

Some paragraphs too long - any ideas on how to split?  
Works consulted - featurette  
Any unnecessary information that I should take out?

Sheppe 1

Allison Sheppe  
Pete Kunze  
ENC1122  
4 November 2007

## GENDER ROLES AND POWER PLAYS: WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

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 co-worker 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. 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.

The primary technique of comedy delivered in these two films is sometimes referred to as "gendermandering." Gendermandering is the use of characterization to portray as well as unravel stereotypes (Johnson 20). Characters are given certain stereotypical qualities, which eventually are undermined by their actions throughout the

GOOD -  
HOW LIKE  
YOU  
SAY  
"POTENTIAL"

documentary  
work at Sunfield ("Inside Look")

course of the plot (Johnson 20). Gendermandering allows the writer to retaliate against society's "habit of gender stereotyping while confirming it by exploiting expected sexual behavior" (Johnson 21). This is evident in the way both films introduce their characters. Judy from *9 to 5* and Sally from *The Associate* possess the mentality of typical working women, but they grow into individuals with many more attributes than what is initially revealed. Doralee and Camille represent the heightened sexuality of women in the workplace. Doralee inadvertently gains success through her physical qualities but refuses to submit to her boss's desires, while Camille knowingly uses her body to acquire power. Violet and Laurel are the two who break from the mold most dramatically. Mr. Hart and Frank are typical sexist males in power, but the audience disdains their biased views and rejoices at their undoing. Through gendermandering, the stereotypes represented in these women are clearly defined and accepted, which leaves room for the comedy to throw the audience off guard when these individuals do not act according to plan.

One of the issues these films discuss is how women were and still are considered not as competitive by nature, limiting them to achievement in these professions only (Basow). Assigning certain mentalities and behaviors to certain genders begins in early childhood. One example of this is sports and childhood play. Girls mostly participate in games that only require one person to play, keeping competition and complexity to a minimum (Basow 132). Boys, on the other hand, learn business fundamentals through the enjoyment of competitive and complicated group sports (Basow 132-133). One of the first interactions witnessed between Mr. Hart and his female employees discloses one of the reasons Mr. Hart feels women are inferior.

DON'T ASSUME  
AUDIENCE  
RESPONSE

post

Hart says, "If there is a word to describe my philosophy of business, it's teamwork. Everybody working together. You girls, of course, never got a chance to play football or baseball. And I, I've always felt that that's unfortunate because I think it's probably the best place to learn what teamwork is all about." When Violet initially refuses to go buy a new scarf for his wife, Mr. Hart asserts his power by accusing Violet of "not [being] there for the handoff." She submits to the degradation because she must please her boss in order to get a promotion.

Violet and Laurel are what would be considered in modern comedy as comic heroes with the classification of "rogue" (Hokenson 121). They are the ones who possess the most "masculine" attributes, like competitive nature and business savvy. In comedies there oftentimes exists an "invincible underdog" whose humorous attributes and cleverness allow them to rebel against the oppression of society (Hokenson 121). People laugh at these rogues as they fight their <sup>battles</sup> fights, but the characters earn the support of the onlookers through humor (Hokenson 121). Because of this effect, <sup>some</sup> the movie-watchers root for these two featured women striving to overcome their obstacles while providing some laughs along the way. Laurel becomes the first woman to be inducted into a particular businessmen's club, in which women have never been allowed to <sup>take</sup> ~~take~~ a step. Violet takes advantage of the absence of her boss to implement the effective office policies she knew would be successful, and she finally gets some recognition for her work. The audience feels the success of these rogues is justified, and they <sup>may</sup> find themselves cheering at each movie's end for the newly empowered protagonists.

Both films establish as well as challenge the traditional social roles of women. Occupations in which the female's nurturing side and organizational skills can

be utilized include the following: secretary, nurse, waitress, librarian, teacher, homemaker, and child-care worker (Kimmel, 180). [Find where it says how women are encouraged to stay at home. The primary workplace role of women was to carry out "emotion work" that would help with the flow of day-to-day interactions among the mostly male workers (Kimmel 177). Women were in the workforce either out of necessity or to earn a little more spending money (Kimmel 177).

Need citation to confirm these qualities are stereotypical?

Judy Bernly's character is an all-encompassing portrayal of a woman's inferiority perceived by men, especially in a professional capacity. She is forced to earn her own income after her husband leaves her, <sup>her husband becomes a secretary?</sup> and becomes a secretary at Consolidated. She has <sup>she</sup> 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 (Ellmann 148). 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 among her fellow female employees and gets 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). In *The Associate*, Sally Dugan, also a secretary, represents this stereotypical nature of women as well. She is timid and does not retaliate to the derogatory actions and nicknames, like "sweetie" given to her by her male superior. By the end of each film, the stereotypical qualities of Sally and Judy have grown into confidence and the ability to fully realize and utilize their talents.

through a female network?

how does Sally find drive to change

Doralee and Camille depict the sexual aspect of women and the role it plays in work relationships with men. Physical qualities contribute to the divide between men and women in the workforce. The female body is described as “simple, sensuous, and insignificant” (Ellmann 148). Men’s bodies have a more aggressive and forceful air than those of women (Ellmann 148). Even when the occasional woman breaks this physical barrier, most do not approve of this masculinity applied to a woman’s form (Ellmann 148). The high-pitched voice of a woman makes her somewhat harder to take seriously in professional situations (Ellmann 149). Some women feel their high-pitched voice makes it difficult for them to command attention in a room when speaking (Ellman #). Doralee has big blonde hair, a high-pitched voice and voluptuous breasts, the ideal physique for a secretary. While Mr. Hart has power over her because of his elevated career status, Doralee has the power of choosing to withhold herself from her superior’s sexual urges. Camille uses her sexuality to advance up the corporate ladder. In a conversation with Laurel, Camille explains, “Men like doing business with men, but they want to sleep with us, and that’s our power.” Her method of manipulation, as well as that of the other female characters, is called “micromanipulation,” in which the minority tries to take power from the majority socially and intellectually through some implementation of deceit. In this case, Camille chooses sexual manipulation and reinforces stereotypes, while Doralee and Laurel use their intellect to change company policy and law founded on stereotypes.

Successful women in the workforce are often regarded in a negative light. One mentality describes this correlation, “Men are unsexed by failure...Women are unsexed by success” (Kimmel 177). This is evident in the character of Roz, Mr. Hart’s right-hand woman. She represents the misconception of what a woman in power would be like,

resulting from the notion that the "attack" caused by intellect would take away from "the man's ideal of [her] delicacy" (Ellmann 25). Her aging features are severe. Her dress is grey, drab, anything but form-fitting. No one find her appealing, except for Hart, because of her masculine qualities. She seems to hold a decent position in the company, but she remains inferior to her boss, once again showing female dependency on men. By falling into Hart's good graces she has permission to mooch of his power, but her power only goes as far as he will allow.

*is Violet a secretary?*

Consolidated, the company in which the three secretaries work, 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). The office is gray and bland, but "efficient". The male boss demonstrates his power by not allowing his female employees decorate their workspace with personal effects. The so-called frills of femininity are perceived by males as unproductive, distracting and unfit for business (Ellmann 77). He also does not allow his secretaries to work part-time, refusing to succumb to the needs of his "girls". He maintains his power in the workplace by restricting the identities of his employees and by enforcing a masculine atmosphere. At the end of the film, the shift of power is evident in the splashes of bright color about the office and the apparent contentment of the co-workers. The film stresses that these women brought positive change to the office. Catering to the needs of the employees through flexible office hours and day care centers is not presented as frivolous but productive.

*daycare*

*The Associate* demonstrates the comedy theories of superiority and incongruity. The audience laughs because its members know it is ridiculous to make business deals with people they have never met, regardless of stereotypes. However, they are reminded

*by making  
it a  
feminine  
space*

that occurrences like this go on in everyday life and in everyday judgments of people. Because the stereotypical successful businessman seems to always ring true, the power players of Wall Street are quick to assume and believe that Laurel's partner truly exists. Although Mr. Cutty and Laurel are business partners, those they do business with only meet with Laurel to pursue Cutty. They disregard the female partner completely and have no idea that Cutty is, in fact, Laurel. The audience knows what the characters do not, and this only raises the degree of hilarity. Through Laurel's story, the film draws parallels to the ridiculousness of viewing stereotypes as infallible foundations for handling situations and treating people.

When Laurel decides to enhance her elusive partner's validity by revealing him in public, the <sup>gone member</sup> audience laughs at how she unexpectedly achieves the look of an elderly white man. She wears a mask, gloves, and menswear to physically become what her <sup>has</sup> imagination created. The audience laughs at how differently Laurel is treated when disguised as a man, which is somewhat expected but still <sup>affective fullness</sup> surprising. The use of cross-dressing in film brings about a sense of integrating the two genders into one as well as signifying a change in the character (Tasker 27). Laurel's transcendence of class and transformation into the accomplished broker she becomes is symbolized by her dressing in male attire (Tasker 27). This is emphasized even more during *The Associate's* pivotal moment, in which Cutty/Laurel wins businessman of the year and membership into an exclusive men's club. Laurel reveals herself by first taking off her white gloves, exposing her dark skin, and then taking off her mask, which reveals a woman's face.

In the film *9 to 5*, all three theories of comedy (<sup>take out or leave in?</sup> ~~superiority~~, ~~surprise~~, ~~relief~~) are present. Individuals laugh at Hart's downfall because they believe they <sup>may</sup> are superior to him. He is a character <sup>some</sup> people love to hate because of his somewhat overly-exaggerated

sexist behavior. People know better than to hold such prejudices against women, but they understand that his character is not so unbelievable. The audience can relate to his character's mentality and behavior through past or present circumstance, and through laughter they express recognition of past wrongs.

A crucial scene in the film that describes the type of comedy where one laughs because of something unexpected is the pajama party. In this scene, the secretaries fantasize about what they would like to do to their boss. Viewers find humor in these scenes because it is unexpected that these women react so strongly. Jane Fonda, dressed and armed in hunting gear, shoots Hart and puts his head above her mantle, similar to that of the deer he displays proudly in his real-life office. One is surprised to see this frail female turning to violence and aggression as means for retaliation. In Doralee's fantasy, it is she who commits the sexual harassment, and Hart is the victim. She is the authoritative boss; he is the timid secretary. This timidity is played in an exaggerated fashion by the actor, heightening the role-reversal effect and the humor. People associate the male with power and laugh when it is the woman who is doing the harassing and pursuing. The last fantasy is Violet's, in which she plays a disturbing version of Snow White. A fairytale princess is the ideal woman, a beautiful, virtuous, innocent damsel in distress. Violet shatters this vision by poisoning the boss's coffee. Her graceful movements and elegant voice are extremely deceptive; we do not expect someone with this seemingly kind nature to be capable of committing murder. However, her underlying motive is revealed and acted upon as she frolics about the room with her animal friends, mixing in poisonous fairy dust with the coffee and obediently serving it to Hart. Once again, the audience laughs because it does not expect a figure like Snow White to solve her troubles in this unconventional manner.



The film's comedy also provides relief. During intense moments of stereotype exploitation in the office, where Hart expresses most of his biased judgment, his broken chair causes him to reel back when he sits at his desk. Violet thinks she has accidentally killed the boss with rat poison, which commences a sequence of events involving kidnapping the wrong dead body at the hospital at night and dealing with the police. While the chair takes away from the boss's masculine presence, the hospital and car scenes play up a woman's irrationality under pressure (Ellmann). Both scenes do little to preserve the social awareness presented for the majority of the film. They do, however, give the audience a break from the seriousness of such controversial issues. This creates an effect that allows the viewers to retain the overall messages from the film and to consider change while not going completely out of their comfort zones.

The key to a film comedy's success in exposing stereotypes while providing entertainment is the influence of the people involved. For *9 to 5*, Jane Fonda, well-known for her political activism, produced this film for the purpose of addressing the issues regarding genders in the workforce ("Nine @ 25 Overview"). She knew that to pull off the film's concept, she would need to find cast members that were popular, well-respected, and provided a wide spectrum of personalities. The cast came before the screenplay, and the end result was an ensemble of three female Hollywood <sup>well-known</sup> <sup>entertainers</sup> powerhouses: Jane Fonda, Dolly Parton, and Lily Tomlin ("Nine @ 25 Overview"). The main characters Violet and Laurel required strong women to fearlessly play the role. Comedy is sometimes viewed as a "male-centered" medium because male comedy rebels against conformity, a conformity which is symbolized by women (Tasker 163). Lily Tomlin was ideal for the role because her success in the male-dominated field of comedy gives her somewhat masculine qualities. The same can be said for Whoopie Goldberg,

↑  
their  
term  
or yours

whose “unconventional” fashion and career choices differ from the typical Hollywood glamour girl. Andrea Stuart describes Goldberg by saying, “her outlandish appearance effectively de-sexes her” (Tasker 163). Goldberg is one of the few African-American women to have sustained her career for so long in male-dominated African-American film, which enables her to be believable in her role (Tasker 163).

While comedy is an effective method of disclosing society’s ignorance, it cannot be truly described as “progressive” (Tasker 163). While social issues are addressed, solutions to them are not usually provided (Downey 122). In comedy “there are only slight (emotional) dangers and the endings are happy” (Hokenson 30). 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. However, the gradual applause of the men encourages social change and confirms that Laurel has gained respect from her business peers. Violet only gets promoted to management after Mr. Hart is transferred to Brazil for his good work. Violet, Doralee, and Judy’s ideas are appreciated by the regional manager, but their unequal pay policy remains on the fence. This does not, however, cancel out the film’s overall influence. *9 to 5* was so popular among all genders and age groups because everybody could relate to being underneath authority (Nine @ 25 Overview). Jane Fonda commented, “It showed women as rambunctious human beings but full-dimensional human beings...who have lives and have friendships and have ideas and carry them out...They’re not objectified” (Nine @ 25 Overview). Comedy hints at a course of action without fully committing to that course in hopes of gaining the audience’s trust and intellectual commitment.

Viewers watching comedy are able to witness the exposure of society’s ignorance as well as enjoy the show’s entertaining aspects. Through gendermandering,

stereotypical characteristics are unraveled and sometimes reinforced. Gender qualities are established in certain characters and settings, and the transformation of power is revealed by the dramatic changes achieved through their development. The people involved in the production of a comedy play a major role in that comedy's success.

While comedy criticizes society, the material still remains within the boundaries <sup>of</sup> ~~within~~ the audience's comfort zones, established by society. Comedy advocates change while lacking or <sup>refusing to state</sup> ~~indirectly~~ stating clear solutions. Comedy instead leaves it to the viewers to make the change happen. Films such as these have already contributed to the modern-day advancements regarding stereotypes and women. Comedy manipulates reality, and by doing so, emboldens the individual to change reality as well.

### WORKS CONSULTED

Comedy also  
reinforces social  
order

affective fallacy  
you can't assume how people will react

sisterhood — how is that relevant  
interdependence  
solidarity  
what does it see as the enemy

Gully Dugan  
unveils — how does she redefine  
her own happiness