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## GENDER ROLES AND POWER PLAYS: WORKING WOMEN

One of the many uses of comedy in film is to address social issues. While modern-day women have become more aware of their rights and opportunities in the workforce, professions such as business primarily remain male-dominated fields. Comedy exploits the fallacies of sexist men and underachieving women, while emphasizing power plays between the sexes. Some comedies, in order to shed light on the possible success of female integration, focus on the triumphs of the movies' heroines. In the 1996 film, *The Associate*, an African-American woman (Whoopi Goldberg) begins her own stock broker firm when a Caucasian male coworker is promoted above her after stealing the credit for her research and making business deals without her knowledge. Her privately-owned firm is an immediate failure. That is, until she creates an imaginary Caucasian male partner named Mr. Cutty. Her business, driven by her ideas, becomes a huge success behind the symbol of business success, a middle-class man of the majority race. In the 1980 film, *9 to 5*, three businesswomen, all secretaries, revolt against having a "sexist, egotistical, lying, hypocritical bigot" for a boss. While providing entertainment, comedy has the potential to advocate change through its portrayals of the genders in a working environment.

Here I plan to insert a paragraph discussing the traditional gender role of the female. Females are more compassionate, better with communication and emotion. The typical female professions are associated with these qualities. Some examples are caretaker roles like housewife (which really isn't as respected but is what society wishes

women to do), teacher, nursing, and secretary. Both films contain secretaries that let their timidity hide their true intelligence and professional capability. The fact that both films use the career of secretary to portray the typical, inferior women somewhat reemphasizes the truth of the stereotype while proving it to be inconsistent.

Judy Bernly's character is an all-encompassing portrayal of a woman's inferiority according to men, especially in a professional capacity. She is forced to earn her own income after her husband leaves her and becomes a secretary at Consolidated. She has never worked before, except as a housewife, and her attire on her first day of work in a light pink and blue suit, with a huge pink hat to top it off. We laugh at her attire and her cluelessness because we consider such a display of femininity in the workplace as ridiculous. Her demeanor is that of a delicate, sheltered woman who needs protection. She has depended solely on her husband and now has to recover from the loss and survive on her own. She seems neither ambitious nor confident in her capabilities, but her male boss finds her aesthetically pleasing. Judy falls into place along with her fellow female employees and is getting used to the routine, with the male boss at the helm. She possesses a "feeling of security" in her new job and initially does not consider the possibilities of career enhancement, which reemphasizes how the female nature is not as ambitious (Lipman-Blumen 7). Consolidated, the company at which she works, symbolizes the ideal relationship for male superiority in the workplace. The male is in charge and the "women...have chosen...to entrust themselves to men and the institutions men run" (Lipman-Blumen 7).

In *The Associate*, Sally Dugan, also a secretary, represents this stereotypical nature of women as well. She is timid, unsure, and does not retaliate to the derogatory actions and nicknames, like "sweetie" given to her by her male superior. I'll try to give

her male superior further

more specific instances, like how she looks down to avoid confrontation and dresses in fuzzy pink sweaters.

I also plan to describe Even the design of the office cubicles themselves reveals the dominant male influence. The building is grey. The secretaries cannot scatter personal effects about their office space, choosing to submit to a more "efficient" look. I still need to find in my sources how female "frills" seem unprofessional.

What I plan to accomplish with this paper

**Alternate between films to show connections and examples from the two sources.**

Comedy and portrayal through characterization

Passiveness, delicacy -Judy (Fonda) vs. Sally Dugan

sexuality and how it relates to females rising in the workforce-Doralee (Parton) and

Camille

Doralee is the "ideal" secretary-blond, high-pitched voice, big-breasted; Camille tries to have sex with powerful businessmen to work her way up the corporate ladder

The exception, ambition-Violet (Tomlin) and Laurel (Goldberg)- doing all the work and not getting the credit or promotions

And the sexist men (may or may not have their own paragraph)

**What classifies women's work? Are there truths to the stereotypes? Do gender differences make people more qualified than others?**

Traditional female careers- secretary, caretaker

Female interests- materialistic, good at shopping, decorating

**Competitive nature- more prominent in males?**

Sports

Women seek more flexible working hours

Women more interested in relationships and details more so than winning, accomplishing intended goal

**The comedy classifications**

The Associate- Superiority; We laugh because we know better than to make business deals with people we have never met, regardless of stereotypes. But...we are also reminded that this does go on in everyday life. The film emphasizes how ridiculous the behavior is.

9 to 5- Superiority- the boss is someone we love to hate and we laugh at his downfall

Unexpected- We don't expect these women to react so strongly. The main scene stressed is the pajama party, when the women have fantasies of what they would do to their boss. Jane Fonda is dressed in hunting gear, fully armed, shoots the boss and puts his head on her mantle. We are surprised to see the female is powerful, aggressive, violent. Doralee- female sexually harassing the male employee. She is the boss, and he is timid the secretary. This timidity is played in exaggeration by the actor, heightening the effect and the humor. Violet's fantasy is a fairytale, a somewhat disturbing take on Snow White. In fairytales, the princess is the ideal woman, beautiful, virtuous, innocent, damsel in distress. Violet shatters this vision by poisoning the boss's coffee.

Relief- the boss's chair interrupts intense moments, Violet thinks she has killed the boss accidentally, which commences a sequence of kidnapping the wrong body at the hospital at night, which is completely devoid of the social awareness presented for the majority of the film.

**Is comedy progressive?**

Somewhat, but not really. Endings are too happy; pleases the audience. Laurel is declared businessman of the year, and the females standing outside the men's club show their support, but they never cross over into the club to congratulate her. The three secretaries show how women's mentality can benefit the workforce, but equal pay is still not granted to employees.

**The movie makers**

Jane Fonda – political activist

Whoopi Goldberg – unconventional, masculine?

Lily Tomlin – female comic (comedy can also be considered masculine. Male humor goes against conformity)

Colin Higgins – awareness in film

9 to 5 was so popular because anyone could relate to being underneath authority. It showed women were full-dimensional people with dreams and lives (Fonda). All age groups and genders enjoyed it.

The Associate encouraged women to “use [their] brain” when it comes to business.

Conference  
notes

Breakdown

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make  
quite  
analyze  
life  
connect

how the office male / female

how do they handle the power

how does it shift, change the workplace

who does the film favor

research

women in the workplace

gender / power

race / power