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The Feminine Expansion of Role Theory: A Community Workshop

Alexis Cisneros
asheeder@lesley.edu

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Alexis Cisneros

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Angelle Cook, PhD, RDT/BCT

Abstract

Traditional gender roles and dominant narratives in society impose different pressures on men and women. Women experience the societal pressure to excel in multiple roles simultaneously such as caregiver, breadwinner, partner, and community member all while meeting societal judgements and expectations regarding appearance, achievements, and behavior (Ilic, 2023). This thesis will focus on the development of a drama therapy community workshop for cisgender women to explore the roles they play in Western society. Because we are living in a patriarchal society where the understanding of human experience is mostly through a white, male, heterosexual, middle-class, and able-bodied lens my focus is on expanding drama therapy's role theory role method to include the voices and experiences of cisgender women.

Key words: drama therapy, role theory, role methods, women, identity, role taxonomy expansion

Author Identity Statement: The author identifies as an able-bodied, cisgender, queer, white-passing, Latina woman who resides in Alaska.

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Introduction

 "From the beginnings of civilization, humans have typically assumed the roles they were assigned by the happenstance of their birth, being taught the knowledge and skills necessary for their gender and the role of their family in society" (Hicks et al., 2021, p. 243).

If you enter the text "ideal woman examples" into Google numerous results will display with videos and articles explaining how to be the ideal woman. After reviewing the results there were a few common themes that emerged: traits women should have to please men, traits women should have to please God, beauty standards, the 'perfect' body, and how to calculate a woman's body mass index. Historically women's voices have been left out of the conversation and in the year 2024 that still seems to be the case.

In looking at Robert Landy's role taxonomy (Landy & Butler, 2012) I noticed that the only roles that were specifically feminine were Mother, Wife, Sister, and Daughter. While the case may be made that many of the other roles included in the taxonomy can be feminine, I don't feel that the current taxonomy encompasses the full experience of being a woman in Western society. Therefore, in using this taxonomy with cis women in drama therapy I feel that we are missing opportunities to discuss the full experience of being a woman and the demands that are placed on women in our society. While selecting topics this summer to explore for thesis, the world was taken by storm by the *Barbie* movie. *Barbie*, directed by Greta Gerwig, is a box office success making $1.4 billion at the worldwide box office and is Warner Bros biggest box office success ever (Larasati, 2024). The movie captured not only the magic and history of the doll, but also introduced feminism and patriarchy and reignited a conversation about the struggles that women face in society. One week after the movie premiered women flocked to numerous social

media sites after seeing the film, reconsidering their relationships with their male partners after the movie highlighted how different men and women view and are viewed in society (Wong, 2023). Both times I saw the movie in theaters, there were verbal outbursts from men that hated the movie and made remarks about how the themes of the movie weren't real. It was clear to me during this phenomenon just how pervasive these themes of femininity, power/disempowerment, dynamics, and roles are in our society and how women experience society differently than their male counterparts. In a conversation with The New York Times, America Ferrara responds to critic's views of the 'Barbie' movie's oversimplification of feminism, "Assuming that everybody is on the same level of knowing and understanding the experience of womanhood is an oversimplification" (Aguilar, 2024, n. page). This topic is one that is expansive so for the scope of this thesis I will only be touching on some of the issues that women face.

As a woman who has struggled with her identity and navigating a patriarchal society, I have a personal bias toward working with other women to help them realize how many roles we each play every day. The method in this thesis was created with my own personal bias of being a woman struggling to identify and accept being an authentic woman and what that means for me in a world filled with organizations, belief systems, and other people telling me who to be.

I identify as a cisgender person meaning my gender identity matches the sex that I was assigned at birth. Being a cisgender woman there was an inherent bias toward the experiences of other cisgender women within the creation of my method. While the focus of my method was on cisgender women, it would be equally important to explore and further the research to include experiences of transgender women, female born non-binary people, and non-binary people who are socialized as women. While there are bound to be differences in the experiences of cisgender, transgender women, and non-binary people, there is social pressure on transgender individuals to

fit into the appropriate attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and roles for men and women created by society (Wilchek-Aviad et al., 2022). The social pressures to fit into these attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and roles therefore signify that there may be overlap in cisgender, transgender women, and non-binary experiences. Through a drama therapy workshop with cisgender women, I aimed to explore the roles that women play in society from their perspective. In the next section, the literature review will support the discussion of why we need to include and acknowledge all of the roles women hold in society and will describe why drama therapy and role theory may be a helpful framework when working with cisgender women in the mental health field.

Literature Review

Women In Society

It comes as no surprise that throughout history women have been oppressed and silenced. With that said in the last 50 years women's lives have drastically changed due to women's liberation and the sexual revolution, meaning the roles women have been able to play have shifted as well (Kelly et al., 2017). Typically, women's roles have been decided by culture, religion, society, organizations that are trying to save women, and men. One thing that I found in common in all of this research is that women are playing many roles in society and there are many gaps in terms of labor, pay, and sexual pleasure that effect the roles women play.

Labor Gap

Women's participation in the labor force has drastically increased since the 1960's; however, men still dominate the labor force by almost 12% (Gueltzow et al., 2023). With this increased labor in the job force women are still having to comply with expectations of traditional female gender norms and roles (Gueltzow et al., 2023). In every society, women's work is

systematically different from men's work because women are expected to not only contribute to the household but also bear and raise children (Hartsock, 2020). Between paid labor and the unpaid labor of housework and child rearing, women as a group work more hours a week than men do (Hartsock, 2020). Women may experience role overload or conflict in roles due to women spending more time in paid and unpaid labor, which can lead to higher rates of depression in women (Gueltzow et al., 2023). Researchers (Gueltzow et al., 2023) analyzed data from 35,699 US adults aged 50-80 years that participated in the 2018 RAND HRS Longitudinal File of the Health and Retirement Study to determine the gender inequality in the labor market and how it effects higher depression risk for older US women compared to men. They found that 32% of the gender gap in depression risk in older adults was due to unequal opportunities in the labor market. "Women's bodies, labor, and very existence have always been interchangeable with money itself. Their lived experiences of this reality are often unspoken, silenced, or forced into incoherence" (Dunlap, 2021, No. 109).

Wage Gap

The gender wage gap is the measure of what women are paid relative to men which tells us how much a woman is paid for each dollar a man is paid. Currently, for every dollar a man makes, a woman typically make roughly 80 cents (Gould et al., 2016). Latina women are typically paid 52 cents for every dollar paid to a white, non-Hispanic man while Black women are paid 66 cents and Native American Women are paid 55 cents (National Partnership for Women & Families, 2023). Despite women's race, age, or pay level the gender gap is a problem for women at every wage level; however, higher-earning women and middle-aged women are at a greater disadvantage (Gould et al., 2016). Conversations regarding the wage gap have focused on women who worked full-time, year-round jobs (excluding part-time and seasonal workers),

and in 2022, 27 million women workers were not considered when discussing the wage gap (National Partnership for Women & Families, 2023). There has been significant work done to close the gender wage gap, but there is still much work that needs to be done for women of all backgrounds to make the same amount as their male counterparts. Even in female-dominated professions like drama therapy, men still advance up the career ladder at a faster rate than women due to a phenomenon called the glass escalator (Frydman & Segall, 2016). Over a lifetime, the average college-educated woman loses nearly $800,000 while the average woman worker loses $530,000 due to the gender wage gap (Gould et al., 2016). Losing that amount of money over time will have effects on how women are able to live, work, retire, and take care of their mental health. Tori Dunlap (2023) host of the podcast Financial Feminist and founder of Her First $100K stated:

> I have been told since I was a child that your value to society is in how much you give. The irony is that when I have the audacity to demand more there is a weaponization of altruism happening. You are being greedy, be grateful for what you have, why are you demanding more. It's the way the patriarchy keeps people controllable and if there is anything I am trying to do its create a society and world where you are able to unapologetically ask for what you are worth, get it, and then create a society where everyone has that as well (Dunlap, 2021, No. 109).

In striving for a society where everyone has the opportunity to ask for what they are worth and what they need, we must acknowledge the socioeconomic issues, cultural standards, and gender-based expectations that keep women from achieving the same success as their male counterparts. Rebecca Walker (2023) defined financial feminism as, "An understanding of the power that

money holds to transform the world in a way that creates a more equitable place for all of humanity" (Dunlap, 2021, No. 109).

Pleasure Gap

The pleasure gap or orgasm gap is the discrepancy in frequency of orgasms between cisgender men and women in heterosexual relationships, with men having more orgasms on average than women (Wetzel et al., 2022). The pleasure gap was largely believed to be caused by anatomical differences in men and women's biology due to stimulation or lack of stimulation during vaginal intercourse, which is culturally prioritized as the most important sexual act in heterosexual relationships (Wetzel et al, 2022). Sociocultural factors contributing to the pleasure gap include women's lack of entitlement to orgasm and partnered sexual pleasure, societal scripts about masculinity, and women's cognitive distractions during partnered sex (Mahar et al., 2020).

When comparing rates of experiencing orgasms, lesbian women experience orgasms 75% of the time, heterosexual women 62% of the time, and bisexual women 58% of the time (Frederick et al., 2017). Since lesbian women are having more orgasms there is an indication that higher rates of orgasms could be achieved by all women by addressing sociocultural factors and encouraging additional sexual activities if vaginal intercourse is the primary sexual act (Frederick et al., 2017). It is no wonder that people are struggling with pleasure in sex when looking at how sex education is taught in the school systems. The United States focuses on a heteronormative risk-reduction framework of sex education that emphasizes avoiding unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases while ignoring how to form and maintain healthy relationships, how to decide when to engage in sex, and sexual pleasure (Kantor & Lindberg, 2020). By ignoring these topics and sexual pleasure specifically, youth miss out on learning that

sex should be pleasurable, sex should not be used in manipulative and harmful ways, and raises the risk for reduced use of contraception and condoms (Kantor & Lindberg, 2020).

Researchers from Australia (Kelly et al., 2017) interviewed 94 women between the ages of 16 and 49 who had ever used contraception to identify if there is a connection between gender, contraceptive use, and sexual practice in heterosexual relationships. The interviewees were recruited through Facebook, noticeboard advertisements, and snowball sampling. Participants took part in an open-ended interview that was created with questions developed by a team of epidemiologists, doctors, psychologists, and social researchers. Interview audio was recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed by the research team using coding and NVivo 10 research software. Once coding was completed, researchers grouped relevant codes together to determine final themes using a social constructionist framework. The study identified themes that impacted how contraception and women's sexual behaviors are rooted in their heterosexual femininity: "unspoken gender assumptions, focus on partner's pleasure, sex becoming a chore, and women's sexual motivations and connection to pleasure" (Kelly et al., 2017, p. 240).

Honey & Wiginton (2022) wrote, "Having ownership over your body and sexuality is extremely difficult when you are a girl or woman" (p. 51). Society has determined that women can only fall into two sexual roles, the virgin or the whore, and both roles are in service of men. These roles, also known as the *Madonna-whore complex*, have been traced from the ancient Greeks to Western literature, contemporary films, and even television shows (Bareket et al., 2018). This complex reinforces unequal gender roles, limits women's self-expression, agency, and freedom by fitting all women into these two roles or social scripts that determine sexual choices and behaviors (Bareket et al., 2018). There is pressure, especially in heterosexual relationships, to either be suited for marriage and motherhood or to be sexually attractive, but

that women cannot exist as both. No matter which role women assume, they must always be worried about men's perception of them which can lead to shame about sexual desires and agency while risking women's mental, physical, and sexual health (Bareket et al., 2018). While the virgin or whore role may be the most common roles that women can play according to men, it would be remiss to exclude the roles that women can assume in Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, and Sadism and Masochism (BDSM). BDSM encompasses a wide range of sexually themed practices and allots for more roles for women to explore through respect, boundaries, and consent (Coppens et al., 2020; Honey & Wiginton, 2017).

Through the years there has been a shift toward sex positivity which is used to describe individuals and communities who are open, nonjudgmental, and embrace liberation about sexuality and sexual expression (Burnes et al., 2017). This view on sex and sexuality aligns well with counseling psychology in that it reinforces healthy development, client wellness, and resilience throughout a client's life (Burnes et al. 2017). In a study from Canada, researchers (Ivanksi & Kohut, 2017) surveyed 52 sexuality and relationship experts to identify a standardized definition of the concept of sex positivity. Those surveyed were identified by searching the internet, social media sites, and by contacting experts the researchers already knew. A recruitment email containing a letter and a link to the survey was sent to everyone, with the option to forward the email to others. The survey questions were both quantitative and qualitative with open-ended questions, a 7-point Likert-like scale, or "yes" or "no" response questions. This study used a thematic analysis, semantic level analysis, and a rich inductive thematic description in analyzing the data. Seven meta-themes and various sub-themes were identified in contributing to the definition of sex positivity. Those meta-themes were *personal beliefs, education, health and safety, respect for the individual, positive relationships with*

others, negative aspects, and *other noteworthy facets* (Ivanksi & Kohut, 2017). More research is needed to operationalize the term sex positivity, while further research and opportunities are needed for women to discuss and explore sexuality and sexual preferences.

Women's Mental Health

Women and men have similar rates of mental health problems but where things differ is prevalence, presentation, course, and treatment of mental health disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). Why We Need To Pay Attention to Women's Mental Health (2021) found that twice as many women struggle with anxiety, exposure to sexual violence is higher for women, women are twice as likely to experience PTSD and develop serious PTSD symptoms, eating disorder diagnoses are higher in women, and women are more likely to attempt suicide. Thomas and Hersen (2022) found that women are twice as likely to experience depression than men with a 10% to 25% chance of experiencing depression throughout their entire lives. Women experience higher poverty rates, higher rates of intimate partner violence and sexual violence, earn less than men in the workplace, and have societal pressures and expectations that are all contributing risk factors for common mental health disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). The way that women seek mental health services are different from men. Women are more likely to seek services from their primary health care physician, are less likely to disclose problems with alcohol, and are reluctant to disclose history of violent victimization (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). When it comes to treatment, women are more likely to be prescribed psychotropic medications and are more likely to be diagnosed with depression than men even when both genders have identical symptoms or scores on standardized measures of depression (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). Women also experience barriers to mental health services such as economic barriers, lack of awareness of treatment options, mental health

stigma, lack of time off from work, lack of childcare options, and even lack of appropriate intervention strategies integrated into mental health and primary care services (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). While it could be argued that men from different backgrounds also experience the same or similar barriers to mental health services, women are still affected differently due to the systemic oppression that is prevalent in the United States.

"There is no aspect of mental health in which the issues of sex and gender can be safely ignored" (Kornstein & Clayton, 2022, p. 597). With that said, women have been ignored time and time again when it comes to research. It wasn't until 1990 that the Office of Research on Women's Health was established in response to concerns about the inadequacy of women's health issues addressed publicly (Kornstein & Clayton, 2022). It wasn't until 1993 that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) created the NIH Revitalization Act mandating inclusion of women in all federally supported research (Kornstein & Clayton, 2022). In the same year, the United States Food and Drug Administration reversed a long-standing policy that banned women of child-bearing potential from early phases of clinical trials which finally allowed women to be included in all phases of clinical drug development.

In 2022, Swedish engineer Astrid Linder led the project to create the prototype for a crash dummy modeled after the average women's body proportions (Venkat et al., 2022). Since the 1970's, car safety manufacturers have been using crash dummies modeled after the average male build or proportions equaling that of a 12-year-old girl to test car safety (Venkat et al., 2022).

When it comes to women's menstrual care, in 2023 there was public outcry because menstruation products weren't being tested with real blood but instead with a bright blue liquid saline solution to demonstrate absorbency of products (Denkmann & Anderson, 2023). Not

knowing how much blood lost in a menstrual cycle can have serious health implications that can interfere with a person's social, emotional, physical, and material quality of life (Denkmann & Anderson, 2023). This research highlights how women and the roles that women play are an afterthought, silenced, and ignored in major sectors of society. Sajnani (2012) wrote:

> Because many of the problems that women bring to therapy can be traced to their experiences of subjugation, oppression, and limited power in society (i.e., rape, incest, sexual harassment, and abuse), feminist therapy focuses on supporting women to make changes in their lives and also in the world p. 188.

In noticing that we are living in a patriarchal society where the understanding of human experience is mostly through a white, male, heterosexual, middle-class, and able-bodied lens, therapists have a need to be vigilant and mindful of how these systems effect their clients who identify as women or are identified by society as women (Hadley, 2013).

Art As Therapy For Women

Art as a therapeutic tool could continue to greatly aid women in not only furthering women's rights in society, but also their mental health. A study by Mayra (2022) used body mapping through the use of birth maps and birthing stories to bring awareness to and improve the quality of women's care during labor and childbirth. Eight participants, women between the ages of 19 and 32 who had given birth in the last five years, were recruited through a scoping study in urban slums and rural villages in Bihar, India. The research was set in critical feminist theory to explore the women's oppression regarding birth stories due to power and gender imbalances, standpoint theory to ensure women's narratives are being heard from their standpoint, and intersectionality theory to understand these women's experiences from their intersections of identity. Researchers brought a large piece of paper with various art materials such as colored

pencils, crayons, and a variety of different photo cutouts of people and medical equipment for each participant to use. The study detailed step-by-step instructions of the process of birth mapping, which included an interview and written one-page summary of the birthing story. The researchers analyzed the birth maps by using Feminist Relational Discourse Analysis, NVivo 12, tracing birthing postures, and creating a hybrid birth map.

The outcomes of the study (Mayra, 2022) indicated women were happy talking about these experiences because they did not have anyone else to share the intimate details with, and the birth mapping experience helped them better visualize and process their experiences. The researcher noted that limitations of the study include limited time per participant, refusal from subjects to participate, and the small sample size. This study paid careful attention to ongoing consent at each stage of the study, engaging participants' family members and occupying their time if they were around during the study and ensuring anonymity for all participants. Social hierarchies in Indian culture and cultural identities for all involved were also taken into consideration during analysis of data.

Another study (Desyllas, 2014) set out to understand the lived experiences of sex workers through their own artistic self-representation via photovoice, community education, group dialogue, and activism through art. Eleven female sex workers, aged 18-52, actively working in the sex industry in Portland, Oregon were recruited. The study began with a photovoice training workshop and then participants were all given a 35mm camera to take 36 photos that represented their needs and aspirations. After the photos were collected, researchers conducted individual one-on-one interviews with the participants where they wrote artist biographies and captions for each image. Two group dialogue sessions were held where all but three participants shared and selected photos for planned art exhibits that took place over a period of two years. The researcher

then analyzed the photographs using both interpretive phenomenological analysis and Smith and Osborn's approaches and found four main themes had emerged: diverse experiences of sex work, stigma of working in the sex industry, the use of art as activism, and empowerment through the arts.

This study paid close attention to authorship by repeatedly checking in with participants throughout the process, seeking ongoing consent, and considering social hierarchies and cultural identities through the use of intersectionality (Desyllas, 2014). Although the main source of data collection was through the photographs, the researcher also mentioned group and individual interviews conducted with participants but does not include questions or details of how the interviews were conducted. The researcher also mentions field notes and journal entries were used during analysis, but only notes their existence in the analyzing section, making it difficult to judge the dependability of the analysis of the data.

These two studies indicate how the arts can be an effective tool for women, a population who are rarely asked and often silenced, to voice their experiences. More research is needed to explore the use of other art forms in women's self-expression.

Role Theory

Playing different roles, whether consciously or unconsciously, occurs in many aspects of most everyone's daily lives. Role theory operates under the assumptions that humans are role takers and role players by nature and that personality can be viewed as an interactive system of roles that a person may play within their life (Landy, 2009). Each role represents one aspect of a person's personality, and all of the roles together represent an individual's role system. Within the role system there are roles that are available to be played out consciously and roles that lay

dormant due to neglect or lack of need. Roles that are neglected or not needed can be activated under proper social or environmental circumstances (Landy, 2009). Roles are not fixed entities, but change according to the psychological, social, political, cultural, and spiritual circumstances of the individual role player (Landy, 2009). When we are exploring a role, in some ways that role begins to become part of ourselves. The goal of role theory is to provide access to as many roles as possible to increase the amount of choices clients have while increasing creativity and reflexibility. In drama therapy the client is given the capacity to try on different roles through aesthetic distance and explore those new roles while also having the ability to de-role . De-roling is a process where clients let go of the role and sensations brought on from the enactment (Lassken, 2017). Landy and Butler (2012) wrote, "Role theory does not focus on the individual's ability to play a role but rather think of themselves in role" (p. 149).

The above literature review identifies the need for more research to explore the role women hold in western society through drama therapy. The community engagement approach aimed to integrate drama therapy techniques into a three-hour workshop for cis women to give voice to their personal experiences with roles they play in society.

Methods

For this thesis, I hosted a three-hour community workshop on January 6th, 2024, titled "Exploring Women's Roles In Society," at a local theatre company in Anchorage, Alaska. The method included an exploration of cis women's roles in society through drama therapy interventions. Individuals who were available and interested were invited by the researcher to participate in the workshop as long as they met the criteria of being a cisgender woman over 18 years of age. Of the eight individuals invited, six individuals participated in the workshop and came from a variety of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. All participants were present for

the full three-hour group and none of them had any experience with drama therapy, however, all of them had experience in performing arts whether it was acting, music, or dance.

The workshop began 10 to 15 minutes late as we were waiting for everyone to arrive due to inclement weather, and due to one participant who brought her six-month-old daughter along. I began the workshop by welcoming everyone and asking if I could audio record the workshop for my own records with the intent on destroying the recording once my thesis was complete. All participants agreed to the audio recording, and we began with a warmup focused on introduction of self to others and group cohesion. I explained that everyone will say their name and create a movement that shows how they are feeling in the moment. Together we said the person's name and then mirrored their movement back to the person and continued around the circle. I went first to demonstrate, and the group said my name and mirrored the movement I made back to me. From there I asked for a volunteer to go next, and we each took turns sharing our names, movements, and sometimes sounds to the group. Once everyone shared, we reviewed everyone's names and movements in the circle. From there we turned our name introduction into a game with someone saying their name and doing their movement and then picking someone else by saying their name and doing their movement. We continued to pass around the circle and play for several minutes while increasing the speed of the game. I asked everyone in the group if they felt comfortable to move on to the next section of the workshop and they all agreed, so we transitioned to sit around a large table.

To continue, I began a lecture style section by asking the group if anyone had any guesses as to what drama therapy entails and then dove into explaining drama therapy, role theory, and sculpting. In the explanation of role theory, I began with inviting the group to think about roles that they play in their life and how the roles I play differ with all of them in the room.

To make sure everyone understood the information, I invited everyone to go around the table and state the first three roles that came to mind that they play in their life. I went first to demonstrate and listed the roles of student, burlesque dancer, and drama therapist. I chose to focus more on role theory as that was what we were going to explore for the majority of the workshop. After everyone had a turn, we took time to reflect on things that we noticed about the roles that were named in the group and then I discussed how roles integrate into role theory and the use of sculpting.

The next stage of the workshop began with the "Who I Am" category, based on Landy's role profile assessment, where participants took about 10 minutes to free write about themselves, identify salient roles, and then create an individual sculpt to share with the group. Next, we explored the categories of "Who I Have To Be" and "Who Society Wants Me To Be" by splitting the group in half. Each half of the group worked together to identify common roles and then created a group sculpt. I created the "Who Society Wants Me To Be" category because there is a societal pressure that women are under that may affect how they present themselves in the world. Once completed, each group displayed their group sculpt for 30 seconds so that the witnessing group could view the sculpt from all angles. Then each individual picked a part of the sculpt that resonated with them in the moment and mirrored it back to the original group that was sculpting. The groups then traded places and repeated the exercise. After the sculpts we had a short discussion about what they noticed in their bodies while they were performing and witnessing and spent time reflecting about any salient moments from the exercise.

We then took a fifteen-minute break and resumed for part two of the workshop. After break, I asked each participant to choose two contrasting roles that they resonated with the most in our exploration, or roles that they had identified but didn't want to share to the full group.

After three minutes everyone selected two roles they wanted to work with, and I invited them to pick whichever role to begin. Once everyone had selected their role, I invited everyone to stand up and begin walking around the space as they normally would. After about 30 seconds of walking in the space I invited participants to begin trying out different ways to walk and take up space as their role. Once they secured a way to walk or take up space as their role, I invited them to hold up one finger to signify that they were ready to move on. Next, we explored how the role would sound by exploring different ways of talking and making sounds. We repeated the same process of letting me know once participants had settled on how their role would sound. Then participants were invited to give their role a name. We moved back to the table, and I invited everyone to complete the following sentence stem "Hi my name is XXXX. XXXX is standing in my way. What I need most in the world is XXXX. XXXX can help me." Once everyone completed their sentence stem, we went around the circle and met all of the roles that participants created. Each participant enrolled as their role and embodied their movements so that they could try on their role for the duration of everyone sharing. After we met all of the roles, each participant de-roled by shaking out their body. We then visited the second role that participants selected at the beginning of this section of the workshop and repeated the entire process with the second role. Once everyone had de-roled from the second role exploration we sat around the table and discussed takeaways, salient moments, things that participants liked and didn't like, what they noticed in their bodies, and things that may have surprised them.

To close our time spent together during the workshop, I had a large piece of paper with the word "woman" written in the middle and invited each participant to write down as many roles as they would like to encapsulate the experience of being a woman. The roles that were written down could be personal roles, roles they've noticed, roles we missed in our exploration,

or new roles that are thought of in the moment. We then gathered around our art piece, each looked at the roles displayed and silently chose one role that we resonated with most in that moment. Then we went around the room and pretended to grab the role out of the art piece and placed the role on the part of the body that needed it the most. After a few moments, I gave space for participants to make any final comments or ask any questions. Finally, I thanked everyone for their time, work, and vulnerability and we closed with one more shake out of our bodies.

I documented the process in several ways, mostly through audio recording of the session, but also through observation of the participants. I documented my assumptions and biases that I brought into this workshop and project beforehand and what roles I believed to be missing from the taxonomy. I took notes in a journal during the workshop of moments that went well, moments that didn't go well, my own emotions that came up, and participant's reactions to the activities. I chose to incorporate arts-based methods and create an arts-based response to the workshop where I reflected on common roles, roles that surprised me, and roles that I felt were missing. An arts-based method offered me a way to understand and examine the experiences of the participants and myself during the workshop (Leavy, 2017; McNiff, 2008). In addition to an arts-based method I used a critical feminist theory lens for my work to identify, critique, and seek to change the inequities and discrimination that women face through society's patriarchal ideologies (Wood, 2015). By using these methods I was able to frame my method and align with my stance as a cisgender woman drama therapist.

Results

The first observation that I noticed was how many roles I was holding during this process: drama therapist, friend, leader, anxious one, comedian, performer, and perfectionist. I had to attend a rehearsal before the workshop, so I arrived early to set up the workshop, went to an hour

of rehearsal, and then had fifteen minutes to ground myself and finish any last-minute set-up. Within the group, the first thing I noticed was a feeling of hesitancy as not everyone knew each other or much about drama therapy. During the warmup, I noticed there was similarity throughout the movements with fluid, wavy arms and themes of anxiety and tiredness. After the warmup, I felt myself making little jokes to alleviate my own anxiety, but also the group's anxiety. We erupted into laughter numerous times throughout the entire session.

As we explored the "Who I Am" section I quickly sensed that there was some discomfort in exploring self through roles. However, I felt the group ease into the exercise as more time passed in their writing/sculpting exercise. I quickly realized I could have scaffolded the exercise differently as I didn't give them specific times or invite them to move around the room to explore their sculpture. This lead to some pressure that I was not aware of until voiced by participants, as I forgot that I was not working with people who were familiar with these interventions. I was mindful of this as we moved forward and adapted to include more scaffolding into the next exercises. There was a collective moment of panic when introducing the next section we were going to explore, "Who I Have To Be" and "Who Society Wants Me To Be." During this exploration, the "Who I Have To Be" group had themes of anxiety, guilt, grief, perfection, and masking while the "Who Society Wants Me To Be" group had themes of running out of time, goal post always moving, and an obstacle course. Each person found parts of each other's sculpts that they were able to resonate with during our discussion and it seemed like they were excited to share with the rest of the group. We identified that there was constant movement and motion that wasn't linear in both groups sculpts that could signify the ever-changing roles and goal posts that women have to navigate.

While the group explored their two contrasting roles, I noticed a hesitancy to be silly when exploring movement, sound, and enrolling as the role. I found myself leading by example and making the first weird movements or sounds and then the group was able to embrace being silly and fully explore these roles. The group discussed how they were beginning to realize in identifying and naming a single role, they were noticing how all roles work together in their personality. In the closing art piece, I noticed that, overall, everyone wrote mostly positive roles that women hold. I took the opportunity to write a few roles to signify other roles I heard stated in the workshop such as multifaceted, angry, all-encompassing, and complex.

After the workshop I wrote a few monologues based on roles that came up numerous times throughout the session and in our art piece we created together. I felt that we could easily take each of these roles and talk about them for an extended amount of time so I thought it would be interesting to give voice to those roles.

Arts Based Response: Monologues

A1: Multifaceted

How am I supposed to be everything all at once for everyone in my life? It feels like I'm too much this and not enough that, but I don't understand that because if I am everything for everyone, how can I be too much or not enough? What about me? I'm competing with not only men, but other women and myself. I have to put everyone and everything before myself and yet uphold these standards that everyone around me is conditioned to agree upon - get a job, find a partner, buy a house, have a family, take care of your family, take care of your partner. If I break out of those standards I'm wanting too much, but if I don't meet those standards then I'm not doing enough. Again, I ask, how can I be too much or not enough when I am everything to everyone? When is it my turn? When do I get to put me first? I have so many people to take care

of that I often wonder who is taking care of me? When do I get to set my own standards to live by? When do I get to be truly, unapologetically me?

Perfectionist or Illusionist? Maybe It's The Same Thing.

Everything is great. Why? Does it not look like it is? I promise it is. I did everything above the standard that was set. If there is one thing you can count on, it's that I will always deliver. Always. You can count on me. Oh yeah, I know my body is covered in hives and my hair is falling out, but I'll just cover up those hives, buy a wig, and carry on. Everything is great.

Always Moving

Do you hear that noise? It's like a ticking sound. As I've gotten older, it's gotten louder. I thought I was the only one who could hear it, but I guess not. Others hear it too, but I don't know if I'm comforted by that fact. Wait, do you see that? Where did the finish line go? I swear it was right here. I've worked for so long to hit this point and now it's gone. (makes phone call) Hello? Yeah, I'm calling because the finish line isn't where you said it would be. What do you mean it moved? Where did it move to? You can't tell me…but why not? I don't think you understand…see…okay…fine. (ends phone call) I guess I'll start again.

Arts-Based Response: Blackout Poetry

While I was reviewing materials from the workshop, I kept thinking about the monologue from the *Barbie* movie that America Ferrera's character gives to Barbie about how difficult it is to be a woman. I decided to first look at the monologue through the lens of "Who I Have To Be/Who Society Wants Me to Be" and use blackout poetry to highlight the roles that women have to constantly be juggling. From there I printed out another copy of the monologue and viewed it from the role of "Who I Am" and used blackout poetry to highlight roles that women

want to play. I wanted to highlight the complexity of being a woman in today's society with a

monologue that swept the nation after the movie premiered.

Figure 1

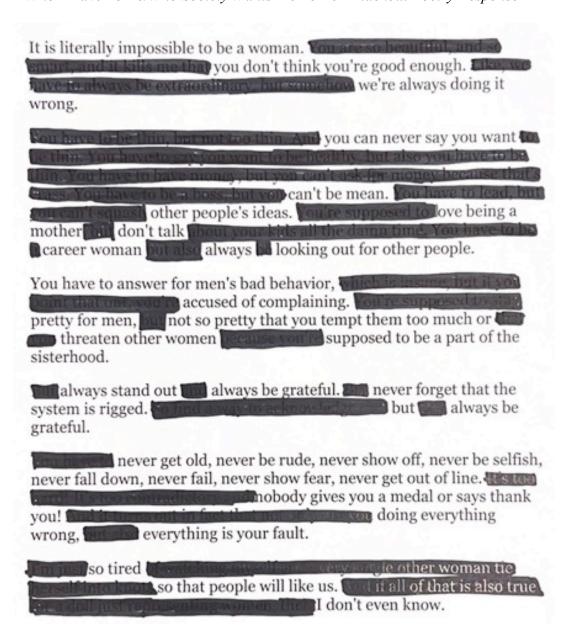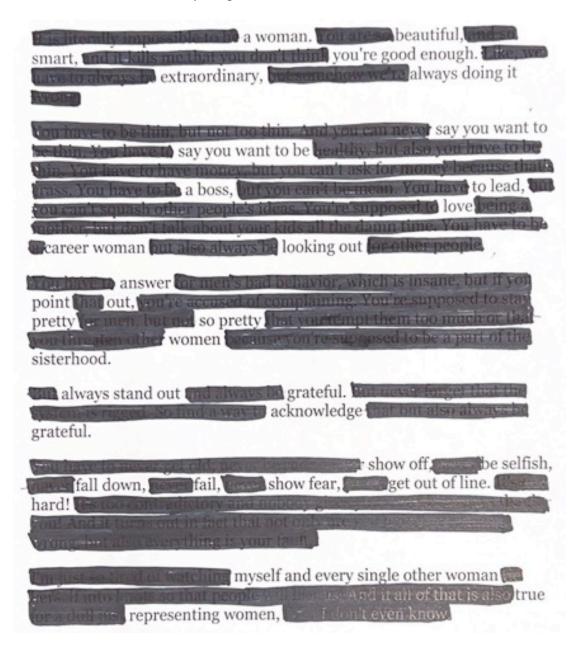*"Who I Have To Be/Who Society Wants Me To Be" Blackout Poetry Response*

It is literally impossible to be a woman. ~~You are so beautiful, and so smart, and it kills me that~~ you don't think you're good enough. ~~Like, we have to always be extraordinary, but somehow~~ we're always doing it wrong.

~~You have to be thin, but not too thin. And~~ you can never say you want ~~to be thin. You have to say you want to be healthy, but also you have to be thin. You have to have money, but you can't ask for money because that's crass. You have to be a boss, but you~~ can't be mean. ~~You have to lead, but you can't squash~~ other people's ideas. ~~You're supposed to~~ love being a mother ~~but~~ don't talk ~~about your kids all the damn time. You have to be~~ a career woman ~~but also~~ always ~~be~~ looking out for other people.

You have to answer for men's bad behavior, ~~which is insane, but if you point that out, you're~~ accused of complaining. ~~You're supposed to stay~~ pretty for men, ~~but~~ not so pretty that you tempt them too much or ~~that you~~ threaten other women ~~because you're~~ supposed to be a part of the sisterhood.

~~But~~ always stand out ~~and~~ always be grateful. ~~But~~ never forget that the system is rigged. ~~So find a way to acknowledge~~ but ~~also~~ always be grateful.

~~You have to~~ never get old, never be rude, never show off, never be selfish, never fall down, never fail, never show fear, never get out of line. ~~It's too hard. It's too contradictory, and~~ nobody gives you a medal or says thank you! ~~And it turns out in fact that not only are you~~ doing everything wrong, ~~but also~~ everything is your fault.

~~I'm just~~ so tired ~~of watching myself and every single~~ other woman tie ~~herself into knots~~ so that people will like us. ~~And if all of that is also true~~ ~~for a doll just representing women, then~~ I don't even know.

Figure 2

"Who I Am" Blackout Poetry Response

a woman. beautiful, smart, you're good enough. extraordinary, always doing it

say you want to say you want to be a boss, to lead, love career woman looking out

answer point out, pretty so pretty women sisterhood.

always stand out grateful. acknowledge grateful.

show off, be selfish, fall down, fail, show fear, get out of line. hard!

myself and every single other woman true representing women,

Discussion

This section details what I discovered from the implementation of my method. The key takeaways from this intervention were the importance of acknowledging the roles that we play and the importance of intersectionality.

My first observations during this intervention were how participants interacted with exploring the roles that they play in the "Who I Am" category. I noticed there was some hesitancy and discomfort in the group to explore themselves on a deeper level. I thought this was an uncomfortability with each other since it was still early in the workshop, but this was a common theme throughout the workshop, and eventually dissipated as the room often exploded with laughter and jokes throughout the workshop. When I asked the participants to name three roles that they identified with there was a common theme of naming roles that were in service to others such as partner, wife, mother, homemaker, and friend.

Something I noticed during the "Who I Have To Be" and "Who Society Wants Me To Be" section was that participants had a verbal reaction when I introduced this section which led me to believe that they were not excited to explore these roles. The group was split into two groups with one group being three women of color. I fully anticipated to dig deeper into their personal experiences with dominant narratives and roles that they played but was surprised that the topic did not come up in their conversation. With that said, the theme of dominant narratives was the main topic of this section in both sculpts that the groups created. Both groups explored themes of putting others before yourself, overextending yourself, biological clock dictating life choices, and the pressure of having to be perfect in a system that is rigged from the beginning It would have been interesting to dive further into these themes to see if participants were experiencing role overload or conflict due to the pressures of paid and unpaid labor (Gueltzow et

al., 2023). I noticed in analyzing the first and second part of this workshop that there was a focus on the collective experience of a woman versus individual experiences of being a woman. While I acknowledged that there would be overlap in both of these experiences since we are all women living in the same society, it was interesting that this was the route that the participants collectively decided on. I wondered if there needed to be more scaffolding in the interventions to help participants engage on that deeper level, but also, I wondered if this workshop needed to be broken into multiple sessions to achieve the depth I was trying to achieve with participants focusing more on their individual roles. I was able to identify through looking at collective experiences of the women in the workshop that there is much overlap in experiences, pressures, and roles that women experience in our society. While not exactly what I intended, this workshop provided a good starting point in acknowledging what roles women collectively play in society and how each participant individually participated in those roles (Landy, 2009).

Throughout the workshop we did touch on some intersectionalities in our roles as women, though, I was surprised that we did not talk about sexuality, queerness, race, or ethnicity given the demographics of the participants. After the interventions of the workshop were completed, we talked about things that went well and also things we may have missed; where one participant called attention to the fact that we mostly touched on womanhood in general and not individually through an intersectional lens. I agreed with their observation and acknowledged that I was surprised that the workshop took that turn, but in taking that direction we were able to explore the topic by what participants brought up organically. As previously mentioned, this topic is large, and it was impossible to cover the full spectrum of women's experiences let alone participant's experiences in one three-hour workshop. The role of the absence of the intersectional lens in this workshop gave us information about how we as women have to be

everything all the time and how we are too tired to dive into the bigger systems that are oppressing all of us and how they may be affecting us differently based on intersectionalities (Landy, 2009). Women are plagued with what we have to be for other people, and this was an important realization for this group and there was expressed interest in continuing the workshop to explore those intersectionalities. Examining the roles and problems that women face through the liberation health triangle could help women identify personal, institutional, and cultural factors of oppression that impact their lives and help them take action (Kant, 2015). In the research I collected it was upsetting to realize how women have been and still are unacknowledged in psychological, social, political, cultural, and spiritual sectors of society. It is an important next step in this research as "intersectionality is a product of seeking to have our voices heard and lives acknowledged" (Dill & Zambrana, 2020, p.109).

Limitations

A limitation of this thesis was that the workshop examined the experiences of six women in the community of Anchorage and while there was some diversity in intersectionalities the group was not representative of all cis women in our society, nor could it have been. While I needed to contain this expansive topic, I found the parameters of the thesis to be limiting in fully exploring this topic. With that said, I feel that I have a good foundation to continue this much needed research.

Conclusion

My research has suggested that it is possible to capture the experience of a woman through the use of role theory and the Role Profiles assessment. Continued research is needed to create a role taxonomy that captures roles that encompass all genders, cultures, and experiences.

Moving forward I hope to continue to explore roles that women play in society through drama therapy by digging further into the roles that cis women play, but also including experiences of queer women, transgender women, female born non-binary people, and non-binary people who are socialized as women. For these populations, not only is drama therapy an invitation for humor and play, but more importantly it allows the freedom of full expression of being which is important when women are constantly being told to be someone or something else (Glaser, 2023). In adopting an intersectional framework for future drama therapy workshops with this population, and all populations, it can expand the understanding of participants to allow for more effective ways to facilitate transformation and social action (Sajnani, 2013).

Beginning the journey of this thesis, I set out to better understand my experiences as a cis woman living in a patriarchal society and why some roles I play are celebrated while others are demonized. I went into this process with the hope of feeling less alone in my experiences and came out on the other side of this process embracing roles that I identified with but wasn't sure how to embrace. In exploring the relevant roles I play and do not play in society, I gained insight into my own identity, specifically my queerness, allowing me to take steps to achieve the freedom of full expression through drama therapy. I have come to realize the power that individuals hold in identifying and naming roles that they may or may not only play, but also have access to. I hope this thesis will be used to help build upon the other graduate research around expanding the role taxonomy and show that drama therapy and the arts can be an effective tool for women's self-expression since we are rarely asked about and often silenced when voicing our experiences.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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Angelle Cook

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