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PERFORMING FEMINISM:
BOY GETS GIRL DURING THE #METOO MOVEMENT

by

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B.F.A. Southern Utah University, 2014

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of Theatre
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Major Professor: Christopher Niess

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ABSTRACT

Sexual misconduct is currently a very hot topic in the media. Not only has the #MeToo Movement encouraged many women to come out with their stories of sexual assault, but it has also given women of many different backgrounds an opportunity to band together in support. I will be exploring the role of Theresa Bedell in *Boy Gets Girl*, by Rebecca Gilman. I will use the given character relationships to build an honest portrayal of the struggles Theresa faces as a woman in the world. I will touch on the mindset behind as well as the effects of victim blaming, the importance of having more women in the world of media, the current #MeToo Movement, and how these topics effect my thesis role.

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To all the women in the world who have felt the unmistakable frustration, pressure, and fear of
being a woman in this world.

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CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT

Theatre UCF's Decision to Produce *Boy Gets Girl*

At the end of the Fall 2017 semester, Theatre UCF had just finished casting *The Day Before Yesterday*. About a week later an article came out about the playwright, Israel Horovitz, in which he was accused of sexual misconduct. The *New York Times* article, titled “Nine Women Accuse Israel Horovitz, Playwright and Mentor, of Sexual Misconduct,” details the horrific accounts from the women, ranging in severity from a single forced kiss all the way to rape. Once the article came out, the Theatre UCF administration had a difficult choice to make: continue with a project that was already in the works or scrap the work that had been done on *The Day Before Yesterday* in hope of finding something to replace it.

After reading the article I decided that if Theatre UCF were to continue with the project, I would morally need to back out myself. I couldn't in good conscience be a part of a project that celebrated the work of a man that has so deeply wronged my fellow sisters in theatre. Luckily, Theatre UCF decided to abandon *The Day Before Yesterday* to instead promote a play by a female playwright that could still highlight the students who had already been cast.

As a replacement the faculty decided to produce *Boy Gets Girl* by Rebecca Gilman. Not only did *Boy Gets Girl* have a casting breakdown that fit the already cast students, but the play itself is about the very thing that forced Theatre UCF to switch plays, sexual violence towards women. With this new play Theatre UCF had the opportunity to keep the original cast intact, as well as make a statement against the sexual misconduct that forced them to drop *The Day Before Yesterday*.

Boy Gets Girl follows Theresa Bedell, a journalist for *The World*, as she deals with the ever-growing aggression and threats of violence from a man she barely knows. The play opens

with an awkward blind date between Theresa and Tony. After an unsuccessful second date Theresa rejects Tony's advances and things begin to go awry. Tony shows up unannounced at her work place, begins stalking her, leaves her aggressive voice mails, and eventually begins sending her death threats. The play focuses on how Theresa deals with all of the fear and complications that Tony creates as she attempts to continue on with her life.

Victim Blaming

One thing that stuck out to me as I was reading *Boy Gets Girl* was that in the first couple of pages Theresa is immediately seen in a bad light. She arrives to her blind date extremely late, she then lies about her phone being broken, while Tony is gone to buy her a beer she receives a phone call on her "broken" phone and admits to her friend Linda that she almost didn't come at all, then when Tony catches her on the phone she perpetuates her earlier lie saying "I guess people can call in but I can't call out" (Gilman 6). This series of events gives the audience permission to immediately view Theresa as an offender and view Tony as a victim in their first interaction.

This early negative portrayal of Theresa continues throughout the play as Theresa is never depicted as a perfectly good person. She gets snippy and rude, she's not always honest, and she occasionally treats people as if they are beneath her or not worth her time. This theme was something that continued to stick out to me as I studied the play. I appreciated that Theresa was portrayed as a human being with flaws instead of as a perfect person. This idea of a flawed individual being victimized would have the opportunity to confront the very real problem of victim blaming.

From an early age we are socially taught that the good will be rewarded and the bad will be punished. We develop this mindset through the interactions we have as children and they are

reinforced as we continue into adulthood. Often times children are given rewards when they do something good. A parent may tell their child that if they clean their room they can have a cookie, but if they don't do what is asked of them they will have their toys taken away from them. This forms the beginning of our belief in the just-world hypothesis, or just-world fallacy.

In his book *The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion* author Melvin J. Lerner argues that people maintain a belief that the world is inherently just; that the world they operate in is a fair one. I believe that this just-world hypothesis is ingrained into our beliefs through societal association with good being rewarded and bad being punished. As children grow up and begin their schooling they see that the students who work hard and do what is asked of them receive good grades, and those who slack off and ignore what they are supposed to do receive bad grades. This belief is further reinforced in adulthood as the same principles they learned in school begin to apply in their jobs.

It is because of this just-world fallacy that the issue of victim blaming has become such a problem. When confronted with something that doesn't fit into our idea of the good being rewarded and the bad being punished we don't want to accept it and instead push against it. It is seen as a threat to our biased worldview. To reduce this potential threat, it can become easy to place blame on the victim. If we can find a reason that the victim may have deserved their fate then everything can stay balanced in our idea of the fair world. We believe that anyone who has something bad happen to them must deserve it because that belief is instilled in us from early childhood.

Though the phrase wasn't coined until 1971 by psychologist William Ryan, victim blaming has been around for a long time. The idea was widely accepted through the 1940s and 1950s and was further reinforced in 1958 when criminologist Marvin Wolfgang introduced the

victim precipitation theory. This theory proposes that if the victim behaves in certain ways the offender will be provoked into an attack.

This societal idea of victim blaming is confronted in *Boy Gets Girl* by Rebecca Gilman's choice to make Theresa look like an offender at the top of the play. By placing Theresa in this negative light it may become easier for an audience member to believe that she deserved her fate. Somebody with a deep-rooted just-world fallacy may choose to only see the negative in Theresa: she lies to Tony, makes him feel stupid or inadequate by showing her own advanced intelligence, abandons him at a fancy restaurant while he is talking about something vulnerable, and aggressively and rudely rejects his romantic advances.

Since Theresa is the first person to be seen as an offender it may take more time for someone ingrained in this just-world fallacy to see Tony's offenses. They may brush off his early red flags as simply a response to Theresa's offenses. Instead of seeing Tony's sexism and manipulation as true to his character, they may believe that he is just reacting to the unfair way that Theresa has treated him. However, as the play progresses it becomes clear that Tony is not the nice guy he pretends to be. As soon as he begins to threaten violence and rape it becomes impossible to blame Theresa's early offenses for the way Tony is now treating her.

We also see examples of victim blaming within the play. During Theresa and Tony's last face-to-face interaction he attempts to blame her for not being open to dating him. He accuses her of being afraid of intimacy and goes on to explain that he knows many women who are "afraid of their own sexual desires or sexual powers" (Gilman 29). When that doesn't work he says she is hiding behind her work, being too closed off, and being "too repressed to even let anybody near [her]" (Gilman 30). Tony seems convinced that he's a charming and loveable guy

so if Theresa doesn't want to date him then there must be something fundamentally wrong with her. In Tony's mind it is her fault that they aren't happily together.

Theresa's research assistant, Harriet, also blames her for not appreciating Tony's romantic advances. After Tony begins to incessantly send Theresa flowers, Harriet is ordered to "go down to the desk in the lobby and tell the guard not to sign for any more flowers." Harriet is told that Theresa doesn't want to see any more flowers and that if Harriet sees any flowers she must destroy them before Theresa has a chance to see them. Harriet, unaware of the full situation, replies, "if some guy was sending me flowers, I'd be flattered" (Gilman 39). In this comment Harriet is dismissing Theresa's feelings on the matter and is essentially blaming her for her disinterest in Tony.

The victim blaming continues with Theresa's boss Howard. When Theresa expresses her concerns to Howard about Tony following her, she is met with disbelief and her own character is questioned. To try and validate her worries Theresa explains that during a brief phone conversation with Tony he seemed to be aware that she was lying about previously being at work. Howard replies, "but you were lying," seemingly taking Tony's side in this moment. He eventually asks if Theresa feels guilty or if she had slept with Tony as if the answer to these questions would dismiss Tony's actions.

The just-world fallacy, and the victim blaming tied to it, is so ingrained into our society that Theresa herself expresses her own concern about provoking this unwanted attention in a conversation with Detective Beck. She asks if she seems like the type of person who would get stalked. When Beck firmly tells her that this is not her fault Theresa admits that she keeps thinking that she must have done something wrong. Theresa's belief in the just-world fallacy makes her question her own part in what is happening to her. Beck helps explain that it isn't

Theresa's fault at all, but is instead "the system of the world" around them that is to blame.
(Gilman 67)

Media Misrepresentation of Women

Something else that I wanted to focus on during *Boy Gets Girl* was Theresa's career as a journalist. She works in the world of media which has a notorious role in belittling women. We see the mistreatment of women in all different types of media: advertising, film, television, plays, music videos, modeling, articles, news coverage, and even video games. The way women are portrayed and reflected in the media has added fuel to a society that often treats women as objects. This makes Theresa's job as a woman in this field very important.

The media we come into contact with everyday has a huge impact on society. What we see in the media from a young age shapes our understanding of the world as we go through it. The media reflects the cultural ideals and values of each gender, it defines what is *normal* for men and women and suggests how we should act as a result. The media controls what we see and what we know by choosing which news stories to cover, what programs to air, which books or plays are published, and how issues and events are represented. It is by "selectively regulating what we see [that] the media influence how we perceive gender issues, ourselves, and men and women in general" (Wood 298).

In her book *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender and Culture* Julia T. Wood explains that there are three different ways that media misrepresents gender: "First, women are underrepresented, which falsely implies that men are the cultural standard and women are unimportant or invisible. Second, men and women are portrayed in stereotypical ways that reflect and sustain socially endorsed views of gender. Third, depictions of relationships between men and women emphasize traditional roles and normalize violence against women" (301).

When women are underrepresented in the media it becomes easier to see and treat them as lesser in comparison to men. If women are viewed as unimportant it becomes easy and acceptable for men to take credit for women's accomplishments. This also makes it seem normal or rational to keep women out of the important roles and decisions in society, whether it be in business, politics, finance, or anything else that has an overpopulation of men in the ranks. This kind of misrepresentation has led to the glass ceiling that so many women are still trying to break through. This unofficial but acknowledged barrier to advancement in the professional world typically affects women and minorities. Wood believes that the invisible barrier that keeps women in lower positions of power can be directly linked to this kind of misrepresentation.

When the media consistently portrays women in stereotypical gender roles it makes it harder for women to break out of those roles. It is because of this misrepresentation that we have the "make me a sandwich" jokes that misogynists are so fond of. The media often portrays women as homemakers, who are in charge of the cooking, cleaning, and child care. When seen outside the home they are rarely in a position of power, and instead are often seen as the secretary of a powerful man, or the damsel in distress.

The relationship between men and women in the media often presents female as dependent with male as independent. This creates a huge power dynamic between these presentations of gender which often leads to the men having authority while the women are seen as incompetent. In these relationships we often see aggression in males and passivity in women. Because of these images it becomes easy to normalize aggression towards women. This aggression leads to violence and soon enough we have men beating women into submission.

One of the biggest examples we have of this misrepresentation is how the female body is used in commercials and ads to sell products. Marketers have learned that by associating a product with enjoyable things that product is more likely to be sold, and one of the most effective things that has been selling products over the years is sex. Women are constantly used as sexual objects in commercials to sell products that have absolutely nothing to do with sex.

One of the most blatant examples of this is a commercial for the Southwest Patty Melt at Carl's Jr. and Hardee's that came out in 2012. It features the American model and actress Kate Upton eating the Southwest Patty Melt at a drive-in. As the commercial progresses she begins to undress and simulate sexual pleasure while biting into the patty melt. It features a lot of close-ups on her full breasts and seemingly wet lips.

Two of the most arresting moments in the commercial show her in the throws of sexual pleasure: we see her lying on her back, legs up in the air, dress pulled entirely off her left breast exposing her black lace bra, all the while unbuckling her garter and suggestively sliding her stockings off; we then see her suggestively writhing in the back seat, legs spread apart, with the fast food bag placed perfectly in front of her crotch to block the view up her dress. The commercial ends with her sitting on top of the car, having removed her headband, cardigan, shoes, and tights, with her dress is pulled down in front showing her cleavage and bra. The commercial ends as she is reaching down between her legs suggestive of masturbation, all while taking another bite of the food.

This commercial completely dehumanizes Kate Upton and turns her into a sex object to sell a fast food sandwich. The commercial seems to imply that if one were to eat a Southwest Patty Melt they would suddenly become sexier than they currently are. If a man eats the Southwest Patty Melt, he will suddenly have the sexual prowess of a man capable of achieving

intercourse with a woman like Kate Upton. If a woman eats the Southwest Patty Melt she will instantly become as desirable as Kate Upton. This commercial is selling sex, which has nothing to do with fast food.

It is this kind of commercial objectification of female bodies that has led to large groups of men feeling entitled to the female form. “Advertising helps to create a climate in which certain attitudes and values flourish, such as the attitude that women are valuable only as objects of men’s desire, that real men are always sexually aggressive, that violence is erotic, and that women who are the victims of sexual assault ‘asked for it’” (Kilbourne, 290-91). According to Kilbourne the facial expressions, positions of bodies, and the power dominance we see in advertising have all been taken directly from violent pornography.

There was a study done in 2008 by Julia M. Stankiewicz and Francine Rosselli that helped to prove Kilbourne’s claim. The study states that “there is a considerable amount of hostility toward women in American culture and that the fundamental cause of this hostility is that women have elevated their position within society’s power hierarchy” (587). Men have had a large portion of the power in society for so long that they are negatively reacting to their small decline in the power hierarchy. These men, whether actively or subconsciously, want to maintain male dominance. They fight to oppose the power that women are claiming.

We see this power struggle throughout history. For years’ men’s accomplishments have constantly outshined the accomplishments of women. Not only have women had to deal with their accomplishments being unacknowledged, but even when given credit for their accomplishments it is usually in a way that belittles them. In 2016 the Chicago Tribune released a tweet linked to their most recent article that read, “Wife of a Bears’ lineman wins a bronze medal today in Rio Olympics.” The Chicago Tribune didn’t even use Corey Cogdell’s name.

They reduced her to simply being the wife of a famous man, instead of the accomplished and independent woman that she is.

Another example from the 2016 Olympics comes from an article that was published in *The Eagle*. The headline stated “Phelps ties for silver in 100 fly” in big bold letters at the top while underneath in a smaller print it read “Ledecky sets world record in women’s 800 freestyle.” This article got a lot of negative buzz on social media after it came out. The implication is that The Eagle thought the mediocre (by Olympic standards) accomplishment of Michael Phelps was more important than Katie Ledecky’s groundbreaking accomplishment of not only winning the gold, but shattering the world record (Patel).

The media is consistently botching the coverage of women’s achievements, while also “consistently misrepresent[ing] the goals, activities, and members of women’s movements.” A lot of this misrepresentation comes from the fact that most editors and media executives are men. These men don’t understand how incredibly difficult, frustrating, and terrifying it can be to walk through this world as a woman. They haven’t had to experience the “daily frustrations women face in a society where they lack rights, opportunities, and status equal to those of men” (Wood 316).

In her book, Wood occasionally includes quotes from interviews and conversations she’s had with friends, family, and coworkers. One quote used in the section on media coverage is from a woman named Louise (we are not given her last name):

Last year a group of us went to Washington, DC, for a pro-choice march. The turnout was fabulous and showed that a lot of women support freedom to choose what happens to their bodies. But was it given coverage? It got less than 1 minute on the nightly news that night, but a big business deal got over 2 minutes, and an athlete’s decision to switch

teams was the newsmaker interview that night... If you just tuned in the news you could think the whole march never happened. (Wood 316)

This quote feels like a direct parallel to the kind of coverage that the Women's March received in both 2017 and 2018. I personally saw a lot of coverage on these marches because of the social media that I subscribe to, and the large number of feminist friends I have on social media. However, to people like my parents who get all of their information on the world from the nightly news and daily newspapers it's as if the marches never happened. According to both of my parents the small amount of coverage that they saw on the Women's March was portrayed in a negative way. The media that my parents saw used negative stereotypes that have plagued feminist for years. They were shown as radical, bra-burning, man-hating feminists instead of women who were doing what they could to have their voices heard.

As we look back through history we can clearly see that our society and the media it consumes hasn't made a whole lot of progress. Men's mediocre accomplishments are still being shoved to the forefront, while women's groundbreaking accomplishments are being shoved to the back, or not covered at all. Even when hundreds of thousands of women band together to fight for fundamental human rights the men in charge of the media coverage still find a way to warp the story and paint them in a negative light.

This kind of under representation and misrepresentation of women in media is a vicious cycle. When we don't have accurate representations in place it becomes almost impossible to get better representation. The men who are in charge of the media are so accustomed to the misrepresentation that they don't recognize accurate depictions of women when they are presented with them. When shown a real woman, with her own thoughts, ideas, desires, and

expressions, they see something that doesn't fit the mold of what society has presented as a woman.

This happens constantly in literature. Many men don't seem to know how to write an accurate portrayal of a woman. Instead they follow the same tropes that they already see in the media and continue to write incompetent and dependent women. Then when women write powerful and compelling women into their work it becomes hard to get that work out into the world. Publishers will see a woman's name on the work and immediately associate the gender with incompetency because that is what the media has taught them to do, making them less likely to even read the work let alone publish it.

#MeToo Movement

Another important detail in this thesis project was that we performed *Boy Gets Girl* during a very charged time in the #MeToo Movement. The #MeToo Movement is a movement against sexual assault and harassment that became popular on social media in October of 2017. People all over the world were sharing #MeToo on all forms of social media to show the dramatic numbers of people who have suffered forms of sexual assault and harassment. The phrase 'me too' was started in 2006 by social activist Tarana Burke, but it became popularized shortly after the Harvey Weinstein allegations by the actress Alyssa Milano. Within the first 24 hours of its popularization the hashtag was used on Twitter "more than 500,000 times... and on Facebook, it was used in 12 million posts" (Smartt).

On the Just Be Inc. website Burke shares the story of where "me too" started for her. As a youth worker Burke met with a number of children from broken homes, abusive or neglectful parents, but the one that stuck out to her was Heaven. Rather than trying to summarize her experience with Heaven here is Burke's word for word recount of what happened:

“The me too Movement™ started in the deepest, darkest place in my soul.

As a youth worker, dealing predominately with children of color, I had seen and heard my share of heartbreaking stories from broken homes to abusive or neglectful parents when I met Heaven. During an all girl bonding session at our youth camp, several of the girls in the room shared intimate stories about their lives. Some were the tales of normal teenage angst and others were quite painful. Just as I had done so many times before, I sat and listened to the stories, and comforted the girls as needed. When it was over the adults advised the young women to reach out to us in the event that they needed to talk some more or needed something else – and then we went our separate ways.

The next day Heaven, who had been in the previous night’s session, asked to speak to me privately. Heaven was a sweet-faced little girl who kind of clung to me throughout the camp. However, her hyperactive and often anger-filled behavior betrayed both her name and light, high-pitched voice and I was frequently pulling her out of some type of situation. As she attempted to talk to me that day though the look in her eyes sent me in the other direction. She had a deep sadness and a yearning for confession that I read immediately and wanted no part of. Finally, later in the day she caught up with me and almost begged me to listen...and I reluctantly conceded. For the next several minutes this child, Heaven, struggled to tell me about her “stepdaddy” or rather her mother’s boyfriend who was doing all sorts of monstrous things to her developing body...I was horrified by her words, the emotions welling inside of me ran the gamut, and I listened until I literally could not take it anymore...which turned out to be less than 5 minutes. Then, right in the middle of her sharing her pain with me, I cut her off and immediately directed her to another female counselor who could “help her better.”

I will never forget the look on her face.

I will never forget the look because I think about her all of the time. The shock of being rejected, the pain of opening a wound only to have it abruptly forced closed again - it was all on her face. And as much as I love children, as much as I cared about that child, I could not find the courage that she had found. I could not muster the energy to tell her that I understood, that I connected, that I could feel her pain. I couldn't help her release her shame, or impress upon her that nothing that happened to her was her fault. I could not find the strength to say out loud the words that were ringing in my head over and over again as she tried to tell me what she had endured... I watched her walk away from me as she tried to recapture her secrets and tuck them back into their hiding place. I watched her put her mask back on and go back into the world like she was all alone and I couldn't even bring myself to whisper... **me too.**" (Burke)

According to Burke the purpose of the #MeToo Movement is to "give young women, particularly young women of color from low-wealth communities, a sense of empowerment from the understanding that they are not alone in their circumstances." However, it has now expanded far beyond that. It successfully brought attention to the vast number of people, both women and men, who have suffered some form of sexual harassment. It has given a voice to many people who felt like their voice was taken from them. It's created an entire support system that wouldn't otherwise exist.

Going into this project I assumed that the #MeToo Movement would affect our production of *Boy Gets Girl*. I thought that it would change the way we looked at and spoke about the difficult topics in the play. I thought that the #MeToo Movement and the subject matter in the play would easily go hand in hand to affect the way that the audience reacted to the

production. I believed that it would help inform my character choices and in turn affect the way the audience perceived Theresa. However, the play does not take place during the #MeToo Movement and was in fact written before the #MeToo Movement. This limited my actual ability to use the movement in my acting choices.

CHAPTER 2: WHY?

Passion

I wanted my thesis project to be something that I'm passionate about. Theresa's story is something I knew I could write about. I'm very passionate about the rights of women to feel safe when interacting with men. I'm also incredibly passionate about women being treated equally to men in the workplace. *Boy Gets Girl* includes both sexual harassment and inequality based on gender.

Being a Woman

In a Twitter thread started on September 25, 2018, civil right activist Danielle Muscato tweeted, "Ladies, a question for you: What would you do if all men had a 9pm curfew? Dudes: Read the replies and pay attention." The replies came flooding in. The answers are surprisingly simple. It's shocking to realize that most women just want to do normal everyday things without feeling fear:

"I'd go for a walk in the dark without leaping out of my skin at little noises. Just thinking about going somewhere alone without anxiety seems like a dream. Is this how guys feel all the time" (Smart)?

"Public transit. I'd take all the public transit" (Harris).

"can you imagine getting up to go to the bathroom and leaving your drink sitting there, knowing when you get back that you're not going to fall unconscious. Or getting as drunk as you want and stumbling home, no fear of being followed. that's twilight zone shit" (the lizard king).

“As long as everything else stays open past 9... go live my best life! Go to the grocery store Go for a walk in the park Drive out to where the light pollution ends & look at the stars Go to bars & take a ride share home while drunk Go outside & forget my phone at home & not worry” (OR4Now).

“I’ve tried to explain this feeling, these feelings, to men, and always been told I’m exaggerating, but look at every woman on this thread, look at what we are saying. What would we do? We’d feel safe. We’d live” (AuroraBorealice).

In an article addressing this twitter thread Cassandra Stone wrote “Fear and anxiety is something women everywhere internalize and are forced to normalize for a variety of reasons, but especially when it comes to being out at night. Once it grows dark, no matter where we are... we have to have our guard up, at all times, because [of] men.” Stone goes on to talk about how emotional the women were from just thinking about what they would do. These women just simply want to *live*. All of the replies sound like “such simple things, but they are things that are stripped away from us. Simple joys we can’t let ourselves have because of the constant and valid fear we’ll be attacked, threatened, intimidated, or accosted” (Scary Mommy).

Power and Gender

Being a woman in this world is difficult and exhausting. It’s an experience that many men struggle to comprehend. Women are not afforded the same opportunities and experiences as men. That’s a fact, plain and simple. Ask any educated woman and she will tell you the same. In the preface to her book *Women & Power: A Manifesto* Mary Beard writes “when it comes to silencing women, Western Culture has had thousands of years of practice” (xi).

In her book Beard goes back and takes a historical look at the silencing of women. She gives more recent examples such as “Elizabeth Warren in the US Senate - and her exclusion

from the debate - when she attempted to read out a letter by Coretta Scott King” (27) while Bernie Sanders was allowed to read out the exact same letter and not excluded from the debate. She also produces historical literary examples such as Henry James’ *The Bostonians*, published in 1886, in which James insisted that “under [the] American women’s influence, language risks become a ‘generalised mumble or jumble, a tongueless slobber or snarl or whine’; [women’s voices] will sound like ‘the moo of the cow, the bray of the ass, and the bark of the dog’” (Beard 28).

She explains that many “other prominent contemporaries praised the sweet domestic singing of the female voice, while entirely opposing its use in the wider world” (Beard 28-29). Women’s voices were often criticized for having ‘thin nasal tones’ or for being full of ‘snuffles’ or ‘whines’. She attributes a lot of these “views about the unsuitability of women for public speaking” as the reasoning behind why we continue to associate a sense of awkwardness with the female voice in public. (29)

Women of the world aren’t often regarded with the same intelligence level as men. We continue to see that when voiced by a woman, “unpopular, controversial or just plain different views” are not taken as such, but instead seen “as indications of her stupidity. It is not that you disagree, it is that *she* is stupid” (Beard 33). Women are often accused of simply not understanding and Beard mentions that she has lost count of the number of times she’s been called “an ignorant moron.”

This is something every woman deals with. There were a number of times throughout my own graduate schooling that I would express my disinterest or dislike of a play we were reading and I was met with aggression from my male classmates. Instead of respecting the fact that I was allowed my own opinions and that those opinions could differentiate from their own,

they accused me of simply not understanding the play. There was no doubt in their mind that *I* was wrong and that *they* were right.

In March of 2018 an academic conference at Stanford University stirred up controversy for featuring 30 white male speakers. Shortly after, *The Chronicle Review* asked “presidents and adjuncts, scientists and humanists, senior scholars and junior professors to take on the theme of women and power in academe.” All of the article responses they received were posted on their website, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Awakening: Women and Power in the Academy*.

Even though the purpose of these articles were to focus on women and academics I want to include one article by Nannerl O. Keohane, a former president of Wellesley College and Duke University. In her article she tackles the subject of power and sexual harassment. In “Don’t Let This Moment Pass” she states that her usual reaction when the words women and power are juxtaposed is that we don’t have much of it. She mentions that “even when women have significant authority, they are vulnerable to sexual predation.”

In a beautiful call to action Keohane says “we are not powerless, and we can – and should – do something about it,” and gives three examples of how we can. First women, and sympathetic men, in positions of authority need to create an environment where claims of sexual harassment are taken seriously. These claims should not be “swept under the carpet, automatically discounted, or settled with monetary payments and confidentiality agreements.” She goes on to stress that “due process matters” and that those who are accused must have the opportunity to defend themselves, but that in the cases of “he said, she said,” the “account of the alleged victim must be given an especially attentive hearing.”

Second, she states that we “must educate boys and young men to understand the difference between sex that is mutually sought and enjoyed, and sex that is imposed.” They must understand that sex through coercion or pressure is not consensual sex, that sex through guilt or duty is not consensual, and that sex from threat is not consensual. Keohane knows that this is not an easy task but says that “it’s not beyond our power to refresh and improve our ways of accomplishing this goal.”

Last, she says that “we should recall that power is collective as well as individual.” Not only women, but men, must work together to “discourage off-color jokes, call out individuals who are prone to unwanted touching, and protect vulnerable colleagues.” It has become easy for women who are harassed in minor ways to brush it off or respond with humor, but instead we all must call out inappropriate behavior. “The #MeToo movement gives us a rare opportunity to act on such ideas. We must not let this moment pass” (Keohane).

This idea that “we must not let this moment pass” was a huge reason behind why I wanted to do this as my thesis project. I saw an opportunity to do something that I felt was important, and I took that opportunity. I wanted to make an impact and contribute to the #MeToo Movement that was happening around me. I believed that I could do that with this project.

CHAPTER 3: APPROACH

Combining Feminist Research with Acting Choices

I typically use a character relationship approach in my acting. When I am preparing for a role I study the script to dissect each of the character relationships in the play. The way my character interacts with the other characters in the play gives me a road map to understand who my character is as a whole. I also like to utilize a moment to moment, or beat by beat, approach in my acting. Sectioning out a scene into beats helps me recognize when my character's tactic needs to change. Some typical examples of a beat change can include when there is a change in topic, when a character makes a decision, when a character is caught off guard, or when a character enters or exits a scene.

As I was reading through *Boy Gets Girl* I found that a lot of beat changes were caused by tension that often centered around gender disparity. This tension was shown in interactions between people with different levels of awareness or belief towards societal gender inequality. There are people who see and fight against the gender inequality, people who choose to ignore it, don't believe in it, or are even completely oblivious to it. When people with varying levels of awareness and belief interact it can cause tension.

I wanted my performance of Theresa to be an honest portrayal of the strong, independent woman I had read in the script. To do this I needed to take the character tension I had found in the script and combine it with my research. I noticed that Theresa usually experienced tension when her view of the world was challenged or ignored. This gave me a chance to utilize my research to understand and further build upon what I believed Theresa's world view was. How she felt about her job, what her role in the media was, how far she falls into the just-world

fallacy, her struggles with being a woman in a male dominated world, and the problems she faces as an intelligent but undervalued female academic.

I chose to focus on Theresa's individual relationship with each character and build how she would interact or react to them based on their different world views. I wanted to take the beat changes and moments of tension that I had found and navigate how Theresa as a woman, journalist, feminist, and academic would react in these moments. *Boy Gets Girl* offered a wide variety of character relationships that I was excited to dive into.

Theresa and Tony

The first, and most toxic, relationship that the audience sees is between Theresa and Tony. Theresa and Tony have been set up on a blind date by Theresa's old work friend, Linda. Going into this blind date Theresa knows very little about Tony. She knows his name, she knows he went to the University of Michigan, she knows that he met Linda's sister Sarah at college, and eventually met Linda through Sarah. Other than those surface level details she doesn't know what to expect from Tony.

Through their interactions Theresa comes to learn that she and Tony are very different people. On their first date Theresa tries to talk about her work as a journalist, writers she likes, and baseball, none of which Tony is capable of contributing to in a conversation. Theresa also tries to crack jokes to ease the awkward tension, but Tony never picks up on the humor. After a few failed attempts she says, "I'll just stop trying" (Gilman 8).

During their first date I picked out a few significant moments of tension. One happens shortly after Theresa brings up baseball.

TONY. The only women I ever knew who liked sports just liked them because their boyfriends did.

THERESA. Oh yeah?

TONY. Did you have a boyfriend who was a big Yankees fan or something?

THERESA. No. (*Small beat.*)

TONY. Well, maybe you could take me to go see a Yankees game sometime, and I could learn to love them too.

THERESA. Maybe so.

TONY. If you want to pick a date I could get the tickets.

THERESA. Um, yeah. They're actually – they're out of town right now.

TONY. Then maybe when they get back.

THERESA. We'll see.

TONY. What's wrong? Am I moving too fast?

THERESA. I just don't know what my schedule will be

TONY. Well we'll just see how it goes.

THERESA. Okay. (Gilman 13)

This is the first moment that Theresa starts to see Tony's sexist undertones. I had a few beat changes marked in this section. The first happens immediately after Tony's comment about women only liking sports because of their boyfriends. This sexist comment comes out of nowhere and completely catches Theresa by surprise. Shocked she responds with, "Oh yeah?" To which Tony furthers the tension by asking if Theresa had a boyfriend who liked the Yankees, as if that is the only possible explanation. There is another beat change here as Theresa catches up with the shock and firmly says no, an attempt at putting a stop to the sexism she's experiencing.

Instead of apologizing and moving on to another topic Tony tries to gloss this moment over by offering to get them tickets to go see a game together. Theresa, however, is cautious about making any further plans with him. The last beat change happens after Tony asks what's wrong. Theresa has a chance here to draw attention to his sexist attitude, but instead she makes an excuse for why she won't make solid plans. Theresa understands that men and women are not treated or thought of as equal in society and Tony has put her on edge. Since she doesn't know Tony, or how he might react, she chooses the safe option of not drawing attention to his sexist comments.

During their second date Tony continues this behavior and acts completely unaware of the problematic statements he makes. The things that Tony says, along with his later treatment of Theresa, made me believe that Tony thinks that women have a specific *place* in society. That place is in the home, serving as a wife and mother. These views are challenged when confronted with a woman, like Theresa, who doesn't fit into that mold.

TONY. I think one person in a couple should always know how to cook. My mom taught me to cook. I'm glad she did because it seems like more and more women don't cook these days.

THERESA. More and more women have other things to do these days. *(Beat.)*

TONY. So are you like a, feminist?

THERESA. I'm like that, yeah.

TONY. I am too.

THERESA. Good.

TONY. I mean, there are women I work with who know so much more about programming than I ever will, and I think how they used to not even have the opportunity to get those jobs, you know? I think that's completely unfair.

THERESA. It is.

TONY. But what I don't like, are those women who are really strident about it. I mean, this might be a generalization, and I know I shouldn't make it, but it seems to me that some feminists really hate men. (Gilman 22)

Tony tries to act charming, but peppered throughout his attempts at charm are hints of his true character. Theresa picks up on these moments and decides that she doesn't want to pursue their relationship any further. As soon as Tony's charm has failed he immediately switches to manipulation. As Theresa is leaving their second date he tries different tactics to make her feel sorry for him. He says that Theresa must think he's an idiot, asks if it's because he didn't know who Edith Wharton was, and admits that he even called the museum where she was covering a benefit for work because he was "feeling really lonely" (Gilman 25).

Theresa is an intelligent woman and doesn't let this attempt at manipulation affect her. She keeps her calm and leaves the situation believing that this will be the last interaction she will have with Tony. Unfortunately, Tony doesn't want to give up that easily and shows up at her workplace the next day to see if she would like to go get lunch with him. Up to this point she has tried to let him down easy to save herself a negative response from him, but she realizes that she needs to be more firm in stating that she no longer wants to see him.

THERESA. No. I don't think we have anything in common so I don't see any point in trying to be friends. I just don't think we should see each other again.

TONY. Oh. (*Beat.*) Is it...

THERESA. What?

TONY. Well, you said you hadn't dated anybody in a long time, and I was wondering, are you afraid of intimacy or something.

THERESA. What?

TONY. Because I know a lot of women who really throw themselves into their work, it's because they're afraid of intimacy. I mean, they're afraid of their own sexual desires or sexual powers.

THERESA. That's not it. Now, if you don't mind, I need to get back to work.

TONY. You sound really, like you're mad at me or something.

THERESA. I just don't think there's any point in discussing this.

TONY. I'm just trying to help you figure it out.

THERESA. There's nothing to figure out. You don't know me.

TONY. I guess I hit a nerve.

THERESA. That's not it. Now, if you would leave, I have a lot of work to do. (Gilman 29).

When this new attempt at manipulation doesn't work he begins to repetitively send Theresa flowers and incessantly call her. After these gestures are continually ignored by Theresa he leaves Theresa a voicemail saying, "I just think that you owe me the truth. I think you owe me at least that much after everything you—" (Gilman 44). In these two lines Tony implies that Theresa owes him a lot, but he will *at least* take the truth if he can't get anything else. We never learn what Tony thinks Theresa owes him for because at that moment in the dialogue Theresa picks up the phone and yells at him to "Stop calling" (Gilman 45).

After those last two lines the audience never hears Tony's voice again. Throughout the rest of the play he becomes an ever present and unseen threat. We hear about him through other characters talking about the voicemails he leaves, or the emails and letters he writes, all worse than the last. This constant unseen threat finally comes to a head when Theresa receives an incredibly horrific letter from Tony. It's through this letter that we finally hear Tony's true thoughts about Theresa, and women in general. In this letter he tells Theresa that she is "a bitch," "something to be fucked until [she] scream[s]," "something to be fucked in the ass," "something to be fucked in the mouth," and "something to be nailed to the ground and fucked so hard [she] split[s] in two" (Gilman 63). In these quotes we see that Tony doesn't even think of Theresa as a person. Instead she is a thing, an object, to be used only for his own sexual conquest and pleasure.

The character dissonance between Theresa and Tony was something I was incredibly excited to explore as an actor. Tony challenges Theresa's world view by turning her life upside down. His actions remove her sense of safety, ruin her ability to work effectively, and even make her question her own actions. The fear that Tony creates in her life becomes so unbearable that Theresa makes the difficult choice to change her name, move away, and start a new life where he can't find her.

Theresa and Howard

It was my own feminist knowledge of media's mistreatment of women that made Theresa's job stand out to me. As a woman in the world of media Theresa constantly has to deal with the blatant sexism that runs rampant throughout that field. It also makes her female journalistic voice incredibly important. It was important for me as an actor to recognize Theresa as an unfortunate cog in the machine of media that constantly mistreats women. As a journalist

she is expected and encouraged to perpetuate the unfair stereotype of her own gender by her boss, Howard.

During *Boy Gets Girl* the audience is made aware of two different stories being covered by *The World*, the magazine Theresa works for. One is a story about literary friendships that her colleague Mercer is working on, the other is a story about a porn director named Les Kennkat that her boss, Howard, is making her write. Theresa makes it very clear that she doesn't want to be working on the Les Kennkat piece.

Despite her reluctance to write this piece she is still expected to complete her job assignment. While she isn't excited about her own assignment she shows great interest in the piece that Mercer is writing. She talks in great length about it with both Howard and Mercer giving input and suggestions. She is obviously more interested in one assignment over the other, but Howard gives Theresa the story she doesn't want. I find this important to note because Theresa has twelve years seniority over Mercer who has only been at *The World* for three months. Despite this seniority, Howard still gives Mercer the preferred story. Is this because he is a man? Yes!

Howard has fallen deeply into the vicious cycle that the media perpetuates. He grew up watching Les Kennkat movies which depicted the women of the world as mere objects for a man's sexual pleasure. We see the consequences of this upbringing in his dismissal of women as apparent in the way he ignores Theresa's worries about Tony. He actively participates in continuing this misrepresentation of women in his editorial work by expecting Theresa to write a heroizing piece on Les Kennkat, the very man who began this cycle for Howard.

Theresa, as a woman, wants nothing to do with the sexist pig that is Les Kennkat, but she is not afforded that decision. As an employee of *The World* she is expected to write an article

about his life and work, things that she is personally disgusted by. As a journalist she is supposed to report on these without bias, something that she has trouble doing evidenced by Kennkat's accusation; "I thought you were a reporter. I thought your job was to come here and ask me questions which I then answer. Not to sit in judgment of me. But that's all you've done" (Gilman 54).

Eventually Theresa finds a way to spin the story in a way that accurately portrays Les as the sexist "connoisseur of women's breasts" while still staying true to the initial intent of the story. Despite the fact that Theresa writes not only a true representation of Les Kennkat, but also a compelling and funny story, Howard almost pulls her piece. Howard speaks to Mercer privately confiding in him that he "can't run it" and it is only after Mercer's reassurance that the article is good that Howard actually considers putting it into print. (Gilman 56)

The audience can see by the way that Howard interacts with both Theresa and Mercer that he respects Mercer's opinion over Theresa. Even though Theresa has known Howard and worked with him for years, Howard still dismisses her because of her gender. We see an example of this when Howard is confronted with the idea of Tony as a threat.

THERESA. ... I think Tony, the flower guy? I think he's following me.

HOWARD. Why?

THERESA. Because I wouldn't return any of his calls.

HOWARD. But why, I mean, what evidence do you have that you're being followed?

...

HOWARD. Have you seen him following you?

THERESA. No, but he asked me where I'd been and I lied and said I'd been at work and he said, "Oh really." All sarcastic, like he wanted me to know that he knew I was lying.

HOWARD. Where had you been?

THERESA. It doesn't matter.

HOWARD. But you were lying.

...

THERESA. Maybe. But I still felt like I was being watched.

HOWARD. Are you feeling guilty about something?

THERESA. What would I feel guilty about?

HOWARD. Well, did you sleep with him?

THERESA. No! Howard. Jesus.

HOWARD. I had to ask.

THERESA. No you didn't. (Gilman 41-42)

As we can see here Howard repeatedly ignores Theresa's worries. He keeps trying to find excuses for Tony's behavior, a man he's never met, instead of believing the female coworker that he's worked with for twelve years. This is one of the examples of victim blaming within *Boy Gets Girl*. He clearly thinks that Theresa must have done something to provoke Tony's actions. Howard seems to believe that Tony's actions are excusable if Theresa slept with him.

Despite all of the issues and differences between Theresa and Howard they still seem to have a good relationship. Theresa and Howard are capable of joking with each other, Theresa is comfortable telling Howard when he's crossed a line, and when things with Tony start to escalate Howard opens up his home to Theresa and does what he can to improve her mood. They've worked together for twelve years, they've have had time to see each others flaws, figure out how to work around their differences, and build a working friendship in spite of it all. It was their

friendship despite their differences that made me excited to work on their arc throughout the show. I had to find a way as an actor to balance the times that Theresa and Howard were friends, and when Theresa allowed her frustration to slip through.

Theresa and Harriet

Theresa's research assistant, Harriet, is the polar opposite of Theresa. Theresa is the type of person who fights against gender inequality, pushes away from female stereotypes, and refuses to entertain toxic male behavior. Harriet, however, seems completely oblivious to her own gender inequality, leans directly into female stereotypes, and doesn't recognize toxic male behavior when it's right in front of her. This made a lot of the beats in their interactions incredibly tense.

Not only are Theresa and Harriet opposite in their world view, but they're opposite in intelligence as well. Harriet can't even accomplish the most basic tasks at work without Theresa needing to correct her. We see an example of this when Theresa has to tell her "if you copy an article from the paper for me, please check to see if it's continued on another page because otherwise, I only have the first page and that doesn't do me any good" (Gilman 39). Later, as Howard and Mercer are having a conversation, Harriet walks in to drop off Theresa's mail and as she leaves the room Howard asks, "How's she working out?" Mercer replies, "Well, besides making a lot of mistakes, she's always on the phone" (Gilman 59).

As a woman who has to fight through a male dominated world I was incredibly frustrated by Harriet's character. I was so frustrated by her because I know women like her. Every time I interact with a woman like this I am incredibly disappointed, angry, and baffled. I'm disappointed that they go through the world representing my gender in a way that undermines other women. I'm angry that their actions contribute to the idea that women aren't as capable or

intelligent as men. And I'm baffled by the fact that they don't seem to see the gender inequality they face, or the problems they create for other women by acting the way that they do.

When faced with these women I often feel like I have two options: I can either try to help them learn what they are missing, or let them continue living the way they do and pity them for their ignorance. I believe that Theresa feels a very similar way when dealing with Harriet.

When faced with Harriet's ignorance Theresa chooses to let her continue on in that ignorance.

HARRIET. Yes ma'am.

THERESA. I don't... don't call me ma'am.

HARRIET. I'm sorry.

THERESA. No, Harriet, don't ever let somebody up here to see me without my permission. Okay? That's rule number one.

HARRIET. I'm sorry. He said he was a friend of yours.

THERESA. You didn't know, I know, but for future reference, don't ever let anyone up here without my explicit permission.

HARRIET. Okay. *(Beat.)* He's cute. Who is he?

THERESA. How old are you?

HARRIET. Twenty-one.

THERESA. Okay... *(As if she wants to tell her so much, but doesn't have the time.)* Cute isn't everything. (Gilman 30-31)

There is a very important beat in Theresa's last line here. The moment is so important that Rebecca Gilman even provided a stage direction to help guide actors in the direction she wanted. "*As if she wants to tell her so much, but doesn't have the time*" implies that Theresa wants to help open Harriet's eyes to the reality around them. She wants to explain why being a

woman is so hard, help her see the gender inequality in their workplace, teach her to fight against the media misrepresentation of women, and show her that her damsel in distress attitude belittles the hard work of other women around them. She wants to do all of these things, but she doesn't have the time.

Harriet's very presence in Theresa's life challenges and undermines Theresa's world view. Their opposite lifestyles created a lot of tension that I could use as an actor. This tension went both ways, and Harriet provides another example of victim blaming.

THERESA. Do you understand?

HARRIET. I guess.

THERESA. You guess?

HARRIET. I don't know. If some guy was sending me flowers, I'd be flattered.

THERESA. Do you understand my instructions or not?

HARRIET. I understand.

THERESA. Then just do as I say.

HARRIET. Okay. (Gilman 39)

Harriet thinks that Theresa isn't showing enough gratitude for the effort Tony is making by sending her these flowers. This exchange provided an important beat change for me, which I had marked after Harriet mentions she would be flattered if a guy sent her flowers. How would Theresa react to this ignorant comment? In this moment Theresa is being blamed for not appreciating Tony's toxic and obsessive behaviors. As a feminist Theresa would be furious. Despite that anger Theresa wouldn't blame Harriet for her ignorance of the full situation. This beat change created a quiet anger that fed into Theresa question about whether Harriet

understood her instructions. The anger towards Harriet continues when Theresa discovers that Harriet hasn't done what was asked of her.

THERESA. Harriet! Throw the flowers in the trash. Don't leave them on your desk.

(HARRIET enters.)

HARRIET. I just thought if you didn't want them... they're so pretty. You keep throwing them all away and they're so pretty. It seems like a waste. *(Beat. THERESA stares at her. HARRIET gets it.)* All right. *(Gilman 42-43)*

This time Theresa doesn't even speak. Instead Theresa silently stares daggers at Harriet until she does what was initially asked of her. Harriet can't seem to see why Tony's actions are problematic. She even later admits that she thought Theresa was just mean. It is unfortunately Harriet's ignorance of the world around her that let's Tony take advantage of her.

HARRIET. I didn't know. I mean, I just thought, you know, you had broken up with him and Tony seemed so nice and everything. I didn't know you at all. And then, in all honesty, you seemed sort of man or mean or something at first. I mean, not mean, but you didn't really tell me anything and he kept calling and I had to deal with him and one day – he called to see if you'd gotten some flowers – and I said you wouldn't take his call and he started crying, and he sounded so sad, so I told him, I knew how he felt, you know? If he wanted to talk. *(Beat.)* And then, he really opened up to me. I thought. He really seemed to trust me.

THERESA. What did you tell him?

HARRIET. He said he just wanted to tell you how much he loved you. *(Beat.)* I gave him your home phone number. And then, when you kept wearing the same clothes to

work... I think I may have told him that you weren't living at your apartment anymore.
(Gilman 75)

Harriet thinks Tony is cute and nice which leads her to blindly trust him. Her actions put Theresa in incredible danger, so Theresa fires her. Harriet's role in Theresa's story is an important example of the kinds of consequences that can come from ignorance. It wasn't Theresa's job to educate Harriet about the dangers they face as women in the world, but maybe if she had taken that time to say something more than "Cute isn't everything" this story would have ended differently.

Theresa and Mercer

Men dominate the world of media. As a journalist Theresa has had to constantly deal with being outnumbered by the men in her field. This male dominated work environment is even acknowledged when Theresa is offered a position as the new sports columnist at the *Denver Free Press*. Theresa mentions that it would be a sort of novelty to have a woman write it. It's no surprise that this sort of environment breeds competition.

Mercer, a man who has only worked at *The World* for three months, is Theresa's new work competition who is already getting the preferred stories. While Theresa is stuck working on the Les Kennkat article, Mercer is writing a story on literary friendships that Theresa would rather be working on. Despite their work competition, Theresa and Mercer actually have a lot in common and seem to be decent friends.

Theresa feels comfortable enough with Mercer that he becomes the first person she truly confides in. When she confesses that she thinks that she is being stalked Mercer doesn't question her like Howard had. Mercer listens, asks follow-up questions, and eventually tells Theresa to call the police. Theresa's trust in Mercer grows as he helps her through the police

interview and continues to check on her throughout the next couple of weeks. It's this trust and friendship that sets Theresa up to feel betrayed by Mercer later in the play.

Mercer gets an idea for a story based on what Theresa is going through. As he's pitching the story to Howard he explains that Tony is not the only guy who thinks about women and romance in the wrong way. He attributes this warped idea of romance to a classic, romantic plot line.

MERCER. If you look at your classic, romantic plot line, it's pretty warped. A guy sees a girl and he falls in love with her. Right there you're in trouble.

HOWARD. Why?

MERCER. Well he might want to get to know her before he falls in love with her.

HOWARD. But he can't. Because the girl's in love with some jerk.

MERCER. Exactly. She's always in love with some jerk who's totally wrong for her. Only she doesn't know it yet. So the guy pursues her. He starts following her around, he sends her flowers and serenades her or whatever. And then finally he bursts in on her wedding and declares his love for her, and bam! She dumps the jerk, and at the end of the movie, she's kissing the guy. Even though he's basically been stalking her, it pays off. He gets the girl. (Gilman 57-58)

All the things this generic romantic movie character does are things that stalkers do.

Mercer suspects that Tony wonders why he doesn't get the girl and believes that there are many other guys out there wondering the same thing. When Theresa finds out about this story she gets incredibly upset. She yells at Mercer that her "life isn't theoretical" and that he doesn't get to "make something theoretical out of [her] life" (Gilman 63-64).

The story that Mercer wants to write is the terrifying hell that Theresa is currently living. Theresa feels betrayed that someone who was initially being so supportive of her situation has now suddenly turned her life into an idea for a story. She believes that Mercer is no longer seeing her as a person and is only thinking about how he can profit from this situation. Mercer gives Theresa a couple days to calm down and then tries to talk to her about the story again.

MERCER. I wanted to explain to you what it is I wanted to do with this story—

THERESA. Are you serious?

MERCER. I think you misunderstood—

THERESA. I'm not listening to this. Okay? If you can't see why I don't want you to write about me—

MERCER. It's not about you.

THERESA. No. No more. I'm not going to stand here and listen to your crap. I did it with Tony, I'm not doing it with you.

MERCER. Are you comparing me to Tony?

THERESA. Why not. You're just like him.

MERCER. No I am not.

THERESA. You're ignoring how I feel and you're ignoring what I say.

MERCER. You're ignoring what I'm saying. You haven't once let me explain-

THERESA. I don't want to listen to your stupid explanations.

MERCER. I'm writing the story to keep this from happening to somebody else.

THERESA. I don't care about anybody else.

MERCER. Well I do, and I'm sorry you feel the way you do but I'm writing the story anyway. (Gilman 71)

Both Theresa and Mercer are so focused on their own opinions and feelings that they are incapable of seeing where the other is coming from in this moment. The friendship that they have built with each other makes this betrayal even more difficult. Not only do they both feel wronged and unheard by the other, but those emotions are coming from someone they trusted and whose opinion they value. There was a lot of tension in the scenes with Mercer that I was able to use as an actor.

Luckily, neither of them are too prideful to hold onto this betrayal. After they've had time to calm down and think about the situation they begin to see each other's side. When they recognize that they both are at fault they barely need to talk about it to move on and be friends again.

MERCER (*beat.*) Theresa, it was never my intention, with this article, to hurt you—

THERESA. I know that. (*Moving on.*) Did you read my piece on the Yankees?

MERCER. I did. I liked it. (Gilman 82)

Theresa and Beck

The character that Theresa has the most similarities with is Detective Beck. She's another strong and hardworking woman that is aware of the systemic struggles she has to face because of her gender. There isn't a lot of character tension built into the relationship between Theresa and Beck but instead a lot of situational tension. The only reason Detective Beck is involved in Theresa's life at all is because of the terrible situation she has found herself in with Tony. Beck has the unfortunate duty of telling Theresa all the things she doesn't want to hear. All of this made the relationship between Theresa and Detective Beck very important to me.

BECK. Do you have a doorman?

THERESA. No.

BECK. Then personally, I would move.

THERSA. Move?

BECK. He knows where you live. So I'd move to a building with a doorman and I'd get an alarm for my apartment. (*Small beat.*) And to be honest, I'd start thinking about changing my name now. Then you can put everything in your new name when you move.

THERESA. Wait a minute. Change my name?

BECK. It just makes it easier in the long run.

THERESA. I don't want to change my name. I'm a writer. I write under this name.

BECK. It's up to you. I mean, the official party line is you should do these things step by step, depending on what the guy does, but I'd rather be ahead of him than have him be ahead of me. (Gilman 49-50)

These two women understand each other which meant that the tension between them had to come from the situation that they find themselves in as opposed to any sort of disagreement between them. It is their understanding of each other that lets Beck comfort Theresa in a way that nobody else in the play can. Theresa confides in Beck that she feels like she did something wrong, or that it was somehow her fault that Tony is doing this to her. Beck is able to share from her own personal experiences that it's "the system of the world around [them]" that makes her feel this way, and that it's not her fault.

Theresa and Les

The most complicated relationship for me to understand and navigate was the one between Theresa and Les Kennkat. In the stage directions Les is described as "a movie producer and director of low-budget, sixties, sexploitation movies" (Gilman 31). The early interactions

between Theresa and Les were easy to understand and full of a lot of tension that could feed into acting choices. Les is a disgusting and chauvinistic old man that Theresa is forced to interview for work.

Reading the two interview scenes with Les came across as a sort of battle of wits between the characters. Les seems to win when he shocks Theresa or catches her in her prejudice. Theresa wins when she gets her feminist point across or when she is capable of getting real information from him instead of the front he puts on. Both interviews feature heated arguments between the two of them, some of which Les wins and some which Theresa wins.

LES. My movies celebrate women.

THERESA. Okay. How?

LES. They celebrate their beauty, so men can enjoy their beauty. And, I might add, they teach women how to be beautiful. That's another service I do.

THERESA. That's ridiculous.

LES. No it's not. Everyone wants to be attractive to the opposite sex. I help show them how to do it.

THERESA. Then why don't you make movies about penises floating around in treetops.

LES. Nobody wants to see that. That's not what women look at anyway. Women go for tight asses... What do you look for first?

THERESA. A good personality—

...

LES. But what do you see first? The good personality? Or the tight ass? (*Beat. She thinks.*) This ain't calculus here, it's the simple rules of physical attraction.

THERESA. You see the tight ass first if that's what you're looking for.

LES. Fine. Stick to your story. Be the Sainted Virgin Mary if that makes you feel better. (Gilman 36-37)

Les is an intelligent man and isn't unaware of the societal difference between men and women. Despite that knowledge he doesn't do anything to try to change it and even goes as far as profiting from it. He shows that he is self aware of his own sexist voyeurism while talking about his ex-wife. Les says that the reason Joy Box, whose real name was actually Kathy Malone, divorced him was that she "didn't like it that [he] slept around with other women." He goes on to explain that she told him that she would leave him, but he didn't believe her; "The reason I didn't believe Kathy is simple. I didn't want to believe her" (Gilman 51-52).

The first interview ends with Theresa getting in a last win before walking out, which may be why Les seems to intentionally mess with Theresa in their second interview. He isn't the type of man who likes to lose and he comes ready to win their second interview. He begins with joking about hiring a nurse to take care of him and says, "there's nothing I like better than a voluminous pair of breasts in a tight, white uniform." Theresa responds by going on a rant about how he isn't a funny or good guy if he can't deal with the women who make up more than half the world.

LES. I see what you're saying. If something offends you, then you're not going to find it funny. No matter what.

THERESA. But do you see what else I'm saying? About how you can't deal with half the population of the world?

LES. Sure, but neither can you.

THERESA. That's not true.

LES. No, you obviously can't deal with me.

THERESA. But that's just because you can't deal with me. If you could deal with me, then I could deal with you.

Les purposefully antagonizes Theresa and brings their argument to a very childish place. He gets Theresa to lose her composure, insult him, and judge him, which he points out later is everything that a journalist shouldn't do. He traps her in this situation that he will inevitably win. The only thing Theresa can do to regain control of the situation is to apologize for being unprofessional and move on with the interview. Les, full of success from this win, continues to purposefully aggravate Theresa.

THERESA. Your new project, do you have any actresses in mind for that?

LES. I do. I just found a lovely young lady, Deena Delite, but I'm going to ask her to change her name because Deena Delite sounds cheap to me.

THERESA. Do you have another name in mind?

LES. Not yet, but something will come to me. Something always does. I usually come up with a good screen name for a woman by staring at her naked breasts.

THERESA. I see.

LES. Or fucking her. But I can't always do that anymore because old age has finally caught up with me in the nether regions. But even if I can't penetrate a woman, I can still bring her to orgasm with my tongue or finger.

THERESA. Okay. That's all I need.

LES. No, because what I'm saying, is that in that moment of ecstasy, when she's wet and moaning, that's when a name will come to me.

THERESA. That's it! That's all. I don't need to hear anymore. (Gilman 54-55)

Les does everything he can in the last part of this interview to make Theresa as uncomfortable as possible until she has to physically run away from him. After leaving this last interview Theresa writes a very exposing article about Les. As a last win she fills her article with witty ways of referring to Les as a disgusting old man obsessed with women's breasts. She calls him a "seventy-two-year-old connoisseur of women's breasts," "a die-hard fan of mammary glands," and "a breast buff from way back" (Gilman 56).

Up until the very end of the play we see Les as a voyeuristic and disgusting old man. So why did Rebecca Gilman choose to make Les redeemable at the end of this play? This is the biggest question I was left with after reading through *Boy Gets Girl* the first time. As I started to think about this I came up with more questions than answers. Does Les actually redeem himself in the end, or does Theresa just view him differently because of his current vulnerability? Is their newfound friendship a sign of change in Les, a change in Theresa, or both? What is the exact moment that Theresa starts seeing Les differently, and why? How can Theresa, as a feminist, be willing to overlook Les' contributions to rape culture and sexist attitudes? These were the questions that made the relationship between Theresa and Les the most difficult for me to navigate.

It was through our rehearsals that I discovered when Theresa begins viewing Les differently. During their last interaction in the hospital Les confides in Theresa that losing Kathy was the biggest mistake of his life. It is the vulnerability Les shows her during this last scene that helps Theresa begin to see a different side of him. He understands that his actions weren't right, and he feels remorse over them. This is preceded by Les admitting that most of his personality is "bluff and bluster for the press."

LES. Then you're not angry?

THERESA. No. I don't know. Maybe you can't help being a jerk.

LES. I can't. As hard as I try, I can't.

THERESA. Maybe it's generational.

LES. It could be.

THERESA. Or genetic.

LES. Or bluff.

THERESA. What?

LES. A man's gotta make a living.

THERESA. There are other ways to make a living.

LES. Not for me. I'm not talented. I'm not smart. I'm just fearless.

THERESA. Or shameless.

LES. Or shameless. (Gilman 85-86)

Despite beginning to see him differently in the hospital I couldn't understand how Theresa was willing to overlook Les' past. Why would she befriend someone who's career had actively contributed to rape culture and sexism? I eventually decided that Theresa feeling bad for Les and Les redeeming himself were two different things. What I had originally read as Les redeeming himself was actually my own self feeling bad for the character and therefore releasing any negative opinions I had formed about him as a result.

In their last scene together Theresa finds out that Les doesn't have any family. This explains why he reached out to her when he went to the hospital. He doesn't seem to have any friends either, but his producers at least went to the lengths to send him some flowers while he was in the hospital. I think Les reaches out to Theresa because he literally has no one else, and

he seems genuinely surprised when Theresa actually shows up. Theresa later tells Mercer a little about her time spent at the hospital:

He's okay, I guess. We watched "Jeopardy." And he didn't know even the easiest ones. But then, when he did know one, he got so excited, like a little kid. Just so proud of himself. And then he told me he never graduated from high school. That when he was a kid, when he was fourteen, it was during the Depression and one day his father came to him and told him that they didn't have enough food for the whole family and he was the oldest so he would just have to go out and make it on his own. He said he sat in the backyard and cried. And then he went inside and packed a bag and went down to the rail yards and figured out how to hop a freight and that's what he did for the next three years. He hopped freights and went from town to town and lived like a bum. He said he was lonely and scared all the time. (Gilman 88)

A lot of the things Theresa learns about Les in their last interaction are things that make her feel bad for him but don't necessarily redeem his character. The most redeemable things Les does are after he learns about Tony. He gets in touch with his producers and arranges to have Theresa flown to Denver on a private plane. He also insinuates that he has a connection with the Mafia and that if Theresa wants them to break Tony's knees all she has to do is "say the word" (Gilman 89).

It was throughout our rehearsals that I came to terms with the fact that the audience would most likely feel for Les in the end of the play. I chose to let learning about Les' tragic past, the kind things he does to help Theresa, as well as the incredibly difficult situation she finds herself in, lead me to a place where Theresa could look past Les' persona and job. Both Theresa

and Les show change towards each other in their final scene which helped us build our characters to a place of friendship.

LES. I promise. That was bluff and bluster for the press. Today you're not working.

You're here as a visitor only. Okay? A visiting friend.

THERESA. Well, I kind of feel like staying.

LES. Then stay.

THERESA. Okay. (Gilman 87)

CHAPTER 4: PROCESS

Movement and Voice

As I was reading through *Boy Gets Girl* and conducting my feminist research I let what I knew about the character of Theresa Bedell inform the way I planned to use my voice and body. Theresa is older than I am and functions in a more stereotypically professional environment than I do. I knew that these things would have to change the way I carry myself. I personally live in a very physically relaxed state, I slouch and make myself comfortable wherever I am. Theresa, however, would not do that. As a woman working in a male centric environment she would need to exude confidence. This would require a more present and alert physicality than I use in my daily life.

I chose to let Theresa's career as a journalist as well as her confidence in herself inform her physicality. She would have stereotypically good posture, keep her movements controlled and precise, but occasionally loosen up that control when she got passionate about things. This was what I imagined to be her base physicality or the stereotypical way in which she operates. Unfortunately for Theresa, her story doesn't live in this base state, but instead in a heightened and dangerous state. These circumstances obviously needed to affect her physicality.

As Theresa becomes more aware of the growing danger that Tony presents I let her physicality grow more tense and rigid. This tension presented itself specifically in the shoulders and hands. As Theresa became more aggravated or on edge I would press my shoulders forward and let them rise slightly upward towards my ears. I would also ball my hands into fists, or grasp them together in front of me. If I was sitting during a scene I often had at least one of my arms close into my torso in a psychological sign of protecting my vital organs; my other arm was

usually up near my face, often times in front of my mouth, literally creating a communication barrier.

During rehearsals I had a conversation with Cynthia about letting Theresa's powerful physical presence melt as she became more defeated in her situation. As her situation became more dangerous I wanted her physicality to concave. This created a sense for me that Theresa's surety of herself was literally collapsing in. This physicality not only portrayed Theresa's physical journey from being confident and sure of herself to feeling insecure, but it also managed to elicit an emotional response in me that I could utilize in some of the more emotionally charged scenes.

The best example of this physical collapse came in Act 2 Scene 2 when Theresa receives a very threatening letter from Tony. During this scene Theresa becomes increasingly frantic as she realizes the gravity of the situation she is now in. She begins to yell at a realtor over the phone and when Mercer takes the phone from her and hangs up she snaps at him as well. As Theresa's initial fight response calmed down from this moment I let her physicality collapse so far that I literally squatted down, put my head between my knees, and interlocked my hands above my head.

I let Theresa's vocal quality be affected in the same way as her physicality. Theresa is a highly intelligent, educated, and confident woman. Because of this, I wanted her voice to be more powerful than my normal voice. I chose to let Theresa's voice fall into a lower vocal tone than I normally speak. I also wanted Theresa's vocal pattern to be different than mine. I typically talk in a very relaxed manner, I don't put too much thought into the words I use, and I enjoy using a lot of slang. Unlike me, Theresa is a journalist and words are very important to her. She would obviously be more articulate than me in her speech pattern.

This gave me the opportunity to put an importance on the specific words Theresa says. It also gave me some insight into the moments in the play that she doesn't speak as eloquently as normal. Those moments became very interesting to me as I tried to understand what it was about her circumstances that changed the way she typically speaks. One of these moments was actually brought to my attention by Cynthia during one of our rehearsals. In the first scene with Tony there is an exchange where Theresa is complaining about her friend Linda. She says that Linda always thinks she knows best for her and is always telling her what to do next. Tony responds with, "Like, maybe, go on a date with me." To which Theresa replies "Like maybe that, but that's okay" (Gilman 10).

Theresa is not the type of person who would start a sentence with "like maybe" so there had to be a reason for her sentence structure here. There were a couple of choices that I tried during this scene. One was that she was simply copying Tony's phrasing as a response to an awkward moment in their date. Another was that Theresa was actively annoyed at his phrasing and emphasized that annoyance through mock copying. And the choice I eventually went with was that Theresa knowingly copied that phrasing as an attempt to relax her speech pattern in an attempt to relate to Tony during their blind date.

There were times in the play that I needed to let Theresa's vocal quality be affected in the same way as her physicality. This meant that whenever I was allowing tension to creep into Theresa's physical state I wanted to let some tension creep into her voice as well. This vocal tension presented itself in two different ways and was dependent upon whether I believed Theresa was in a fight or a flight response.

Whenever I felt that Theresa's tension was coming from a place of wanting to push back at whatever was causing the tension I would let her vocal tone lower even more into a place of

aggression. That aggression both caused Theresa to yell, like when she snaps at Mercer for wanting to write a story about stalking based on her current experience, and also presented itself as a sort of quiet anger that felt as if she was taking a defensive and ready to pounce stance, like when she firmly tells Tony to leave her office. Whenever I felt that Theresa's tension was motivated by wanting to run away from what was happening I let her vocal tone pitch upwards into a sort of cry or whine. This happened whenever she was scared or when she was talking about something that upset her.

I think it is important to note that my strong physicality and lower vocal choices for Theresa can be viewed as stereotypically masculine. In reality they aren't masculine qualities, but instead simply qualities of power. We are conditioned to believe that these qualities are inherently masculine simply because society associates power and strength with men, while it associates more nurturing and softer qualities with women. I made these choices based on how I felt Theresa would act as the powerful and confident woman I read through the text of *Boy Gets Girl*. It wasn't until it was pointed out to me later that they could be read as masculine choices.

Summary of Rehearsal Journal

As soon as the University decided to change the intended production to *Boy Gets Girl* we needed to recast. The six students who were originally cast in *The Day Before Yesterday* were given a couple of days to prepare before reading sides from *Boy Gets Girl* together. I knew that all three women would be vying for the role of Theresa Bedell. I wanted to be as prepared as I could so I checked out a copy of the script from the library to study before our audition.

A couple days after the re-audition we received the cast list and I was delighted to have the opportunity to play Theresa. We were slated to start our rehearsals once we came back from Christmas break. I kept the script I had checked out from the library so I could study the

character through the holidays and be better prepared to move forward with this play once we got back. As rehearsals started up we were given our scripts and I was delighted to find that we had a newer edition of the script than the one I had been studying. The differences between the two scripts gave me new insight into the characters, as well as what Rebecca Gilman had intended with her play.

Our rehearsal process started with a read through and table work. It gave the cast a chance to discuss their individual characters and their relationships. It was through these discussions that some of my early questions about character relations were answered and new questions also formed. I felt that it was incredibly beneficial to take the information and questions we gathered in these discussions into our later rehearsals.

Once our table work was complete we moved on to blocking the show. During our blocking rehearsals we were able to pull from our discussions to help solidify different interactions between characters. The information and questions we had helped shape the way characters moved around each other in these scenes. For example, when we discussed the scene between Theresa and Tony in her office we had talked about Theresa avoiding Tony and trying to get out of the situation she was in. This led to the physical movements that were eventually blocked into our scene. Theresa was literally trying to avoid Tony by putting distance between them, keeping furniture in between them, and keeping her eye on the door as a potential exit.

After the show was blocked we had a chance to put it all together and stumble through the show. It was during our first stumble through that I made an interesting observation in my journal. As we were discussing scene changes a joke was made about displaying some of Les Kennkat's work to fill the dead time between scenes. The joke continued with us acknowledging that since Les Kennkat isn't real, and his movies don't actually exist, we would have to make our

own content for these fake films. There was an implied “casting couch” joke, talk of filming women’s naked breasts, and projecting these voyeuristic clips in front of our audience. I participated in this joke and it wasn’t until I was completing my journal entry later that I realized this joke could have easily offended somebody or made someone feel uncomfortable.

I thought it was important to note that during our table work we had a discussion about Les Kennkat’s work and how morally problematic his films may have been. In the script they are described as “low-budget, sixties, sexploitation movies” and in our discussion the actor playing Les chose to think of them as late-night adult films with nudity as opposed to fully pornographic films. Our discussion of the films during table work was dealt with in a sensitive manner and didn’t feel offensive or overly graphic. Despite the sensitivity we had previously given the topic we still joked about it later on.

I found it odd that nobody in the moment of that joke brought up the possible offensiveness of the topic we were discussing. Instead, everyone seemed to go along with it. I was disappointed with myself that I didn’t address this topic with more grace and insight. However, I do recognize that it’s human nature to joke about things that make you uncomfortable, and pornography, however mild it may be, is a topic that makes me uncomfortable. After this I made it a goal to try to handle similar situations in the future with a better awareness of my own faults, as well as the comfortability of those around me.

Once we had the show blocked our director chose to rehearse individual relationships instead of a chronological scene by scene. For example, we would rehearse all of the Theresa and Tony scenes one night, then we would move on to the Theresa and Mercer scenes the next. This was incredibly beneficial for me to track the individual relationships between my character and the other characters I interacted with. It gave me a chance to notice things that

carried over from scene to scene that I hadn't noticed during our read through or blocking rehearsals. This way of rehearsing also gave me a chance to see where I felt there were holes in the journey from one interaction to another.

The biggest hole that I had to fill was between the second interview with Les and the final scene with Les in the hospital. The second interview ends with Theresa running out of his office after hearing Les graphically detail pleasuring a woman to come up with her film name. The two interviews Theresa conducts with Les breed a hatred and disgust for him that helps her write the snarky and insightful article about the "seventy-two-year-old connoisseur of women's breasts" (Gilman 56). Yet, after writing this article fueled by hate and disgust she still agrees to go visit him in the hospital when he asks her to. Why?

The jump between storming out of Les' office in anger and going to visit him in the hospital was a difficult one for me to make. I finally came to terms with this difficult transition after I realized how true Theresa's line "I don't know why I came" was. I chose to acknowledge that since Theresa was going through something incredibly traumatic maybe she just wanted to do something outside of herself and her situation.

Theresa isn't sure why she agreed to visit a person that she doesn't really like or care for. Maybe she felt sorry for him, maybe she wanted to see him in a physically weakened state, or maybe she just wanted to forget her own problems for a while and focus on someone else's problems. After rehearsing through the three different scenes with Les it wasn't hard to let her statement of "I don't know why I came" ring true. Theresa didn't know why she agreed to come and I didn't need to know either.

During our rehearsal process my Grandfather passed away. He died the morning of January 22nd and oddly enough my journal entry for that day is one of the longest and most

detailed that I have. I think I was trying to focus on something other than my own grief so I threw myself into rehearsal with a passion to forget my pain. We happened to be working on some very emotional scenes between Theresa and Mercer and I wrote in my journal how grateful I was that I trusted the actor playing Mercer. It made diving into the grief and terror of this play a lot easier knowing that I had someone there to support me and help me through it.

The next weekend I flew home for my Grandfather's funeral and my understudy went into rehearsals for me. Luckily we had previously watched the understudies walk through the show which made me confident that my understudy would do fine while I was away. I appreciated that our rehearsal process allowed the understudies to walk through the show. Not only did it help the understudies feel more confident in their ability to step in if they needed to, but it also gave us a chance to discuss our different takes on the characters and build upon each other.

It was very different watching the show as the understudies were rehearsing. I had a chance to sit back and muse on the story that was in front of me. The day of the understudy rehearsal I wrote in my journal that "Theresa is alone in her experience." I continued to muse upon the fact that I currently live in a world where the #MeToo Movement has given a powerful voice to people who previously felt like they had none. While watching the understudy run through I was struck by the fact that Theresa had no access to a support system.

The power of the internet and the ability to connect with a wide variety of people has made it easier for women who suffer these kinds of experiences to find a support system. The #MeToo Movement has given many people the support system that they needed to speak out about their experiences and try to shape the world to a better tomorrow. It was heartbreaking for me to realize that Theresa Bedell didn't have this luxury. As I was watching my understudy

rehearse I realized how different Theresa's experience might have been had this taken place in our current time instead of the early 1990s.

As we continued to rehearse and work through the show I wrote about different moments and notes in my rehearsal journal. One that I specifically want to highlight happened on January 25th. Our director Cynthia White was sick and out for the day but luckily we had a very capable assistant director who was able to run our rehearsal that night. Our assistant director was a young woman who was currently taking classes in the undergraduate BFA Acting track. While we were rehearsing that night I noticed a shift in energy and power dynamics.

Throughout our rehearsal that night I felt that our assistant director wasn't being shown the respect or authority that she deserved. There was a specific male undergraduate student in our cast who flat out told her "no" when she suggested we try something new in a scene. His disrespect may have come from a number of places: he was older than she, they were classmates in the same year of schooling together, or it could have been the fact that he was a man and she was a woman.

I wrote in my journal that I understood it might be difficult to go from being equal classmates to suddenly having a power differential in rehearsal, but that we should work on showing our respect for the titles people hold. Despite the fact that they usually interacted with each other as classmates on the same power level he should have respected the fact that she was our assistant director during rehearsal time. I personally found it helpful to work with our assistant director that night as we explored some of the ideas she had. The suggestions she gave helped me find new moments that we hadn't focused on before.

I found that specific night of rehearsal important because of the academic differences between men and women in the world. I don't claim to know exactly why my male castmate

chose to disrespect our assistant director as he did, but I do believe that it had something to do with the gender difference. I oftentimes see young women in power be talked down to or disrespected by males in lower positions of power.

As we got closer to opening the show we started to focus on specific moments that our director thought were important and needed more attention, or moments that we hadn't solidified yet. We continued to work on specific moments as we started doing full run throughs of the show. Soon after, we got into our performance space and were able to start working with the set and props. We had our spacing rehearsals which soon led into our technical rehearsals with lights and sound.

Performances

We performed *Boy Gets Girl* February 22nd through February 25th, and then February 28th through March 4th of 2018. After our opening night we had the opportunity to go out into the lobby to get some snacks and wine while interacting with our audience. During this meet and greet I had a middle aged woman come up to me and thank me for my honest performance. She explained to me that she had gone through something similarly traumatic when she was younger and that she really related with the character of Theresa. She went on to tell me that she was grateful that I was able to give such an honest and strong voice to something she identified with.

As performances continued I began to have more audience encounters like this. I had strangers telling me their traumatic life experiences because they had seen something during *Boy Gets Girl* that they identified with. I also had fellow students and friends express their own difficulties with previous, and even current, men in their lives. As an artist it was empowering to realize that I was connecting with the audience in this way. I was relieved that my performance

was honest enough that women who had gone through similar situations were identifying with Theresa.

Overall I felt that our performances went well and that the show as a whole was well received by our audiences. I chose not to facilitate a feedback form for my thesis performance, but occasionally received kind words from UCF students and faculty who had seen the show. We also received a kind review in the *Orlando Sentinel*. “Anchoring the production, Amanda Anne Dayton gives a strong performance as Theresa... Dayton taps into that most primal of human instincts – the desire for safety – and convincingly shows us how a self-assured woman can crumble when fear overtakes her life. Perhaps most important, Dayton doesn’t shy away from Theresa’s rough edges. She’s not always likable, but that makes her more real” (Palm).

CHAPTER 5: REFLECTION

Goals Going into *Boy Gets Girl*

Going into the process of *Boy Gets Girl* I had an idea of what I wanted my thesis to be and what I wanted to achieve in my thesis performance. Ultimately I wanted my thesis to challenge the gender dynamics that seem rampant in our society and I wanted to draw attention to the difficulties women face in this world simply because of their gender. I understood that my thesis performance wouldn't have a large effect on the world, but I hoped that our small audiences would leave *Boy Gets Girl* with a larger understanding and empathy for the difficulties women face, a sense of fellowship in the difficulties they themselves face, or an ability to relate to the character of Theresa and find comfort in how she moves forward at the end of the play.

Despite what I hoped the audience would get out of our performance I didn't want my goals to center around how the audience would perceive or react to *Boy Gets Girl*. Since audience perception wasn't something I could control, I instead wanted to focus on what I could do to honestly portray this character and her struggles. I wanted to use the text and the given character relationships to show a strong, working woman with flaws, portray the true fear and anxiety that comes from this kind of a situation, and activate change in the way people see and treat each other in these difficult situations.

Effect of the #MeToo Movement

As we began the process for *Boy Gets Girl* I was interested to see how the current #MeToo Movement would affect our work. I assumed that our discussions of some of the more difficult topics in this play would be treated with extra respect or care due to the current social

climate. Throughout rehearsals I found my assumption to be correct during our discussions, but incorrect when we were just interacting as a cast in between discussions.

In the previous section I mentioned that we began our rehearsal process with table work. It was during our table work discussions that I felt the most sense of respect was given to the difficult topics covered in *Boy Gets Girl*. We didn't crack jokes to lighten the mood, we didn't discredit each other's opinions when met with differences, and there were times that we even opened up to share our own related shortcomings. Looking back on our table work I can attribute this sort of reverence to two things: the #MeToo Movement and given circumstances that led us to *Boy Gets Girl* in the first place, as well as the mutual understanding that we were building the foundation for our artistic journey with this play.

As we continued with our rehearsals the respect for difficult topics slightly subsided. Nobody was outright disrespectful or rude but it became easier to make little jokes here and there. The most notable joke was the one I previously mentioned about making Les Kennkat content to show during scene changes. That joke was by far the most lewd, but we also made jokes about stalking each other, taking stalker photos of each other, and we even joked about how stupid we thought Harriet was, and by extension, people like her.

I never thought that these jokes were inappropriate at the time, and reflecting back on them I'm surprised to find that I'm glad we became comfortable enough as a cast to joke like this. I believe that it was important for our cast to dive deep into the challenging and quite frankly depressing topics as we built our foundation, but it was also important for us to pull each other out of those depressing thoughts in whatever way we could. I noticed that as we grew closer as a cast we were more inclined to joke with each other, but it also became easier to

engage in serious discussions about the situations in *Boy Gets Girl*. As our trust in each other grew we were able to dive deeper into the difficult scenes we were rehearsing.

In looking back on the process I was surprised to realize that the #MeToo Movement didn't affect our production in the way I expected it to. *Boy Gets Girl* doesn't take place during the #MeToo Movement and because of that it was difficult to utilize in my acting. I found that it became impossible to try and place something where it didn't belong. There were times throughout the process that I would completely forget about the #MeToo Movement. Instead it became a disconnected section of my thesis that I felt was a failure. What I didn't realize was that I wasn't going to understand the effects of the #MeToo Movement until we got the show in front of an audience.

I felt the most effect of the #MeToo Movement when we got into performances. I had a number of women confide their own experiences to me after watching what Theresa goes through. Each woman saw something different in Theresa's story, they identified with different things, they experienced similarities as well as differences, and each of these women were empowered to see what happened to Theresa during *Boy Gets Girl* and say, "Me too."

Reflection

Throughout rehearsals for *Boy Gets Girl* I spent a lot of time focusing on the character relationships. I chose to do this because I thought it was the best way to understand the character of Theresa Bedell and more honestly portray her character. Reflecting back on the performances I do feel that I was able to successfully portray Theresa's struggles in an honest way. Using the character relationships was helpful in keeping me engaged with my fellow actors on stage and helped keep me honestly in the moment.

I believe that it was building these character relationships through rehearsals that led me to success. It was easier to stay engaged with my fellow castmates during our performances because we had taken the time to discuss and build these relationships together. Instead of focusing on my own dialogue and actions I was able to take into account the place that my scene partner was coming from and really respond to them.

While I was able to gauge whether I was successful at portraying Theresa in an honest way, I found it difficult to gauge the level of success in activating change. The only audience feedback I participated in was a brief talkback we had during the run of the show. In that talkback the response was positive towards actively working to create safer spaces for women and speaking out when seeing something. However, saying that you will do those things is different from actually going out and doing them. I considered creating a feedback form for audience members to fill out, but I realized I would run into the same problem.

Even though I wasn't able to confirm whether this show activated change in the audience I can definitely confirm that it activated change in me. I have never before been so passionate about feminism and creating a safe space for the women around me. I find myself speaking out more when the women in my life are treated unfairly or dismissed, I am more vocal when men belittle me or the women around me, and I actively seek ways to build up other women.

Performing the role of Theresa Bedell, during the #MeToo Movement, and under the circumstances that we did, activated change within me. I am now a stronger ally to women. I speak out against victim blaming. I speak out against gender discrimination in the workplace. I am a stronger actor, a stronger person, and more importantly I am a stronger woman.

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