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please scan this QR code**How to Cite:**Kadhim, R. J. (2023). The impact of female misuse of power on their families in two selected plays by Clifford Odets and Edward Albee. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 4(4). <https://doi.org/10.58256/tmrgm073>**The impact of female misuse of power on their families in two selected plays by Clifford Odets and Edward Albee**

Rawaa Jawad Kadhim

English Department, University of Babylon, College of Basic
EducationCorrespondence: rawaa441@gmail.com <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4583-3052>**Abstract**

The following study investigates the impact of powerful women in the two American plays *Awake and Sing!* by Clifford Odets and *The American Dream* by Edward Albee. The study directs our attention towards the significant role of powerful female characters in the deterioration of familial structures and the dissolution of interpersonal connections during the 20th Century. They were portrayed as authoritative and commanding individuals. They asserted their entitlement to express anger, wit, and ruthlessness. Their dominion was evident in their capacity to dictate the lives of others, regardless of the ramifications it had on those directly entangled with them. The study posits that Foucault's analysis of power presents a unique interpretation that has the capacity to provide valuable insights into the essence of power in the two plays. It commences by offering an explication of the American family, and subsequently concludes by delineating certain resemblances between the chosen plays, drawing upon Foucault's conceptualization of power.

Keywords: Clifford Odets, Edward Albee, Dominant Women, American family, infertility.

1-Introduction

In America, Family is considered as a social institution. The term 'Institution' means a group of individuals organized according to cultural principles to carry on activities which fulfill their essential needs as human beings (Sirjamaki, 1953, p8). The American family is defined as "an institution adapted in structure, functions, and values to the society, constantly affected by national growth and the events of history" (Sirjamaki, 1953, p10).

If we are to chart the changing family dynamics over the centuries, in the 17th Century American society viewed 'family' as an essential unit. It had been considered the center of social relations (Skolnick, 1953, p26). 18th and 19th Century American literature portrayed a slightly different view of the family regarding it as a utopian society. The unit of the family was likened to building blocks which were directly responsible for a stable society. The 20th century image of the family was a stark contrast of the previous three centuries. The value and the importance of the American family changed from domination to loss. Family systems were collapsing and dying, if not already dead (Reiss & Hoffman, 1979, p 2).

Studies have identified several reasons for the collapse of the American family. Burgess believes that the diversity of sociocultural backgrounds was primarily responsible for family fragmentation. The American families belonged to different historical eras and, consequently, to different cultures (p18). Within the United States, there were marked differences in family structures and relationships by national origin. "The diversity of folkways and mores in the United States is reflected in wide variations of family patterns and relationships" (Burgess, 1960, p18).

Philippe Ariés cites capitalism as a probable reason for the breakdown of family relations given its economic function (p15). Capitalism created a lifestyle that valued materialism alone. It gave rise to a new kind of reality, one that the common man found difficult to deal with. Wakefield concurs with Ariés on Capitalism being the reason for the collapse of the family as it hit at social constructs; family members were not valued for who they are, but rather as economic producers and consumers (p11). Arthur W. Calhoun proposed that 'Individualism' and 'Democracy' were profoundly ambiguous forces that affected the American family (Skolnick, 1991, p26). The political events which followed the Declaration of Independence in 1775 and continued to the middle of the twentieth century had an impact on the American family. These included America's war with Britain, the Civil War (1860-1865) which raised the black-white problem, and the two World Wars. They hit at the very foundations of the American family. From the beginning, the American identity and dreams had been based on scientific inventions and industrial developments. Such a dream proved disastrous to an American who believed in a dream of wealth and stability (Madden, 1970, pp21-26).

Yet another reason was the decline of religious authority. According to Adams, the religious function that once proved important to socialisation and discipline had its roots in the home. It had been weakened now that its activity was restricted to specific times and places outside the home (73). Between 1930 and 1940, the number of American churchgoers dwindled. Furthermore, the Freudian and Jungian theories contributed in decreasing people's religious faith. The consequent changes in morals, ethics, and values affected the unit of the family. These theories conflicted with all forms of Christian authoritarianism. What was earlier prohibited under the banner of religion became acceptable for instance engaging in sexual relations outside the bond of marriage (Reiss, 1979, p15).

At the social level, the developments ushered in by the Industrial Revolution paved the way

for a new democratic type of family. Women were granted suffrage rights. They took up employment at factories, arranged their own marriages while also looking after their homes. These new roles and responsibilities affected male authority. Men, who were earlier regarded as the ideal and the head of the family, were stripped of their authority. They were hardly listened to by their families. The notion that the husband was like a God to the wife, a figure who was expected to be worshipped and obeyed (Kadhim, 2018, p128) gradually lost currency. In fact, the family began to be viewed as a responsibility rather than as an asset. In addition, the law imposed new burdens. The father became the financial provider for the family (Keniston & Shorter, 1977, pp18, 160). Calhoun stated that a man would “work longer and harder for the happiness of wife or child more than will any other man in the world” (Calhoun, 1945, p208). Meanwhile, Sar A. Levitan and Richard S. Belous in *What’s Happening to the American Family?* (1981) highlighted the change of roles in the family as one of the reasons for the breakdown of modern families (p26). The family was no longer important; the father left his role as the head of the family and engaged himself with other workers outside the unit of the family (Adams, 1971, pp19-73). The traditional makeup of the family was soon replaced by a modern structure. Women in an attempt to save the unit of the ‘family’ switched their domestic roles. They became dominant and tyrants. They exhibited a power like one never seen before. However, contrary to expectations, their dominance led to a collapse of the family. Writers such as Clifford Odets and Edward Albee have portrayed such women in a negative light.

Clifford Odets was a leading American dramatist. He has been considered as a forerunner of drama of the common man in the United States during the 1930s. He had written over forty plays and movie scripts. His plays were a great success during the period of the Depression. His play *Awake and Sing!* is one of his widely acclaimed works. *Awake and Sing* put Odets at par with O’Neill in his literary craft. He made use of the insecurities of his times to create dramatic tensions in his plays. The image of the “failing family” was a microcosm of the larger society which questioned the significance of the individual. The play has several aspects of realism blended with humour. He was deeply influenced by Anthony Chekhov’s writings. According to Michael J. Mendelsohn, both playwrights were viewed as revolutionary dramatists whose main concerns were to replace the values and conventions of previous drama (pp103-4).

The second dramatist is Edward Albee. He was one of the well-acclaimed American playwrights of his generation and responsible for bringing in a new form of theatre in the United States. His command of language, a dominance of rhythm and tone, the use of powerful dramatic metaphors, and most important of all, an integrity which made no compromise with his artistic objectives were the unique features of his work (Bigsby, 1940, pp8-9). Technically, Albee brought absurdism to the American stage, showing intelligence in creating dialogues that were both realistic and absurd. He was influenced by Eugene Ionesco (1912- 1994) and Samuel Beckett (1906 - 1989). The influence of Absurdist theatre was evident in his work *The American Dream*. Albee, unlike other writers, was not a reformer. He had no aim of correcting societal flaws or finding solutions to modern-day challenges. His only goal was to turn social polemic into an existential quandary.

Both playwrights had continually portrayed American’ families in their plays. They dramatize the hopes and conflicts of their culture. Women characters in both plays appear to be more dominant and symbolic, though some women seemed to be conventional. The study, will examine the potential for a female persona to transform into a powerful character and the ways in which she may destroy the

principles of her household and her own moral fabric in the pursuit of ultimate authority.

The concept of power is commonly understood as the ability of an agent to dominate over the powerless, compelling them to act against their will. This view perceives power as a form of possession, a quality that is possessed by those in positions of authority. (Sergiu, 2010, p:56) However, according to Michel Foucault, power cannot be owned, but is rather a force that operates and reveals itself in a particular manner. It is more akin to a strategy than a possession, and must be examined as a phenomenon that circulates or functions as a chain. Power operates through a network of organization, and individuals serve as conduits for its exercise, rather than being the focal points of its application (Foucault, 1980, p:98).

The aim of this study is to establish the notion that there exists no inherent distinction between individuals possessing power versus those who are powerless. Rather, power and powerlessness are contingent upon situational factors that impel individuals towards either a position of dominance or subjugation. The present investigation had elucidated a set of conditions that have given rise to two dominant figures in the selected plays. These figures will be subjected to analysis in accordance with Foucault's conceptualization of power.

Undoubtedly, power has been a pivotal aspect of human cognition that has influenced human actions since the beginning of civilization. Despite its potential for coercion and abuse, power is highly advantageous in human discourse and creative social engagement. In this context, power typically pertains to a dynamic of dominance and resistance. The impact of power on shaping and comprehending the historical context of humanity holds significant importance in the work of Foucault (1926-1984).

Power is not contingent upon a specific philosophy of history, a particular political theory, or a world view. Rather, it is rooted in strategic perspectives that center around the actuality of conflicts that pervade the social realm. Foucault posits that power is not an institution or a structure, nor is it a simple matter of possessing strength. Rather, it is a term that denotes a complex, strategic situation within a particular society (Foucault, History, p.93) power usually refers to a relationship of domination and resistance.

2-The portrayal of Female in *Awake and Sing!* and *The American Dream* :

Throughout history, power has been known to lead to corruption at every stage of life. Furthermore, it should be noted that the corruption caused by power does not remain confined to a single individual or institution. Rather, power has the potential to be abused or exploited in any human interaction, be it within family dynamics, or any other part of society. The corruption of power is intrinsically linked to one's character formation, as it can reveal a certain level of frailty in individuals. In the selected plays the heroines think they have authority to break or alter rules .Over time, those women of power tend to prioritize their own self-centered desires over the needs and perspectives of others. They hold the belief that they are capable of acquiring what others lack through the wielding of power. The acquisition of power represents the highest point of their ambitions, resulting in a state of blindness that prevents the recognition of the harm caused to those in their immediate surroundings.

Awake and Sing! is a true representative of realistic drama, being closer to common American life than contemporary literature. It stand out with its realistic setting, characters, language and themes. The play was first rejected as it was supposed to be read and not staged (Odets, 1991, pp75-90).

Bessie Berger, the mother of the Berger family residing in the Bronx, has often been depicted as a

powerful and materialistic woman. Over the course of the narrative, she exhibits a resolute determination to assert herself and independently make critical choices, without the solicitation or recognition of her husband. Regardless of the absolute truth, Bessie sought to enhance the ambit of her authority over others' lives by an official validation of her already fabricated truth that she could lead her family to safety. Through her actions, she exerted a significant degree of control over the lives of her family members. Bessie's exercise of absolute power was to keep the family together and restore the abandoned middle-class values. However, her attempts to dominate the family unexpectedly led to a completed fragmentation of her family at the end of the play.

Myron, Bessie's husband, spent thirty years as a clerk was left with no sense of financial security. The small payment he received was enough for Bessie to disregard his value and role in the family. To find comfort, Myron escaped into the past; he got lost in thoughts related in particular to Teddy Roosevelt. This escape confirms his unconscious desire for a lost self-esteem which he needed to endure his wife. The charisma and machismo which defined Roosevelt's character were exactly what Myron lacked (Krasner, 2006, p10). His escape was a relief to satisfy a growing sense of emasculation within. Myron mirrors Jacob, Bessie's father who represented the first generation of frustrated Jewish immigrants. At the same time, he functioned as the Marxist voice in the play and was sketched as a character against materialism. For Jacob, Bessie represented the values of capitalism. He was the moral center of the family. He strongly advocates for Ralph to abolish families that prioritize material possessions (Odets, 1962, p55). Bessie thought that Uncle Morty was a fine example of a successful man. She wished to see Ralph like him. **"I should only live to see the day when he rides up to the door in a big car with a chauffeur and a radio. I could die happy, believe me"** (Odets, 1962, p66). In fact, Moe Axelrode believed that **"life in America...without a dollar you don't look the world in the eye"** (Odets, 1962, p95).

Bessie, all along the play, rejected any issues Ralph raised or any questions he asked, telling him to **"Go to sleep, you look tired. In the morning you'll forget"** (Odets, 1962, p83) and **"Go out and change the world if you don't like it"** (Odets, 1962, p95). The lack of a personal and private space for himself was evident in his statement, **"I can't even have my own room"** (Odets, 1962, p42). Ralph's inability to contribute financially to his family left him in a position of dependence and powerlessness in the presence of his mother, he was unable to fulfill his basic needs and desires, leading him to bitterly protest **"I want a pair of black and white shoes and can't get them. It's crazy"** (p.42). During the entirety of his life, Ralph had never been able to celebrate his birth through a festive gathering, whenever his birth anniversary arrived, he would isolate him and cry. When Ralph opened his heart and expressed his amorous feelings towards Blanche, Bessie exhibited a conspicuous lack of empathy or consideration for his emotional state. In fact, she responded heartlessly and dismissively by advising him to knock his head against the wall. Such a response from a mother could leave a negative psychological impact on her son.

Despite Jacob's previous beliefs that a woman's capacity to insult a man's soul surpasses any other phenomenon in the world (Odets, 1935:33). And his conviction that his own marriage was his downfall, in this scene he appeared to be advising Ralph that, if he truly loved Blanche, he should marry her, even if it meant going against his mother, leaving his home, and risking his job. Nevertheless, despite Ralph's objections and assurances to Blanche, he failed to meet her as they had planned. After Ralph decided to give up on pursuing Blanche, she called him demanding an explanation, which left him flustered. It's worth noting that Blanche hung up on him. As Gabriel Miller observed, Ralph's persistence in pursuing his goals was meant to resonate with the audience. Another critic proposed that the audience

must accept Ralph's decision to take affirmative action and work towards revolutionary change, rather than the specific actions he takes, for him to be considered the 'affirmative choice'. Ralph's choice to stay with the Bergers instead of leaving like Hennie reflects his desire to an effect transformation while the possibility of repeating the same experience with his family is still set (Miller, 1989:49).

Jacob's suicide was a selfless sacrifice to help Ralph challenge Bessie's dominance since she believed that material success was better for Ralph than Jacob's dreamy philosophy, but Ralph gives the insurance money to his mother and remains ineffective and unconvincing. He did nothing to challenge his mother's dominance. Baird R. Shuman argued that the dramatist himself did not show Ralph as a character that develops or matures during the course of the play, but instead remains static and gets worse (p60).

Harold Cantor demonstrated that Odets paradoxically highlights simultaneous proposition of the middle-class family as a social entrapment from which individuals must liberate themselves to realize their human potential as members of the human community, while also presenting the family as source of compassion, love and fondness that can only be abandoned at great risk to the individual. (Cantor,1978,30) The ambivalence exhibited in the aforementioned is a clear indication of Odets's internal and conflicting Jewish identity. His deep-seated affinity towards Jewish ethnic culture is contrasted with his unwavering belief that individual triumph is based on the ability to overcome or surpass one's own heritage.

Hennie was an attractive, self-confident, vibrant and possessed a good sense of humor. She was much like her mother. She got pregnant by a man who later could not be located. She had several suitors including Schlosser, the janitor. She was also courted by the sensitive but ineffectual Sam Feinschreiber and Moe Axelrod. Axelrod was soon discovered to be Hennie's first love. She called Bessie a hateful "Mussolini" (Odets, 1962, p57). Hennie showed courage when she chose to go away with the man she loved. She also showed no sense of responsibility when she left her husband and baby behind.

Bessie, who was more concerned with upholding respectability than with the ultimate well-being of her daughter, had orchestrated a marriage that can only achieve the legitimization of an unborn child. Undoubtedly, Bessie had undertaken this course of action due to her acute sensitivity to public opinion and her burdening adherence to what Odets deemed as outdated values. However, in Bessie's mind, the destiny of the unborn child was intertwined with the "ultimate good" of her daughter. Bessie's objective was to safeguard Hennie's reputation, not solely for how it reflected on herself, but also because she had fully internalized the old values of Shuman (Shuman, 1962: 64).

Ralph and Hennie embarked on divergent paths in their respective lives. Ralph assumed the role of a social activist, reminiscent of his Grandfather, while Hennie's assertive departure from an unproductive marriage, which perpetuated a cycle of both financial and emotional dissatisfaction, served as illustrations of Odets' ambivalence and even disdain towards the concept of family in the American context. These instances unequivocally provide evidence of Odets' conviction that the family functioned as a regressive entity, undermining individual aspirations and idealistic endeavors aimed at achieving societal progress.

The American Dream is an expressionistic play. It criticized the false values and relationships of the American family in the 1960s and 1970s. In his "Preface" to the play, Albee articulates a description of the work as an exploration of the American Scene. The play serves as a critique of the replacement of authentic values with artificial ones within society. Additionally, it offers a condemnation of complacency,

cruelty, emasculation, and vacuity (Pp53-54).

The playwright calls his characters by their roles in the family - Mommy, Daddy, Grandma and the Young Man. By not explicitly naming them, they could represent any individual in the American family. The names were symbolic as they presented the middle-class family as thoughtless and futile. Mommy was a sadistic and horrifying figure. She emasculates Daddy who was almost submissive. There was no bond of marriage existing between the two, at least not in the traditional sense of partnership and harmony expected in a couple. Their marital arrangement was nothing more than a perverse and emotional sterility. The wife's authority was unquestioned; the husband was a negative, passive entity. He did not exhibit behaviors emblematic of a familial leader, nor was said individual granted the authority to make decisions of significance. He was required only to listen "I'm all ears" (Albee, 1961, p100). She was happy to exercise her will on others. She criticized the way her husband spoke. The American Daddy was not to be concerned with what goes on in his own household; emancipated Mommy had become completely powerful and capable. While Daddy's job was to mind his own business, and bring home the money (Paolucci, 2000, p29). The man who was expected to embody the epitome of familial excellence and serve as its leader was ultimately reduced to a mere source of financial gain. At every occasion, he was subjected to dishonor and shame. When Daddy displayed hesitancy with regards to accessing entry, the Mommy derided him as being indecisive and possessing feminine qualities. In addition, Mommy utilized his perceived impotence as a tool to persuade him of his ineffectiveness.

"Mommy: Open the door.

Daddy: And was I decisive?

Mommy: So decisive! Oh, I shivered.

Daddy: And masculine? Was I really masculine?

Mommy: Oh, Daddy, you were so masculine; I shivered and fainted". (Albee, 1961, p111)

Daddy was unable to have children of his own. Mommy ensured this when she said that he "can't get satisfaction" (ibid., p102). As a result, he finds himself subjected to the dominance of his spouse, who exerts a terrorizing influence over him. In response, he adopts a subservient role to his wife, mirroring her opinions and displaying an inclination towards immature behavior as a means of avoiding the humiliation of his reality.

Their unhappy marriage goes on further to reveal that Daddy had no desire for Mommy because of an operation he underwent. He said "the doctors took out something that was there and put in something that wasn't there" (ibid., p117). Grandma clarified that Mommy used to sleep in her room, but now "Daddy doesn't want to sleep with anyone, because he's been sick" (ibid., p108). Daddy was unhappy in his life, but he was not strong enough to leave.

For Mummy, marriage was nothing more than a commercial business to gain wealth and security with sexuality. In this particular milieu, the concept of love appeared to have dissipated and had been supplanted by a sense of sexual sterility. The institution of marriage, once deemed to be a sanctimonious bond, had now been reduced to a mere mechanism for amassing worldly gains. Albee has provided insight into how human conduct has been influenced and modified to resemble a mechanical construct, unable to express their emotions. The once expressive and warm language employed within familial bonds had been exchanged for vacuous and insipid expressions. Mommy said

"You're my sweet Daddy; that's very nice.

Daddy: I love my Mommy. (Albee, 1961, p118)

According to George Wellwarth, Albee took a happy, solid, traditional family with an idealistic hero and painted them in a distorted form. “The happy family becomes an emasculated money supplier dominated by an emotionally sterile, nagging wife; the idealistic hero becomes a handsome, empty-headed, hollow shell of a man with the outlook and philosophy of a professional pimp” (Rutenberg, 1970, p69).

In *The American Dream*, the mother-child relationship was based on materialistic benefits; it was devoid of love and respect. For instance, Grandma reminded Daddy that she had warned him before marrying her daughter. She had advised him to “**stay away from her type**” (Albee 107). She did not think about the consequences of what she said. Mommy always threatens Grandma with the van man and the nursing home. Mommy could not bring herself to give up the free maid service. Mommy “**can’t stand it, the cooking and the housework, polishing the silver, moving the furniture**” the things Grandma used to do (Albee 105). Mommy consistently denigrated her own mother during communication by stating “**don’t you dare say a word**” (Albee, 1961, p. 109) or “**be quiet**” (ibid., pp. 112, 118). Furthermore, even when Daddy attempted to attentively listen to the grandma, Mommy rebuffed and dissuaded him, contending that her mother’s words lacked significance. One of the contributing factors for this behavior is that, according to Foucault’s perspective, the grandma lacks productivity, and is unable to generate income to become independent and free from her daughter’s authority. (Reiss, 1979, p 56)

The mother artfully manipulated the father to gain his allegiance by convincing him that the choice was entirely his own and that he had exhibited a steadfast, resolute, and virile demeanor in reaching said decision (Albee, 1961, p. 110).

Mommy’s convinced Daddy “**to smash the tubes of Grandma’s television**” (ibid., p121), because Grandma opposed her. When Grandma refuses to give Mrs. Barker a glass of water Mommy threatens her “**Now, you be a good Grandma, or you know what will happen to you. You’ll be taken away in a van**” ((ibid., 124). When Grandma rebels against her cruel daughter, Mommy threatened her to hide her teeth (ibid.). The ungratefulness of Mommy made Grandma sad and angry, she arranged her boxes to leave, when she knew that her daughter decided to put her in a nursing home. Mommy pretended to be sad and crying, but the tears soon faded when she was assured by Mrs. Barker that Grandma had been taken off. It is evident from the portrayals of the characters of Mommy, Daddy, and Mrs. Barker that Daddy displays a deficiency in masculinity, whereas Mommy and Mrs. Barker attain it, with one assuming a position of dominance and the other serving as a chairman. In the play, Mommy exhibits a dominant persona which represents the evolving female figure, transitioning from a traditional homemaker to an unfeeling, ostentatious consumer. A typical sadist, Mommy degrades Grandma and belittles Daddy, treating him as a child.

Moreover, Mommy was much attracted to the handsome, muscular Young Man, whose presence in the household came as a substitute for Grandma. Mommy and Daddy, hold an affectionate view of the Young Man, whom they had endearingly called their “Bumble of Joy”. The Young Man exhibited a proclivity towards engaging in any and all activities that offer a financial incentive. He symbolized the old traditional values of the American family and the American society were replaced by a new artificial picture of the American Dream.

It can be noted that as an authoritative figures and dominant forces in their respective families, Bessie and Mommy challenge the patriarchal structure of the ideal families they aspired to emulate. This

valuable irony of both women is undoubtedly emphasized by Odets and Albee as a critique and rebuke. “Edward Murray viewing the play through a Freudian lens contended that “few works of American drama reveal so well what transpires within a family when natural relations are distorted.”(Murray, 1986:43) Murray’s identification of Bessie as the antagonist of the play. However, scholars such as Warshow have noted that Bessie is a result of and reaction to an ineffective father figure. The father’s inability to provide for his family in America could be attributed to the construction of the modern (Western) family and the larger capitalist system.

Similarities between the two plays

The selected plays by Odets and Albee were an authentic reflection of realistic drama, exhibiting a closer proximity to the everyday life experienced by Americans than contemporary literature. Their realistic portrayal of the setting, characters, language and themes was particularly noteworthy. Both playwrights shared a common thread - the action of family struggle and personal dilemma. They depicted the American family as a battleground with its agitations and crises. By talking of the family, the dramatists attacked the social reality of the American culture that has emptied the institution of the family of almost all substance. The image of the family portrayed in both the selected plays is an empty myth, a form without content, a combination of attitudes and words handed down mechanically from one generation to another. Dramatists also shed light on the concept of power and its consequences inside the American family. Foucault emphasized that power is exercised from countless points. The connections of power relations extend to other external forms of relationships, such as economic, cognitive, and sexual. Foucault argues that authentic power relations do not indicate domination; rather, power relations constitute a mobile network of struggle that is “less a matter of domination than of circulation” (Foucault, 1977, p. 26-27). A genuine power relation manifests in a field of struggle where multiple parties attempt to structure the actions of others, who may, in turn, submit, resist, or themselves attempt to structure the same terrain of action (Shiner, 391). In both plays the characters submit to the power personified by the female figures, whilst the male counterparts are exposed as, ineffective and unproductive figures. Foucault asserts that power has an massive limitless effects. In the two selected plays Bessie and Mommy represented the massive effects of power Bessie , the primary purpose of their existence was solely to impose their will onto others via various means such as actions, speeches, and at times, gestural communication.

Resistance, for Foucault the concept of power transcends the notion of a mere oppressive dynamic between the powerful and the powerless. Rather, he scrutinizes the quotidian interactions among individuals and institutions to comprehend the workings of power. In this regard, power is not a tangible commodity that can be obtained, seized, or attained. It operates more like a technique than a form of control. Foucault posits that power is associated with resistance, serving as a generative variable due to its constructive consequences, such as the production of the self and its existence within societal relationships. Thus, where power exists, resistance is present, and the latter is not outside power’s purview. (Foucault, 1977, p. 26- 27) As with any power relations, resistance is not independent but rather interwoven with other relations. Therefore, power undergoes decentralization or potentially ceases to exist, resulting in a diverse array of resistances. Throughout the progression of the dramatic works, it was duly observed that the male characters displayed an absence of resistances. Consequently, their state of being endured without alteration, whereby they remained subjugated to the authority of

their dominant females. Conversely, the female characters, specifically Hennie and Grandma, exhibited resistance. As a result, their circumstances underwent transformation, yielding either positive or negative outcomes. Ultimately, they emancipated themselves from subjection.

Powerlessness or emasculation, played a direct role in reducing the position of the father in the family. Albee and Odets brought forth the issue of the powerlessness in the play. Myron and Daddy were an emasculated this gave an opportunity to both Bessie and Mommy to strongly dominate and attack them. According to Martin Esslin Mommy was the consummate “bad mother”: sadistic, jealous, greedy, and onward.”.(Esslin,1991,p:45) While Bessie had been compared by her daughter with Mussolini, according to Edward Murray , Bessie’s assumption of control over the household resulted in the male family members being “warped, impotent, and crippled in some way (Murray ,1986:43). For instance, the manifestation of Mommy’s aggression and violence was evident in the incident wherein Daddy responded to a doorbell while the Mommy ridiculed him in an exaggerated manner, thus intending to undermine his masculinity. The young man was also complicit in this act of insult. Both Myron and Daddy were subjected to the dominance of Bessie and Mommy. The daughter had even likened Bessie to Mussolini. Hence, while some critics may argue that the intentions of Bessie and Mommy were to provide for and sustain their families, this does not justify them of being “destructive forces”.

It is likely to say that the breakdown of the familial unit may also be construed as an outcome not solely attributable to a dominant female who limits the involvement of the male, but rather to a male who refused to resist or take responsibility of his own actions. Self-acceptance was missing in all the male characters in the play starting with the grandfather and trickling down to the husbands and son. They stand in contrast to the dominant female characters who were the thinkers and the planners in the family. According to Elisabeth Badinter, to be acknowledged as a genuine man, men must overcome their own passivity. This isn’t always the case with females. A girl does not need to fight for her ‘female’ identity because she can be labeled ‘a woman’ on the first day of her period (Badinter, 1992, p:2). However, the first step in this endeavor is for individuals to acknowledge and accept themselves for what they truly are, regardless of whether they suits the role designated by the society , or the role suits them.

Financial instability can be viewed as another reason women begin to assert their authority in their families. The reason was enough to debase the other characters as “antiheroic” and “inactive”. For instance, Myron’s role in the family was insignificant because of the small payment he received. Despite having been offered an opportunity to improve their financial situation, the male characters, such as Ralph, were unable to do so. The characters’ defeats were attributed to the futility of their actions, a concept that opposes the existential philosophy that regards the human being as an active subject. According to Heidegger and Sartre, the future serves as a motive to act (Warnock, 1970, p. 119). Thus, one must act in order to attain freedom. The problem in both plays lies in the men’s lack of motivation to act, as they do not have any expectations from life. They did not believe that their actions could alter their destinies, and consequently, they accepted life as it was, rejecting all opportunities to improve it. Foucault asserts that power is linked with production. Where there is power, there is production. In analyzing both theatrical productions, it has been noted that the concept of productivity was not attributed to any male character (Foucault, 1978, p: 142).

The absence of maternal love and affection, the disintegration of families can be attributed to another factor. When examining the plays of Odets and Albee, it is difficult to disregard the significance

of their biographies, which contain several challenging personal experiences that may have inadvertently influenced their works. According to Gerry McCarthy, failing to acknowledge Albee's biography would be misguided, as it sheds light on some of the emotional aspects of his plays (p4). In both plays, the mother's unwavering love is supplanted by cruelty and a lack of empathy. For instance in *The American Dream*, Mommy cuts off the hands and tongue of their adopted baby (bumble of joy) because of his unruliness. Similarly in *Awake and Sing* Bessie's mistreatment of her children, whereby she imposed several restrictions on them, including forbidding them from receiving birthday gifts and preventing her son from being with his beloved. Hennie also faced a similar treatment, as she was forced into marrying a man of her mother's choice. However, she eventually left her husband and child to pursue her love. Hennie portraying herself as a heartless and selfish mother who prioritizes her own wishes over her family's well-being. In both plays, an absence of love is palpable towards the parents. The characters Bessie and Mummy portrayed no emotional attachment, and their relationship seemed to be centered solely on fulfilling personal interests or reaping advantages.

Struggle between generations,The characters of the grandfather and grandmother can be regarded as representatives of the older generation, as evidenced in both plays. In both the plays, the older generations possess energy, courage and honesty. They come to represent spirituality which oppose the materialistic generations. They were marginalized and not provided the opportunity to correct or instruct their peers, rather they were subjected to allegations of nonsensical speech, according to Mummy in *The American Dream*. "Old people have nothing to say: and if they did have something to say, nobody would listen to them" (Albee, 1961, p118).

The act of their leaving is a symbolic representation of losing spirituality in the modern materialistic age. Within Odets's play, the character of Jacob served as an emblematic figurehead for a larger message, pertaining to a whole generation of American citizens who had been rendered vulnerable due to economic hardships and social strife; however, regrettably, his voice went unheard. The selfless deed of providing help to his grandson was not given due recognition, and ultimately, his suicide was employed as a means of remedying his sense of estrangement. In Foucault point of view relations among parents and children, partners, and employers and employees are all characterized by power dynamics. Within every human interaction, power is a variable that is subject to negotiation. Regardless of the level of flexibility that exists within these power relationships, each individual occupies a particular place within the hierarchy. But when negotiation is step aside undoubtedly, there would be an imbalance in the system of the family which overshadows on the position of the elders (Sergiu, 2010, p:61)

Power is Actions, power is comprehended as an act that is exercised, rather than owned. Power is not a predisposition or an aptitude, nor is it a resource or a commodity (Foucault, 2003: 13). To illustrate, one could argue that within a family, each member possesses the power to determine. However, Foucault would emphasize that this authority does not exist in an abstract form, as it connect to a specific action. This authority solely occurs when the members of the family undertake the act of deciding or rejecting. If they do not do so, then decision-making becomes an unfulfilled capability or a latent potential rather than an actual power. Males in both plays did not undertake the act of deciding or rejecting, only Bessie's father by committing a suicide. Even this action may be deemed as a means of escaping from reality and is entirely unrelated to authority. .

Foucault rejects the notion that power can be confined in the control of a specific group of individuals. He claimed that, "Power is everywhere" (Foucault, 1978: 93). The complicated structure of

power shares similarities with a network, implying that it spreads throughout the entirety of the familial group rather than being concentrated within a single person, such as Bessie and Mommy. The exercise of power within the realm of family functions through a complex web of relationships: between parents and their children, and among siblings. If these connections undergo alteration or deterioration, the capacity of the family to practice power will also undergo transformation. Consequently, the assertion that the two women possess the authority to make decisions holds true, but that was because males did not want to practice their power might be because they lost interest to be powerful or because females were like obstacles that hinder the males to be powerful. According to Barbalet, the acceptance of power encompasses a notable element of resistance, which may arise either due to a lack of interest in achieving the objectives of power or as a result of actively impeding its effective functioning. (1985, P:531)

Finally, in drawing to a close, Foucault contends that power is not centralized but rather diffuse throughout the entirety of society. This affords us the ability to perceive power in action during every human interaction, thereby allowing us to observe the manifestation of resistance. Power is viewed as a more unstable and unpredictable element, which is constantly open to contestation, thereby necessitating ongoing renewal and reaffirmation of power relations (Foucault, p:107-133). If we consider Foucault's notion regarding the dynamic nature of power, it is possible to suggest that the males or at least Ralph's transformation or change is possible.

Conclusion

On the surface level, the plays appeared to revolve around the deception of the American Dream. However, upon closer examination, the plays served as an allegory for American life. Both plays offered a historical and social perspective of the American family. Undoubtedly, Odetts and Albee themselves inherited specific family life depictions and values, which they ultimately rejected. Their expectations were derived from a shifting family structure and a complex set of ethical and emotional attitudes towards the family. Their preoccupation with the family was linked to their notions of the good life, the American Dream, and their presumptions about the democratic system.

In both plays, women had played a role in the dissolution of familial relationships. Their attempts to establish a conventional lifestyle through the exertion of their authority had resulted in a psychological crisis characterized by a lack of love and communication, engendering various negative emotions such as disappointment, hatred, aggression, anxiety, and distrust amongst the members of the family. Consequently, the family unit had been rendered incapable of adapting to the outside world. No panaceas were presented to the afflicted family members, and they were left to lead their futile existences.

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