

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA NSUKKA

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STUDIES**

**AN ASSIGNMENT WRITTEN IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE COURSE MODERN COMEDY**

ELS 240

**TOPIC: THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND
SEXUALITY IN ANY TWO MODERN COMEDY
WORKS**

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In the importance of being earnest, the question of each gender's role in society often centres on power. In the Victorian world of display, men have greater influence than women. Men make the political decisions for their families, while women work around the house, quietly taking care of the children.

Men are valued for their intellect and judgement, while women are attractive to men for their beauty and chastity. However, 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 (i.e Jack and Algernon) can be irresponsible and bad at decision making.

In the play, "she stoops to conquer", traditional gender roles are most easily identifiable in scenes concerning the courtship of Mr. Hastings and Miss. Hardcastle. However, predictably, the two people perpetuating the patriarchal custom are the fathers, Mr. Hardcastle and Sir Charles Marlow, which is unsurprising because their rhetoric indicates that arranged marriages were typical. For e.g, Mr. Hardcastle informs his daughter that, "I expect the young gentle man I have chosen to be your husband from this very day". While he does assure her to "depend on it, child, I'll never control your choice", he immediately attempts to guilt her by adding that Mr. Marlow is the son of a good friend. Similarly, Sir Charles has certain marital expectation of his son, though his are centred more on Mr. Marlow's character than if he will marry his

friend's daughter. For example, after Miss Hardcastle describes the love and passion her suitor has for her alter ego he confesses, "...If I find what you describe, all my happiness in him must have an end". That is, Sir Charles is so concerned about the ways his son should behave with women, because he thinks it is the only way for him to marry a "good and virtuous girl" that, at first, he forgets about Miss Hardcastle. However, two scenes later, he anxiously asks, "what a situation am I in? If what u say appears true, I shall then find a guilty son. If what he says be true, I shall then lose one that of all others, I most wished for a daughter". In other words, even though Sir Charles was temporarily more concerned about his son's manners, his thoughts soon return to the arranged marriage. His word choice, particularly, "lose" and "wished", indicates that he was so confident in the arrangement that he had already begun to think of Kate as a daughter; therefore, if she did not become it, she would be lost and his wish would be unfulfilled.