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**DEPT: ARTS EDUCATION (ENGLISH EDUCATION)**

**TOPIC: PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND EQUALITY IN THE LION AND THE JEWEL**

**COURSE: MODERN COMEDY**

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**Gendered sexuality** is the way in which [gender](#) and [sexuality](#) are often viewed as likened constructs, whereby the role of gender in an individual's life is informed by and impacts others' perceptions of their sexuality. A **gender role** is a set of societal norms dictating the types of behaviors which are generally considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for people based on their actual or perceived sex or sexuality. Gender roles are usually centered on conceptions of [femininity](#) and [masculinity](#), although there are [exceptions](#) and [variations](#). The specifics regarding these gendered expectations may vary substantially among cultures, while other characteristics may be common throughout a range of cultures. There is ongoing debate as to what extent gender roles and their variations are [biologically determined](#), and to what extent they are [socially constructed](#). Gender roles are the culturally defined behaviors deemed appropriate for a man or a woman. A role is essentially performative. One learns how to play a masculine or feminine role, what is acceptable and what is not, how one should behave, think, evaluate oneself and others in a gendered manner. While age, ethnicity, class, and many other factors also have culturally prescribed norms, gender is the most universal and salient social organizing principle.

**Human sexuality** is the quality of being sexual, or the way people experience and express themselves as sexual beings. This involves [biological](#), [erotic](#), [physical](#), [emotional](#), [social](#), or [spiritual](#) feelings and behaviors. Because it is a broad term, which has varied over time, it lacks a precise definition. This is also seen in the the way men have their way sexually over the female counterpart

This is seen in Oscar Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest* and Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*.

The *Importance of Being Earnest*, the question of each gender's role in society often centers on power. In the Victorian world men had greater influence than women. Men made the decisions for their families, while women worked around the house. Wilde raises interesting questions about gender roles in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, by putting women (like Lady Bracknell) in positions of power and by showing that men can be irresponsible and bad at decision-making. The traditional view of gender relations in the Victorian era was that men were active, manly, assertive and economically independent whilst women were assumed to be passive, pliant and dependent. I believe that Oscar Wilde does challenge these traditional roles deliberately to make humor out of these characteristics and to make fun of the conventional roles of society. The two main male characters, Jack and Algernon, cannot really be regarded as masculine, or at any rate both of them do not fit the criteria for what characteristics a stereotypical Victorian man would be they are both what people at that time would call 'dandy's'. Algernon and Jack's ungentlemanly behavior and trivial pursuits can be seen as comic and deliberate in making men seem less powerful and serious. Algernon is also a little too concerned with clothing to come across as masculine. This can be seen when he criticizes Jack by saying that he had 'never known anyone to put so much effort into dressing and to produce so little effect'. Algernon also says in Act two when talking to Cecily that he wouldn't trust Jack to buy his outfits as he has "no taste in neckties". Algernon is dandy, making him unmasculine and a bit of a joke in the eyes of the Victorian audience. A time in the play when we see women as having more power than men is in the character Lady Bracknell, she is strong and blunt even coming across as a bit intimidating we get the feel that even Algy is afraid of her as he would rather make up a fake man than tell her that "he cannot have the pleasure of dining" with her.

Another strong female character we see is Gwendolen. She is feminine in some aspects like how she wanted the proper engagement (she makes Jack propose formally), but at the same time she can be seen as more masculine than Jack especially because she is quite assertive. Gwendolen is also breaking stereotypes as when her mother tells her to wait in the carriage but she defies her, were as most girls at this time would not even dare to disobey their mothers. A good example of Gwendolyn being assertive is when Jack is made to propose to her properly. Even though

Gwendolen knows exactly what he is going to ask her and she even tells him that she is going to accept him before he proposes, Gwendolen insists on a proper proposal, which is absurd.

Gwendolen. I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.

Jack. Well . . . may I propose to you now?

Gwendolen. I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly before-hand that I am fully determined to accept you.

Jack. Gwendolen!

Gwendolen. Yes, Mr. Worthing, what have you got to say to me?

Jack. You know what I have got to say to you.

Gwendolen. Yes, but you don't say it.

Jack. Gwendolen, will you marry me? [Goes on his knees.]

Gwendolen. Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it!

I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

Gwendolen is clearly going to be more and more like her mother as she matures we see Algernon mentions this when he says that a girl's worst flaw is that "they will end up just like their mothers".

Her mother, Lady Bracknell, is probably the most masculine character in the play. She is very pompous and the most assertive of all the characters. She has the power to stop Jack from marrying Gwendolen and has the ability to boss the male characters of the play around. Lady Bracknell's masculinity is funny because it is almost absurd. She is seen as lacking some more feminine characteristics like sympathy for example she has no sympathy for Bunbury who she claims "should just make up his mind whether he is going to live or die". She gives Jack no condolences when he says that he had "lost" both his parents, instead she says that he was careless, and when he explains that he was found she appears to be outraged and shocked giving us the impression that she has control over the situation. Lady Bracknell has the upper hand over all the main characters in the play. After the examination of the female characters it can be

concluded that the female characters are not really typical Victorian women than are Algernon and Jack typical Victorian men. Oscar Wilde has created characters that challenge the Victorian views of gender relations and this is what causes the play to be so funny. The characters are not what you would expect and can be seen as over exaggerated stereotypes of gender roles at the time.

Wilde's contention that a whole world exists separate from Victorian manners and appearances is demonstrated in the girlish musings of Cecily. When she hears that Jack's "wicked" brother Ernest is around, she is intensely desirous of meeting him. She says to Algernon, "I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time." The thought of meeting someone who lives outside the bounds of prudery and rules is exciting to naïve Cecily. Even using the name Earnest for his secret life is ironic because Algernon is not being dutiful — earnest — in living a secret life.

Various characters in the play allude to passion, sex and moral looseness. Chasuble and Prism's flirting and coded conversations about things sexual, Algernon stuffing his face to satisfy his hungers, the diaries (which are the acceptable venues for passion), and Miss Prism's three-volume novel are all examples of an inner life covered up by suffocating rules. Even Algernon's aesthetic life of posing as the dandy, dressing with studied care, neglecting his bills, being unemployed, and pursuing pleasure instead of duty is an example of Victorians valuing trivialities. Once Algernon marries he will have suffocating rules and appearances to keep up. Wilde's characters allude to another life beneath the surface of Victorian correctness. Much of the humor in this play draws a fine line between the outer life of appearances and the inner life of rebellion against the social code that says life must be lived earnestly.

In his well acclaimed play, Soyinka portrays a post-colonial Africa in which modernity and tradition are in constant rivalry. But still, the way Soyinka has represented women makes them male-dominated creatures and or creatures to whom things are done. women are also presented as a weaker vessel to men and men are also seen as a domineering factor in this play. This is seen the scene where is seen carrying a pail on her head. She is slim and lovely. The schoolmaster, [Lakunle](#), looks out the window, then shuts it and comes outside to Sidi. Lakunle tries to help Sidi with her pail, but she refuses. He admonishes her that she should not carry things on her head because her neck will be squashed, but she retorts that he said he did not care

about her looks before. He agrees but says it is unwomanly to carry loads thusly. Also, he adds, she ought to cover her shoulders because people look at her and lust after her.

Annoyed, Sidi replies that she has already fixed the fold on her dress and cannot do more or she wouldn't be able to move her arms. He asks if she does not care about the names or the jokes or the lusting of men. Sidi replies that in reality everyone knows Lakunle is a madman and is full of words and curses; he is the one people call a fool Lakunle is surprised, but claims he is above the taunts of savages. Sidi is furious and shakes her fists at him, but he says this is natural because she has a smaller brain than he does. He is patronizing and adds that he cannot be drawn into an argument with her because it goes over her head. Sidi grabs for the pail he'd taken and tries to leave. Lakunle begs her not to be angry, because it is science that says women are inferior to and weaker than men. Sidi asks if weak women are not the ones that pound yams and plant millet. Lakunle explains that soon machines will do all this work for them. Sidi says this turning her world upside down, but Lakunle sees it as turning it inside out.

Lakunle is seen also as one who uses his education and academic achievement as an advantage to corner Sidi to his side. But Sidi, strongly rooted in the tradition, asserts that he must pay the dowry before any marriage could be possible. Lakunle rejects this idea and qualifies it as barbaric. Indeed, Lakunle is one of the major actors in the play. In his attempt to win the heart of Sidi, the Ilujinle most celebrated beauty, he resorts to all sorts of rhetorical strategies to convince her. A close analysis of how he uses language shows that he is more privileged than Sidi and Sadikou, his female counterparts in the play. He is described as intelligent, modern, and wise: "A prophet has honour except in his own home. Wise men have been called mad before me, and after, many more shall be so abused (p. 5).

Lakunle, while positioning himself as an illuminated man, takes a terrible stance towards Sidi and Sadikou and the villagers. Evidence of this can be seen through the attributes he uses to describe them.

a. Lakunle: A natural feeling, arising out of envy;

For, as a woman you have a smaller brain than mine (p. 4).

b. Lakunle: The scientists have proved it. It is in my books.

Women have a smaller brain than men (p. 4).

c. Lakunle: That 's why they are called the weaker sex (p.4).

d. ) Lakunle: you are an ignorant girl, can you not understand? (p. 8).

e. Lakunle: Bush-girl you are, bush-girl you'll always be; uncivilized and primitive-bush girl! (p. 9).

f. Lakunle: A savage custom, barbaric, out dated, rejected, denounced, accused, excommunicated, archaic, degrading, humiliating, unspeakable, redundant. Regressive, remarkable, unpalatable (p. 7). As it can be seen, Lakunle uses some possessive attributes.

Sidi is not the only one character to undergo Lakunle's degradation. Sadikou is also one of his victims. The following instance is quite telling:

Lakunle: For though you are nearly seventy, your mind is simple and unformed (p. 37). In the same vein, Baroka does not consider women otherwise. Let's consider the following two utterances by Baroka: Not even Ailatou, my favourite? Was she not at her usual place, beside my door?

Baroka: Sidi is the eye's delight, but she is vain, and her head is feather-light, and always giddy with a trival thought (p. 49). That Baroka derides women and considers them as his subordinate is an open secret in the play but this can go beyond human understanding. He is the village chief, who symbolizes tradition and Yoruba's culture. Both will play all tricks to convince Sidi to accept their project of marriage but it is Baroka who wins and marries her at the end. Baroka on the other side, with the help of his elder wife, Sadikou, uses all sorts of flatteries, sweet words, and the lie that he has lost his manhood to get Sidi in his trap.

Sidi in the other hand uses **her sexuality as a weapon to entice and bring doom upon men who become infatuated with her beauty. She mentions that she is looking forward to breaking men's hearts and views them as her opponents.** In Yoruba culture, the payment of the bride-price is a very important custom. **Sidi understands that her worth has elevated and views her virginity as a treasure. Initially, she is not willing to marry Baroka because of his age, when the village girls tell her that she has become famous because her image is throughout**

an entire magazine. Sidi is excited and believes that she is more esteemed than Baroka because of her fame. When the girls discuss how many leaves of the magazine her picture takes up, Lakunle counts three leaves, and Sidi says, "***One leaf for every heart that I shall break***"

In the second scene of the play entitled "Noon," Sadiku tells Sidi that Baroka asks for her hand in marriage. Sidi is quick to reject Baroka's offer and begins to criticize him for his old age. Sidi has become conceited and believes that she is more important than the Bale of Ilujinle. Sidi looks at her images in the magazine and comments that she never noticed her velvet skin before. Lakunle feels guilty for not mentioning her skin and says that he would have said something, but believed it was not the proper thing to do. Sidi pushes out her breasts and says, "***There's a deceitful message in my eyes beckoning insatiate men to certain doom. And teeth that flash the sign of happiness, strong and evenly, beaming full of life***".

