one or two things in sharp focus, they can now take in many” (Bogart, Landau 31). The goal of *soft focus* is to prepare the actor to use their whole body in gathering more information about their surroundings, thus listening and engaging more with others.

After the ensemble approaches these exercises, each individual Viewpoint should be introduced and worked on in succession to accumulate knowledge. Outlined in Bogart and Landau’s *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*, the first Viewpoint is encouraged to be Tempo, where “the focus is not on *what* the action is but on *how fast* or *slow* the action is performed: awareness of *speed*” (36). Next is Duration, which “asks you to be aware of *how long* you stay in that action and/or tempo” (40). After that is Kinesthetic Response, or “your spontaneous physical reaction to movement outside yourself”. By trusting in Kinesthetic Response, movement becomes a choice and a reaction fueled by “discovering action, not from psychology or backstory, but from immediate physical stimuli” (125). Once these first three Viewpoints have been introduced and explored, one has essentially worked on *how fast*, *how long*, and *when* to move. The fourth Viewpoint is Repetition. The focus of one’s movement is now dictated by “repeating someone else, either their path, their direction, their speed, their stops and starts, etc.” (43). Next is Spatial Relationship, which is an examination of the distance between bodies. When there is an increase or decrease of space, there is a creation of “dynamic, event, *relationship*” (44). Up until this point, these first five Viewpoints should be worked on within a grid.

When introducing the sixth Viewpoint, Topography, which is the landscape or floor pattern of the space, it is important to note that the grid itself is a topography and therefore the group has already been working closely with this Viewpoint. However, now is the time to transition towards other topographies by playing with height, depth, and shape. Next is the Viewpoint of Shape, or “the contour or outline the body (or bodies) makes in space” (9). All of Shape can be broken down as either “(1) *lines*; (2) *curves*; (3) a *combination* of lines and curves... and can either be *stationary* or *moving* through space” (9). The eighth Viewpoint is Gesture, or “a movement involving a part or parts of the body” (9). In terms of Gesture, there are behavioral, everyday actions and expressive movements, which convey feeling and meaning. Behavioral gestures can be connected to descriptive staging, where the presentation “repeats the external physical and vocal reality of the event being described” (146). In contrast, expressive gestures correlate to expressive staging, where one shows how an event or situation *felt* in the moment rather than staging the presentation with a realistic approach. The last Viewpoint is Architecture, which is “the physical environment in which you are working and how awareness of it affects movement” (10). Architecture can be broken down into solid mass, texture, light, color, and sound. After all the Viewpoints have been covered, an ensemble is encouraged to work with all of them being aware of how each influences the other. There are additional exercises addressed in Bogart and Landau’s guide that deepen the practice and incorporation of each Viewpoint into a whole.

Putting the Philosophy to Work and Practice

“The actors are no longer playing a psychology, but rather are playing *with* one another” (Bogart, Landau 118). Viewpoints emphasize the physicality of the actor, which

is key when working with the exercises and techniques of any physical theatre practice. Viewpoints “trains actors to remain awake to the most subtle shifts of their partners” (135). Performers “can learn to rely less on generating feeling out of *thin air*, and instead start trusting the simple physical actions that we live through onstage” (119). An important value of Viewpoints is that ‘everything happens for a reason’. Bertolt Brecht once said, “Do not move unless there is a reason to move, and desire for variety is not enough of a reason” (70). Viewpoints is about making choices about time and space and reacting; “every move is based upon what is *already* happening” (71).

Bogart and Landau encourage work with supplementary exercises to work out different approaches and connections to the work. These exercises can be used for rehearsal or to inspire movement and relationships for a final performance. Two of the exercises I find most important help to develop a character through Topography. The first exercise is called “Expressing Character”. Bogart and Landau explain the performer must choose a person and express her/his *character* in a floor pattern. This means using the space to map out the character in relation to their surroundings. The next exercise that follows is called “Life Story”, which requires the performer to express their life (or character’s life) through topography. I personally have worked with this exercise when I did a Viewpoints workshop in the fall of 2015 with director and educator Michael Osinski. In this workshop I chose to examine the last week of a character that I was playing: I created “a floor pattern which has a journey (a clear beginning, middle, and end), and with switches inside of it that correspond to *chapters* of your life” (56). This exercise proved to be extremely helpful in not only examining the journey a character

may take, but also how the character interacts with that journey physically and emotionally.

“Lane Work” is another exercise that can be extremely useful. Several members of the ensemble stand upstage in a horizontal line where they are encouraged to move only forward or backward reacting and listening to one another. The performers must only move within strict limitations of walking, running, jumping, dropping, and stillness. This exercise teaches the performer to go beyond the natural desire to entertain or impress and “trust simplicity and a minimalism of movement” and teaches “the necessity to commit fully to an action while simultaneously being able to adjust and change based upon new events” (69). The body is encouraged to be open and a new sense of freedom can be found in the starkness of the exercise.

Composition is the next step after an ensemble has worked with the individual Viewpoints and participated in exercises. “Composition is a natural extension of Viewpoints training. It is the act of writing as a group, in time and space, using the language of theater” (137). Composition can be applied toward making original work, toward rehearsing a play, or simply as practice. The key to Composition work is “to do a lot in a little time. When we are not given the time to think or talk too much (because someone has set a time limit), wonderful work often emerges; what surfaces does not come from analysis or ideas, but from our impulses, our dreams, our emotions” (138). Composition encourages the establishment of ‘Exquisite Pressure’, where “there is an attitude of necessity and respect for the people with whom you’re working, for the amount of time you have, for the room you work in, for what you’re doing with all of these” (138). When creating a Composition, there should be little prior discussion and

planning, but rather the mentality of just getting up and putting ideas on their feet. When using Composition to devise a work, the structural dimensions should be laid out clearly but should allow for discovery and invention. This technique in Viewpoints invites the body to be free to express physicality and experiment with movement and interaction.

Purpose

Anne Bogart and Tina Landau acknowledge that Viewpoints can be utilized and explored in a myriad of ways. Viewpoints does not denote a style. The work produced by Viewpoints can be formal and choreographic or naturalistic and behavioral. “To one extreme, you can use Viewpoints to find movement that you then set, independently from the text (as stated above). The text is put together with the set movement to create tension and juxtaposition. The text and movement become highly legible through their difference from each other. To the other extreme, you can simply rehearse a scene while maintaining awareness of the individual Viewpoints” (133). In an interview I conducted on March 15th, 2016 with Kate Marks, a film director who utilizes Viewpoints in her approach to directing, she described how Viewpoints serves her in many ways. “It is a concrete window to look through, a good starting point, a vocabulary where there is no wrong answer, and a language to help both a director and actor appreciate and understand each of their vulnerabilities more” (Marks). Marks stated that she finds Viewpoints to be the most effective at the “beginning of rehearsal process to build ensemble, play, grow, and create” (Marks). Viewpoints training can be used to create staging (blocking) for a production. The training can also be used to approach a text or script in a new perspective. Bogart and Landau admit that Viewpoints can stand-alone or contribute to other genres. Through the different possibilities of use and application, Viewpoints is a

physical technique that can be used to approach creative material practically, spiritually, and aesthetically.

iii. Contemporary Relevance

“To be *physical* in performance connects you to territories not regularly associated with theatre – with, for example, sport, dance and club culture and (more theoretically) with contemporary discourses that articulate and rehearse the nature of embodiment in a wide range of public, personal, and intellectual spheres (Murray, Keefe 17). Physical theatre can connect the viewer to an understanding of the body in much larger contexts than theatre alone. Looking through the lens of Viewpoints, these practices and values are everywhere. Viewpoints can be relatable outside of theatre. Bogart and Landau make some contemporary connections at the end of their guide, saying how Viewpoints can be found in sports, in waiting tables, and even in animals. In terms of sports, Viewpoints agrees with the philosophy of *In the Zone*, which is something often used to describe focus and openness in sports. Similarities between this sports analogy include an emphasis on relaxation, confidence, focus, effortlessness, self-containment, and joy. “Both sports and Viewpoints involve *play*, the kind of play young children engage in – that of reacting to something that happens in a spontaneous fashion, without self-consciousness, judgment or hesitation (Bogart, Landau 209). Ultimately, the lesson of Viewpoints “might be one of humility... the natural world itself holds such timeless and consistent patterns of behaviors. It is our struggle to name the patterns and then apply them to our art” (Bogart, Landau 210).

By creating performance with a physical theatre approach, there can be a unique outcome. Physical theatre is inspired by culture and by a goal of creating truth and expression, free from physical restraints or oppression. Physical theatre challenges those creating, performing, and watching to go beyond the accepted expressions of language and delve into a new realm where the body is telling the story. Physical theatre can break through expectations, stereotypes, and labels. Much of the contemporary work of physical theatre strives to address issues of the body and identity. As theatre has moved towards spectacle and commercialization, the goal of physical theatre has remained to engage the audience in finding expression of the body. In physical theatre, “the physical aspect, and the visual aspect of engaging the audience's kinesthetic empathy, and giving them a tantalizing experience visually, not just with the use of lights and set changes, but through the exchange between human beings that the audience is observing” (Eckersall 17) is crucial in providing more than just spectacle or entertainment. Physical theatre continues to be transformed today in meaningful performances and new approaches focused on creating through visual text. Viewpoints in particular creates its own language to be understood by the creators and interpreted by an audience. Viewpoints allows for creativity to be fostered in an ensemble and for the body to explore extremes of space and time and communication with other bodies. What better way to explore the themes of sexual and physical oppression that occur in *Summer and Smoke* and many of Williams' other plays than through physical theatre? By allowing Alma and the other female characters to express themselves with a freedom beyond physical restraint, the issues of their repressed bodies and buried desires can be exposed and liberated.

IV. Staging *Slip Like Shadows*

My performance piece, *Slip Like Shadows*, was featured in the Drew University Spring Dance Show called *Art for a Purpose, Dance for a Cause*.² The piece was choreographed throughout the spring semester in conjunction with the Choreography class at Drew University, taught by dance artist and professor Kimani Fowlin. As a choreographer in the class, I had mandatory showings of the piece's progress each week and received continual feedback. My goal in creating this piece was to foster a collaborative environment, interpret and create five modern versions of the five Williams' women presented, and use Viewpoints to build ensemble, devise a story through improvisation and exercises, and develop a common language and understanding of the principles. I strove to create my own hybrid form of performance with influence stemming from Viewpoints, contemporary dance, physical theatre, modern music, and the women of Tennessee Williams.

i. Why Now?

In constructing this thesis, it has been important to me to create a piece that would connect Williams' female characters with a modern audience. In combining their stories together through movement, I hoped to evoke these women's oppressed sexuality, mutual support, and liberation. The social concerns I hoped to raise with this piece are relevant on a college campus, as evidenced in my outreach to fellow peers and students, as well as sociological studies that echo these modern concerns. The issues of ownership of the female body, sexuality, and expression of desire are in constant conversation on college

² The performance was in the Kean Theatre at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. Performances ran from Wednesday, April 20th through Saturday, April 23rd 2016.

campuses in the United States. It seemed appropriate and invigorating to present my piece to an audience that consisted largely of students from my university.

ii. Collaboration Process

Anne Bogart once said, “Beginning is simultaneously exciting and harrowing. My blood churns rapidly; my body is full of energy and a certain tension. I feel awkward, ill equipped and uncomfortable but also grateful for the engagement. The effort is real” (Bogart 1). I felt a similar nervous vigor as I started this journey towards creating and choreographing my own theatrical piece for the first time. In retrospect, I did not find confidence in my abilities until we neared performance week. I was on an emotional rollercoaster, probably because I had taken on the positions of director, choreographer, performer, student, writer, sound designer, and costume designer of this piece. However, I firmly believe that I would not have found the success of the product without the collaboration, communication, and support from all those around me.

In reflecting on the collaboration process through the creation of the piece, I believe we built a powerful and cohesive ensemble of women. I cast four female performers and myself to each embody one of the Williams’ women studied in this thesis: Mikaela Simon as Blanche, Madeline Lederer as Catharine, Nycole Nurse as Myrtle, Michelle McQueen as Flora, and myself as Alma. In figure 1, the five of us women are brought together through our collective movement and stories.



Figure 1: The Women of Tennessee Williams. Photo by Lynne DeLade.

Our first rehearsal I conducted an introduction to the nine physical elements of Viewpoints: Tempo, Duration, Spatial Relationship, Kinesthetic Response, Shape, Gesture, Repetition, Architecture, and Topography. We worked on the Viewpoints grid, exploring each element individually and then in combination. By the end of the rehearsal, we had created several compositions through improvisation that explored all of the Viewpoints at various stages. As the process of choreographing and collaborating went on, I faced the challenge of not always having an outside, critical perspective of what we were creating because I myself was in the performance. Thus, we video-recorded every composition and improvisation, as well as alternated stepping out to observe the others working. After becoming familiar with Viewpoints as an ensemble, we discussed each individual Williams' character that we would be portraying. We examined the direct text,

the background and story line of each character, and discussed how we felt we could relate to these women.

It was invaluable to receive weekly feedback from my professor Kimani Fowlin and fellow choreographers in my Choreography class; they provided that outside eye of direction and critique that is crucial in creating a performance. However, in applying their feedback, I found that the piece began to morph into more of a modern dance with Viewpoints elements rather than a physical theatre performance with elements of Viewpoints as I had originally intended. Yet this change in direction proved to our advantage because I believe the piece became more relatable.

I believe one of our biggest accomplishments working as an ensemble of five women was finding ourselves in the characters as a collective group of empowered women. Mikaela Simon, the performer who embodied Blanche DuBois, stated in an interview³ a week after we closed the show: “I think that this piece accomplished everything it was meant to. It showed characters that we are all familiar with in a way that they were all tied together, making the audience really see the connections between them. The layering on and subsequent shedding of society's pressures, as portrayed with the interactions with the shadows, created a powerful dynamic and allowed the characters to complete a gorgeous and identifiable arc that really hit home with me.” All of us performers found ourselves having deeply emotional responses to the piece leading up to and in performance. On closing night, I had a very personal, poignant last moment, realizing the experience had come to an end. As the lights went down, I felt a catharsis in myself: not only had Alma found a release at the end of the piece, but I felt I did as well.

³ See Appendix C for full interview.

In one of our last rehearsals where we added the final moments of dialogue and release, Mikaela turned to us once we finished with tears in her eyes. She confessed that her last lines, “I want to breathe again,” struck her as being particularly relevant to how she has felt since being at college. Nycole had a similar reaction as she slowly walked off after her solo as Myrtle. She said that embodying the movement that accompanied her recorded suddenly overwhelmed her. After our opening night performance, the five of us women ran off after our bow to the backstage area and immediately enveloped one another in a hug of sweat and tears. The five women who embodied the shadow figures also joined in and as I looked up, there was an energy of relief, hope, and excitement that had been unparalleled leading up to this point.

iii. Choreography, Design, and Performance

My choices in choreography⁴ strove to uphold my research. Each of us five performers worked towards constantly bringing forth our characters and ourselves. We incorporated walking on the Viewpoints grid into the piece to give us a basis for physical restraint. We continually came back to this element as it represented order, confinement, and expectation. The black shadow figures, who I cast as five women covered in all black covering their entire bodies, represented oppressive forces reinforcing expectations of femininity. The figures followed us on the grid at the beginning of the piece and dressed each of us in 1940s Southern dresses. The gestures and quality of movement mostly stemmed from working with improvisation from Viewpoints. In Figure 2, this pose was devised one rehearsal when we were exploring where on our bodies we have personally

⁴ A detailed script of the performance can be found in Appendix B.

felt oppressed by society. We utilized the elements of Repetition and Duration from Viewpoints during the execution of this pose in the final product.



Figure 2: Gesture of Oppression. Photo by Lynne DeLade.

We strove to convey suppression that transforms into exploration that finally transforms into liberation. I compiled direct text to tell each woman's individual story. Our voices were recorded to represent the separation of body and mind and the loss of ownership over our own voices. When we find our voices in the final moments of release, we have found strength and a unification of body and mind.

The design elements all strove to represent and uphold the tone throughout the piece. In terms of the light design, designer Zoe Camp reflected on her choices⁵: "I looked towards starkness to help give an emotional embodiment of the struggles the characters were going through and when each girl had their own individual solo I looked

⁵ See Appendix C for full comment.

towards a pink to red color shift that showed the progress of building strength amongst each character so that by the end there was a shift to a bright white pink color to show strength having been gained.” In figure 3, the cyc is a bright pink as Zoe describes to represent a finding of strength. The shadow figures are dimly lit upstage and the focus is clearly on the five women as they release themselves from the oppressive forces behind them.



Figure 3: The Presence of the Shadows. Photos by Lynne DeLade.

Zoe incorporated shadows and variation to help build the eeriness of the beginning grid-work to the climax to the release. I chose to approach the costume design myself instead of assigning another student designer because I had a very clear image of the Southern style dresses that I wanted to represent us as Williams’ women. We experimented with several different options for each woman, trying to find the appropriate tone, length, and style for each character. We also had the added challenge of finding dresses that could

easily be put on and removed onstage. After photographer Lynne DeLade shot our production stills, we decided the day before previews to substitute two of the dresses for better options. In figure 4, you see both Nycole and myself wearing brighter, more colorful dresses.



Figure 4: Backstage after opening night performance. Photo by Sabine Ready.

To contrast the traditional dresses, I wanted the performers in simply a black sports bra and black dance shorts, exposing the majority of the body, at the beginning before the figures dress them and again at the end when we women remove the dresses and release ourselves from the oppression they represent (see figure 3 above). When I continue developing this piece, Kimani Fowlin suggests, “I would love to see more exposure of the body. Experiment with nudity. This is a very vulnerable and brave piece so go further and commit fully” (Fowlin).

I also chose to personally mix and compile the music for the piece. My song choices all came from film soundtracks. I searched to find music that spoke in some way towards themes and tones of danger, oppression, struggle, empowerment and liberation. In the final composition, I included “Grievous Injury” and “66 Million Girls” from Thomas Neman’s soundtrack for the documentary *He Named Me Malala*, “Any Other Name” by Thomas Newman and Nikolaj Bloch from the soundtrack for *American Beauty*, and “Flickers” and “Lost It To Trying” by Son Lux featured in the soundtrack to *The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby*. I felt that these pieces of music aided in creating a story of struggle and finding strength.

iv. Reactions, Responses, and Reflection

In sharing the feedback⁶ and thoughts I received from those directly involved and audience members, I first want to look at the perceptions of what this piece accomplished. Madeline Lederer, who portrayed Catharine Holly, reflected, “I think this piece was a good demonstration of the breaking of gender norms and finding strength and empowerment within our femininity, instead of trying to be masculine or conform to norms.” Light designer Zoe Camp commented, “Overall I think the piece accomplished telling a story of how women still struggle today with feeling invalid and taken advantage of, but in a tasteful and meaningful way.” Audience member and dancer at Broadway Dance Center Gabby Cogan discussed her thoughts with me after the Thursday performance: “Your piece showed that vulnerability is okay. It shows that feminism transcends gender. I found myself relating to the piece not because I was a woman, but because I am a human. I also think it showed that being quiet can be powerful. I thought

⁶ See Appendix C for full reactions and responses.

the progression of the vocal recording allowed the sentiments to resonate more when the women found their voices.” I interviewed Ronald Kitts, an audience member and choreographer at Drew University, after the Saturday matinee: “The success of the piece was in utilizing the strength and vulnerability, which you don’t often see in female empowerment pieces because there is a fear to be vulnerable and a fear to proliferate the myth that women are intrinsically weak.” Christine Troha, an audience member on the Saturday matinee reflected, “I was affected to an almost unsettling amount by this provocative piece. The dancers, movement, music, lighting, and costumes combined to make it feel as though you were watching a haunting dream (nightmare?) of Tennessee Williams' female characters. I especially liked the voice-overs because they were so personal to each dancer. I cried twice during the piece because I felt reflections of my own life or women I know personally. When the dancers shed the dresses at the end it was like they were molting and it was somewhat hopeful. I thought it was very beautiful.”

Next I want to look at constructive feedback I received for improving and developing upon this piece for the future. Kimani Fowlin advised, “I would love to see execution of the Southern accents potentially morphing into the modern individual woman’s own voice. This piece’s entry point is the South during the 1940s/50s – take us through time and a woman’s life journey to 2016. I would love to see more women and women of all kinds of nationalities. I would also love more from the figures/shadows. The strong elements can go even further from their sneaking out, their looming ubiquitous presence, and their manipulation. I think you could really find a strong feminist voice” (Fowlin). I find this last comment particularly intriguing. When I first

approached my ideas for the piece, I originally planned on casting the shadow figures as all men; however, I chose to cast females to show them as a reflection of the main women. They represented the “shadowy people” Alma describes when she tells John she needs to find her strength. They act as oppressive forces stuck in a cycle of being complicit and complacent. I do think however that exploring these roles as men would transform the meaning and potentially offer new ways of using their presence and manipulation through the piece. I was also advised by Kimani Fowlin and Chris Ceraso, my advisor for this thesis, to work towards improving both the sound quality and vocals within the performance. I would also want to make the transition from recordings to live spoken word stronger and more of an arc.

As I reflect on the challenges and successes of the performance, I believe this piece is just starting its journey. I feel in many ways that we only scratched the surface of the possible connections between Williams’ work, Viewpoints, and current female issues. In moving forward, I want to expand the ensemble to incorporate more voices and experiences of both the Williams’ women and modern day women. By adding more perspectives, a wider view of the social issues women have faced over time can be explored. I would also like to build more on the notions of identity and critique that can be achieved with Viewpoints. I see a major success of the piece being that it was relatable and accessible to a modern audience and I attribute a lot of that success to the common vocabulary we established with Viewpoints. I would like to go further with Viewpoints in developing the movement to convey agency and emotion through the body.

V. Conclusion

Looking at my research and performance as a whole, I want to conclude that Williams' women resonate with an audience today because we still exist in a world that experiences a double standard regarding the expectations of female sexuality. I think that through my approach of Viewpoints, I was able to communicate the stories of these characters, as well as the stories of women today by building an emotional bridge between the two. I believe that through our exploration as a collaborative ensemble, we united the body and spirit both onstage and for ourselves in this process. We allowed ourselves to discover liberation from oppression through movement. I think this work has provided a foundation for further research and development of the performance we created.

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Appendix A
 “College Students’ Experiences with the Hookup Culture”

This appendix shows a personal interview I conducted on my personal Facebook⁷ on April 27th, 2016. Below includes my original status and the subsequent comments posted through direct message as well as direct comments to the status. The goal of this interview was to receive insight from my college-aged peers on their experiences and views of the double standard embedded in hookup culture.

Original status: 4.27.16 at 4:53 pm.

To all of my friends in college (or recently graduated), if you have a minute or four, comment below (or direct message me) any insight or personal experience with the double standard on college campuses surrounding the hookup culture. I am making a claim in my thesis that the hookup culture (typically hetero-normative but not limited to) degrades female sexuality and freedom of expression by evaluating men more positively than women who share the same sexual lifestyle and freedom. What do you see specifically, or have experienced yourself, that relates to this? Thanks.

Direct Message: Junior at Drew University 4.27.16 at 4:56 pm.

yo i just saw your status
 literally the most valid thing ever
 basically (as you probably know) i have a (presumably bad) habit of hooking up with random people, and people will totally judge me afterwards. the response is mostly that i should value myself more and not be such a slut

even if all i ever do is make out with people, the general consensus is that i'm easy and will do anything with anyone who asks, which honestly isn't the case, but because i'm playing the field at the moment, everyone gets super angsty about self esteem and self worth and all that stuff

any guys i know that do the same thing are mostly applauded by their guy friends because they're seen as "champs" for getting girls into bed that they have no intention of ever talking to again. if i do that with a guy, even if there isn't sex involved, it's seen as slutty or promiscuous.

Direct Message: Senior at Hampshire College 4.27.16 at 5:08 pm.

In response to your status: I often hear some of my male friends discuss women they're interested but aren't interested in pursuing a relationship with due to the fact that said women have had sex with a lot of other guys. What's interesting i that these same guys don't think it's wrong for a woman to date a guy who's slept around along. There seems to be a kind of belief that women who have a lot of casual sex are somehow tainted by these

⁷ Outreach to 1,524 Facebook friends

habits, and unworthy or incapable of being monogamous. I won't venture to guess at the source of these misogynistic beliefs, but it does feed into the negative stigmas and shame culture associated with female sexuality among (but certainly not exclusive to) young people today. Hope this helps.

Direct Message: Sophomore at Drew University 4.27.16 at 5:14 pm.

On double standards, I see no such thing on this campus. Just people being themselves. For my personal thoughts, I look down on either sex being sexually active. Each is equal in my eyes. For expressing my own sexuality, I'm a rare case who is celibate. So I have no fear of judgment or labeling.

Direct Message: Freshman at DePaul University 4.27.16 at 5:34 pm.

Hey grace! Here are some of my thoughts for your thesis. I hope this helps!

As a man I notice that there is a hierarchy in the hookup culture. The higher "body count" a man has then the more masculine or superior he is. If a man is a virgin then he is shamed: he's either ugly or has a small penis.

For girls I feel like it is the opposite. If girls have sex then they are sluts and if they are virgins then they are prude.

For me I've noticed the double standard when my father compares me to my sister. My father often hints at the fact that he does not mind if I have sex yet he doesn't want to think about his "little girl" have sex with her boyfriend.

I'm not sure if that helps but I thought maybe you could use a perspective for a man!
Good luck!!

Direct Message: Freshman at Drew University 4.27.16 at 5:38 pm.

HI IM ANSWERING YOUR POST. all of my guy friends, and some of the girls (one in particular) have told me that hooking up with eric⁸ is self-destructive and something i'm doing that's "unhealthy for my emotional being" and can really hurt me. a few of them have called me a hoe for doing that and are incredibly judgmental about the situation and look down upon me every time they find out i've hooked up with him again. those are the friends that dont know eric but only know me. the friends that eric and i have in common dont ever say anything to him about us hooking up and see it to be normal, but will constantly question if i am ok and why i'm doing this. i remember someone who knows him and is friends with me told me to think hard about it and understand what i was getting myself into. did she say this to him? NOPE. I LIKE HOOKING UP WITH HIM. IT IS FUN. I HAVE A GOOD TIME. I DO NOT LIKE HIM, HE DOES NOT LIKE ME. I AM HAPPY AND CONFIDENT AND I LOVE MYSELF AND I WANT EVERYONE TO STOP JUDGING ME BECAUSE THEY THINK I CANT HANDLE

⁸ Name of male partner has been changed

IT EMOTIONALLY. JUST BECAUSE YOU GUYS CANT EMOTIONALLY HANDLE IT DOES NOT MEAN I CANT. YOU DONT KNOW WHAT GOES ON IN MY HEAD. THANKS.

Comment on Status: Withdrew sophomore year from Drew University 4.27.16 at 5:57 pm

(off the record; I was gonna direct message this response but then I realized I would just be reinforcing the double standard that women should be fearful of having an opinion on sexuality. So I decided I would leave it here. Good luck tomorrow! I'm so excited for the work you have put into your thesis. This topic is real.) I am a white, twenty year old, bisexual woman, living in a greater metropolitan area. I attended Drew University for three semesters and have most definitely seen and experienced this double standard first hand within my time spent in college but also within each individual chapter in my life. Throughout my adolescence the concepts of "purity" and "virtue" were placed upon my sexuality and intertwined to represent my self worth as a woman. Meanwhile, I observing my heterosexual male classmates find their "self-worth" and "masculinity" within the development of their own sexual experiences. When I entered college this standard continued however I met many other women that had similar experiences and for the first time I was able to discuss human sexuality within a communal atmosphere. Although there was more freedom to delve into conversations about sexuality, a subconscious standard still remained within the social constructs of my life; men gaining affirmation through their sexual experience and women gaining respect through their abstinence. Upon leaving college I faced a much more independent lifestyle than I had ever known in my life. It was only in this place that I was finally able to disregard the social constructs I had been raised to believe and finally explore my sexuality in the way that suited my interests. Today I am a self-sufficient woman with a healthy grasp on my own sexuality and although I believe there is a sexual revolution happening within the United States at present, I still hear words like slut, whore, prude, tease, etc. which further reinforces that women are still under the microscope of these social constructs. I see in my own life that women live within a catch 22, shamed if they do and shamed if they don't. I look forward to the day that sexuality and self-worth can truly be separate within our minds eye so that people of all genders could own their sexuality without fear of backlash alienation, or double standards.

Direct Message: Senior at Bowling Green State University 4.27.16 at 7:57 pm.

Hello my love!!!! Okay so WRT⁹ your status/claim - and I just wanna say I don't wanna post this on ur FB bc of certain prying eyes from HS who have since defriended me as well as my mom, who lurks, with whom I would rather have this convo abt me & sex organically. K so when I engaged in hookup culture I think I do it as we're told men traditionally do - without reservation, with no regards to feelings, based only on sexual impulse - which is empowering for me and other women I know who consider sex in a similar way. When I had sex, my friends that I told were overwhelmingly supportive, and I knew I was safe and happy with the decision but I still suffered from some self inflicted

⁹ WRT stands for "with regard to"

shame and embarrassment that I think was only born out of the way society regards women who have sex lives without commitment. Within a week of the experience, though, and now months since, u feel empowered about my decision which is demonstrative of the influence of feminist theory and culture on my life. But there IS a stigma around girls & hookup culture. I can only imagine how that extends to women who don't identify as heterosexual as I do - but I also attend a university with a huge hookup/sex culture where girls are regularly shamed on social media (crush and confession accounts) and where gay ppl¹⁰ are still considered "deviant" - a gay guy was just jumped by four frat dudes this weekend - and the Greek life culture doesn't make things any better. Certain frats are regularly avoided by me and my friends when we consider going to parties bc they're known to use roofies and other date rape drugs. Furthermore, campus culture continually victim blames and universities (mine notwithstanding) where the admin refuses to help women/men get their rapists/assailants adequate punishment. Okay I think that's all???

Direct Message: Senior at Miami University 4.27.16 at 9:59 pm

Hi Babe! So, I often get degraded by others because of my satisfaction with the hookup culture. In my personal view, I view "love" as the words and emotions shared in an exclusive relationship. I view sex as a natural need generated by hormones and almost animal-istic needs. So, I see casual sex as NBD¹¹ and a way of expressing my sexuality, but, I have been called "easy" and a whore in the past (specifically by ryan) for embracing this lifestyle. Not sure if that was what you were looking for but I hope it helps. I believe a lot of power can come to women out of owning their sexuality and natural need for sex/hookups. I believe that we should look past the normative "christian" values of sex as told to us in a book (the bible) which none of us have any proof to its validity. I believe we should have the introspective power to look at our own views of what "love" is, and not associate it with hookup culture.

Direct Message: Senior at John Carroll University 4.30.16 at 12:49 pm.

why do girls that hook up get called hoes and bros stay bros?! Also, if a guy hooks up with a girl high fives all around. If a girl hooks up with a guy she spends the next day worrying about who knows and what is being said. In other words, people knowing a guy has hooked up with a girl helps his reputation but if a girl hooks up with a guy 75% of the time it doesn't help her.

Direct Message: Senior at Drew University 5.2.16 at 10:13 am.

I wanted to take the opportunity to join in this discussion and be as candid as I want, like so many of my peers have been in their responses. I have *always* felt a double standard in regards to my expressions of sexuality throughout my life. Growing up I often attributed my lack of sexual freedom to the Catholic guilt instilled upon me by my upbringing. I was the oldest girl of four and a presumed pillar of morality towards my other siblings. I

¹⁰ ppl stands for "people"

¹¹ NBD stands for "no big deal"

went to Catholic school for fourteen years. I attended mass regularly and was even involved in my parish's youth group that practically shoved abstinence down everyone's throats. But I began to realize as I was nearing the end of my high school experience that my sexual guilt was not entirely from my religious upbringing, but stemming from something more inherent, something perpetuated in society. I realized the double standard was inherent towards my gender. As a young woman, I went off to college with the notion that as a girl, if I hooked up with too many people, I would be seen as a slut, and if I didn't hookup with anyone, I would be called a prude or seen as the good little Catholic girl. I felt this dichotomy haunting my every move. My first year, fellow freshmen shamed me after making out with a guy I met at a dance club in Brooklyn: one turned to me that night and said, "You're literally such a slut". I have been constantly shamed for the clothing I wear out, the pictures I take, and the way I dance at parties. I have been criticized for accepting drinks from guys at bars and body shamed by other girls. I recently witnessed a friend being called a desperate thot¹² for moving too fast with a guy (with no comment about the guy) and another friend called a whore because she slept with a guy who was in a relationship (again, with no comment about the guy). It is SO frustrating when I overhear my guy friends in the rugby suite at Drew University saying "that girl is a psycho once you sleep with her" but praising one another for "getting laid". I see men being regarded with a higher favor than women for enjoying the same sexual lifestyle. This inequality needs to stop.

Direct Message: Senior at Drew University 5.2.16 at 9:07 pm

The hookup culture is generally why you see so many unreported cases of sexual assault. It creates a grey area because people are expected to take part in this. Because of that double standard, we see a major gap of assaults towards men and assaults towards women being reported because you have that kind of submissive/dominant culture propagated between the two genders. It overlays a general discomfort with owning your own sexuality and being aware of the differences between consensual and nonconsensual sex.

Direct Message: Junior at Drew University 5.2.16 at 9:42 pm

My freshman year when I started hooking up with guys, basically all of my friends from back home had still never done stuff. When I got a boyfriend pretty early on my freshman year, I confided in my friend back home that I was having more sexual experiences. She called me a slut and told me people would think badly of me and I was like no I am dating him and she still insisted that was no excuse. I stopped being friends with her because I realized that slut shaming is not something I tolerate in a friend. I find hooking up with guys empowering for the most part. As long as I have a respectful partner, I feel confident in myself when I am in the hookup phase and I feel I have control of my body. However, I have had disrespectful partners before – one guy my freshman year told me one night we were hanging out pretty late that I could only continue to stay in his room if I sucked his dick.

¹² Thot stands for "that hoe over there"

Appendix B
Slip Like Shadows performance script

SLIP LIKE SHADOWS

Text taken from

SUMMER AND SMOKE by Tennessee Williams
SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER by Tennessee Williams
KINGDOM OF EARTH (THE SEVEN DESCENTS OF MYRTLE) by Tennessee Williams
A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE by Tennessee Williams
“THE IMPORTANT THING” by Tennessee Williams

Adapted by Grace Leneghan

CHARACTERS:

ALMA

CATHARINE

MYRTLE

BLANCHE

FLORA

[5] FIGURES DRESSED IN BLACK

Text written in *italics* explains physical movement and intention.

Text written in **bold** indicates recorded voice over.

Text written in regularly indicates live spoken word.

I. THE SHADOWY PEOPLE

“Grievous Injury” composed by Thomas Newman begins as dim, shadowy lights come up. Individually each woman enters and begins walking on the Viewpoints grid. The women are dressed in a black bra and black dance shorts, exposing skin and body shape. One by one, a figure dressed in black enters to follow each of the women. They each carry a 1940s Southern style floral dress. Both the woman and figure stop. The figure begins to slowly dress the woman as she faces forward.

As soon as the dress is on, the woman begins walking once more but with more realized tension and fear as the figure follows closely behind.

Improvising with Viewpoints on the grid, focusing specifically on the elements of Duration and Tempo, the women explore their path knowing the figure is always behind them. There is a change in music to “Any Other Name” composed by Thomas Newman. The figures melt away offstage, leaving the women to find their way into an upstage horizontal line. The women face forward, take a deep breath, and begin to walk to form a diagonal line from DSR to USL. Each woman, as her voice-over plays, embodies their own Viewpoints-devised Gesture one by one...

CATHARINE

Suddenly last winter I began to write my journal in the third person.

FLORA

There was no relaxation in Flora, none of the softness and languor which he found physically interesting in girls.

ALMA

The girl who said “no” – she doesn’t exist any more, she died last summer.

BLANCHE

People don't see you – men don't – don't even admit your existence unless they are making love to you.

MYRTLE

I've always been weak compared to men. I think that's natural, don't you?

Together the women reach for something not quite attainable. There is cyclical movement representing the cycle of oppression they find themselves trapped in. As they come to the floor, their collective anguish and struggle is made clear. They continue to reach out in hopes of grasping on to the courage they need to continue. When they stand again they revert back to grid work.

The music changes to "Flickers" by Son Lux. The women abruptly break into a pose together, devised through Viewpoints, depicting how their bodies and minds have been repressed sexually or emotionally.

They free themselves from this pose after it is repeated and again desperately reach for freedom. They pull and lean on one another for support, yet still are stuck in a cycle.

MYRTLE breaks free of the group for a moment, but comes running back in fear. The other four women catch her as she falls into their arms. The women rock her back in a nurturing manner, but propel her forward, giving her the strength to confess her story.

II. THE STORY OF MYRTLE

MYRTLE is left alone onstage where accompanied with her voice-over, she both literally and figuratively embodies her story through movement.

MYRTLE

Someone once told me they's two ways to stop hysterics in a woman. One way is to give her a slap in the face and the other way is to lay her. Sometimes you got to do both. I've always been weak compared to men. I think that's natural, don't you? Yet I still own my self-respect an' decency as a woman!

She leaps to break free but falls to the ground. She slowly gets up and walks off, holding her body feeling vulnerable and abused.

III. THE STORIES OF FLORA AND CATHARINE

FLORA runs on as the song abruptly changes tone. CATHARINE runs on following. Their duet shows mutual struggle and support. FLORA's voice-over contains stillness to juxtapose her wild spirit.

FLORA

He could not imagine me lying passively still and quietly submitting the way he thought a girl should to a man's embrace. But I would not accept it, none of the ways and means. The most important part of me was the most pure.

CATHARINE's voice-over tells the story of when she was raped in the woods. FLORA embodies her inner thoughts through her movement as CATHARINE stands facing out, removed and silent.

CATHARINE

Somebody took my arm and said, "I'll drive you home". We stopped... stopped! – I said, "What for?" – He didn't answer, just struck a match in the car to light a cigarette in the car and I looked at him in the car and I knew "what for!" I think I got out of the car before he got out of the car, and we walked through the wet grass to the great misty oaks.

As CATHARINE's voice-over ends, both her and MYRTLE turn to face one another at opposite ends of DS and slowly walk to cross and exit offstage. However, as soon as MYRTLE crosses CATHARINE, she begins to run.

As MYRTLE runs off DSR, ALMA and BLANCHE run on from USR. MYRTLE runs back on and leaps horizontally into their arms. They catch her and release her into a drop that propels them all to roll over to extend to the left. They roll the other direction and push out as if ridding themselves of something affecting them. As they stand, MYRTLE slowly walks off.

IV. THE STORIES OF BLANCHE AND ALMA

BLANCHE's voice-over begins and her movement is both self-conscious and feminine Her sharp movements reaching out show resistance and yet resolve. ALMA stands still throughout her movement.

BLANCHE

I was never hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft- soft people have got to court the favor of hard ones. Have got to be seductive – put on soft colors... and glow – make a little – temporary magic just in order to pay for- one night's shelter!

When BLANCHE's voice-over ends, ALMA's begins and she repeats the same combination of movement, echoing BLANCHE's experience and emotion. These women are deeply connected.

ALMA

Oh I suppose I am sick! One of those weak and divided people who slip like shadows among you solid strong ones. But sometimes, out of necessity, we shadowy people take on a strength of our own.

As ALMA's voice-over ends, both women run in opposite directions forward and backward as if a force is pulling them, encouraging them to break free of the cycle of oppression. Symbolizing their attempt to find freedom, they speak out loud. The voice-overs have represented a restriction on their own natural voices. They have kept them silent in reality. By speaking aloud here, BLANCHE and ALMA realize they have the power to fight and find unity and liberation.

BLANCHE

I've run for protection –

ALMA

The girl who said no –

BLANCHE

Because it was storm –

ALMA

She doesn't exist anymore –

BLANCHE

And I was caught in the centre –

ALMA

She died last summer –

BLANCHE and ALMA turn to look at one another.

V. THE COLLECTIVE

The music changes to "Lost it to Trying" by Son Lux. MYRTLE, CATHARINE, and FLORA all enter from the sides. This section of the piece is much different in tone. The music is quicker and builds to a much-awaited climax. The movement reflects this faster struggle as if they are leading up to break free. The movement is cyclical and the women move in and out of fluid shapes, breaking from the confines of the grid. All five women are fighting the oppressive forces that have repressed their bodies and freedom of expression. They pull, they push, they run, they reach – all towards their liberation. In their last cycle of oppression, they repeat movement as the five black figures silently return, walking slowly on from the wings and forming a semi-circle upstage of them. There is a final moment when the movement of the five

women slowly pushes forward and suddenly ALMA breaks free. The other four women, including the five figures, stare at her in shock.

VI. THE LIBERATION

ALMA slowly begins to take off her dress. She drops it to the ground and steps forward, leaving it behind her. As she steps forward, the other four women break from their pose in the circle to face ALMA. One by one, each of the four women slowly walk downstage to meet ALMA in a line. Once they have all gotten there, they begin to undress themselves, kicking or dropping the dress behind them. Suddenly the figures walk forward in unison to come behind each of the women. They each place a hand in front of each of the women's mouths. In rejection, the women push their hands down and the figures recoil backwards, grabbing each of the dresses. In movement, the women lean on one another for support one last time before finding their individual strength. The figures stand in a horizontal line across upstage and the women confront them one last time, avoiding their grasp. Each woman begins doing her gesture from the beginning of the dance repeatedly as the figures revert back to grid work and slowly walk off, defeated. Each woman repeats her gesture but the final time breaks free from whatever was confining her within that physical movement. There is one more collective movement together to show solidarity. Each woman speaks one last time.

FLORA

I will live my own life!

BLANCHE

I want to breathe again!

CATHARINE

I knew "what for!"

MYRTLE

I own my self-respect!

ALMA

Because sometimes we shadowy people take on a strength of our own.

ALMA walks forward and the lights fade.

END.

Appendix C
Reactions and Responses to *Slip Like Shadows*

This appendix includes an interview with Kimani Fowlin¹³, several responses from students involved in the process when asked about their challenges and accomplishments, and several reactions from audience members.

Interview with Kimani Fowlin

Conducted May 2nd, 2016 by Grace Leneghan

G: In moving forward with the piece, where do you see the weaknesses and how can those elements be improved?

K: Make sure to have the sound quality and audio as strong as the movement. Specifically look at the transition from vocal recordings to live spoken word. We are being taken on a journey of empowerment and we want to feel that freedom. Having the entire piece spoken live would be incredibly powerful. Strengthen the text more to give a fuller picture to bring out more than just a glimpse of these characters. We really want to see who each of them are. By intensifying the vocabulary, the movement will go deeper. This is only the beginning of a larger journey of exploration.

G: In terms of choreography, what would you like to see more of?

K: More partnering, more lifts. Be more daring. Explore what makes the audience uncomfortable. I would love to see more exposure of the body. Experiment with nudity. This is a very vulnerable and brave piece so go further and commit fully. In performance and execution of the choreography, you and your performers need to find the delicate balance of pushing and holding, of soft versus powerful movement. Find those dynamics because that is the unique language of the piece. Your ensemble needs to be present and focused. I would love to see execution of the Southern accents potentially morphing into the modern individual woman's own voice. This piece's entry point is the South during the 1940s/50s – take us through time and a woman's life journey to 2016. I would love to see more women and women of all kinds of nationalities. I would also love more from the figures/shadows. The strong elements can go even further from their sneaking out, their looming ubiquitous presence, and their manipulation. I think you could really find a strong feminist voice going with your initial instinct to cast them all as men.

G: Any thoughts on observing my process of creation and collaboration?

K: You doubted yourself with choreographing something outside of what you are used to creating and now you can put that self-doubt to bed. You panicked at the beginning of the process as you realized how extremely difficult it is to be both creating a piece and performing in that piece but you came through very strongly. It was brave and beautiful. I hope you have learned from this process that you are courageous, smart, talented, and

¹³ Kimani Fowlin was the director of Drew University's spring dance show, *Art For a Purpose: Dance for a Cause* in which *Slip Like Shadows* was featured, and the professor of the Choreography class.

that when you have something to say, let your voice be heard. Your voice needs to be heard!

Response from Zoe Camp, light designer for *Slip Like Shadows*

Received Wednesday, April 27th, 2016

Zoe: Going into this process, the hardest thing I faced was trying to turn Grace's thesis into a visually pleasing reality that helped portray it well to an audience. I looked towards starkness to help give an emotional embodiment of the struggles the characters were going through and when each girl had their own individual solo I looked towards a pink to red color shift that showed the progress of building strength amongst each character so that by the end there was a shift to a bright white pink color to show strength having been gained. I enjoyed doing this piece so much because I felt that I was accomplishing telling a story through lighting. Overall I think the piece accomplished telling a story of how women still struggle today with feeling invalid and taken advantage of, but in a tasteful and meaningful way.

Response from Madeline Lederer, Catharine Holly in *Slip Like Shadows*

Received Wednesday, April 27th, 2016

Madeline: The challenge I faced most was capturing the tone of the piece. I felt that I was able to embody my character the more I learned about her, but because I have never been a very emotional dancer it was sometimes difficult to convey the right tone. I think this piece was a good demonstration of the breaking of gender norms and finding strength and empowerment within our femininity, instead of trying to be masculine or conform to norms.

Response from Mikaela Simon, Blanche DuBois in *Slip Like Shadows*

Received Friday, April 30th, 2016

Mikaela: My biggest challenge was to not act while I was onstage. I've never done a dance piece that wasn't a part of a musical before, so completely embodying all of the emotion I was feeling was a huge challenge for me, and I got told several times to stop acting. I think that throughout the process, I was able to grow as a dancer and overcome my tendencies to act with my face and nothing else. I think that this piece accomplished everything it was meant to. It showed characters that we are all familiar with in a way that they were all tied together, making the audience really see the connections between them. The layering on and subsequent shedding of society's pressures, as portrayed with the interactions with the shadows, created a powerful dynamic and allowed the characters to complete a gorgeous and identifiable arc that really hit home with me.

Reaction from Gabby Cogan, audience member

Discussed after the performance on Thursday, April 21st, 2016

Gabby: Your piece showed that vulnerability is okay. It shows that feminism transcends gender. I found myself relating to the piece not because I was a woman, but because I am a human. I also think it showed that being quiet can be powerful. I thought the

progression of the vocal recording allowed the sentiments to resonate more when the women found their voices.

Reaction from Ronald Kitts, audience member

Discussed after the performance on Saturday, April 23rd, 2016

Ron: The success of the piece was in utilizing the strength and vulnerability, which you don't often see in female empowerment pieces because there is a fear to be vulnerable and a fear to proliferate the myth that women are intrinsically weak. As we are finding now, whatever this wave of feminism is, there is an acceptance that being vulnerable is not a weakness but rather a strength and it is not something that necessarily tears you down but can lift you up. It is where you can truly find what your voice is. You ask what could be improved in any future exploration of this piece? Well, anything I look at critically is objective so this is not necessary but I think could be interesting: I would love to see you explore more of Tennessee Williams' contemporaries and then subsequently modern playwrights he has inspired. You could track the ways he has affected trends in theatre, specifically looking at the ways gender and sexuality have been depicted onstage. I could also see you incorporating the shadow/figures more and possibly having them as men. They could start as modern oppressors, transition into Williams' male characters, and then revert back to modern men.

Reaction from Christine Troha, audience member

Received after the performance on Saturday, April 23rd, 2016

I was affected to an almost unsettling amount by this provocative piece. The dancers, movement, music, lighting, and costumes combined to make it feel as though you were watching a haunting dream (nightmare?) of Tennessee Williams' female characters. I especially liked the voice-overs because they were so personal to each dancer. I cried twice during the piece because I felt reflections of my own life or women I know personally. When the dancers shed the dresses at the end it was like they were molting and it was somewhat hopeful. I thought it was very beautiful.