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LAUGHING IN THE FACE OF FEMININITY

A STUDY OF GENDER AND COMEDY

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Abstract

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LAUGHING IN THE FACE OF FEMININITY

This thesis examines the dichotomy between comedy as a radical form of expression and communication, and the limiting and usually over-sexualized female characters available within comedy. Not only are there not enough roles for women within all of theatre, comedic roles for women are especially rare. Most of the time those 'comedic' roles are not the creators of the jokes but rather a presence off which a male character may act upon and then react to when seen fit. Very little research has been done on the effects of social roles and obligations, and the number of women who find their way to comedy in the same easy manner that most men do.

DEDICATION

To

Patricia Gallagher

Without whom I would be lost in all things and the world a significantly less funny place.

The Research

> We, who live…in this Shangri-La of progressive thinking that is the Bay Area, think of how radical and forward-thinking San Francisco is in terms of civil rights, free thinking, technology, LGBT rights, etc. etc., it is alarming to find that our theatre community is okay with unequal representation of women in theatre (Guzman).

Fontana Butterfield Guzman is the organizer of "Yeah, I Said Feminist"; a Bay Area group of woman from every facet of theatre who are joining in their efforts to create more openings for women in theatre, especially for writers and actors. Simply put, there are just not enough roles for women in theatre. And of those available female roles, many are not artistically fulfilling, or else fail to display the complexity and variance of today's women. In taking acting classes and auditioning regularly for the past five years, I have noticed a habitual imbalance in the lack of men and the large numbers of women at auditions. Yet, the majority of roles being cast are male characters. This is not a fair representation of the members of the theatre community or an essentially evenly split population of men and women.

Why is this? Theatre began as a male tradition with men playing all the roles to a dominantly male audience. It makes sense that the stories being written then were those of the male experience. But there has been great change since the 'classics' were written and women have since taken on more power and presence in society. But theatre does not reflect those powerful positions

women are taking on in real life. Living in such a progressive place, in such a progressive field, in such a progressive time, why is it that the stories being told on stage have not evolved with women? In fact, why is theatre not setting the example of an equitable power structure both on and off the stage that society can learn from? Is there even room for women in theatre?

This imbalance I see in theatre is magnified when looking at comedy, which is the genre I have been drawn to specifically. Comedy is a powerful tool. It has the power to make people see incongruities in the way they live and think. Through laughter, an important line of communication between the audience and performer is created, making spectators more willing to listen to ideas and opinions they otherwise might not agree. However, along with the possibilities comedy holds for restructuring certain areas of society, comedy itself is entrenched with rigid archetypes and limitations for women. Amy Seham explores this paradox within improv-comedy with her book, *Whose Improv is it Anyway*? She examines "tensions in improv-comedy between the rhetoric of freedom and self-expression and the rather rigid rules that govern performance"(xxiv). Seham interviews a multitude of performers and analyses the different "waves" of improv throughout its history. Teams that use long-form improv or Heralds[1] rely on something called "Groupmind". Groupmind is created when a team of improvers is so synchronized with each other they can create

[1] A style of improv in which improvisers create a 30-minute or more completely unplanned interaction, creating characters and relationships, based on audience suggestion.

dynamic, in-the-moment entertainment that, at its best, stays a few seconds ahead of the audience's expectation. It relies on the performers always taking each other's offerings and saying 'yes' to keep the scene moving forward. She asks why, with "improv's promise of truth, freedom, and… community"(5), do female improvers end up confined to the roles of wife, girlfriend, mother, and sexual object by the men on most teams? In a genre that celebrates every performer's free will, women are still boxed into a position of subordination and it is extremely difficult for those women to fight back and still be considered a "team player". I see this problem in scripted comedy as well. Female characters are often stereotyped and one-note, usually setting up the joke for the male characters. I also see this in real life with the negative association with the word 'feminist'; if society is operating under the Groupmind and feminists are not being good "team players". These limitations for women in comedy and life only stunt the creativity and choices of everyone involved, so why does the 'win the girl' trope still exist?

Sue-Ellen Case, in her book *Feminism and Theatre*, lays out a "new poetics", which diagnoses and introduces a new series of techniques of representation onstage that feminists are using to break away from fictionalized associations with gender roles. She explains that everything in theatre is a sign, not just representing the thing it is in real life, but also something new based on covert cultural encoding. This cultural encoding "is the imprint of ideology upon the sign--the set of values, beliefs and ways of seeing that control the

connotations of the sign in the culture at large". For example, when a brunette actress makes an entrance, it immediately means something different to an audience than when a blonde walks on stage. A blonde might be associated with dumb, sorority girl, virginal, and moral, while a brunette might invoke the images of a "bad girl", "Plain Jane", and "nerd". The audience immediately projects a culturally created meaning onto her before she even opens her mouth. Cultural encoding does not just happen to women, and men are victims of stereotypes as well, however, those expectations weigh more on women and the positions they are expected to fill. If we understand this cultural encoding, we can identify why certain casting, staging, and actions are associated with certain feelings or opinions and then work to change those preconceived ideas (116-117). In her book, *Women and Laughter*, Frances Gray breaks down the typical way we see comedic female characters through the ever-present male gaze in relation to semiotics:

> Comedy positions the woman not simply as the object of the male gaze but of the male laugh—not just to-be-looked-at but to-be-laughed-at—doubly removed from creativity. Hence the relentless stereotyping of women into roles which permit them to be looked at, judged, and laughed at as sexual objects: the dumb blonde, the wisecracking tart, the naïve virgin, the dragon who doesn't realize she is sexually past it (9).

Most of the time male characters hold the power on stage, so the problem is not just the number of female roles, but also the quality of female roles that must be improved. Luckily, this is possible because it is already happening with playwrights like Ann Washburn, Naomi Wallace, Sarah Ruhl, and Susan Lori

Parks. Artists are immerging with new styles and stories to tell. These new playwrights are exciting and energizing but unfortunately they are not the standard. We have a theatre that by and large shows women who are in a submissive position. Female characters are usually either accessories to a male story or bystanders in their own story while the men around them take action. Even when their name appears as the title, the female character is rarely the central force within the play. Melissa Hillman, Artistic Director of Impact Theatre in Berkeley, California noticed that even female playwrights still write passive female characters. Some women, though not necessarily passive themselves, still project that engrained passivity onto the women they create. These female characters revolve around the men in the play and react to their action just as Seham explained the female improvers' pattern of holding back and letting the male improvers take the lead. Although many plays written by both men and women reject them, there are still many plays that enforce standard male and female power relationships. Plays by women do not necessarily break away from convention since many of them are "still a story with a central male character, just told from the woman's point of view" (Hillman).

So what happens when women begin to take hold of their own story and change the ways in which women can be funny by changing the associations we put with femininity in comedy? Nina Auerbach responded to Regenia Gagnier's essay, "Between Women", by saying, "Women's humor in the public realm is constrained by prevalent cultural values of male superiority and dominance, and

female passivity; that certain social factors like marriage and advanced age remove the constraints" (qtd in Gagnier 137). Young women are at risk of being unwanted or unattractive by doing things (like comedy) that are associated with men and masculinity, but once they have secured a man, or grown out of the beauty of youth, they can finally live life without those constraints. This is a very pessimistic way to live life but I am confident that comedy, and in turn theatre, can continue to change. But it will by no means be easy.

When women use humor not to poke fun at themselves but to highlight their entrapment within a system of power their humor is often less appreciated by both men and women. Everyone who is raised in our American culture assimilates representations of women through the male gaze and in some way perpetuates the gender roles we have all learned from infancy unless they actively choose not to. Those women, like Kathy Griffin and Sarah Silverman, who do not exhibit the appropriateness expected of them make both men and women feel uncomfortable. Laughter that is not constructed under a male system is dangerous laughter, and though funny women are merely making people laugh, laughter is a form of power. Female stand-up comics, who turn the source of their comedy away from themselves, avoiding self-deprecating humor and instead use men as a source of material, raise questions about what is or should be normal. Stephen Wagg discusses the relationship of power and comedy through gender, class, race, age, and region in his book, *Because I Tell a Joke or Two*. He puts it best in saying, "Indeed, rather than neutralizing the

radicalism of women's laughter, comedy, particularly in women's cultural spaces, is always potentially threatening to dominant social orders, processes and power relationships" (52). This female power-base that comes out of this type of comedy needs to be encouraged and continued so that perhaps one day will see just as many female stand-up comics as male. But on the whole, women in comedy are not being encouraged. Indeed, why would the power of female comedy be nurtured if it disrupts the working order of everyday life?

Dr. Avner Ziv is a psychologist and professor at Tel Aviv University. Though he spends a small portion of his book, *Personality and Sense of Humor*, on gender, he describes his own experiment in administering a test that measured senses of humor in both boys and girls. He found that "humorist boys were not significantly different from their nonhumorist peers. Humorist girls, however, were significantly different from other girls: they had [better] self-image, and they saw themselves as having more characteristics of the male stereotype" (160). This is not difficult for me to believe.

At the same time as researching gender and comedy, I have also been working as a teaching assistant for an Introduction to Acting class that is composed equally of males and females; half coming from a theatre background and half never having done theatre. I see a startling difference in the amount of space the female students are willing to take up compared to the males. The girls are drastically different in the confidence they project in their body language—failing to make eye contact, crossing their arms or holding their hands in a closed

off way, and looking unengaged in what they are doing. Vocally, the amount the girls will talk or voice opinion in front of the class compared with the boys is significantly less. When playing physical games the girls' conviction with which they play is almost non-existent —as if somehow committing to a physical action or playing a game to win will be seen as too aggressive for good taste.

This became very pronounced during a game of Elbow Tag when the boys would enjoy being chased around the room for a while before finding safety by linking arms with someone. Conversely, most of the girls would only allow themselves to be chased for mere moments until linking arms and having the class' attention refocused elsewhere. Only a fraction of the male students showed restrained characteristics and at week seven in the quarter, when introverted boys began stepping outside their comfort zone, the girls were still very controlled, not doing anything that could make them look silly or unattractive. Many girls stepped back into the shadows and allowed the boys to become the dominant presence in the room.

I see this and am discouraged, knowing this is not because of their natural tendency or that they are like this with friends and family. They have been bred by "a clearly definable set of sex-role standards regarding humor which exists for males and females in our culture" (qtd. in Barreca, 5). I see it in myself when I naturally stop telling a story or talking in a group because an inner timer goes off telling me I have talked too much. Or when I immediately take in my surroundings when laughing to see if others are laughing. This does not seem to

be a dominant issue with men and many of my male counterparts do not seem barred in the same ways from speaking and laughing freely.

According to Regina Barreca, author of *They Used to Call Me Snow White…But I Drifted*, women have only fairly recently been allowed to be funny in the spaces historically associated with a woman's life. The main space she discusses is the kitchen among other women, while men are out in the world—a place where women had to maintain the façade of their delicate innocence. Any natural humor women might have had was completely suppressed or only shared in the company of other women. As women slowly began to move away from the kitchen and enter the competitive world, their right to laugh began to develop, followed by the authority to make others laugh. However, this evolution did not just happen by itself. Small openings throughout history have created opportunities for women to take power. Susan A. Glenn presents an example of this in her book, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism,* with live entertainment at the turn of the 20th century when Vaudeville began opening many doors to female performers, allowing them more freedom than ever onstage. In this time, the look of beauty underwent a drastic change. A full figure and fleshy body that was previously sought after because it showed the marks of eating regularly, wealth, and the upper class quickly went out of style and was replaced by thin and narrow. As a result, female performers of larger sizes began dipping their toes further into the masculine world of comedy, where they could use their newly deemed unfeminine bodies in masculine ways

for comedic results. It became evident to women embracing the genre of physical comedy and slapstick that "to sacrifice femininity, even in the name of artistic devotion, was really to emphasize it by calling attention to the difference between sanctioned and unsanctioned female behavior" (59). This meant a clear divide was created between those girls who employed femininity and those who didn't. Women who were more masculine appealed to mainly female audiences.

In 1918, America entered WWI and any man physically capable of fighting who was not upper class or an industrial worker was shipped over seas. The jobs and duties those men left behind still needed doing and suddenly women who sat around maintaining a demure social standard while waiting to be married were not a gainful use of half the population. A higher expectation for women was expected in the sciences, industry, and factory work and women met those standards and many found they thrived in their new responsibilities. Glenn explains why this development in women's independence did not continue evolving at the same rate after WWI. Once men came home from war and found women had taken their place in the public sphere, men expected life to return to its pre-war state. Men wanted their wives and jobs back but some women found they liked their new sense of power over their own lives and tensions between the sexes grew high. Women who hoped to keep that power intact were threats to the patriarchal system of power and had to be stopped.

It is not that great female writers or strong female characters do not exist in history, but those stories have been lost to time and instead of hearing them

early on as we do with Tom Sawyer, Peter Pan, and The Three Musketeers, little boys and girls alike are given stories of the male narrative. Those stories include women, but they are always in the role of mother, wife, sexual conquest, or witch. Can a woman exist outside of those roles? Can women not have adventures? When people think of the big existential questions like 'what is my purpose', 'what am I meant to do with my life?' 'What is my relation to whatever lays beyond this life?' we think of those as "universal questions." But when questions like 'do I want children and a family?' or 'how do I identify my sensuality as opposed to the sexuality society has taught me?' are asked they are considered "female questions" by many men and women. Yet, in today's world men should be asking those questions just as much as women ask them and labeling them "female questions" devalues their importance in the eyes of a male dominated society.

These are the same issues I have with theatre, especially within the context of comedy. Women as a whole are often labeled 'unfunny' and women who employ a style of comedy that veers away from mainstream ideas of funny and do not make men laugh are considered failed attempts. Those same people who are inclined to label women 'unfunny' do not stop to ask if women, within a patriarchal system, have been trained to embody a male sense of humor. What if there is an innately female sense of humor that is fundamentally different from men's and society cannot recognize it because, like most things, our idea of 'natural' is made prevalent by the male perspective? Regina Barreca is also the

editor of *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy*[2] and in her introduction she explains the existence of a specifically female humor that greatly differs from men's humor and, thus, from mainstream humor. Women's use "of comedy is dislocating, anarchic and, paradoxically, unconventional" (10) and takes on major questions and problems concerning the status quo. There is often more anger and tragedy interwoven into women's humor, not always ending on a laugh, but hinting towards a solution. Women's comedic writing often demands more of the reader than is typically asked because its function is to motivate people into action. Many people allow the anger within women's comedy to invalidate the humor present because if a woman's comedy is not including "certain elements [such as] reconciling gentility, soft admonitions for social lapses, [and] sweet mirth" (10) it is not truly comedic or female.

The disparagement theory of laughter boils down the relationship of the person laughing, and the person being laughed at, to winner and loser. The laughter "is not caused by the intrinsic ugliness or stupidity of someone else but by our perception of ourselves as superior" (Gray, 25). Laughing at someone out of victory reinstates that person's position of power. When the source of women's comedic material shifts from her to him, she can be seen as taking a position of superiority over him. In my experience, many men are not fans of

[2] The essays of this book revolve around dissecting the writing of female authors and how comedy functions in the characters and narrative of those works. Barreca's introduction to the book grapples with women and comedy at large and so can be applied to the study of female comedy in performance.

being laughed at. Amy E. Seham weighs the effects of improv comedy as either a seizure of agency and power versus a reinforcement of power structures. She says, "Women and other oppressed people are often effectively barred from wielding the weapon of humor by two obstacles: mainstream society's refusal to acknowledge their ability to create comedy, and its punishment of those who try" (Seham, xxi). I have found in both my performance career and my immersion in theatre criticism that the smallest misstep by a woman will result in critical and overly harsh critique, whereas the same missteps will be overlooked when committed by a man. Deviance and experimentation from men are heralded as innovative, yet when women try to tap into their innate comedy and tell their own story in a non-male way, it often falls flat.

I am frustrated not only by female characters that are shallow and one-note as well as few and far between, but also by the practice of directors casting men in "gender neutral" parts. These are characters who are written with no obvious gender, sometimes without even the stamp of gender in their name, and I constantly hear those characters referred to with a male pronoun even before casting. Who is to say women could not play them? I am equally as frustrated that even in self-written work I feel a need to abide by the rules of my gender in order to be taken seriously and compete at a professional level that will be appealing to people. It feels as though I am caught between making my own work, requiring me to be performer, writer, director, producer, and advertiser, and being part of established theatre institutions that pay well but where I will

sit on the sidelines most of the time and compromise my personal standard. This, of course, is not true of every enterprise I involve myself in, whether it be independent work or with an established theatre company. However, I have enough past experience and knowledge about this profession to know there is a good chance it will be so.

Last summer I was an acting intern at Shakespeare Santa Cruz for their two outdoor shows, *The Man in the Iron Mask* and *Henry IV Part 2*. I enjoyed the experience and the people I met there immensely. I was exposed to a caliber of acting higher than my own and learned invaluable lessons. It was not until I had time and self-reflection that I realized how some of my liberal Santa Cruz education and female empowerment was counteracted in subtle ways by my summer with SSC. One memory that does not sit well with me is an off-hand remark made by an actor during a *Henry IV* rehearsal a couple weeks into rehearsals. The girl interns, needing parts in a play that only has three female characters written in (played by two paid company members), were cast as 'Angels of Mercy'. We would sporadically appear onstage to create a divine presence, or as nurses aiding the King, or to carry furniture on and off the stage. Our director asked the girl interns, "Which two Angels want to enter with Mark[3]?" Being the well-trained and behaved girls we were, none of us gave a solid answer, instead we just shrugged our shoulders and raised our eyebrows

[3] Name has been changed for anonymity.

as if to say, “whatever works for you!” In the silence of our mimed responses a twenty something actor with a fairly large part blurted out in a playful tone to the more seasoned actor involved in the entrance, “Mark, you can take your pick. Whichever ones you find most pleasing”. Mark silenced the young actor’s laughter with a definitive headshakes and serious “No.” It was a fleeting and odd interaction that clearly defined the ‘male gaze’. We were objects on stage, there to create a nice stage picture and bring a feminine gentility to an otherwise testosterone driven play. Everyone in that rehearsal room knew one another, maybe not intimately, but after fourteen full days of interaction the idea that we were people with names and personalities was obvious. Yet this actor still decided to talk about us as objects right in front of us as if we were not there. What I find disheartening is that in the room full of men and a female stage manager who all heard these remarks, including the director, no one except Mark chose to say anything. I appreciated Mark’s response but I do not think it was enough. I do not think that actor left SSC or that rehearsal room knowing how much his remarks sexualized and demeaned us. I developed a hyper self-critical attitude leaving the internship that I neither like nor want to have reinforced by future projects. But I can’t help thinking: is this kind of off-hand disregard what I will meet at every juncture of a professional theatre career? If that company of actors had been eleven women and eleven men as opposed to seven women and fourteen men, would the presence of other women bring an empowerment to the women and a natural checks and balances to the

atmosphere? The drive for women to have more to do and say onstage is there, the creativity is there but the parts are not. In the last fifty years the mindset of what a woman's function in life is has shifted. The women before me fought the battle but the battle is not over.

Women today are in a state of liminality, still treading the line of what we want to do and what we should do. American women undoubtedly have more rights than they did 200 years ago, but does that mean that employing those rights is any easier? In the opinion of Carolyn Heilbrun, author of *The Lives of Women: The View from the Threshold*, "the reason why these old structures so appeal to some is…in following them, [women can] avoid liminality, avoid hovering on the threshold. It is easier to do what is expected of you than to live in 'intensity and suspense'" (90). This can just as easily be applied to women in theatre as well. The ingénue stereotype will always be with us, as will the expired hag will always be funny to a certain demographic. Even if that is true, I envision a theatre that will some day equally represent the male and female experience. Contemporary playwrights are actively rejecting stereotypes about women, not abiding by sweeping generalizations about femininity or feeling the need to masculinize women. My ambition in doing this thesis to inspire theatre artists to create more female characters that are as unique and complex as the living, breathing women who embody them.

The Process

When I decided that my thesis would culminate in a one-woman show, I did not yet have any idea what the final product would look like or even what themes it would cover. The only thing I knew was that I wanted to utilize the year ahead and challenge myself beyond the show over-loading of my undergraduate years. When I met with Paul Whitworth, my interim thesis advisor, on the first days of classes I told him the details I had established. He advised me to use the format of a one-woman show to explore a question or topic that I wished to answer or understand better. Both the process and performance would be building blocks to navigate my way to answers. He asked if I had any such burning questions at this time and suddenly a switch flipped on in my brain. In retrospect, how I did not connect the two earlier is baffling but I did indeed have questions and they were all to do with comedy and gender, my gender specifically, and a one-woman show was the perfect way to investigate them.

From my own experiences doing comedic plays, writing and performing sketch comedy in an all-female group called *Shebam*, creating clowning material, to consistently watching different improv groups on campus, I had plenty of time and reason to reflect on comedy and gender. Some of my original questions at the start of this process were: why is cross-dressing only funny on men? Why are women considered the "less-funny sex"? Could women de-gender themselves

and would that make them more or less funny? I answered these questions as they came and slowly made my way to the heart of the matter, using myself as a jumping board. I went back and looked at why I held back so much in collaborations and why I felt, even with some of my closest male friends, not as welcome as other guys in certain creative spaces. Why were identical ideas coming from me, and then a man met with such different receptions? Why did I have to convince people so thoroughly before they would see that my idea had comedic value? Was it all in my head?

While these questions were simmering on the back burner I did my internship with Shakespeare Santa Cruz, where clear gender roles hung thickly in the air and my ability to be thin, beautiful, and well mannered became my tools to success. Here, questions about how appearance affected comedy for women began forming. Do attractive women have more license to be funny or is conventional beauty a hindrance? When I asked myself these questions, it was never in terms of absolutes one way or another. Rather, how does appearance change a first impression or create a barrier that a female-bodied actor must push through?

The Show

The material I wrote in conjunction with this research was performed as a basic staged reading. I began by telling a story about a date I went on in which I mixed up the words 'minstrel' and 'menstrual' multiple times. After my date and I finished laughing about the mix up, he responded, "don't worry, I think it's cute!" I explained why this did not sit right with me and how it summed up the restrictions I have been experiencing in the comedic world of theatre. Then I set up the audience for what they were about to see: five more characters who were all on a journey to putting themselves into the position of subject of their own lives.

The first fictional character was Allegra Clearwater, who ran an acting class for ingénues. Allegra taught her girls to only train their upper register voices so they could sing beautiful arias to backdrop the action of the hero. She taught the "shrinky dink effect", which is the act of collapsing one's whole body to appear smaller than the male lead. After going into all the character choices ingénues have, which were not all that many or vastly different from each other, Allegra taught the girls the 'four iles rule'; when in doubt be fragile, agile, docile, and fertile. She impressed upon the girls the need for ingénues to be beautiful, not funny. Allegra Clearwater is an example of a ridiculous character that makes ridiculous demands of her students, but ultimately, she rooted very much in real life. The lessons women learn from infancy about how to be a girl seem

ridiculous when packed into four pages and spoken frankly by Allegra but go unnoticed when subtly instilled over many years.

The next monologue addressed the newly named[4] trope, the Manic Pixie Dream Girl. This character, Leila, began giving the eulogy for the man around whom her life revolved. Beginning with realizing she does not actually have a last name, to the moment she discovers she cannot remember anything about her life before meeting Ethan, Leila has a slow discovery about the fact that she is not real. She is just the quirky and fun girl who helped the down-on-his-luck guy out of his brooding funk. After this realization she wondered what would happen to her when Ethan is completely gone and began advertising her muse services to anyone who needed an epiphany.

Leila led right into Michele, a twelve-year-old girl obsessed with Rihanna and her famous lifestyle. She admired Rihanna's hot body and fashion style and explained how she thought Rihanna had done a lot for boobs and nipples because of the way Rihanna flaunts hers freely. Michele talks about wanting to buy leather underwear/shorts and how her mom told her they looked too slutty. Michele is an example of the many mixed messages happening between lessons parents are teaching and the examples celebrities are setting for young girls. On one woman a revealing dress might be sexy or "hot" and on a woman with a slightly different body type, "slutty". I am very interested in how age plays into this dynamic. The people who create the mass branding for young women have

[4] By Nathan Rabin in 2007

decided when a girl is allowed to become a woman in regards to clothing and behavior. In Michele's case, she is too young to flaunt cleavage, but on her sister Trish, who is two years her senior, cleavage is completely fine. What happened in those two years? When development and maturity happens at different times for different girls, why do people box ages into definite stages of where a girl should be on the road to womanhood? This just leads to girls policing each other and themselves and participating in "slut shaming".

This is where my piece on female stand up comedians comes into play. Instead of fighting imposed standards, most women find it easier to accept them and know an assured way to get laughs is to self-disparage themselves. Tracy, the character of the next monologue, is a female stand-up comedian. Her stand-up set is completely comprised of lines I pulled from over fifteen real women's stand-up sets. I took the first thing they would say about themselves and it was almost always disparaging. The most trouble I had with this piece was weaving the lines together to make sense because most of the disparaging remarks about themselves were also paired with talking about a boyfriend, husband, or date. Many described how surprised they were that 'this' (pointing to themselves) had a boyfriend. At the end, after the audience laughed most of the way through the monologue, I asked when was it too much? When did the onslaught of negativity go from funny to pitiful? Women prefacing questions with "this is a really dumb question…" or "This is going to sound really stupid…" goes unnoticed in every day life because it is ingrained in most people to be normal. However, when you

see it in mass, it becomes unsettling how often women feel the need to self-sabotage.

I have decided to end my show with a monologue titled “Eve and Eve”, which is my re-telling of the original sin myth. It might seem odd to put a story known for the beginning of all things at the end but I have done this intentionally. When I continue this show after this masters program I would like to create a second half to the show with characters who come after Eve and who represent women in a different way from the first half. I will challenge myself to not rely on their looks, their sexuality, or the men in their fictional lives. In my story of original sin Eve, who was bored and unhappy in Eden with only Adam for company, weighed the possibilities of what would happen if she ate the forbidden fruit. In the end Eve decided that gamble was worth it because anything was better than where she was then. My story of Eve is the recreation of women. What if we celebrated Eve today as a hero? How different would women have been treated from then until now? How much more power could female characters and performers have today based on how we perceived Eve? Eve will set up the characters born in that world as opposed to the one we currently live in. She also created a contrast to the characters that came before her, who were all fighting to not just be someone’s object, but be the subject of their own lives in one way or another. The difference between those early characters and Eve is that Eve *intentionally* acts to become the subject of her own life.

From the feedback I received after the show, I believe I was successful in the most important aspects of why I did this one-woman show. After my reading, people came up to me and told me they had never thought of women in comedy like that and that they had never noticed how self-deprecating they were to themselves until watching the show. I wanted to bring light to the issues so many women, including myself, face and think about every day in an entertaining way and that is what I did.

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