

Hey Pete,

The research paper has definitely been the most difficult to write for me. My problem was not that I could not find enough material. I had simply too much to choose from. Part of what took me so long to construct this paper was figuring out how to make transitions as well as whittling down my sources. I did, however, enjoy researching this topic of women in the workforce. I am a business major (who loves English too) and an extremely ambitious, assertive, and competitive person. Before your class, I had not considered the differences between sexuality and gender. Delving into this paper helped me learn more about what is considered masculine and feminine and what power struggles exist between the two genders and why.

My first draft mostly consisted of elements from The Associate. While the film addressed the issue I was looking for, I felt it did not have enough of a comedic element. I also tried the film, Working Girl, but once again, not enough comedy. I was also confused about what material I should use from the first film.

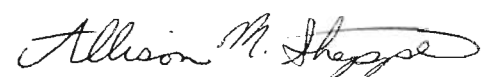
By the time I had started on my second draft, I had viewed the film 9 to 5. I decided it was ideal for my topic and considered it to be the funniest of the three films. Once again, I had trouble with getting started. Not only did I have too many research materials, this film was overwhelming me with possibilities. I simply could not get going. To overcome my writing slump, I created a concept sheet that outlined what I wanted to accomplish with the paper. Writing down all of my points enabled me to start thinking about how I would support those ideas.

After writing the previous draft, my third draft took flight. I finally I had an idea of how I could create and direct the flow of the paper. I had a better understanding of how to support my ideas and eliminate potential sources. Therefore, this was the most accomplished and productive draft.

Our conference discussing my fourth draft told me that I was in the right direction, but I needed a little more elaboration. The main aspect of analyzing comedy that I had forgotten was affective fallacy. In my paper, I mistakenly assumed that everyone thought the scenes were funny that I thought were funny. Comedy, while having a tendency to move in a particular direction, is subjective because everyone's sense of humor is different.

Overall, I am content with my final draft. You were definitely right; this paper was a doozy to construct. However, I have made so much progress from my first draft. I am sure I could continue to find things to edit, but for the purposes of meeting deadlines and preserving some sanity, I feel this work is ready for evaluation. I am proud that my diligence and hard work has created a final paper that I can consider satisfactory. I did not merely survive the research, writing, and editing processes. I was able to learn about and discuss a topic that I can directly relate to by analyzing a genre that I thoroughly enjoy.

Sincerely, Allison Sheppe

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Allison M. Sheppe". The signature is written in dark ink and is located at the bottom right of the page.

MLA ✓  
 Allison Sheppe  
 Pete Kunze  
 ENC1122  
 20 November 2007



## Women's Struggle for Power 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 may exploit the fallacies of sexist men and underachieving women while emphasizing power plays between the sexes. Many 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*, a 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. 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*, two secretaries and a senior secretarial supervisor 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 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

satire?

need a source for such a claim

solid thesis ✓

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 immediately perceived. 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 most dramatically defy conformity. Mr. Hart and Frank are sexist males in power, but the audience may disdain their biased views and rejoice 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 society's standards.

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 only a few professions (Basow 71-72). 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, however, 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.

is Doralee a success?

Think about the ways women alienate Doralee based on patriarchal biases

fascinating research!

Hart says, "If there is a word to describe my philosophy of business, it's teamwork... You girls, of course, never got a chance to play football or baseball...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.

*and compromise her values*

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 battles, but the characters earn the support of the onlookers through humor (Hokenson 121). Because of this effect, some movie-watchers root for these two 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 enter. Violet, senior secretarial supervisor, 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 may find themselves cheering at each movie's end for the newly empowered protagonists.

*Violet has to be coaxed into role. She's more of an "everyman" than a better "everywoman"*

*What does this suggest about female leadership?*

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). 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 large population of male workers (Kimmel 177). Women worked either out of necessity or to earn some more money for leisure (Kimmel 177). The clash of these traditional roles and business professions is a driving force of gender tension in the workplace.

Judy'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 by becoming a secretary after her husband leaves her. She has never worked before, except as a housewife, and her attire on her first workday is a light pink and blue suit, with a huge pink hat to top it off. We may laugh at her attire 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 seems neither ambitious nor confident in her capabilities. Her best attribute, according to her boss, is her beauty. Judy falls into place among her fellow female employees and gets used to the routine, with the male boss at the helm. She considers herself fortunate for just having a job and initially does not consider the possibilities of career enhancement, which reemphasizes how the female nature is not as ambitious (Lipman-Blumen 7).

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

Analyze and reflect - don't fall back too much on scholarship

Is Ellmann referring to 9 to 5?

Bingo!

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). Doralee has big blonde hair, a high-pitched voice and voluptuous figure, 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." Camille chooses sexual manipulation and reinforces stereotypes, while Doralee and Laurel use their intellect to change company policy and law founded on stereotypes.

*Can sex be empowering?*

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 attire is grey, drab and anything but form-fitting. No one finds her appealing, except for Hart, because of her masculine qualities. She holds a decent position in the company, but she remains inferior to her boss, once again showing female dependency on men. <sup>^ and happily so</sup> By falling into Hart's good graces she has permission to mooch off his power, but her power only goes as far as he will allow.

*and she's a sycophant*

The vitality of sisterhood among females is evident in the character development of the characters, especially Sally and Judy. By the end of each film, the stereotypical qualities of both women have grown into confidence and the ability to fully realize and

✓

utilize their talents. However, this accomplishment is not individual; they depend on fellow female employees for support. At first, Sally seems to be the typical mediocre, timid, and passive secretary. She does not retaliate to derogatory nicknames like "sweetie" given to her by her male superior. After starting her own firm, Laurel hires, inspires, and encourages Sally, which motivates her to experiment with computer programming and voice her opinions. Violet, Judy, and Doralee join together to overthrow Mr. Hart's authority. While this lack of individual initiative may seem disturbing, it is only natural for minority members to band together to make change happen. In the cases of these movies, the symbolic struggle between working women and their male bosses represents an attempt by the inferior gender to overpower masculinity.

Consolidated, the company in which the three secretaries work, symbolizes the ideal relationship for male superiority in the workplace. 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 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 by providing flexible work schedules and

creates community among a larger group suggesting all women are united against a common enemy

effeminate?

day care, but the colors also show how the women have dispelled some of the workplace's masculine atmosphere.

*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 that these instances occur in everyday life and everyday judgments of people. Because the stereotypical successful businessman seems to always ring true, the financial power players of Wall Street are quick to assume 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 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 audience might laugh at how she unexpectedly achieves the look of an elderly white man. She wears a mask, gloves, and menswear to physically become what her imagination has created. The audience may laugh at how differently Laurel is treated when disguised as a man, which is somewhat expected but still 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 an accomplished broker 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.

In the film *9 to 5*, all three theories of comedy (superiority, surprise, relief) are present. Individuals might laugh at Hart's downfall because they believe they are superior to him. He is a character people may dislike because of his somewhat overly-exaggerated sexist behavior. People know it might be wrong 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 can 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 dream of what they would do to their boss. Viewers may 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 just like 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 may 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; people do not expect someone

yet he perceives himself to be superior

very manly thing to do

revising typical depictions of femininity

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 may laugh 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. 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"). 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 well-known female entertainers, Jane Fonda, Dolly Parton, and Lily Tomlin ("Nine"). 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, whose “unconventional” fashion and career choices differ from the typical Hollywood woman. 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 unresolved. This does not, however, forego the film’s overall influence. *9 to 5* was popular among all genders and age groups because everybody could relate to being underneath authority (“Nine”). Jane Fonda commented, “It showed women as rambunctious human beings but full-dimensional human beings...who have lives...They’re not objectified” (“Nine”).

what do you think?

yes!  
so  
true!

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 the use of 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 of the audience's comfort zones established by society. Comedy can advocate change while lacking or 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.



or to do nothing-

Allison -  
Great research, solid argument!  
I wish I could give you  
higher than an A on this...

All the best, Pete

*Chin*

Works Consulted

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