

**WOMEN, THY NAME IS WOMB:
MARGINALIZATION OF VOLUNTARY CHILDFREE WOMEN IN FEMINIST
PERFORMANCE LITERATURE**

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines voluntary childfree women's lack of representation in modern feminist theatre. Pronatalist ideology within North American cultural feminism is explored in the context of childfree marginalization, and is applied to performance literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In order to counteract discordance between mother and non-mother narratives, and directly address some of the associated stigmas of childfree women, an original theatrical script accompanies the research components as a conceptual application of this research. The script highlights the reproductive complexity of female voices, breaking down the notions of universalism and binary schema that sustain cultural feminism's essentialist arguments. Illustrating the interconnected gap between ideology, experience, and representation gives voluntary childfree women a subject position, and highlights the importance of inclusion within the realm of feminist ideology. Without the representation of a growing demographic of childfree women, feminism cannot hope to expand the definition of female identity and expression.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my husband for his ongoing support and love.

There really are no words.

Chapter One

Childfree Context

As a practitioner of theatre, it seemed clear to me when first starting this project that there was a general lack of childfree representation in theatrical scripts. Since representation of childfree women within mainstream theatre is extremely rare, feminist theatre became a logical focal point. Therefore, in early stages of research the main question was: how has the stigma and marginalization of voluntary childfree women been presented in modern North American feminist theatre? As research narrowed and connections became clear, the assessment of feminist theatre's representation seemed highly correlated with ideological shifts within the feminist movement. The fields of childfree, feminism, and theatre research converge on the ideology of pronatalism, which is defined by "attitudes which encourage fertility" (Veevers *Childless by Choice* 3), highlighting the ongoing perpetuation of the "motherhood myth." Therefore, pronatalism's infiltration into North American feminist theatre has devalued the notion of reproductive choice, prioritizing motherhood as essential, and resulting in a lack of representational childfree narrative, which is directly influenced by the exclusion of alternative reproductive voice as a central theme. Since the integrated nature of creative work and research is important in understanding the interrelatedness of the topic itself, the particular format of this project is unique. Each section will begin with a critical research component, followed by a creative portion. By interspersing the script within the conceptual framework of each chapter the theoretical relevance of the creative sections will be enhanced.

To fully understand the complexity and devaluation of childfree existence within modern North American feminism, that of the last half of the twentieth century and up to the present day, it is imperative to first discuss the prevailing literature that informs both historical and

ideological underpinnings of this movement. Since the North American paradigm differs from other known feminisms it is important to identify the brand of feminism which I deal with specifically. North American feminism, and its theatre, evolved from the more “radical” doctrine that existed during the early second wave feminist movement, which emphasized female autonomy in opposition to a patriarchal system and challenged the biological assumptions of motherhood as an element of oppressive hegemony. However, it is important to note that theatre scholars such as Elaine Aston, Sue-Ellen Case, and Shelly Scott use the terms cultural and radical feminism interchangeably with regard to feminist theatre. This may be due to the political nature of feminist theatre in general. Cultural feminism views women as inherent biological nurturers, and emphasizes a “difference feminism” (DiQuinzio 6) based on female specific gender characteristics and experience. This type of ideology is consistent with an essentialist point of view, which highlights the biological aspects of women’s lives as a deterministic element, and thus, seems to reflect a pronatalist sentiment.

In contrast, materialist (Marxist) feminism in Britain focuses on methods of disseminating socially constructed gender roles through “production, reproduction and procreation” (Reinelt 151). Given materialist examination of labour in all forms, men and women within this paradigm are categorized less on the basis of specific biology. Therefore, the difference between materialist and cultural feminism is significant, and will be addressed in the context of specific theatrical representation. However, it is important to point out that ideological underpinning can impact the formulation and application of each paradigm. Therefore, due to the essentialist framework of much of modern North American feminism, it is logical to assume that pronatalist views infiltrated the movement at some point. Although this is supported by evidence, pronatalist focus was not always the case.

Early on in the second wave's reproductive rights movement (1960s and early 1970s), childfree narratives were at the forefront of feminist discourse. Female writers like Betty Friedan and Ellen Peck began casting doubt on previous dogma surrounding women's biological destiny, countering the 'women = mother' dialectic. Certainly, advocating reproductive rights and freedoms aligned with the fight for access to all forms of birth control: abortion, sterilization, and contraceptives. This access allowed women to choose whether or not they desired children at all, and strongly countered the pro-family social mores that had previously existed. Feminists of the time specifically fought against prescriptive norms of motherhood that were based on fallacious essentialist ideals, ones that reinforced the biological potential of childbirth as a necessary part of being female. Furthermore, motherhood was viewed as an oppressive act, an "institution" (Rich 13) which reinforced the existing hegemonic control of male patriarchy. So, not only did the early campaign advocate choice but it "recognized differences among women, even as [the women's movement] insisted on the unity of women as a group" (DiQuinzio 31). Texts such as Nancy Russo's *The Motherhood Mandate* (1976) enriched the discourse of childlessness with its analysis, which not only identified social pressures of procreative activity, but also the lack of non-mothering role models. She made a clear distinction between women who deferred motherhood and women who did not *want* to mother. Obviously then, "choice" was of prime importance to early feminists.

"Choice" was also paramount in the emerging research of childfree women during the same period. Jean E. Veevers, a Canadian pioneer in the field of childfree scholarship in the 1970s-80s, questioned assumptions about a universal biological instinct as a precursor to childbearing ("A Neglected Area of Family Study"), and posited a socialization aspect to the role of motherhood. Her additional research revealed negative stereotypes associated with voluntary

childlessness, which solidified Veevers' hypothesis that childfree women are a marginalized group. In both her studies, Veevers utilized quantitative and qualitative research to explore the lives of childfree women. Further research, both historic and contemporary, confirms the rising number of women choosing not to have children (Chancey; Martin; Shea; and Veevers), resonating with a continuous downward fertility trend evident in the United States and Canada. During the 1960's -1970's, the growing demographic of childfree women was predominantly "white, middle-class women" (Hayden and Hallstein xxxv). While my thesis deals specifically with this demographic, in no way does this limitation undermine the importance of childfree research within minority populations; socio-economics, sexual diversity, and race play an integral part in the complexity of voluntary childlessness.

Scholars like Carolyn Morell and Ann Snitow admit that in the latter half of the second wave movement the majority of feminisms departed from their more radical roots and mothering became valorized once again: "inscribing mothering as the most important part of femininity" (Hallstein 7-8). The ideological switch back to pronatalist values, coined the "feminist backlash" (Thurer 267), was *partially* due to women's not wanting to be associated with perceived "child haters" of the 1960s. Ideology surrounding motherhood continued to be questioned by various feminist scholars¹ but association with non-mothers generally started to wane in the mid to late 1970s, with a definitive break evident with the return to family values in the 1980s. Unfortunately, early feminism's "radical questioning was misread as an attack on housewives" (Snitow 37), and many scholars in both the feminist and childfree fields agree that the outward hostility toward the notion of mothering created an "antifeminist" (Faux 18) sentiment. Because

¹ Ellen Peck, Judith Senderowitz, and Shulamith Firestone are regarded as more "radical" in their views on motherhood and childfree existence.

feminism went on the offensive, Snitow argues that feminists “were better able to attend to mothers’ voices” (33), and as such, the opportunity of procreative choice became one of two main taboos surrounding motherhood (39).

Since feminism is not a homogenous movement it should be noted that as third-wave feminism developed in the 1990s it recognized some of the earlier ideological contradictions, and thus, attempted to embrace more diversity in race, sexuality, and economic status. Patrice DiQuinzio and Mardy Ireland specifically explored disparity between mothers and non-mothers, which expanded the discussion of childfree women within the framework of feminism. They both opened up the definition of female identity by analyzing biological assumptions, which lead to motherhood myths such as childbirth as the pinnacle of female expression. That being said, American feminists’ view of childbirth “fails to validate reproductive difference” (Morell xvi) due the association of empowerment through biology, and as such, there is a simultaneous devaluation of alternative reproductive choice. Voluntary childfree women still stand on the periphery of feminist debate because they do not choose to empower themselves in traditional ways. Unlike the earlier movement, procreative choice has become devalued, and in turn depoliticized. Of course this essentialist doctrine also aligns with persistent biological assumptions that exist outside of feminist ideology. Basically, pronatalism, both inside and outside feminism, reconfigures notions of femininity as an expression of motherhood.

Since the tenets of motherhood myths are not fully addressed within third-wave feminism, this type of “selective inattention” (Veevers *Childless by Choice* 13) has had a significant effect on the negative representation of childfree women in North America. Because the notion of childbearing is reinforced as “natural” it defines the childfree lifestyle as a normative transgression, which ultimately aids in the continual marginalization and stigma of

childfree individuals. Since motherhood is situated within the binary framework of the natural/unnatural (Burkett 186) the implication is that childfree women are not natural. Several researchers such as Hayden, Kelly, Gillespie, and Veevers have identified the stigma of unnaturalness as a focal point of childfree marginalization. Yet, as Badinter contends in her book *Mother Love Myth and Reality*, women who do not have children are not “unnatural” because the expression of natural motherly instinct has never been positively established. However, given the stigma associated with non-mothers it is not surprising that such narratives are devalued. In fact, by ignoring childfree existence, there has been an inverse expansion in motherhood narratives and feminist dialogue regarding the maternal, which perpetuates childfree exclusion by reifying essentialist and binary notions of femininity.²

To be fair, pronatalism can benefit women with children by helping prioritize child welfare initiatives and reinforce family value statutes in both employment and domestic spheres. However, even within the scope of positive pronatalist exchange no woman can ever be fully represented because there is conflict between promoting universal ideals and integrating diversity of experience. This “double bind” (DiQuinzio 11) can lead to alienation on both sides of the normative boundary. Additionally, positioning motherhood as privileged, both in social and political spheres, leads to the myth of “having it all.” Certainly, some pro-family policies are not affiliated with feminism, but rather aligned with a more traditional definition of women and family. Regardless of which ideology is represented, often the expectations placed on mothers are heightened due to a perceived alleviation of workload, which often overestimates how much responsibility a mother can handle. This unrealistic expectation places the burden of labour, in all

² Sara Ruddick and Nancy Chodorow are highlighted as integral players in the feminist discourse of mothering; however, both are viewed by childfree advocates as perpetuating the natural/essential aspect of femininity.

its forms (maternal and occupational), onto women. Arguably then, mothers can be both helped and hindered by pronatalist shifts.

Non-mothers, on the other hand, do not seem to benefit at all from pronatalist ideology. In fact, childfree scholars like Elinor Burkett even argue that childfree marginalization is politically sanctioned and cites several American social policies that overtly deny childfree autonomy. Of course, political policy and social ideology should not be conflated here; most pronatalist policy is, in fact, not feminist. Nevertheless, the feminist shift to a more pronatalist ideology did make an impact in the discourse of women's lives. Critics of American feminism, like French feminist Elizabeth Badinter and childfree researcher Morell, view the pronatalist shift as a detriment to *all* women because it reaffirms traditional biological gender roles. Specifically, Badinter³ argues that American feminism turns away from "libertarian feminism" (*Dead End Feminism* 54), which focuses on a more inclusive humanist approach. Although third-wave feminism in North America has attempted inclusion, the faulty assumptions about biological destiny make the practical application of reproductive diversity unreasonable. Therefore, the focus on biological idealism greatly undermines the position of minority groups like childfree women, who were, and still are, excluded from reproductive dialogue.

Rosemary Gillespie and Kristin Park pick up on such exclusionary tactics in their current qualitative research of childfree women, addressing the psychological impact of negative attitudes towards this group. These researchers address the persistence of essentialism within feminism, and reiterate Veevers' initial assertion that childfree women are marginalized. This seems to be the case even as childfree trends triple in North America (Chancey 18) and

³ Badinter's stance against a biological/essentialist analysis of motherhood seems in line with a French feminism on the whole.

dramatically increase around the world (Martin; and Miall). Ironically, Park argues that pronatalist pressures are stronger now than they were prior to the reproductive rights movement (22). Fittingly, she specifically examines the stigma management techniques that childfree women utilize to lessen the exposure and effect of censure. Additionally, Park and others⁴ adamantly believe that the “voluntarily childless individual remains culturally invisible and voiceless” (40). Of course, this is in spite of third wave feminism’s attempt at inclusion. Interestingly, this childfree exclusion leads some researchers to examine current representations of childfree narrative within popular media, and it is clear that marginalization occurs within all forms of literature, television, and film (Carroll; Gandolfo; and Sass).

A plausible assumption would be that feminist theatre, a form of creative and political expression which develops the “personal as political” (Aston *An Introduction* 66) would likely excel at exploring the dynamics of childfree narrative; however, this is not the case. Even though it seems to be perfectly positioned to acknowledge and address female marginalization, especially given Aston’s definition of “move[ing] women’s issues, experience and stories centre stage” (*Feminist Theatre Practice* 6), feminist theatre has actually perpetuated the motherhood narrative to the detriment of alternative voices. Therefore, due to a focus on pronatalism within American cultural feminist theatre the mother’s voice has become the predominant female narrative. Scholars like Jill Dolan, Charlotte Canning and Shelly Scott freely admit the prioritization of motherhood. They posit that focus on motherhood serves as a venue for reclaiming the female body. Moreover, the central position of mothers and daughters has been a conscious and “corrective” effort to combat existing patriarchal approaches to theatre (Canning 128). Although Lizbeth Goodman and Aston (*Feminist Theatre Practice*) both discuss how

⁴ See Morell *Unwomanly Conduct*; and Snitow.

feminist theatre has complicated the notion of motherhood in order to change perceptions of gender roles, the central figure is still the mother. Furthermore, most examinations of female relationships in theater come from a mother-centered point of view, contextualizing the role of mother as the ideal or pinnacle of female identity. However, as Mary Brewer points out, this continued perpetuation is another way of “camouflag[ing] the contradictions of women’s identities” (3) by ignoring and oppressing one group of women over another.

Given that the hypothesis of this thesis is predicated on the lack of childfree representation in feminist theatre it is prudent to point out that inquiry into the existence of childfree theatrical texts yielded very little results. The number of published childfree scripts, those that develop a centralized childfree narrative, is almost non-existent. Certainly, my examination is limited to published English language scripts of North American feminist theatre, so it is important to mention other modes of representation outside these particular research parameters. There are mainstream plays which may represent childfree women in less marginalized way although a tertiary reading of popular American plays reveals, not surprisingly, a focus on a traditional view of childlessness. Many mainstream plays⁵ emphasize the deficiency of non-mothers, and therefore, the expectation of motherhood is reinforced. That being said, feminist plays written in alternative languages may be another intriguing area of childfree study. However, for this project the framework of English feminist plays poignantly intersects historical and ideological shifts with the demographic of childfree women.

The two most notable feminist scripts, written by Tina Howe and Wendy Wasserstein, are marginally better than mainstream texts in representing childfree women. *Birth and After Birth* and *Uncommon Women and Others* are less than effective at conveying childfree interests

⁵ *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Crimes of the Heart* focus on infertility, not choice.

due to a reliance on ambiguity. Discussion of childfree ideology is overtly downplayed and/or used as a device to counterpoint extreme motherhood idealization, which depreciates the importance of childfree discourse by simply complicating expressions of motherhood. The only exception seems to be *Drama: Pilot Episode* written by Canadian playwright Karen Hines. She delves into the complexity of childfree motivations and stigma by developing a centralized, but unapologetic, voluntary childfree female protagonist. Although not explicitly labeled a feminist play I would argue it epitomizes Aston's definition of feminist theatre. Thus, Hines' script proves that it is possible to creatively express the marginalization and social conflict surrounding childfree women within the framework of cultural feminist theatre.

Interestingly, compared to American feminist theatre, there are a greater number of published scripts that deal with childfree women in Britain. Undoubtedly, a divergent approach to feminism informs the treatment of voluntary childlessness, and although there are still very few representations, these British childfree characters are nevertheless slightly more visible. This visibility is not only due to the higher amount of theatrical texts, and the significance of childfree characters within each play, but also the profile of the playwrights themselves. For instance, Goodman considers Caryl Churchill, a well known feminist playwright, to be a more "mainstream" image of feminist ideals (22). Furthermore, characterizations are often more complex than American counterparts, but even so, there is still a poignant lack of cultural analysis and deficiency in representing childfree women as centralized figures. Moreover, Caryl Churchill, Pam Gems, and Timberlake Wertenbaker's plots still devalue childfree women as secondary, not only to mothers, but to their own "nature." Many of the childfree women represented in feminist scripts do not play a significant role in comparison to mothers, and most end up regretting their childfree decision. Ultimately then, childfree narrative is not only

marginalized within the cultural feminist paradigm, but materialist as well. Certainly, this means that pronatalism has more insidious and far reaching implications within social dogma.

In light of this type of widespread marginalization, Gillespie aligns with DiQuinzio and Ireland when she highlights the importance of “new femininity discourses” (“When No Means No” 224) in order to expand the scope of female identity outside the realm of motherhood. For Gillespie, these discourses will directly attack cultural norms, beyond the ideological boundaries of feminism. The theatrical form can be highly effective in combating the invisibility and social injustice of minority groups, and therefore, a call which theatre should accommodate effectively. The stage highlights the reality of politicized issues and marginalized groups, giving legitimacy and voice to those who have been disregarded. Since the personal becomes political in feminist theatre, Sue-Ellen Case argues that this form can be especially instrumental in “consciousness-raising” (65). Given that the stigmatization of the lesbian community—a similar minority group—has been addressed through feminist theatre performance, Brewer and Goodman assert that it is a perfect venue for prompting cultural change. Furthermore, theatre is inherently more accessible to the masses than feminist and childfree theoretical discourse and research. For instance, similar to what D.A. Hadfield argues, the audience does not have to discern the tenets of feminist ideology to recognize the social stigma associated with transgressive behaviour. Instead, a theatrical script can reveal complex social interactions, based on gender role construction and inequality, and challenge statements of universal experience by complicating conventionally expected behaviours with marginalized voices. Through my own amalgamation of theatrics and the examination of essentialist ideals, the stigma of childfree women becomes a central narrative, addressing the disparity between predominant motherhood discourse and realities of childfree marginalization.

THE LAST TABOO

By Zarrah Holvick

CHARACTERS

CHERYL	A 32 year old nurse at Victoria General Hospital.
VALERIE	Sister of Cheryl. She is 34 yrs old and 8 months pregnant with third child.
JANET	Clinical psychologist in her mid-thirties and Cheryl's friend.
SEAN	Boyfriend of Cheryl. He is a 35 yr old travel journalist.
NEW MOM/ MOTHER/ MARY	Mother in memories of both sisters/baby shower guest
DOCTOR/DINA/VOICE MAIL	GP/ pregnant baby shower guest/automated voice
DAD	Male voice on the message machine

SETTING

There are three defined spaces: Cheryl's apartment; a hospital room, which doubles as a doctor's office; and a café. Cheryl's stylish but child-unfriendly condo apartment is situated in downtown Victoria. The space is open concept with a large living room area adjacent to a trendy cooker's kitchen. Modern décor, such as vases and paintings, fill the uncluttered living space. The large wine rack and half painted canvas on its easel indicate Cheryl's off-duty hobbies. The light coloured couch compliments the dark rich tones in the rest of the apartment, accented by glass-topped tables.

The hospital room is hidden by a rail curtain and is very sparse, which aids in the set change from hospital to doctor office. This space consists of an examining table/bed, a small desk with file folders, trash bin, a rolling stool, and a bassinet. For focus, it may be best to situate this space upstage center.

Finally, there is a small bistro café just down the street from Cheryl's apartment. It has a vibrant flair on the inside: bright colours, odd knick knacks, and African instrumental music plays softly in the background. There is a small seating area outside the weathered front window.

ACT I

SCENE 1

(Early Wednesday morning, mid-summer: CHERYL'S apartment. Warm light streams in from the living room/patio window. CHERYL enters with mail in hand. SHE has just finished a 12 hr hospital shift and is still in HER scrubs. On HER way to the living room she presses play on the message machine in the kitchen. In the living room, CHERYL turns the stereo on. The speakers pump out loudly her favourite Jazz CD.)

VOICE MAIL: *(automated)* You have one new voicemail message, recorded at 3:23 am.

DAD: Hey pumpkin, ah I know you hate that...

(CHERYL realizes who it is on the machine and immediately turns down the CD player and rushes to replay the message. CHERYL stands and listens while SHE peruses HER mail.)

VOICE MAIL: Replaying new voicemail message.

DAD: Hey pumpkin, ah I know you hate that...*(sigh)*...anyways just calling to see if you got my letter yet...

(CHERYL finds his letter and opens it.)

CHERYL: Got it!

DAD: ...takes so bloody long here...let me know when you get it...

CHERYL: First class!!

DAD: ...I know what you're going to say...don't worry about it...I know a guy at the travel agency and I got a good deal for the two of you...

(CHERYL chuckles and rifles through the rest of her mail as the message plays on.)

...I'm just so happy you're coming out, gotta give that guy of yours a once over before...*(ominously)* things get serious. *(pause)* Love you pumpkin.

(When the message finishes SHE tosses the mail on the counter and starts to make coffee. HER buzzer rings.)

(Presses the intercom button.)

CHERYL: Hello?

VALERIE: Hiya

CHERYL: Hey.

(SHE pushes the buzzer to let VALERIE in the building. CHERYL quickly hides the top letter behind the others then gets back to her coffee prep. After a minute there is a knock at the door. CHERYL opens it to find

her pregnant sister VALERIE holding a brown bag and one cup of coffee.)

VALERIE: I come bearing muffins.

CHERYL: O-o-o bran. Where's Rye?

VALERIE: At grandma Barb's. *(beat)* So I need you to host my baby shower.

CHERYL: *(mouth full of bran muffin)* Sorry.

(VALERIE walks over to stereo and turns it off then comes back.)

VALERIE: My baby shower, we need to have it here.

CHERYL: Why?

VALERIE: Susan's gall bladder nearly exploded yesterday. It sucks. I mean I feel bad for her of course, but she's in no condition to host.

(VALERIE looks through mail, and picks up the hidden letter.)

Pen pal from Australia?

CHERYL: Ah...yeah...I have a couple people I keep in contact with.

VALERIE: Huh, this kinda looks like Dad's handwriting. See the s.'

CHERYL: Oh really?...Huh that's weird...So, Susan's down and I'm the next best thing?

VALERIE: Oh, come on. As Auntie it *is* technically your duty ya know. Oh speaking of Auntie, Abby and Riley made you this yesterday.

(VALERIE takes the picture out of HER purse while CHERYL sneaks the letter into a drawer.)

VALERIE: See, it says best auntie ever!

CHERYL: Aww, that's awesome! Abby's really getting good. Are these the pastels I got her?

(Puts kids' picture up on the fridge with the others.)

You're still a great saleswoman, but I don't really feel comfor...

VALERIE: Oh god, you make it sound like the end of the world. It's a day of celebration...they're fun!

(SHE tries to peek at the mail again.)

You had a blast last time.

CHERYL: Right...How many people are coming?

(CHERYL moves into the living room, VALERIE follows.)

VALERIE: Just Dina and Mary. See, the more babies you have, the less people care. It'll be smooth sailing. *(beat)* You haven't heard from Dad have you?

CHERYL: ...No.

VALERIE: Big surprise! I bet you he doesn't even know about number three, what an ass!

CHERYL: Don't you have all your baby stuff already?

VALERIE: Oh yeah, but that's not what it's about. Well, for first timers maybe. It gives me an excuse to get out of the house...without the kids. Have a little girl time. Adult time.

(VALERIE takes a sip of her coffee. CHERYL notices there is only one 'to go' cup so SHE goes back to kitchen and continues making coffee.)

CHERYL: Hmm.

VALERIE: *(noticing)* I assumed you'd be going to bed.

CHERYL: Uh yah, but I have a doctor's appointment this afternoon so figured I might as well stay up.

VALERIE: Everything okay?

CHERYL: Yeah, just issues with the pill again.

VALERIE: You switching?

CHERYL: *(pause)* Ah... I'm not sure...maybe.

VALERIE: If it's giving you trouble you should. At least *for now*...until things change.

CHERYL: *(sigh)* I'll see what she says...just want to check...

(VALERIE looks at her expectantly.)

I'll see what she says.

VALERIE: Alright, alright. Hormones are a bitch I can tell you that much. Or as Richard says, "Hormones make you a bitch!"

CHERYL: Nah, they just make you a bigger bitch.

VALERIE: Excuse me! *(recovers)* You never answered my question.

CHERYL: *(preoccupied)* What was the question?

VALERIE: Can you host my baby shower? Please. Come on, you have to.

CHERYL: I'll ah...I'll have to think about it.

VALERIE: I pretty much need your answer now.

(CHERYL comes back to the living room and sits.)

CHERYL: What's the rush? When did you plan on having it?

VALERIE: Tomorrow. I love you little sis!

CHERYL: Tomorrow! Cutting it a bit close don't you think?

VALERIE: You have tomorrow off.

CHERYL: Yes, but Sean and I were going to spend the day together.

VALERIE:...in bed.

CHERYL: Probably! He's only here for three days this time. They have him shipping off to some resort in Aruba I think.

VALERIE: *(mocking)* Oh jeez, he just has the crappiest job ever.

CHERYL: Very funny. I'm going to be bagged when I pick him up later, as it is.

VALERIE: Pick him up...with what? Your bicycle?

CHERYL: When I go to m-e-e-e-t him.

VALERIE: (*sarcastically*) Mass transit is so romantic, isn't it. (*beat*) Hey, maybe the shower will get you two in the mood!

(*CHERYL gives her a look.*)

Just saying...a little baby on the brain before bed isn't a bad thing. Get the juices flowing in the right direction.

CHERYL: If that was the case, I'd be in heat every time I got off work.

VALERIE: Work doesn't count. That's all about the nitty gritty. I'm talking about the stuff before and after; anticipation and joy, that kind of stuff...being empowered...in touch with your maternal instincts! Then you don't have to feel bad getting all primal on his ass, if you know what I mean.

CHERYL: Yes, I get it...I get it. But a baby shower as an aphrodisiac? I don't think so.

VALERIE: You'd be surprised! Those instincts kick in pretty quick, especially around other women. Pheromones, hormones, whatever. We're all just puppets on a string.

CHERYL: I'd like to think I have a little more input than that.

VALERIE: So is Sean the one?

CHERYL: Whatever that means.

VALERIE: You have to admit, Sean and Cheryl, that's pretty damn cute. (*sings*) Sean and Cheryl sitting in a tree, K.I.S...

CHERYL: Hilarious.

VALERIE: Well, is he the ONE?

CHERYL: I love him.

VALERIE: Is he a keeper is what I'm asking here.

CHERYL: Yes I...I think so. We're on the same page about almost everything. (*laughs*) A couple of nights ago I had this dream. Sean and I were old, like in our 80's, dancing naked around a campfire... totally free. Seemed like we danced for hours, two little wrinkly bodies, but completely happy with ourselves...(giggles)...he even did a really bad pop and lock at one point. I think we must have joined an Australian nudist colony or something because there was a whole crowd of naked people around us chanting "Donger, donger you know you want to prong her."

VALERIE: What's that mean?

CHERYL: Never mind...it's slang for...

VALERIE: Ah...got it. Has Sean ever been?

CHERYL: Once, for work. We're thinking of going back for Christmas to visit Da...(catches herself) I don't know just do the touristy thing this time.

VALERIE: So you two are going together? At Christmas...(sneer) that'll be nice.

CHERYL: (oblivious) Yeah, I'm gonna take him to Kangaroo Island; I want to paint that coast line again. It's gorgeous!

VALERIE: Well, you better hurry up and get all that stuff out of your system. Time to settle down sis, you're not getting any younger.

CHERYL: I'm not that old!

VALERIE: Hey, having a baby in your thirties is way more risky, as I'm sure you know.

CHERYL: Phff. Thanks for the medical advice Dr. Val but...

VALERIE: Yeah-yeah. I'm telling you, it'll happen. You just needed the right guy, and it sounds like Sean is the one for you...

(CHERYL rolls her eyes.)

...Hey, attractive man equals attractive babies! A little baby Cheryl running around, with those big dimples and chubby little legs...Come on, you can't tell me you haven't dreamt of that. (beat) Mom would have loved to see our kids playing together.

CHERYL: She would have been a great grandma.

(Silence.)

VALERIE: Tick, tick, tick. Awgh...and kick.

(SHE stands and walks around.)

CHERYL: (talks to VALERIE'S belly) Good one Olivia! That's what you get for calling me old.

VALERIE: What is up with you today, Miss Snarky?

CHERYL: *(sigh)*

VALERIE: Did you lose someone? A baby?!

CHERYL: No nothing like that. The exact opposite. Perfectly normal, healthy baby boy, really cute too.

VALERIE: So...

CHERYL: I had a weird...well not weird...just... this interaction with a new mom this morning...kinda threw me I guess.

VALERIE: What was weird about it?

CHERYL: Well...I don't know this woman at all right, apart from the fact that I'm taking care of her and her baby, and she up and confesses...ah...something really personal.

VALERIE: Blood from a stone, jeez! What did she say?

CHERYL: *(beat)* She regrets having her baby.

VALERIE: Like a teen mom or something?

CHERYL: No, and happily married from what I gather.

(While still speaking to HER sister, CHERYL moves to upstage center and opens the curtain to reveal a hospital recovery room. A NEW MOM is sitting up in bed, with a swaddled up baby in a bassinet upstage. This is a re-enactment of CHERYL'S memory from earlier in the day. VALERIE watches the memory sequence from the living room, and interjects as she would if it were a two-way conversation.)

I was just ending my rounds. *(to NEW MOM.)* So how are you feeling?

NEW MOM: Pretty good. A little sore.

CHERYL: That's to be expected, the swelling and pain should go down in about a week or so. They'll give you a prescription for some pain medication when you leave tomorrow, if you need it. Has he been latching okay?

NEW MOM: Seems to be a pro. Just like his dad.

(THEY both laugh.)

CHERYL: I am sure everything is fine, but just going to look him over okay? He sure is cute.
(*whispers*) Everyone says all babies are cute...but yours actually is.

NEW MOM: He is, isn't he? He looks like his dad.

(*Long pause.*)

This was a mistake.

CHERYL: Hmmm?

NEW MOM: I never should have had him.

VALERIE: Jeezus.

CHERYL: Oh god... I'm so sorry. There is strict confidentiality when it comes to paternity...

NEW MOM: What? Oh no, no, he's my husband's.

CHERYL: Oh.

NEW MOM: I meant *I* made a mistake.

VALERIE: Phff.

CHERYL: (*stillness*) Really....I see.

NEW MOM: I hope to God I can to make up for...but I...I don't know why I'm telling you this.
It's not as if you can absolve me or something.

CHERYL: What about adoption? Giving him to someone who really wants...

NEW MOM: I can't, not now. Greg's already... You must think I'm a horrible person.

VALERIE: If the shoe fits.

CHERYL: (*breaks away*) Hey!

VALERIE: Lighten up, it was a joke. Go on.

CHERYL: Not funny.

(*Returns to memory sequence.*)

I'm not here to judge you.

NEW MOM: I was hoping it would change. Everybody says that's what's supposed to happen right? A rush of maternal love or something...

VALERIE: It will.

CHERYL: But it didn't?

NEW MOM: I held him in my arms...and there was nothing. *(beat)* I knew. I knew all along...but here I am.

CHERYL: With time that might...*(rethinks)* What made you go through with it?

VALERIE: You have to ask that?

CHERYL: *(to VALERIE)* I needed to know why.

VALERIE: I'll tell you why. Because whether she can admit it or not, some part of her wanted to have a child. It's biology, you can't escape it.

CHERYL: That's so...

(SHE takes a moment then returns to memory sequence.)

...what made you go through with it?

NEW MOM: He's going to be such a good dad...baseball, hockey...Thank God for that. *(beat)* I'm not one of those hippie dippies, but I think I should have listened... I thought about everyone else... I should've listened...

CHERYL: Have you always known?

NEW MOM: Yes. *(pause)* I'm tired.

(SHE turns away. CHERYL closes the curtain and walks back into the living room.)

VALERIE: Wow.

CHERYL: I know. It really makes you think.

VALERIE: About what? That woman was obviously emotionally unstable.

CHERYL: She was being honest about...

VALERIE: Give me a break! That's not honesty, that's post-partum depression. Believe me.

CHERYL: I know I was there. *(beat)* So you don't think some women regret having kids?

VALERIE: Ahhh, they think they do, but it's new mommy jitters. Ask her in a month.

CHERYL: It took you more than three.

VALERIE: Yah...well sometimes you have to suck it up, get over it, and do the job that's required!

CHERYL: Get over it?! I hope you're not saying that every woman should have a child regardless of whether or not she wants one? Please tell me that's not what you're saying.

VALERIE: Oh, here we go.

CHERYL: I've seen it first hand, not all women are cut out for it...or want it.

VALERIE: Fine, but don't put your insecurities about motherhood on me. I'm just telling you what I know from the trenches okay. You can't possibly know what it's like to be a mother until you are one...

CHERYL: Never heard that one before.

VALERIE: ...and however remote that possibility seems to be, I still hold out hope for you.

CHERYL: Val...

VALERIE: ...so don't talk to me about what it's like until you're there okay.

(CHERYL goes and pours herself a cup of coffee.)

CHERYL: ...Fine.

(Silence.)

VALERIE: ...Yes or no?

CHERYL: Yes or no?

VALERIE: Baby shower. Yes or no? But it has to be yes.

CHERYL: What a choice! Okay, okay, but can't we have it at your place? It's a bit more suited...

VALERIE: The plan is to get away from my kids.

CHERYL: Fine...but you need to contact your friends about the details. I don't want to have to worry about that too.

VALERIE: Oh come on, it doesn't have to be anything fancy.

CHERYL: You say that...

VALERIE: Games though, you have to have some games. And snacks, good quality snacks.

CHERYL: So...you never...ever...regretted...even for the tiniest of tiniest moments...being the MOM?

VALERIE: The Mom...*(represses emotion)* I love my kids.

CHERYL: Of course you do, that's not even in question. But...

VALERIE: Not everyone wants play house, I get it, but some of us do. We step up and do what needs to be done, even if that means we have to sacrifice...*(reliving old wounds)*...even if it means we aren't appreciated by those who should. We have to be strong...because that is what's asked of us.

CHERYL: But would you have done things differently...given the chance.

VALERIE: If given the chance?

(VALERIE'S cell phone goes off; SHE answers it quickly.)

Hello?

(A spot light comes up on SEAN stage left. During this conversation CHERYL is drinking her coffee, and VALERIE is attempting to ignore her.)

SEAN: Hi, it's Sean...Cheryl's boyfrie...

VALERIE: I know!

(SHE looks at CHERYL.)

That's funny, we were just talking about...

SEAN: Is she there?

VALERIE: Yeah.

SEAN: Don't let her know it's me!

VALERIE: Oh okay...Why?

SEAN: I have something important to ask you, but Cheryl can't know. It's a surprise.

(VALERIE strategically moves away from HER sister.)

VALERIE: Sure, sure.

CHERYL: Who is it?

VALERIE: Ah...Abby's school.

CHERYL: Hmmm.

SEAN: You there?

VALERIE: Yup.

SEAN: I want to propose to Cheryl.

VALERIE: OH MY GOD!!

(CHERYL is intrigued.)

Oh that's...that's a shock...

CHERYL: Is everything okay!?

VALERIE: *(to SEAN.)* Hold on a minute sweetie! *(to CHERYL.)* Umm. Yeah just a bloody nose. It's fine though, really. Everything's under control.

CHERYL: That's the reason I don't work in Emerg. Do you mind if I take a quick shower? My appointment's at eleven so...

VALERIE: Sure no problem!

(CHERYL exits upstage.)

VALERIE: *(whispers loudly)* Okay she just left. *(giggles)* Are you asking my permission?

SEAN: No I already asked your Dad. *(softly)* Shit.

VALERIE: *(hostile)* Why?

(There is total silence.)

SEAN: Permission?

VALERIE: Jeez, that's a bit archaic of you. *(beat)* How did you even get a hold of him?
Nobody knows where he is.

SEAN: Uh...I Googled him.

VALERIE: Where the hell is he? What did he have to say? You know what, I don't even care.
When are you going to do it?

SEAN: Tonight when she picks me up from the airport, but I haven't gotten the ring yet.

VALERIE: Where are you right now?

SEAN: London.

VALERIE: England?

SEAN: Ontario. The problem is time is seriously running out. Would you be willing to give me
your opinion on some ring options?

VALERIE: Definitely.

(The sound of the shower is heard offstage.)

SEAN: Great, I'll email you some images ASAP and let me know which one you think Cheryl
would want. This is time sensitive so if...

VALERIE: *(loudly)* Hold on a sec. It would be better if I was there in person. Believe me, you
want the right ring and a photo is not going to do it justice!

SEAN: Really? Well that's not possib...

VALERIE: Do you know her size?

*(As SHE talks, VALERIE begins to aimlessly rifle through CHERYL'S
mail but notices the letter from Australia is missing.)*

SEAN: No. But she can get it sized after right?

(Intrigued, VALERIE searches around the counter and in drawers.)

VALERIE: Technically yes, but I really don't think you want her to have to wait on something like that. Women want to wear the ring after, you know...show it off. Plus it's less hassle, less risk, and less expensive. *(finds it)* Ha!

SEAN: Sounds reasonable. Thing is, my flight leaves in four and a half hours, and I really want to get this done.

(SEAN'S doorbell rings.)

(yells offstage) Be right there...*(to VALERIE)* hey can you hold on a second.

(SEAN exits stage left for a moment.)

(VALERIE looks at the letter intently and notices it is open. SHE just barely resists the urge to look inside.)

VALERIE: *(whispers to herself)* Why would she hide this?

(SEAN comes back.)

SEAN: Sorry about that, the...

VALERIE: Why does it have to be tonight? Do you have a romantic evening all planned out?

SEAN: No...kinda wanted to get it out of the way. I mean...you know what I mean.

VALERIE: Well, tonight might not be the best. She already told me she's super tired.

SEAN: Ahhh, hmmm. I guess it could wait a day. When do you want to meet then?

VALERIE: Tomorrow afternoon is probably our best bet. *(yells to offstage)* CAN YOU BABYSIT FOR ME TOMORROW AFTERNOON!

CHERYL: *(yells back)* NOT IF YOU WANT ME TO ORGANIZE YOUR SHOWER.

VALERIE: Crap! I'll have to figure a babysitter out, but that'll have to work.

SEAN: What am I going to tell Cheryl? She'll want to spend time together; I can't just ditch her for no reason.

VALERIE: Oh, don't worry. She has to get stuff ready for my baby shower tomorrow night anyway. It's perfect!

SEAN: Baby shower?

VALERIE: Where are we going? To get the ring.

SEAN: Barclays?

VALERIE: Jeez, you'll be raked over the coals if you go there. I know a guy who's much cheaper, same quality.

SEAN: You know a guy?

VALERIE: A wholesaler! Jeez Sean. Okay. I'll grab one of her rings before I leave. I don't have the guy's address on me, so I'll call you later with the details. That sound good?

SEAN: Sure.

(Shower stops.)

VALERIE: *(whispers)* Gotta go, she's getting out of the shower.

SEAN: Thanks Val.

VALERIE: No problem!

(Hangs up the phone. VALERIE sneaks to CHERYL'S offstage bedroom. SHE comes back into the living room and puts the ring in HER purse just as CHERYL comes back in the room wearing a towel.)

CHERYL: You're leaving?

VALERIE: Abby bled all over her desk and her new shirt and she's freaking out. I should go and get her.

CHERYL: Hope she's okay.

VALERIE: Oh, she'll be fine. *(halfjoking)* So that pen pal of yours isn't some guy on the side is it? Bareback in the outback.

CHERYL: Ugh, NO!

VALERIE: *(smile)* So you and Sean are exclusive, committed, looking toward the future.

CHERYL: Yeah of course...what?...why?

VALERIE: *(sly)* He's a great catch, just wanted to make sure he was taken.

CHERYL: (*chuckles*) You in the market?

VALERIE: Sadly, no.

CHERYL: Hey about earlier, I'm...

VALERIE: Oh I am sure it's going to be awesome! A night to remember...(*points at CHERYL*) with games and snacks. Aww, I love you so much, little sis. I'm just so happy!

(*SHE hugs CHERYL and then exits.*)

CHERYL: No pressure...sure.

(*Blackout.*)

SCENE 1.2

(*11:45 am that same morning. Lights come up on upstage center. The DOCTOR opens up the curtain to reveal that SHE has just finished doing a gynaecological exam on CHERYL, who is in a patient apron.*)

DOCTOR: I don't know why they even serve that, nobody eats it! Not even the patients.

(*THEY both laugh*)

(*The DOCTOR throws her gloves in the trash bin and grabs the file.*)

Okay, everything is tickety boo. So...you're still having issues with...Alesse?

CHERYL: Yup, still feeling funky.

DOCTOR: How so?

CHERYL: Frequent headaches, difficulty sleeping, irregular mood swings, some nausea, things like that.

DOCTOR: Well we should probably talk about some other options then. Mat. ward wouldn't want you more sleep deprived than usual eh. Not to worry, there are plenty of other pills we can try. No family history of cancer so that makes it a little easier.

CHERYL: I always feel much better when I am not on anything at all.

DOCTOR: That seems to be the consensus. Are you currently sexually active?

CHERYL: Yes...well...my boyfriend just got back into town...

DOCTOR: Unless you're planning on getting pregnant anytime soon...are you?

CHERYL: ...not planning...

DOCTOR: ...we'd better find you something that works. What about the IUC? Lasts up to five years.

CHERYL: I guess...

DOCTOR: It's not as scary as it sounds. It's only this big.

CHERYL: Oh, I'm not concerned about that. I just really don't want to be on anything.

DOCTOR: I wish I could say there was a male pill, but we're not there yet. Certainly would take the pressure off us gals though!

CHERYL: It's just...I've always had such trouble with any type of pill. Imagine if it's all for nothing!

DOCTOR: What do you mean?

CHERYL: Well...I wish I knew if I even needed the pill or not. If it's never going to happen, I'd go off it right now. Do people do that?

DOCTOR: Chance it? All the time!

CHERYL: No-o-o-o...fertility testing.

DOCTOR: Not unless there's some reason to assume you'd have trouble conceiving which, given your history, is not something I'm concerned with.

CHERYL: ...what about...a more permanent solution?

DOCTOR: You mean sterilization?

CHERYL: Yah...what are the options for that? Obviously I know about tubals...but you probably know...

(The DOCTOR'S tone changes dramatically.)

DOCTOR: Let's not get ahead of ourselves here. You are 32 yrs old correct?

CHERYL: Yes.

DOCTOR: And you have *never* been pregnant, is that correct?

CHERYL: (*beat*) That is correct.

DOCTOR: Well then...I would not advise getting any permanent procedures done. Reversals are very pricey and are not always successful. At this stage in the game, it is best to avoid ruining any future chances. (*more amicable*) Besides, you still have good childbearing years left. Don't let anyone tell you you're too old! As I'm sure you've seen, reproductive technology has vastly improved over the past...

CHERYL: But...what if I decide I don't want any children.

DOCTOR: Some women feel that way, but then that biological clock kicks in. Better late than never right?

CHERYL: Haven't you come across women who want tubals who haven't had kids though?

DOCTOR: I wouldn't recommend it for someone who has never been pregnant. Tubals have a higher risk of ectopic pregnancy, you know that right?

CHERYL: Okay...but there must be some other options you could recommend...sterilization wise. The women I see only have tubals, but I've overheard some patients talking about this other thing...

DOCTOR: You're serious?

CHERYL: I'm...possibly considering it.

DOCTOR: What does your boyfriend think about this? Is he on board with such an extreme measure?

CHERYL: We haven't really...okay wait...so what if he wanted a vasectomy?

DOCTOR: Well, that would certainly be his choice.

CHERYL: But shouldn't he have to ask me about it? I'd have to be "on board" right?

DOCTOR: That would be best, but it's not a requirement, especially if he's over 30.

(*CHERYL stands up emphatically.*)

CHERYL: So let's be clear here. Sean can get a vasectomy without my knowledge or consent but I have to "consult" with him on my procedure? He's not even my husband.

DOCTOR: That is the way this generally works, yes. People in relationships...

CHERYL: Are...are you toeing the line on this? You?

(The DOCTOR stand and attempts to be consolatory.)

DOCTOR: Look Cheryl, I'm *all* about women's rights, reproductive or otherwise, but this is permanent. You need to take the time to assess the ramifications, not only to your life, but to your family's life, before you do anything drastic.

CHERYL: Well obviously! What does my family have to do with it though?...*(beat)* So...let's say I have thought about it...a lot...made my decision, and come to you. What do you say?

DOCTOR: Women change their minds all the time.

CHERYL: I...I don't know what...out of everyone, I thought...

(CHERYL begins to boil over.)

DOCTOR: I'm only thinking about your best interests in this matter.

CHERYL:...it shouldn't matter what kind of birth control we're talking about, should it? I am legitimately asking for information and...I feel like you're stonewalling me.

DOCTOR: *(coolly)* Birth control, in the traditional sense, is one thing...

CHERYL: Tradition...yah. Look, I haven't made any decisions about anything...but it would have been nice to get an opinion...an unbiased medical opinion...from a doctor I respected.

DOCTOR: Fine. My professional opinion is you need to be informed before making an irreversible decision.

CHERYL: Great! I would love to be informed. Please...inform me.

DOCTOR: Kelly will rustle up whatever pamphlets we have.

CHERYL: Thank you, I really do appreciate it.

DOCTOR: You should know that a patient with your history cannot simply book an appointment to get a sterilization procedure. You'll need a doctor's consultation and evaluation, which would have to include your significant other's participation.

CHERYL: You've got to be kidding me.

DOCTOR: No. It is a prudent measure, one that I fully endorse. If there is nothing else...

(Pulls the curtain and exits the room. Blackout.)

END OF ACT I

Chapter Two

Problem of “Choice”

The binary opposition of reproductive choice (mother or not mother) is a falsehood; the ability to choose motherhood was diluted by the revitalization of essentialism, and the notion of choice morphed into a choice of when, not if, women had children.⁶ As Badinter critiques, “motherhood is not a choice but a necessity whose time can at most be put off, but not escaped” (*Dead End Feminism* 94). Although voluntary childfree women exemplify much of what the early reproductive rights movement stood for there is an inherent paradox when dealing with this group. This paradox upholds the notion of women’s reproductive rights while simultaneously marginalizing childfree alternatives. Instead of viewing women like Cheryl as “empowered” (Holvick 17) because they challenge the limitation of socially constructed roles, they are “treated as if they do not exist” (Cain 139). This is based on the assumption that all women will eventually have children; they just need to find the right man, or wait until their “biological clock kicks in” (Holvick 30). Valerie poses this specific argument by stating “...biology, you can’t escape it” (21). Valerie takes every opportunity to reiterate that she “hold[s] out hope” (19) for her sister’s maternal proclivity, even as Cheryl exhibits all the signs of a childfree postponer.⁷ Moreover, Valerie is not willing to openly discuss the complexity of non-mothers, or realistic doubts about the motherhood role. Russo and Burkett would argue that this deliberate dismissal of alternative femininities is the direct result of the pronatalist shift, and since alternatives are not actively discussed within pro-family doctrine the deficiency of childfree narrative is perpetuated.

⁶ Gillespie; Hayden; and Hallstein argue the “superwoman” ideal reformulated the composition of pronatalism; the idea of personal freedom intertwined with motherhood is difficult to resist, even though it is not actually attainable.

⁷ Contrary to an “early articulator” this term indicates a longer decision making process in determining childfree status. See Gillespie; Maher and Saugeres; and Veevers.

The problem then becomes two-fold, internal and external; internal in terms of biological arguments, and external in terms of inadequate representation.

Reproductive choice is not a “real” one if internal decisions are made under duress. In describing the current American situation, Lisa Cassidy echoes Peter Kramer’s slogan: ““free choice under pressure”” (42). For those who are childfree, or are contemplating it, there can be “obvious and indirect” pressure with regard to their decision making (Butler 279). In Act I there is a mixture of both types. Valerie’s anticipation of Cheryl’s future motherhood is direct pressure since it deals specifically with motherhood expectation; and Valerie’s presumption that her sister will gladly hold the baby shower illustrates indirect pressure as it involves indoctrinating a woman into the sphere of children. DiQuinzio explains that women must *want* to have children, and want to be associated with activities involving children; if they do not, they are deviant. She calls this specific expectation dynamic “essential motherhood” (11). In this dynamic, sex is equated with children. Though subtle, this equation is reiterated by Valerie in Act I when she describes the utilitarian value of sex: “Get the juices flowing in the *right* direction” (Holvick 17). Though Valerie may not view it as harmful, the pressure she places on her sister exacerbates Cheryl’s discomfort.

There is an interesting question that arises here “...if the maternal instinct is so strong, why do women need to be pushed to have babies anyway?” (Faux 150). Clearly, direct and indirect pressure exists because the essentialist nature of motherhood is false. It is even postulated that some women have children to avoid the associated stigma of being childfree. Although this pressured choice may be unconscious, research suggests that childfree stigma can be a motivating factor in having children (Lampman and Dowling-Guyer; Veevers “Voluntary Childlessness: Neglected Area”). Certainly, the New Mom in Act I feels pressured to choose

motherhood even though she is what Maher and Saugeres call an “early articulator” (10)⁸ as indicated by her affirmative response to Cheryl’s question “Have you always known?” (Holvick 21). The New Mom’s decision to have a child is based on the desires of others, and undoubtedly, what others think is an acceptable role for her. In essence, she is a foil for Cheryl, revealing what Cheryl’s life could be like if she ignores her own intuition. However, pronatalist pressures are extremely difficult to reject. Even Cheryl initially reinforces “maternalism” (Badinter *The Conflict* 56) before realizing her hypocrisy. By the end of the scene, however, Cheryl is clearly stating that biology is “not destiny” (Burkett 166). As she states, “I’ve seen it first hand, not all women are cut out for it...or want it” (Holvick 22). Here, Cheryl is specifically refuting the essentialist notions of maternal instinct and love. Thus, Cheryl’s argument hinges on the diverse accounts of women she has had direct contact with in the maternity ward. Her experiences, and those of other women, do not fit within the rigid framework of intrinsic biological expression. Although Cheryl does not overtly admit her own lack of desire, Valerie infers this association, which creates hostility and widens the gap between them.

Obviously, Cheryl’s understanding of herself as childfree by choice lies in juxtaposition to mainstream mothering ideology and has a significant effect on her interpersonal relationships, and this is certainly the case in Act I scene 2. The Doctor is unwilling to believe Cheryl’s sincerity in desiring sterilization information, and dismisses childfree alternatives as foolish. By saying “[w]omen change their minds all the time” (Holvick 31) the Doctor assumes future regret as a consequence of female indecisiveness. However, as Annily Campbell’s research on female sterilization reveals, “...women do not choose to be sterilized on the ‘spur of the moment’” (198). However, due to the paradox of reproductive choice (i.e. the acceptance of *temporary*

⁸ These women “never imagined themselves as having children” (10), thus the notion of “choice” is less of a factor.

childlessness only), perceived irreversibility trumps female choice.⁹ Interestingly, in “When No Means No,” Gillespie indicates that the medical field generally perceives non-mothers to be immature, partially because the “diagnostic model” (*Childless by Choice* 8) attributes mental instability and disturbance to voluntarily childfree individuals. Thus, physicians believe that childfree women should have less control, or choice, over their own reproduction; they cannot be trusted to make the “right” decision for themselves. As a result, qualitative research shows¹⁰ that sterilization is much more difficult to secure for females than males. As Burkett, Campbell, and Rich assert, when voluntarily childfree women choose sterilization, there is resistance from medical professionals and a stringent evaluation process is required. Therefore, the function of this scene is to specifically refute assumptions about the level of choice involved in procreative control, and complicate women’s ‘universal’ experience.

The notion of universal experience is essentialist in nature because it defines women by virtue of biology. DiQuinzio argues that feminism tends to create universality in order to demand political change for the entire group, which works to a certain extent. However, even though political or social “solidarity” (Butler 274; Scott 211) provides a united front from which to fight patriarchy, there is loss to minority representations. Thus, some feminists’ privileging of binary ideals devalues female diversity, such as Cheryl’s childfree identity. Take for example Valerie’s assertion that all women are “just puppets on a string” (Holvick 17), alluding to the universal nature of maternal instinct. She may not identify as feminist, but nevertheless, she holds a similar universal attitude toward procreation, which alienates her sister. Valerie’s belief that Cheryl cannot “know what it’s like to be a mother” (22) also bolsters the exclusivity of motherhood, and

⁹ Veevers points out the irony since childbearing is also irreversible (“Voluntary Childlessness and Social Policy”).

¹⁰ See Burkett; Cain; Campbell; Gillespie (“When No Means No”); and Veevers (“Voluntary Childlessness and Social Policy”).

negates any equivalent experience Cheryl possesses as a maternity ward nurse. A professional caregiving career is not enough to avoid the social expectations of motherhood because universalism dictates that nurturing must be expressed as an act of motherhood.

Because childfree women are “transformative” (Ireland 70), creating lifestyles and experience beyond the traditional female roles, they often foster hostility and alienation from other more conventional individuals. Using Park’s 2002 study, researchers assert that “...people expressed a desire for more social distance from voluntary childless people” (Gemma et al. 128). This reaction exemplifies the notion that although reproduction seems to be predicated on choice, aversion to productive refusal is evaluated as if choice did not exist. Furthermore, due to divergent experiences, Morell states many childfree women feel there is a “wedge” (*Unwomanly Conduct* 127) between themselves and mothers, even if those women were very close prior to a change in parental status. Mothers and non-mothers are divided by an invisible barrier; their experiential commonality becomes more diffuse over time, and therefore, it is harder to feel a sense of connection among these women.

Act I Scene 1 addresses the subjective distance between these two groups, with the memory re-enactment highlighting the ideological separation between Cheryl and Valerie. Both women find difficulty in interpreting each other’s lives. Like Morell points out in her book *Unwomanly Conduct*, there can be a fundamental lack of understanding between mothers and non-mothers. As Cheryl moves into her own subconscious it is clear that she interacts with the New Mom in a drastically different way than her sister does, as evident in Valerie’s belittling comments. Moreover, realism is broken specifically to highlight the metaphorical distance between them on stage, illuminating just how divergent two women’s opinions or feelings can be with regard to motherhood. In fact, the dramatic separation between the two sisters is indicative

of the lack of understanding surrounding childfree choice and the problems that arise from socially divergent reproductive decisions. Breaking realism, or using Brechtian alienation technique,¹¹ is often utilized in feminist theatre as a way to circumvent the “‘male’ narrative structures” associated with established theatrical convention (Aston *An Introduction* 40), as well as highlight the political motivation behind each representation. Although active alienation may displease some audience members, the effect will also “make ideology visible” (Reinelt 150) through visual cues, accentuating theatricality in order to call attention to social mores.

Now that reproductive choice has been examined on an internal level it is prudent to explore the second problem of choice, namely, the lack of external representation. Obviously, a lack of general feminist representation has been indicated, but exploration of feminist theatre in particular is important in understanding this specific marginalization of childfree women. As Goodman and Aston (*An Introduction*) both argue, the stage can be a site of social change, a space where the theoretical and the practical coalesce to affect an audience. Dolan even asserts that theatre is “an ideological force” (290) which materializes in the cultural perceptions of its viewers. In order for change to occur however, the audience must be given the opportunity to view and react to dramatic contrasts. This is where the representation of childfree narrative in feminist theatres falls short. It should be stated that feminist theatre is niche, and not representative of all forms of women’s theatre as it specifically deals with political and social issues, while women’s theatre can encompass non-political forms of theatre written by or for women. However, since the context of feminist ideology is paramount to the discussion of childfree exclusion, my focus is on feminist theatre and its exploration of specific themes.

¹¹ Brechtian alienation, or *Verfremdungseffekt*, distances the audience from sentimentality and prompts conscious critical awareness of the stage performance and its themes.

Since North American feminist theatre is predominantly biased toward cultural feminism, themes generally uphold standard motherhood myths and do not usually include voluntarily childfree women. According to Wyllie, motherhood is one of the top five themes in women's theatre (22) data which is consistent with feminist theatre specifically. He even goes so far as to say that there are only two roles for women "the Fury or the Mother" (27). In identifying the limited scope of female roles, Wyllie iterates that centralized female empowerment has been gained at the expense of the doctrine of essentialism. In order to contrast this established form, *The Last Taboo* represents both mothers and non-mothers with varying degrees of normative deviance. Hence, the binary schema of motherhood is complicated by the internal and external struggle of individuals who do not fit the universal experience model. This treatment avoids limiting the variation of female experience since such tactics only serve to restrict the definition of women as a whole. In fact, by challenging the constraint of biological imperatives this narrative decreases the reliability of the essentialist definition of women. To be fair, motherhood issues are brought to the forefront of feminist theatre in order to modify oppressive perceptions of the role, but fundamental challenges, such as childfree growth, are not addressed. Ironically, countering mainstream theatrical technique is generally prized, but countering mainstream essentialist assumptions is not. Moreover, since cultural feminism stresses the differences between genders (Austin 137), but not within gender, childfree women are not explicitly addressed even when American feminist theatre attempts to push cultural boundaries.

Although theatre can transform, there is an inherent difficulty in representing childfree women on stage because of the blurred distinction between critique and propagation. In discussing *Break of Day*, Aston admits that it is hard "to engage in debate around reproduction without it being read as advocating a biologically determinist view of women's lives"

(“Geographies” 157). Hadfield and Brewer pose similar arguments and insist on creativity in order to avoid reinforcement of normative behaviour. However, unless the script is partial to childfree ideals, it can be hard to assess intent and meaning, as evident in plays like *Birth and After Birth*, *Uncommon Women and Others*, *Break of Day*, and *Queen Christina*. These plays uphold the feminist notion of ‘choice’ which has only served to reiterate the deviance of choosing to be childfree and reinstates binary dichotomies. Morell contests that, “[w]ithout dual focus on reproduction and nonreproduction [sic], the notion that motherhood is essential to women’s lives is confirmed” (“Saying No” 316). However, in order to circumvent a sermonizing effect Jozefina Komporalý argues that complexity is sacrificed for a more middle of the road approach which, I would argue, highlights reproductive options rather than taking a stand on marginalization. In order to avoid confusion, *The Last Taboo* takes a definitive stand on childfree inclusion, creating a likeable non-mother protagonist who is clearly persecuted by others. However, even analysis of clearly defined childfree characters is often moot since critics like Aston prefer to prioritize pronatalist characters regardless of the interconnected development of childfree narrative. The issue is further complicated by satirical treatments of motherhood myths (Wyllie 27), because although they are meant to subvert stereotypes, the audience may not fully comprehend the underlying critique.

If social commentary is not overt, the critique of biologically based motherhood myths is not fully present, nor is the voice of childfree women. Instead of examining the question of “whether a woman can live fully without having been a mother” (Wandor 165) plays often highlight women lamenting their decision, reaffirming the notion of “irresistible biological drive” (Wyllie 29). Thus, the invisibility of childfree women is perpetuated through prioritization of motherhood narrative, as well as ineffectual representations of childfree individuals, which

yield deficient counter criticism to pronatalism. Additionally, Veevers states, "...there is a paucity of potential role models" (*Childless by Choice* 42), a point that Gillespie ("Childfree and Feminine") and Russo also demonstrate. If voluntary childfree women look for positive representational characters in theatre particularly, many will only find mainstream narratives that expose involuntary non-mothers or tales that demonize childfree women in some way (Carroll 23). Moreover, extrapolation of Morell's argument about 'normalizing' through depreciation of childless narrative (*Unwomanly Conduct* 15) may even partly explain the absence of childfree narrative within theatre. Infertility and barrenness become the counterpoint to motherhood, not childfree by choice. There is really no choice of alternatives to motherhood representations, and this external alienation is detrimental to women who identify as childfree because it excludes them from relational subjectivity and reinforces further stigma.

ACT II

SCENE 1

(The next afternoon. VALERIE and SEAN are sitting together at a small round table outside the café. The ring box sits open between SEAN'S large cup of coffee, and VALERIE'S bottled water.)

SEAN: Thanks for the coffee, and the help.

VALERIE: Well it's the least I can do for my future brother-in-law!

(SEAN laughs.)

SEAN: Now comes the hard part.

VALERIE: What are you talking about? She is going to absolutely flip when she sees this ring.

(SHE takes out the ring and admires it.)

It's gorgeous, she'll love it.

SEAN: I hope so. It cost enough, even with 'your guy.'

VALERIE: *(examining the ring carefully)* You *do not* want to know how much this would have been anywhere else, trust me.

SEAN: Put it on if you want.

VALERIE: Not with these sausage fingers! I'd never get it off.

SEAN: No, you look good! Voluptuous with a hint of luminous glow.

VALERIE: Sweet talker! *(beat)* You're really quite the catch you know. Not many guys would pick up on the stinking desperation of a pregnant woman.

SEAN: *(laughs)* I've been through my fair share of pregnant sisters.

VALERIE: Oh, that's right! Six sisters. Wow. Have they all had children?

SEAN: They're breeders! Including the newest which I haven't officially met yet, the number rounds up to twelve nieces and nephews...so far.

VALERIE: Hmmmm, must be nice. All the kids play together I assume. Jeez, Christmas must be a hoot.

SEAN: Oh yes. Supposedly the Disneyland trip was a gong show too!

VALERIE: Sounds nice. *(deflects)* How's that for you? Being the one and only uncle.

SEAN: Pretty cool. I can kick the ball around with the boys, roughhouse. Don't get kicked in the nuts as much!

VALERIE: ...get to hang out, but have none of the responsibility. You get to be *just* the uncle. All the fun stuff, none of the crap...literal and figurative.

SEAN: Hold on, I've dealt with my fair share of... literal and figurative.

VALERIE: Really?!

SEAN: I've taken my nephews on solo camping trips before. We get out in the middle of nowhere, go fishing and hiking. I love that! There's the odd eruption of fluids and what not but I've seen much worse vacation trauma drama than that while on the job. It isn't anything I can't handle.

VALERIE: Kinda like a dad in training. That is pretty great. I'm sure Cheryl will appreciate your hands on attitude. Our Dad sure didn't. Not many guys do.

SEAN: Again with the stereotype.

VALERIE: Oh come on, you grew up with six sisters: you don't think that made you different from other guys?

SEAN: Yeah, I guess.

VALERIE: I'm not trying to raz you about it. I think it's fantastic!

(Lights come up on CHERYL'S apartment. SHE and JANET are finishing up lunch. From here on, these two scenes run simultaneously. Miming of action replaces dialogue when the focus switches between locations.)

CHERYL: ...and then she says I'd have to have a psych eval. to even get to the next step. How ridiculous is that!

JANET: Hate to tell you this sweetie, but I have done my fair share of those.

CHERYL: Seriously?

JANET: Comes with the territory, but I will say that for the most part it is pretty cut and dry. There's a list of questions: if you answer them "right" (*air quotes*) you get promoted to MATURE ADULT.

CHERYL: It's sickening.

JANET: Is that what you want to do?

CHERYL: God I don't know. Everything is good, except when I'm on the stupid pill...then I feel like crap. But I'm happy where I am, you know, happy at my job, happy with Sean. Life is good.

JANET: So why would you want to jeopardize that?

CHERYL: Exactly!

JANET: Hey, preaching to the choir. Have you talked to Sean about what's going on with you?

CHERYL: He knows I'm having side effects.

JANET: You know what I mean.

CHERYL: THE talk. (*sigh*) Not yet. I'm not trying to avoid it... (*shrug*) it just hasn't come up.

JANET: Sweetie, you've been going out for over a year now. Don't you think it's time?

CHERYL: Technically a year, technically. But he's always gone. It seems too soon to get all heavy with future goals. I don't want to jinx it.

JANET: Still...

CHERYL: I know... big scaredey run away...

(*SHE starts gathering dishes and moving to the kitchen.*)

...but, I mean, how do you broach the topic? "Love ya honey, so do you want kids cause I'm thinking not so much, want some more coffee?"

SEAN: I better not, I'll never get to sleep. I should probably...

VALERIE: Oh I have a sneaky suspicion you might be up anyway!

SEAN: Why's that?

VALERIE: Uh, nothing. You can thank me later.

SEAN: Oh I meant to ask, how long is this baby shower going for? I'm hanging out, out, until the coast is clear.

VALERIE: Starts at six but it'll probably be pretty short. Not many people are coming.

JANET: Honestly, I have no idea why you said yes in the first place. Number one, your sister. Number two, it's a baby shower. Why would you want to put yourself through that? Especially now. Imagine the tears and recriminations. "Tears and recriminations?"

CHERYL: Ah...*Buffy*. Shit, I know Dawn says it.

JANET: Yes.

CHERYL: Season 5 episode...19?

JANET: Oh your streak is over! Episode 20.

CHERYL: Dammit! (*laughs*) Ahhhh...I know...but as usual Val doesn't give me much choice. I didn't do anything for her two other showers so...The timing sucks though! I've barely even seen Sean at all! And now he has to do a disappearing act tonight too.

JANET: I thought for sure he'd be hanging around here until he was forcibly removed.

CHERYL: One of his sisters needed help putting together a swing set or something.

JANET: No pressure there!

(CHERYL *throws a tea towel at JANET'S head*. CHERYL'S *phone rings*, SHE *looks at the call display, indicates who it is to JANET, and answers*. JANET *continues to clean up during phone call*.)

CHERYL: Hi Dad! Yes, I got your letter today...It's too much!...Okay, okay...No, nothing out of the ordinary, why?...Yeah he's here. It's been super busy though. Val sprung her baby shower on me at the last minute so we haven't gotten to spend much time together so far but...Sure okay. (*amused and slightly confused*) I'll let him know you said hi...She's good, bossy as ever...I wish I could say it was hormones!...She did, Olivia...Really! I didn't know that. I'll have to let Val know...(*pause*)...No, not yet. She's still really angry Dad...and you know...she has reason to be...I know I'm not blaming...I understand...Yeah. I'll work on her, but don't get your hopes up. It's going to take time. (*looks at her watch*) Crap Dad, what time is it there? You should get back to bed and I should go anyway...(*laughs*) Janet said the same thing...ah, it'll be fine. How bad can it be? Okay, I'd better...love you too, bye.

SEAN: Well, this has been great but I should probably...

VALERIE: I'm really happy for you two.

SEAN: Me too.

VALERIE: You don't have anything to worry about, promise. The two of you are a perfect match.

SEAN: Well, thanks.

VALERIE: I really feel blessed to have been a part of the start of your new family. Thanks for including me.

SEAN: (*half joking*) I didn't really have a choice.

VALERIE: When you two decide to upgrade, let me know, I can help you find a bigger place. Just don't wait too long okay!

(*VALERIE is beaming ear to ear.*)

Your kids are going to be s-o-o-o cute!

SEAN: I'm not sure I really have much of a say in that.

VALERIE: Good luck.

(*SHE hugs him goodbye and exits stage left.*)

(*SEAN walks towards CHERYL'S apartment stage right.*)

CHERYL: So if I needed it...could you do my evaluation?

JANET: For the...

CHERYL: Yeah.

JANET: Sure sweetie. What are you going to tell Sean?

CHERYL: I don't know...I'll cross that bridge when I come to it I guess.

JANET: Good luck with that.

(*Blackout.*)

SCENE 2.1

(Evening of the same day. SEAN walks into the kitchen as CHERYL and JANET are placing decorations and blowing up balloons in the living room. There are two cards on the living room table.)

CHERYL: Hey you want to help blow up some balloons?

SEAN: *(whine)* Oww, do I have to?

CHERYL: It's only fair. I blow some, you blow some.

SEAN: Wee wee mon Cheri

(CHERYL throws a balloon to blow up at HIM.)

CHERYL: You know I hate that.

JANET: *(laughs)* Ha, I haven't heard that one before.

CHERYL: For good reason. Mom thought she was super clever. I think she would have been a poet.

SEAN: Wee wee. Français is the language of *(slowly)* l-u-u-ve.

(SEAN starts to suggestively use his mouth as he blows up the balloon.)

JANET: *(noticing)* Okay, do I need to leave?

CHERYL: We'll behave.

SEAN: For now.

(SEAN takes off his jacket and throws it on the stage right living room chair.)

JANET: So what's your exit strategy?

(SEAN goes to the kitchen to forage for some food. HE finds an open bag of Cheetos and starts munching.)

SEAN: Food and movie.

CHERYL: *(jokes)* Hey is there a girl on the side I don't know about?

SEAN: Well I did have coffee with this one chick today...

CHERYL: Damn sisters hey!

SEAN: (*mouth full of cheetos*) How...how did you find out?!

CHERYL: You told me. (*pause*) You're a weirdo. Did the kids like the swing?

SEAN: Ahhh...yes very much.

CHERYL: So who's the dinner date with then?

SEAN: Brett for sure, maybe Ron.

JANET: Single? Married? Attached?

SEAN: Ron's married but Brett is single, I think.

CHERYL: Seriously? The ink isn't even dry yet.

JANET: It's called moving on. I'm not above having a boy toy as a rebound buddy.

SEAN: I don't think Brett would mind either.

JANET: See.

CHERYL: Whatever.

(The buzzer rings.)

Crap.

(Answers the intercom)

Hello?

MARY: Hi, is this Cheryl?

CHERYL: Yes, come on up. Third floor to your left, number 305.

(Buzzes MARY in.)

JANET: So much for finishing touches.

CHERYL: (to JANET) Can you put the snacks in bowls for me? Oh, and coasters on the coffee table.

(SHE turns to SEAN in an accusatory fashion.)

If I didn't have to do another run to the store...

SEAN: They weren't labelled.

(Shows the bag as evidence.)

I plead ignorance to the law of the baby shower.

CHERYL: Yeah, but I already told you *those* were for the shower. *(snatches the bag away)*

SEAN: I'm sorry, but I promise I will make it up to you tonight!

CHERYL: You better. *(kisses him)* You smell like Cheetos.

(There is a knock on the door. CHERYL opens it.)

CHERYL: Hi come on in. I'm Cheryl.

MARY: Hi I'm Mary, nice to meet you. Do you have any Midol, I'm dealing with some wicked cramps today and I forgot to bring mine.

CHERYL: Ah...yes...in the medicine cabinet. Washroom is just to the right.

MARY: Thanks.

(SHE passes her present to CHERYL and exits.)

SEAN: And that's my cue!

(CHERYL passes present to JANET, who places everything on the coffee table, then sits in the chair with the jacket.)

Nice to see you again Janet.

JANET: You too. Hey, and I wasn't joking about your friend. I have a great profile pic, get him to check it out.

SEAN: Sure.

(As SEAN starts to leave CHERYL notices his jacket.)

CHERYL: Aren't you going to take your jacket?

SEAN: Nah, too warm.

(CHERYL runs back into the kitchen and kisses HIM goodbye. SEAN mimes a heart, CHERYL does the same back. HE exits as MARY returns from the bathroom.)

MARY: Really appreciate it!

CHERYL: No problem, I know how that goes.

(THEY both sit on the couch in the living room.)

MARY: (to JANET) I'm Mary.

JANET: Janet. Nice to meet you.

CHERYL: Ah sorry for not...

MARY & CHERYL: So...? (THEY laugh)

MARY: Was that your husband?

CHERYL: Boyfriend.

MARY: Good stock.

(CHERYL coughs out of reflex. There is a long pause.)

CHERYL: How long have you known my sister?

MARY: Five years. Our girls are in the same class together and they hang out quite a bit. My daughter's name is Alexis. I also have twin boys, Trent and David.

CHERYL: That must be a handful.

MARY: You know it. Yesterday I gave David a time out for talking back, and then Trent goes and switches shirts with him so David can go to his friend's house. Those little liars! They do it all the time. I used to be able to tell the difference, but it's hard to keep track now that they're older and much more devious. I should send them to acting school. No wait, that's probably a bad idea.

CHERYL: Huh...that's funny.

MARY: So when are you two planning on starting a family?

(The buzzer goes off again.)

CHERYL: Oh.

JANET: Saved by the bell!

MARY: *(to JANET.)* What about you?

CHERYL: *(answers)* Hello?

VALERIE: Hey.

(CHERYL buzzes VALERIE up.)

MARY: Do you have any children?

JANET: Why do you ask?

MARY: Just making polite conversation.

JANET: Is it polite? *(earnestly)* Should a total stranger really ask another stranger about, essentially, their sex life?

MARY: But I didn't...I just...

JANET: What do you gain from that information?

MARY: I don't know.

JANET: Have you ever thought about what that says about you?

MARY: Ah...

(CHERYL interjects.)

CHERYL: *(to MARY)* Would you like something to drink? Coffee, water, pop...I have wine.

MARY: Water...thank you.

CHERYL: *(loud whisper)* What the hell!

JANET: Just making polite conversation. (*smiles at MARY, then to CHERYL*) Okay, okay, I'll play nice.

(CHERYL grabs a bottle of wine from the rack as SHE moves to the kitchen. SHE pours a glass of water for MARY and wine for HERSELF and then brings the open bottle to the coffee table. CHERYL will drink through the entire rest of the Act, and consequently, HER speech will become more muddled. There is uncomfortable silence from the living room.)

(MARY points to the half finished painting in the corner.)

MARY: S-o-o-o...Cheryl did you paint that?

CHERYL: Oh yeah...

(Gives MARY the drink.)

I've been working on it a while. I took this amazing photo in Glasgow and I liked it so much I decided to replicate it.

MARY: It's really good, very vibrant colours. Do you sell them?

CHERYL: Nah, I took a couple of art classes at University but I never did it for money; it's just a hobby. Val used them when she used to stage houses. That was kind of cool. Now I just give them away as presents. My Dad has a whole set of Cape Cod.

MARY: Oh! Val told me you guys don't talk to him.

CHERYL: Ah, yeah no, that was a while back. (*pause*) Hey, don't mention it to her; it'll just make her upset.

JANET: And it doesn't take much these days.

CHERYL: It's a sensitive subject...the Dad thing...and the painting thing.

MARY: The painting?

CHERYL: I used to get Val to model for me sometimes.

MARY: Really!?

CHERYL: Ah yeah, but obviously she hasn't done it in a while. (*sincere*) She had quite the figure back in the day.

(MARY reacts. VALERIE and DINA come in the door one after the other. THEIR pregnant bellies make it difficult to navigate through the space together.)

VALERIE: Thank god for air conditioning. I'm blowing up like a balloon in this heat. Hey balloons, how cute.

CHERYL: Kinda cheesy I know...

VALERIE: A little. Oh...Janet's here.

(Shoots a look at CHERYL then recovers.)

Mary, you beat us here.

MARY: Couldn't live without my GPS.

(MARY places drink on coffee table; CHERYL places a coaster under it.)

VALERIE: This is Dina. That's my sister Cheryl...and her friend Janet. You've met Mary before right?

DINA: Hi, how are you?

(SHE moves over to sit near MARY on the couch. THEY talk to each other under the current dialogue. JANET is left out of the conversation.)

CHERYL: How's Abby?

VALERIE: Huh.

CHERYL: Abby's nose, how is it? When you rushed off yesterday I assumed it was a big deal.

VALERIE: Oh... yah it's good. She's fine. Let's get this party started!

(Goes to sit on the couch.)

I'll just squeeze in here. Jeez, we can barely fit five women in here. You need a bigger place sis.

(Looks over the snacks.)

Okay...what's up first?

CHERYL: Umm... the diaper challenge I guess. You probably all know the drill...

(Retrieves diapers from the kitchen.)

...but in this game you have to identify which diaper has what chocolate bar, blindfolded.
It's kind of messy...

VALERIE: Too bad, it wasn't a diaper changing challenge. I can get those puppies off in no time flat.

(VALERIE and MARY both laugh.)

MARY: Me too!

DINA: Eww gross. I hate anything bodily fluidy.

MARY: Oh sweetheart, you'll get over that *real* quick, especially in delivery.

DINA: I won't see anything though. Right?

MARY: You'll feel it!

VALERIE: There's the regular yicky stuff...

DINA: Yeah...

VALERIE: But then there's the...you know.

DINA: No. What? Tell me!

MARY: It's just one of those things, you're pushing the baby out and...well you're using the same muscles as...

DINA: Ahhh.

VALERIE: ...and nobody talks about it. Am I right sis?

(CHERYL comes back into the living room with arms full.)

CHERYL: Not with every delivery, but yes, I've heard it's fairly common. Sometimes there's meconium...

VALERIE: Newborn poop.

MARY: In the womb.

CHERYL: I don't think that's exactly...

DINA: Oh my god!

VALERIE: Welcome to the club!

(VALERIE and MARY laugh. Fade to black.)

SCENE 2.2

(Exaggerated dialogue is heard over the transitional music and lighting.)

MARY:

Have you seen the new daycare on Seymour, gorgeous!...I'm so much more patient and tolerant now...I do not envy you Val, pregnancy sucks, but everyone should do it at least once!

VALERIE:

Richard is such a good dad, he's always there for me and the kids...Soccer Mom to the rescue!...I'm already fantasizing about empty nest syndrome *(laugh)*.

(Lights come up on CHERYL hunched over the kitchen counter holding her head.)

DINA: *(to JANET)* So how many children do you...

(MARY nudges DINA and shakes her head.)

DINA: Oh, I'm so sorry.

(VALERIE walks into the kitchen while DINA and MARY chat quietly.)

VALERIE: Are you okay?

CHERYL: Just a headache.

VALERIE: What's Janet doing here?

CHERYL: She's here for me... helped me organize and set up.

VALERIE: But it's my day.

CHERYL: Ah...don't you mean Olivia's day.

VALERIE: Same diff. She did at least bring a present.

CHERYL: I thought you said it wasn't about that.

VALERIE: It's customary.

CHERYL: Yes she did, only because I knew you'd be weird.

VALERIE: Well I should know who is coming to my shower.

CHERYL: *(sigh)* Do you want her to leave?

VALERIE: No...it's fine.

(VALERIE walks back to living room and sits on the far side of the couch, furthest from CHERYL.)

CHERYL: Ah...so I guess we should get to the presents then.

(CHERYL brings a garbage can from kitchen and sets it beside the coffee table; SHE sits in a chair across from JANET.)

DINA: Yay!

VALERIE: This is cute wrapping, Mary.

MARY: Just like Carol's shower! Except I used tinted tape. See.

VALERIE: Very nice...

(Shows off the very pink dress.)

...aww how cute! It's perfect.

MARY: For Sundays or whatever.

VALERIE: Thank you. Oh more?...so so cute. She'll look adorable in that.

(VALERIE and DINA fawn over dress and pass it to MARY, who then gives it to CHERYL, who immediately passes it on to JANET, who immediately passes it back to VALERIE.)

(MARY surveys this behaviour carefully.)

MARY: I got it from a little...shop in Market Square...a bit higher end but much better quality.

VALERIE: Perfect for hand-me-downs. (*looks at CHERYL*) Having an older sister has its perks!

DINA: Oh I hope I have a girl! Then a boy, then another girl. (*giggles*)

(*VALERIE'S cell phone rings.*)

VALERIE: Oh it's Richard, I better take this.

(*SHE walks to kitchen. The entire conversation will be clearly heard in the living room.*)

Hi honey, I'm in the middle of my shower...*baby* shower dear.

CHERYL: (*to DINA*) So what do you and your husband do for a living?

DINA: I'm not married.

JANET: Boyfriend or girl...

DINA: He's in pizza delivery.

CHERYL: And you?

DINA: I just quit my job at the Gap, I'm going to be a stay at home mom!

JANET: One income can be tough. Do you think that's going to affect your relationship? I only ask because many of my patients are struggling parents. Financial strain is the number one cause of divorce...or in your case, break up.

CHERYL: Didn't you just say you wanted...was it three kids?

DINA: At least!

CHERYL: Hmmm.

DINA: How many kids do you want?

CHERYL: Ah...

(*Pours another glass of wine.*)

I don't think it's in the cards for me.

(*MARY shakes her head in acknowledgement.*)

DINA: O-o-o-h, that makes me so sad. Both of you! I think it has something to do with all the chemicals we eat. You just don't know what's in everything, like those unnatural additives. It's unhealthy.

CHERYL: I'm sorry what?

(Turns to JANET.)

I missed something.

DINA: You know, that you both can't have kids. It's nothing to feel bad about.

MARY: No, not at all.

VALERIE: Jesus Richard I get one night off!

JANET: I can...why would you assume that?

MARY: You were pretty pissy about it earlier. I understand, my sister was the same way when she first found out..but y'know, honesty really is the best policy.

JANET: Well I really don't feel it's anyone's business. But I agree with you about honesty, so for the sake of full disclosure, I'm fully capable of having kids, I just don't want them.

DINA: Never!? Why not?

JANET: Never, ever. Why? Because I don't want to.

(JANET gives CHERYL a knowing look. CHERYL takes a large gulp of wine.)

MARY: Well...(condescending smile)...you never know, mistakes can happen.

JANET: Mistakes can be corrected.

(MARY shudders.)

DINA: What do you mean?

(JANET and MARY both give her a look.)

VALERIE: It's a freakin' bath Richard! It doesn't take a rocket scientist.

MARY: I can understand not wanting to have children if you know deep down you just aren't the *right* kind of person. Maybe some people just shouldn't have kids. Teaching children to be good and moral adults is extremely difficult when your own compass is, shall we say, a little off.

DINA: Oh, are you two gay? Together?

CHERYL: No...I...I have a boyfriend.

JANET: Wait, wait. Why should it matter if we were gay? Just because someone is lesbian doesn't automatically mean she doesn't want or can't have children.

DINA: I just thought...

JANET: Did you? Did you really think about it? Bigotry can be very hurtful Dina.

MARY: Hey, lay off her!

JANET: And for the record, I don't think that's what Mary meant. Right Mary?

MARY: Don't blame us if we don't understand your *lifestyle*. If you want to live a lonely, selfish existence that's your prerogative, but don't expect people to "get" it. It's weird and unnatural if you ask me.

JANET: I didn't actually ask...

MARY: And I'm sure Cheryl doesn't appreciate your flippant disregard of it either. Can't you see how uncomfortable she is? It isn't your fault honey; my sister wasn't blessed with working pipes ei...

CHERYL: (*snaps*) We're not asking you to understand. Just don't assume everyone wants to be a mother okay.

MARY: You said...(shock) Oh I see!

VALERIE: It's not babysitting IT'S CALLED PARENTING!

(*SHE hangs up violently.*)

(*The room has become silent again.*)

Sorry ladies. Richard is being a typical man. Why couldn't he...so anyone need anything while I'm up?

(*DINA shakes her head. Silence.*)

Jeez, I didn't mean to poop on the party.

MARY: It wasn't you so don't worry.

VALERIE: Come on ladies, there's still more prezzies and cake. There is cake right?

(CHERYL nods.)

MARY: I don't know Cheryl, are you *sure*...there's...cake!?

CHERYL: What? Val's right, let's not let...let a heated conversation put a damper on her day. It's bad enough Richard is being a dick.

(Laughs at HER own joke.)

Seriously...

DINA: I would love some cake! But first I want Valerie to open my present.

VALERIE: That sounds good to me!

(SHE comes and sits on the couch to opens the box.)

Oh so soft. I'm going to keep this for myself.

DINA: It plays music. You upload your favourite lullabies and it will play in her crib during the night or whatever.

VALERIE: Thank you Dina, this is great. I've always wanted one of these but never got around to it.

(Joking with CHERYL.)

Look how cute and cuddly. Oh come on, embrace your feminine side for once.

(MARY snorts. CHERYL gets up to get another bottle of wine.)

CHERYL: Yeah that's neat.

VALERIE: Where did you get this? *(overly loud)* I might want to get one for Cheryl at her shower.

(MARY yammers to CHERYL even though SHE is back in HER seat.)

MARY: Wait...so you are planning then?

CHERYL: Here's Janet's gift.

(CHERYL frantically passes the card to VALERIE who immediately tears it open.)

VALERIE: What's this? Art lessons?

JANET: It's an art studio for kids. There's all sorts of different activities for them to do, good for creative development. They get messy but you don't have to do any of the work so...the coupon is for your other two kids as well, it was a package deal. No expiry, I checked.

VALERIE: Janet...that's perfect, really. This couldn't've been cheap. Thank you so much!

JANET: Cheryl said they liked painting so I figured...*(shrugs)*

VALERIE: They really do. And no mess, I can handle that!

(Picks up the last envelope and opens slowly.)

Last one. What i-i-i-s-s-s i-i-i-t?...Maid service for six months.

MARY: O-o-o-o, ouch.

VALERIE: Maid service, really.

CHERYL: What? I thought it would help you out.

VALERIE: You think I live in a pigsty, is that what you're saying?

CHERYL: No! I just thought you'd need the help. I'd come over more but you know my schedule...

VALERIE: So this is your way of avoiding spending time with me and the kids?

CHERYL: What...? That's not what...

JANET: Valerie I think you've misinterpreted what Cheryl was trying to say.

VALERIE: Don't do that! Just stay out of it.

CHERYL: Val!

DINA: (*under HER breath*) I don't like fighting.

VALERIE: No no, I get it. Both of you think you're too damn good for me. I obviously can't handle cleaning up after my own children. I need a maid and a freaking art teacher to just get through the day!

JANET: Let's everyone just take a breath. Obviously you are emotional right now...

CHERYL: Third trimester hormones make you a bit wacky, you know that. If you want me to return it fine, I'll get you something else okay.

VALERIE: Don't you two talk down to me! I know I'm pregnant, but that doesn't make me stupid.

MARY: Not a surprise. They don't know what it's like.

VALERIE: Exactly, just wait until you're out to here...(*indicates*)...with kids at home...and then you tell me if it isn't just slightly insulting to be told you're a bad mother.

CHERYL: I never said that!!

DINA: I have to go to the bathroom.

(*DINA moves to the bathroom offstage.*)

VALERIE: The incompetency was implied.

CHERYL: All I wanted to do was help you. You're already overworked with two. Richard isn't around, we all know it. I seriously doubt that will miraculously change once Olivia comes along.

VALERIE: Not everyone can be as "perfect" as Sean. Walk a mile in my shoes sis, then we'll talk!

MARY: Yeah, it's easy to judge from the sidelines when you never get into the game.

CHERYL:	VALERIE:
You have no idea what you're talking about.	Ain't that the truth!

MARY: You're such a liar!

VALERIE: What the hell happened when I was on the phone?!

MARY: Well, I certainly got a peek at Cheryl's true colours. I feel bad for you Val, really I do.

CHERYL: I feel like I'm on trial here.

JANET: You are.

VALERIE: Oh don't worry the baby shower hasn't been that bad. Come on cut her some slack Mare. It is her first time.

MARY: She deserves to know the truth Cheryl!

JANET: I really don't think it's any of your business *Mare*.

(DINA walks back into the kitchen.)

VALERIE: *(to MARY)* What do you mean? What truth?

MARY: Clearly, your sister hates kids!! Why she hosted this shower I'll never know.

(DINA walks back into the bathroom.)

VALERIE: What are you talking about? She's a maternity nurse for god's sake.

MARY: Well I wouldn't let my kids anywhere near these two! Especially her...

(Points to CHERYL.)

...she's a snake in the grass. Pretending to be...uh...it's disgusting. My sister has to deal with that shame everyday, and you make a mockery of it!

CHERYL: I'm sorry I didn't mean...

MARY: She lied to all of us, and made you look like a fool this entire time. *(to CHERYL)* If you're going to be such a...dink, D.I.N.K., you could at least tell it to her face.

VALERIE: Oh god, Mary no, it's okay...I...

CHERYL: Honestly Mary...

MARY: Oh let me guess, you didn't mean to lie! And you didn't mean to ask me to lie *for* you. Go ahead Val, ask her about the paintings your fa...

(JANET moves aggressively toward MARY; VALERIE attempts to intervene.)

JANET: Stay out of it...

VALERIE: Whoa!

JANET: ...this has absolutely nothing to do with you. Get your prying nose out of everyone's ass and live your own goddamn life.

VALERIE: That's enough! This is my shower. I didn't even want you here, and now you're threatening my friends. Get out.

CHERYL: *(stands)* Val wait. She's only trying...

VALERIE: Get her to apologize then.

JANET: It's fine, she's right I shouldn't have come. But I will not apologize to that gossiping cow.

(JANET starts for the door.)

(VALERIE picks up the coupon, grabs the jacket from the back of JANET'S chair and flings it.)

VALERIE: Take your damn stuff and get out!

(SEAN'S jacket falls on the ground in front of JANET. SHE goes to retrieve the coupon but not the jacket.)

CHERYL: That's Sean's.

(SHE goes to retrieve the jacket and finds a black box underneath.)

CHERYL: What is...Jesus!

JANET: *(flatly)* I guess that bridge was closer than you thought.

(DINA comes into the room.)

DINA: Is it over?

(SHE sees the ring and screeches like a kid in a candy store.)

Oh...my...gosh...Ya-a-a-y!!

(Instant blackout.)

END OF ACT II

Chapter Three

Stigma Confirmation

As Park perceives it, living childfree is “the last taboo, the last alternative lifestyle” (30), and as such, there are various stigmas that are socially enforced. Reinforcement of essentialist ideals is indicated by judgments of non-compliance, which in turn, culminate in specific childfree stigmas. The act of normative transgression is relevant to Judith Butler’s discussion of performative gender, and the punishments that result in “performing one’s gender wrong” (279). In the context of this thesis, performative acts include procreation, since as Badinter asserts, the performance of procreation either strengthens or stigmatizes an individual’s identity (*Dead End Feminism*). As well, deviance punishment is akin to what childfree women must endure, and yet ironically, the act of punishment simply reaffirms the falsity of essentialist arguments due to the forced nature of the compliance. Regardless of how valid, punishment is often enacted through what Gillespie calls disregard, disbelief, and deviance (“When No Means No”). Specifically, there is “disbelief that childlessness [is] by choice; disregard of childlessness as a valid choice; and finally a conviction that childlessness represent[s] a deviant choice” (227). These attitudes culminate into several main stigmas, ones that fit into the framework of biological and moral judgment.

The most common biologically based judgments made about childfree women are that they are unfeminine or sterile. The first assumption falls into Gillespie’s category of disregard, which interconnects with the previous discussion of the natural/unnatural binary. Considering childfree women as unnatural is part in parcel of the expectations of femininity. Taking this into account, childfree women have a “destabilizing” (Ireland 133) effect, and thus, are often viewed as more masculine (Morell “Intentionally Childless” 314). This occurs in both society in general,

and in feminism specifically, as DiQuinzio and Ireland assert. Interestingly, the stigma of masculinity is only associated with voluntary childfree women: infertile women are viewed as still being feminine (Ireland 161). Since childfree women could be viewed as more individualistic, and individualism is associated with masculinity (DiQuinzio 11), the feminist interpretation is clear. Childfree women are encoded as the 'enemy' because they have taken on a masculinized role in society, and therefore, they do not support a unified female front which often aims to reinforce the binary opposition of women versus men. Childfree women put the binary gender system in jeopardy because men and women cannot be in conflict based solely on procreation or gender attributes (Hird 15). Perhaps this is why some mothers seem to be threatened by non-mothers; childfree women question the uniqueness of female experience. Although Valerie does not necessarily seem threatened by her sister, Cheryl's lack of femininity is brought up as a reaction to her lack of interest in the baby shower activities. Valerie takes a jab at Cheryl: "Oh come on, embrace your feminine side for once" (Holvick 60). Clearly, Cheryl is not 'performing' her duties as a female subject and as such, her participation is ranked within the expectations of her gender. Interestingly, Monique Wittig argues that the desire to counter masculine stigma can prompt women to have children; they wish to appear more feminine, more natural. This is of course a contradiction that exposes the socialization aspect of motherhood, one that is not addressed within the framework of biological judgment.

Following Gillespie's framework, disbelief that a woman would choose not to have children creates another biological assumption which equates *voluntarily* childfree women with *involuntarily* childless women. Women without children are initially assumed to be infertile. As Ireland puts it, "[s]ociety is most familiar with and accepting of these childless women" (17) because they have not chosen, but been forced, to live a childless existence; they are victims of

their own flawed biology. However, once the association is broken, childfree women become ostracized. In the play, it is obvious that Mary desires distance from Janet and Cheryl once she knows of their childfree status, which is indicative of Gemma et al's findings on social distancing. As Gandolfo states, the voluntary childfree woman is "the *other* of the *other*" [her emphasis] (113). She is "othered" not only in terms of gender, but in her refusal to fulfill the required role as mother. Gillespie takes this one step further by reinforcing some of Gayle Letherby's earlier research in her article "When No Means No"; the act of choice produces another level of ostracism beyond that of gender and role expectation. In essence, Gillespie believes that childfree women are othered to a factor of three.

The implication to childfree women seems clear; involuntary childlessness is viewed with sympathy,¹² but voluntary childlessness is viewed as "aberrant" (Gillespie "When No Means No" 225). This marked difference is clearly represented in Act II scene 2 with Mary's shocked reaction to Cheryl's childfree disclosure; "You said...(shock) Oh I see!" (Holvick 59). Cheryl's status as voluntarily childfree is deemed worse than infertility alone. Of course, Mary's animosity is also a reflection of Cheryl's subterfuge earlier on in the scene. However, the differential reaction to voluntary and involuntary childlessness is also partially due to the implied moral aspect of childbearing. Because there is a link between parenting and perceived morality, Veevers states that those who are voluntarily childfree "are considered immoral and hence deserving of censure" (*Childless by Choice* 7). During Act II Scene 2 this complex dynamic is examined. Dina's assumption about Janet and Cheryl's infertility is based on her own ingrained assumptions about childlessness; childlessness must be involuntary. Furthermore, Mary agrees

¹² Some "women revealed their infertility to avoid the negative perceptions associated with being childless by choice" (Miall 277), which capitalizes on this sympathetic contrast. See also Lampman and Dowling-Guyers.

with Dina's statement, "[i]t's nothing to feel bad about" (Holvick 58), which reinforces the sympathetic response to infertility. However, once Janet articulates her conscious childfree decision Mary enacts negative judgments, such as insinuating that Janet is immoral: "...you just aren't the *right* kind of person" (Holvick 59). This highlights Mary's own moral superiority, an outlook which Sharon Hays points out mothers often share. Therefore, the ideological divide between voluntary and involuntary childlessness not only encompasses the notion of biological and moral obligation, but can assist in creation of this third factor marginalization.

In *Childless by Choice*, Veevers denotes the most common moral judgments as being selfish and hating children, judgments clearly situated within Gillespie's category of deviance. Morell describes the foundation of the selfish stigma "[i]f women don't care for children, they care only for themselves" (*Unwomanly Conduct* 77). This is of course erroneous, but is upheld by pronatalist ideology and the moral associations discussed earlier. In tandem with the assumption that motherhood is a "selfless act" (Kelly 167), judgments are made about the "materialism" (Hays 168) of childfree existence. Of course, these judgments have no bearing on the productivity and nurturing aspects of childfree individuals. Take, for example, Cheryl: she is a maternity ward nurse and an active Aunt who also makes creative projects and travel a priority in her life. Yet, she is "condemned for her egotism" (Badinter *Dead End Feminism* 94) by Mary who does not understand Cheryl's lack of child prioritization. Consequently, Cheryl ends up "having to defend [her] aberrant choice" (Gandolfo 112), something parents are usually not asked to undertake.

Cain asserts that the "[d]isliking of children is one of the strongest social taboos in existence" (21), and without doubt the tenets of pronatalist values support this statement. For instance, take into account the influence of this taboo on the "feminist backlash," which was an

intentional pronatalist switch aiding in the reincorporation of oppressive ideology. Certainly, because the immediate assumption of non-reproductive choice is the dislike of children reactions to a childfree lifestyle are rarely neutral (Veevers *Childless by Choice* 133). As a result, the powerful effect of this child hating taboo fosters contempt for childfree individuals. As Hayden points out, childfree women often have a difficult time convincing others they are “good women” (270) even if not having children is their only “immoral” act. This dichotomy is highlighted by Mary’s refusal to believe that Cheryl likes children. In Mary’s mind, nurturing and childbearing cannot be mutually exclusive. However, even though a woman may not have her own, Morell argues that many childfree women are still “child-oriented” (“Saying No” 318). In examining this issue, Veevers states the conundrum: “[u]nfortunately, other than by becoming a parent, it is very difficult to ‘prove’ to another’s satisfaction that one does truly like kids” (*Childless by Choice* 120). Thus, Mary forcefully insists that Cheryl “hates kids!!” (Holvick 63) even when Valerie indicates otherwise. Obviously, it is true that some childfree women do not like children; however, as Kelly argues, the dislike of children is not a major factor for most childfree women’s reproductive decisions. As such, society often disregards or disbelieves the conscious choice of childfree women in favor of viewing them as flawed, either biologically or morally.

To be fair, mothers must also contend with social judgments, ones that revolve around the ‘good mother’ model;¹³ thus, childfree women are not alone in dealing with the burden of stereotypes and societal expectations. Just as negative labels have been used to “negate any further identity” for childfree women (Rich 11), being identified as a mother also frames one’s expected role in society and devalues the multiplicity of individual voices. Therefore, *The Last*

¹³ This is a child centered parenting style that requires personal sacrifice from an actively engaged mother (Thurer).

Taboo attempts to neutralize the black and white divide between mothers and non-mothers by identifying this equally oppressive standard. For instance, Valerie's private post-partum depression and subtle expressions of "maternal ambivalence" (Ireland 129), which are insinuated in Act I and return in Act III, contradict her public maternal enthusiasm in the baby shower scene; she does not want to be seen as "a bad mother" (Holvick 62). Interestingly, Badinter, Burkett, Hays, Maher and Saugeres, and Thurer have all highlighted the 'good mother' model as one reason why some women forgo motherhood; the pressure to be perfect is too high.

This type of evasive maneuvering could be considered a form of self-imposed isolation. Abstaining from activities which will undoubtedly elicit procreative inquiry saves childfree women from overt exclusion. Veevers describes this phenomenon as "taking evasive action to avoid confrontations" (*Childless by Choice* 133). This may explain why Janet comments negatively on Cheryl's agreement to host Valerie's baby shower: "Why would you want to put yourself through that?" (45). Given Gemma et al's findings, Cheryl will feel "out of the loop," even in her own home, due to the focus on motherhood. Certainly, Janet is concerned about this ideological "wedge," but also the exclusion which will likely result from a disclosure of her childfree status. Interestingly, sterile women also take similar evasive action, such as avoiding "baby showers" or gatherings with "pregnant friends" (Miall 279). Thus, the motivation to avoid stigma is common even in very dissimilar women, which supports the strength and pervasiveness of social expectation.

The notion of self-imposed isolation also seems plausibly connected to childfree marginalization in theatre and therefore, may be one of the reasons for a lack of representational work. Even though non-mothers have been the most active in examining women's state in society, at least according to Rich, the limited number of scripts may be proportional to the

number of childfree playwrights. Think of the limited number of female playwrights, and of those, women who are childfree. Not only that, there may not be many playwrights who would risk associating themselves with childfree narratives, given the confirmed associated stigmas. Possible inquiry into their own reproductive decisions may influence female playwrights, and certainly childfree ones, to avoid this specific topic. Therefore, they may isolate themselves creatively for fear of social reprisal. Of course there is also something to be said for access to publishing. Aston points out that the ability to sell childfree works may be hindered by the content itself. She uses Wertenbaker's play *Abel's Sister* as an example of a script which deals with the diversity of reproductive choice but is "significantly, unpublished" ("Feminist Views" 151). Furthermore, playwrights who are mothers may feel uncomfortable delving into childfree issues, and so, they avoid representing a group with which they do not identify. As Earle and Letherby contend, those who attempt to speak on behalf of an ostracized group may "reinforce precisely that 'otherness' which [they] intended to undermine" (227). Therefore, mothers and non-mothers alike may end up creatively isolating themselves, aiding in the marginalization of the childfree through the innocuous act of avoidance.

Childfree individuals often join or create "support networks" (Park 26) to avoid feelings of isolation and exclusion. Burkett, May and Park all discuss this option as a way to help to elevate feelings of social stigma through commonality. Cheryl attempts to create a childfree cohort by having Janet present at the party, but when Valerie questions this, Cheryl says, "[s]he's here for me...helped me organize and set up" (Holvick 55), which seems to indicate Janet is an organizational asset. However, since the audience is privy to Janet and Cheryl's prior conversation about the baby shower, the underlying message of childfree camaraderie is implied. There is an inherent sense of belonging in identifying with others, which can effectively contrast

feelings of alienation; there is often “safety in numbers.” In essence, they “have a stake in maximizing the differences between themselves and mothers” (Faux 23). Certainly mothers socialize to gain similar support, as the baby shower attests, but their status in society is less stigmatized: they are the majority. For minority groups, when individuals can actively identify with each other as outsiders there is an immediate sense of inclusion. Thus, the behaviour of avoidance and creation of support networks can be considered coping mechanisms for ongoing marginalization.

However, if procreative inquiry is inevitable Park delineates several specific coping mechanisms, both reactive and proactive, on which childfree women rely. She calls these coping mechanisms “stigma management” techniques (31) because most help elevate stress regarding their childfree status. The childfree woman circumvents the subject of procreation through misinformation or judgment reversal. One of the reactive techniques is called “identity substitution” (33). Cheryl utilizes this more passive tactic to avoid Dina’s question about how many children Cheryl desires. Instead of identifying herself as childfree, she insinuates infertility, replacing one stigmatized identity for another less censured one: “I don’t think it’s in the cards for me” (Holvick 57). In contrast, Janet uses proactive techniques to push back against oppressors. One such technique is called “redefining the situation” (Park 36). This tactic turns the table on an inquisitive party and challenges parents to reflect on their own parental choices, while simultaneously questioning the nature of pronatalism. Take for instance Janet’s response to Mary’s procreative inquiry: “[h]ave you ever thought about what that says about you?” (Holvick 51). Janet’s use of a proactive technique appears overly aggressive, and consequently, Mary feels personally attacked. Veevers argues that childfree women “may provoke the very kind of disapproval to which they object” (*Childless by Choice* 139) by using such tactics, which in turn

often leads to “rapid escalation of hostilities” (136). This is certainly what happened in the case of Janet and Mary. Both women became increasingly hostile toward each other as the night progressed, no doubt because they felt judged by one another. That being said, stigma management techniques are reactionary; they are a way for childfree women to actively distance themselves from a group which routinely excludes and ostracizes them. This not only aids in disassociation from pronatalism, but it also solidifies the connection made with other childfree individuals, which ultimately aids in lessening the detrimental effects of the associated stigmas. It is also clear that even within the category of childfree women there are multiple childfree voices, communicating and managing their stigma in various, sometimes divergent ways.

ACT III

SCENE 1

(Dream Sequence: CHERYL is sitting alone on the couch later that evening staring at the ring. There are still bowls of half-eaten snacks and diapers on the coffee table. Soft smooth jazz is playing in the background. The lighting should give a cheesy romantic movie atmosphere.)

(The buzzer rings. CHERYL gets up to answer.)

CHERYL: Hello?

SEAN: I left my key...Is it safe?

CHERYL: Yah, they're all gone.

(SHE buzzes HIM up and waits at the door nervously. When SEAN walks in HE almost rams HER.)

SEAN: Whoa, hi.

CHERYL: *(holds up the ring)* This fell out of your jacket.

SEAN: Ah...well I guess the cat's out of the bag. Surprise! *(kisses HER)* Oh!

(HE takes the ring and gets down on one knee.)

SEAN: Cheryl will you...

CHERYL: We...need to talk.

SEAN: That wasn't quite the response I was expecting.

CHERYL: I'm sorry, I know...look we really should talk.

(SHE leads HIM by the hand to the couch. THEY sit in silence for a moment.)

SEAN: I suppose it's a no.

CHERYL: Not...necessarily.

SEAN: Hey that's a start.

(Places the ring on the table.)

Ball's in your court.

CHERYL: *(giggles, then becomes serious)* I don't want kids.

SEAN: Perfect!

CHERYL: *(beat)* Huh.

SEAN: I had a vasectomy three years ago.

CHERYL: Why didn't you tell me?

SEAN: Just never came up I guess.

(CHERYL laughs hysterically.)

SEAN: Did I...*(laughs too)*...did I miss something?

CHERYL: No, no obviously I did! Vasectomy...phew...I dodged a bullet there.

SEAN: *(jokes)* Or twenty billion little ones.

CHERYL: Oh my gawd. Do you know how sexy you are to me right now!

SEAN: O-o-o, this sounds promising. *(abruptly)* You never answered my question.

(HE grabs the ring box from the table.)

CHERYL: *(snatches it)* Yes, yes, my god yes!

(SEAN picks up CHERYL and moves toward the bedroom. SHE is giggling uncontrollably.)

SEAN: What?

CHERYL: I just realized I don't have to take the pill anymore. I love you.

(The buzzer rings.)

Ah...seriously?! Val must have left something.

SEAN: No worries, I will get into my skivvies and await your presence in the *(accent)* boudoir.

(HE imitates a royal flourish.)

CHERYL: You better!

(SEAN exits.)

(The buzzer rings again and the music stops abruptly. The dream sequence ends; the atmosphere lighting changes to 'normal'.)

VALERIE: *(calls from offstage)* Are you going to get that?

CHERYL: Hello?

SEAN: I left my key...Is it safe?

CHERYL: Yah, they're all gone.

(SHE buzzes HIM up and waits at the door nervously. When SEAN walks in HE almost rams HER.)

SEAN: Whoa, hi.

CHERYL: *(holds up the ring)* This fell out of your jacket.

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(SHE leads HIM by the hand to the couch. THEY sit in silence for a moment.)

SEAN: I suppose it's a no.

CHERYL: Not...necessarily.

SEAN: Hey that's a start.

(Places the ring on the table.)

Ball's in your court.

CHERYL: *(giggles, then becomes serious)* I don't want kids.

SEAN: Oh...o-k-a-a-y. Ever?

CHERYL: Never ever.

SEAN: Is it possible you'll change your mind?

CHERYL: No.

SEAN: How do you know for sure?

CHERYL: I know. *(pause)* So that's a problem I take it?

SEAN: Why didn't you tell me?

CHERYL: It just never came up I guess.

SEAN: Uh...I'm not really sure what to say.

CHERYL: Is it that important to you?

SEAN: Of course it is! You've met my family.

CHERYL: So...so does that mean you have to have a caravan full of kids too?

SEAN: Maybe not a *caravan*, but eventually yes.

CHERYL: *(stands)* Jumping off a bridge...good to know.

SEAN: How is this my fault?

CHERYL: Well...it would have been nice to know you were so pro kid.

SEAN: I've always talked about my nieces and nephews.

CHERYL: That doesn't auto...matically mean you want children. I talk about Abby and Riley too.

SEAN: Exactly, how was *I* to know.

CHERYL: So you just assumed! Why is it the woman's responsibility to bring up kids...the topic...of kids?

SEAN: It is what women do.

CHERYL: That's what women do!!

SEAN: (*stands*) I sure as hell can't!

(*VALERIE comes back from the bathroom, talking all the while.*)

VALERIE: Sorry sis, with two pregnant ladies...you're going to have to stock up on more...Oh...hey Sean.

SEAN: Hey.

CHERYL: Fine, I could have been more upfront about it. But I really didn't think we were there yet.

SEAN: Come on, this is something you should have told me on our first date. "Hi, do you like kids 'cause I don't. Thought you might want to know."

CHERYL: Don't even...you know I *like* kids! Val...

VALERIE: Oh yeah, she loves my kids to death.

(*Comes in and stands beside SEAN.*)

All kids...she's always been good with kids, right sis?

SEAN: Me too. So what's the problem?

VALERIE: Yeah, I don't get it. What is the problem?

CHERYL: I like them...

(*Shoots a look at HER sister*)

...I don't want them.

VALERIE: Oh that old song and dance.

SEAN: (*ignoring VALERIE*) But it's what people do Cheryl. They fall in love, get married and have kids.

CHERYL: Not everyone! Falling in love, I'm down with that. Marriage? Sure, sounds good to me. Kids, I don't think so. I've worked to hard to get where I am...I'm good, we're...I'm good.

SEAN: We both want the same things, it doesn't mean we can't compromise with kids...

CHERYL: Ha. Who'd be doing the sacrificing?! You? Are you willing to give up your job? I'd be stuck raising kids...plural...while you go gallivanting off to "report" on exotic locales. You'd probably be away so damn much, you wouldn't even know how to give your own kid a bath!...No offense.

VALERIE: Too late.

(VALERIE plunks down in a chair)

SEAN: Uh okay...your sister doesn't deserve that.

VALERIE: Thank you Sean.

SEAN: Val's in your corner believe it or not. She understands how important family is!

VALERIE: I try and tell her that, but she won't listen to me...

CHERYL: AHHH!! Could you stop being a Mother hen for one second?

VALERIE: NO.

CHERYL: Just shut the hell up! This isn't about you. Just go okay, I'll talk to you later.

(VALERIE moves to the door but does not leave. CHERYL focuses back on SEAN.)

Are you saying you wouldn't have gone out with me if you knew?

SEAN: That's what I am saying.

CHERYL: Jesus Christ.

(SHE slowly sinks into the couch.)

SEAN: What's the point in wasting time?

CHERYL: *(begins to cry)* Wasting?...Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize being in love was such a horrible experience. Do you even love me?

SEAN: Yes...(sigh) yes I do. But this...

CHERYL: What?

SEAN: It's a deal breaker for me...but let's not...we still have plenty of time to think about this.

CHERYL: WE, we'll think?

SEAN: You don't have to decide right this minute how your life is going to play out.

CHERYL: Oh, so you want me to just go with the flow huh? Maybe I'll just...change my mind?

SEAN: It's possible.

CHERYL: This is who I am!

(VALERIE gives a snort of derision.)

It has taken me a long time to come to terms with it, but I know it's right for me.

SEAN: Then how come nobody knew it before now?

(CHERYL finishes off her glass of wine as SHE motions to VALERIE.)

CHERYL: She knew.

SEAN: Babe...

(Touches CHERYL gently.)

...don't you think that maybe, just maybe, this is fear talking. You think you won't be able to handle being a mother, and that anxiety is clouding your judgment. But deep down you know I'd be there for you, baths and all that stuff. A hands-on dad like Val said.

CHERYL: I know you'd be a good father, but that doesn't change how I feel. I don't want to be a mother.

VALERIE: Cher...

(SEAN takes the ring box and moves to the door.)

SEAN: *(to VALERIE)* How could we both have been so wrong?

(Turning to CHERYL.)

Did you at least like the ring?

CHERYL: It's beautiful...*(quickly comes to a realization)* Hold on!!

(Stands, then staggers)

What did you mean "like Val said." When did you talk to Val?

SEAN: When we...

VALERIE: He's obviously mistaken.

CHERYL: That doesn't...Oh my God.

(Plods towards VALERIE.)

Why didn't you ask to see the ring? *(interrogates)* Why didn't you look at the ring!

VALERIE: I don't understand what you're asking me.

CHERYL: It's a fairly syn-am-able question. When I first cracked open this box, why didn't you react like good ole Val.

VALERIE: You're drunk.

CHERYL: Per-r-r-haps, but that is beside the point. Answer my question!

VALERIE: You're not thinking clearly. You've just ruined the chance at a wonderful marriage to a great guy because you can't see past the excitement of booze and sex. Don't you think...

CHERYL: Uh uh uh. You don't get to pin this one on me sis. I have it a-a-a-a-I figured out.

VALERIE: I don't know what you...

CHERYL: *(focused)* You didn't look at my ring.

VALERIE: So what.

CHERYL: You'd look at a stranger's ring in line at the grocery store if you thought it was worth something. But, you chose to stand back while your friends took a gander at my surprise rock.

VALERIE: I knew you'd show me after.

SEAN: Ah...that wasn't how I planned...

CHERYL: Yeah, I get it. *(beat)* Huh, it all makes sense now.

VALERIE: It's been a long night.

(Takes CHERYL by the shoulders.)

You're upset and drunk, and you should really go to bed. Everything will be better in the morning.

(CHERYL pushes back but ends up falling onto the couch.)

CHERYL: Nice try, but this maternal crap doesn't make up for being a conniving bitch.

VALERIE: Excuse...

CHERYL: And you don't get to play the victim here either.

VALERIE: I don't even know what you're talking about.

CHERYL: I could let the ring thing go...so you helped him pick it out, that's a nice sisterly thing to do right?... but he just said something...weird.

VALERIE: Sean...what did you say?

SEAN: Will you marry me? I don't know.

CHERYL: *(talking to herself)* I thought he meant us. That would have made perfect sense. We were wrong about each other obvi-ous-usly. But he didn't mean us, him and I...no no no. *(drains the last drops from glass)* Like Xander...in season five episode two...no...crap...one. I always get that one wrong...not sure why...*(emphatically to THEM)* "I'm sick of this crap!...As of this moment, it's over. I'm finished being everybody's butt-monkey!" *(laughs)*

VALERIE: Can you help me get her into bed?

(THEY move in on HER.)

CHERYL: He was talking about you and him. YOU!

(Pushes THEM off.)

"How could *WE* have been s-o-o-o wrong?"

VALERIE: I think it would be best if...

(VALERIE takes the glass from CHERYL'S hand)

CHERYL: I have been talked for, and at the last two days...and I have decided...I don't really give a rat's ass what you think right now...What's wrong about what? What could you have possibly have been talking about that you had been talking about that were both *wrong* about? Hmm...Somehow sis, he got it in his head I wanted kids, but he was wrong. So that must mean...you were wrong too. But you're not, 'cause *you* knew all along. You or...chastrated the whole thing. Sneaky sneaky. And I'm a snake in the grass!

(CHERYL starts to cry, then dry heaves. VALERIE comes and sits beside HER.)

VALERIE: Cher I'm sorr...

CHERYL: No you're not! You're only sorry it didn't work. Luckily for me I finally got some balls. *(laughs)* They are finally in my court! Right Sean!

SEAN: Uh yeah, you've certainly grown a pair. *(to VALERIE)* Hey, what does she mean? Orchastrated...orchestrated what?

VALERIE: It's the wine.

SEAN: Cheryl, what did you mean? Sneaky about what?

CHERYL: For a journalist you're a little thick! But I guess travel isn't that "investigative."

SEAN: *(mock)* Nice.

CHERYL: She manipulated you to get to me. It's her dream not mine.

VALERIE: Oh right, that makes sense.

(SHE stands.)

He jumped to the obvious assumption that a married woman might want kids and I'm the one that planted it! Hundreds of years of human reproduction had nothing to do with that. Must be coincidence.

CHERYL: Yes, he jumped alright, but you were right by his side cheering him on. You...with your Moms are the best club. Sign up fee, your freedom.

VALERIE: Oh please.

CHERYL: Sean, while you were patronizing me, didn't you say Val called you a, and I quote, "hands-on dad."

SEAN: I wasn't...yes she did.

CHERYL: God you're good. Puffing up his ego like that.

SEAN: Hey!

CHERYL: Did you think he could somehow convince me? "Oh a big shiny rock, come here you big lug and impregnate me!"

SEAN: Did you? Why would you do that?

CHERYL: 2.5 kids my ass. *(nibbles on some snacks)*

VALERIE: I was trying to do the right thing. You're so perfect together. I didn't want...

SEAN: But obviously we're not, that's the problem. Christ, I don't agree with her, but I respect that she was honest with me, *finally*. Better than getting divorced after the fact.

VALERIE: Oh what do you know.

SEAN: I know that's not what my sisters would do.

VALERIE: Well isn't that nice for you.

(Flings herself into a chair.)

I guess your sisters aren't a let down.

SEAN: Cheryl...for my part...I'm sorry...I should go.

CHERYL: Okay.

(CHERYL signs a heart, then starts to cry. SEAN signs back and then quickly exits. Prolonged silence.)

VALERIE: So now I guess you blame me for Sean leaving?

CHERYL: Breeder gets a bingo! *(laughs)*

VALERIE: Breeder! Really?! That's downright offensive. *(resets)* Please enlighten me, how have I ruined your life?

CHERYL: Don't take all the credit, I'm only talking about the engagement, well...and the baby shower too.

VALERIE: What does any of this have to do with my shower?

CHERYL: Everything. You sided with them.

VALERIE: What?

CHERYL: It was more important to keep your mommy clique than it was to defend me.

VALERIE: You didn't need to be defended.

CHERYL: Oh really, when someone calls your sister a child hater that's okay with you?

VALERIE: Come on, I told Mary off.

CHERYL: No you didn't.

VALERIE: I think you'd be a great mom, I've always told you that.

CHERYL: Ad nauseam. That's my point!

VALERIE: I'm lost. What this has to do with Sean?

CHERYL: He was right, you don't respect me.

VALERIE: Yes I do.

CHERYL: Then why would you do that to me?

VALERIE: DO WHAT?

CHERYL: Push us together...hoping I'd cave under the pressure. How is that okay?

VALERIE: But you don't know what you're missing out on! Cher, being a mother has made me a better person.

CHERYL: If you think lying and manipulating into getting your way is being a better person, I think you need to rewrite the dictionary definition...Do you really think I need to be a better person?

VALERIE: No I...I just want you to be happy.

CHERYL: Uh uh! This has nothing to do with me and everything to do with me, I mean you.
Misery loves company.

VALERIE: That's unfair.

(Picks up bowls and walks to kitchen.)

I'm not miserable.

CHERYL: Phff...*(follows)*...what's unfair is your attempt at sacrificing my happiness for play dates, and a willing babysitter. I don't think that's what Mom wanted for us. She'd want us to be content, whatever that means. And I *am* content, as is.

VALERIE: Right, so Sean walking out that door makes you "happy"?

CHERYL: No, but I'm not going to end up like...

VALERIE: ...like me...

CHERYL: ...like that woman in the hospital. I'm not. What I want matters.

VALERIE: Ya, well you can't just focus on your self all the time.

CHERYL: I'm a nurse for Christ sake, I help others for a living. Don't I get any credit for that?

VALERIE: You can walk away from that anytime. I'm responsible for my kids 24/7, 365.

CHERYL: Don't pull that self-righteous bull crap. Half the time you'd rather be sailing, or selling houses, doing any of the other things you loved to do. Don't deny it! I see it in your face every time I go on a trip.

VALERIE: *(pause)* Do I really look that miserable?

CHERYL: You miss being you. There's nothing wrong that. It doesn't make you a bad mother, or a bad person. You *should* want more than just your children. Otherwise who the hell are you?

VALERIE: You seem to have it all figured out. Maybe you'd surprise yourself and be able to handle it after all.

CHERYL: Have you been listening to me?! *You* need to find the balance, I already have mine. Work and play, well and love too...I'm not interested in sacrificing that. I'm just not.

VALERIE: *I* want nieces and nephews! It's just us...it's always been us. If Dad gave a crap about us... don't you want more than this? A real family.

CHERYL: Yes, and I have been working very hard at forging one.

VALERIE: What does that mean?

CHERYL: Dad and I...

VALERIE: Screw you!

CHERYL: I tracked him down in Australia...and we kinda worked things out. You know he shut down after Mom...

VALERIE: Oh poor him. What about us! We needed him too. I needed him! He just stopped...

CHERYL: Dad's sorry, truly he is. He's really trying Val...

VALERIE: Dad only cares about himself, he made that very clear. People don't change. *(beat)* I can't believe you went behind my back! How long has this been going on?

CHERYL: It was the reason for my trip there the first time.

VALERIE: Jeezus that long! *(shock)* Is that why you're going for Christmas?!

(CHERYL nods.)

Oh my God. That *was* his letter!

CHERYL: I knew you'd be upset about it so I didn't say anything. But he really does want to reconnect with you, when you're ready...

VALERIE: Oh this is just too ironic.

CHERYL: Huh?

VALERIE: You'll spend an important FAMILY holiday with our deadbeat Dad, a total lost cause, but won't give Sean a chance to prove that some guys can get it right.

CHERYL: It's not my job to fulfill Sean's dreams, or yours....or anyone else's. Dad understands. He's been very supportive.

VALERIE: Good for him. It's obvious he doesn't give two shits about his grandchildren, so...I guess that makes sense.

CHERYL: Mom would hate how judgemental you're being.

VALERIE: Stop bringing Mom into this!

(Moves to the living room.)

You have no idea what she thought about anything. I was older remember.

CHERYL: So?

VALERIE: She told *me*.

CHERYL: Huh?

VALERIE: I was in the room NOT YOU! Mom needed me...I held up my end...

CHERYL: What the hell are you talking about?

(Harsh lights come up on the hospital bed upstage center. VALERIE walks from the living room up to the bed and sits in the chair behind. MOTHER is sitting up in the bed, very weak. CHERYL stays behind in the apartment. This scene is a parallel to Scene 1.1)

VALERIE: Mommy?

MOTHER: Hi sweetheart. Is your sister here?

VALERIE: No, she went with Daddy to get a pop, do you want me to get her?

MOTHER: No, no that's okay.

(Takes VALERIE'S hand.)

I want to talk to my Valerinie Beanie. *(beat)* I'm pretty sick sweetie. The doctors aren't sure...

VALERIE: Mmmmm. *(sob)*

CHERYL: Oh my god...she talked to you before...

MOTHER: Hey now, it's okay, it's okay. I know it's hard sweetie, but it's really important you listen okay. I wanted you to know how much I love you. You and your sister are my little stars. Right?

VALERIE AND CHERYL: Yes.

(CHERYL moves from the apartment into just inside the hospital room.)

MOTHER: And yours shines a little brighter because you're a little older right?

VALERIE: Yes.

MOTHER: I need you to use that big bright light sweetheart, okay. I need you to be strong after...

VALERIE: But Mommy I'm not!

MOTHER: Shhh, yes you are. Your sister needs you to be strong...and Daddy too. I want you to take care of Cheryl, keep her safe and love her like I love you.

VALERIE: *(starts to cry)* Mommy!

CHERYL: *(getting emotional)* It's okay Val...it's okay...

MOTHER: And I'm s-o-o-o-r-y that I... won't be there for all your big moments. Graduation, weddings and watching my grandchildren grow up to be as beautiful as you two. But I'm there sweetheart, I'll be there, watching over you. I promise.

VALERIE: Please don't die! It's my fault...

MOTHER: What? No sweetie, no!

VALERIE: If you didn't have to pick me up from dance....

CHERYL: Oh Val don't blame yourself. It wasn't your fault, how could it be?

VALERIE: Logically I know that...but I still feel...it's like it was yesterday.

CHERYL: I never knew you felt that way.

VALERIE: Of course you didn't.

MOTHER: Hey, you can do this. I need you to do this for me. I love you.

VALERIE: Okay.

(VALERIE lays her mother's hand down, walks back to the living room in silence, and sits. CHERYL follows and sits beside HER.)

VALERIE: See, Mom told me so herself.

CHERYL: And you think, what...I'm dishonouring her memory or something? That's lude...icrous.

VALERIE: Is it? I put my life on hold after Dad...I made sure you were looked after.

CHERYL: I never asked you to.

VALERIE: But Mom did.

CHERYL: Well she shouldn't have. She was dying Val, she wasn't thinking straight. That's too big a burden.

VALERIE: Should've been Dad!

CHERYL: So now I owe you?

VALERIE: That's not what I'm saying, I just wish you understood, appreciated family more.

CHERYL: I do, that's why Dad and I...

VALERIE: Screw Dad, you're the only one I've got. And I don't want to be alone.

CHERYL: You're not alone! You have your kids, your husband. You have your own family.

VALERIE: But that isn't enough! They always want something from me. God, sometimes they drain the life out of me. You don't *need* to talk about the kids, I can even forget I have kids when I'm with you. Well maybe not now...but you know what I mean.

CHERYL: So you're judging me for the same things that you like about me? That's just plain...stupid.

VALERIE: Ahhh...I guess...it's...you've got so much freedom. You go gallivanting off to foreign places for weeks at a time. It's like I don't matter to you.

CHERYL: Now who's being the selfish one? (*beat*) We have a good relationship, we do. But you know you've always bossed me around.

VALERIE: I have not...

CHERYL: Oh my god, yes you have! And I've always let you get away with it. Things were just easier that way. I get it now...but I won't let you dictate my life anymore, no matter how hard you try.

VALERIE: But you know what Mom said.

CHERYL: It doesn't matter what Mom assumed about us...me...it's not going to happen. Do you think she would love me any less?

VALERIE: ...no.

CHERYL: So why should you?

VALERIE: I don't love you any less!

CHERYL: Really?! You could have fooled me.

VALERIE: I'm just...disappointed. There's this picture in my head of our kids playing together, and growing up together, I want that so bad.

CHERYL: Well you're going to have to get over it, sis. It's not my fault you've scripted my whole life without me.

VALERIE: (*reluctantly*) Yeah.

CHERYL: I'm not asking you to change your whole outlook on life. Just support my decision. And...

VALERIE: What?

CHERYL: I want my sister back; this weird replacement mother thing is definitely not working anymore.

VALERIE: But that's all I know. How do I just turn that off?

CHERYL: I don't know. All I know is me having kids isn't your choice, and I have to learn not to apologize for it.

VALERIE: It doesn't seem like you're apologizing right now.

CHERYL: We'll see what happens when the wine wears off.

VALERIE: So, no kids.

CHERYL: No kids.

VALERIE: Who's going to take care of you when you're old though?

CHERYL: Val!

VALERIE: Not judging, just asking, as a concerned sister.

CHERYL: I'm sure your kids will do just fine.

VALERIE: Hey, they're my meal ticket! *(laughs)*

CHERYL: So...do you want to get in touch with Dad?

VALERIE: I've had enough dirty laundry for one day thanks...literal and figurative. I'll get back to you when I am feeling...*(cries out in pain)*...Holly hanna! That was a biggy. *(beat)* Dammit! Why'd you have to bring him up?

CHERYL: Sorry! Just kicking or more intense.

VALERIE: O-o-o-h...intense doesn't cover it. Aren't you going to do something?

CHERYL: I don't usually deal with this end of things...

VALERIE: Am I in labour or not!

(CHERYL awkwardly feels VALERIE'S belly.)

CHERYL: I think so.

VALERIE: Son of a bitch. This is why you need a car. A-a-a-a-w-w-w...

CHERYL: I wouldn't be able to drive anyway. I'll call an ambulance.

VALERIE: And Richard!

CHERYL: And Richard.

(CHERYL grabs HER cell phone and starts dialling while VALERIE starts Lamaze breathing.)

VALERIE: H-e-e-h-e-e h-o-o-h-o-o. Is there enough time?

CHERYL: I have no idea.

(The home phone starts ringing.)

VALERIE: H-o-o-o-o...

(CHERYL shuffles VALERIE out the door as best SHE can.)

CHERYL: My sister just went into a labour; I need ambulance to apartment building...

(There are two more rings and then the machine picks up.)

SEAN: So...I guess you don't want to talk to me right now. I...I feel bad about how things went and I...I don't know. *(hesitation)* Guess I should've figured out what I was going to say before I called. Look, I love you...I don't know if I want to throw away what we have on one argument. Kids are important to me, but so are you. A-a-a-h-h! *(pause)* I'm staying at Ron's...I was going to stay with Brett but guess who he hooked up with tonight...she works fast! Anyway...that's where I am. There's still some of my stuff...so can I swing by tomorrow and pick it up if...just call me back okay.

SCENE 3

(Four months later. CHERYL, VALERIE and JANET are sitting at table outside the café. THEY all have a glass of wine.)

VALERIE: This is weird.

CHERYL: Welcome to my world.

VALERIE: Oh come on, these aren't normal are they?

JANET: Actually, now that a lot more women are opting out of motherhood, they are becoming more frequent.

VALERIE: Baby showers are one thing, but this...

CHERYL: Hey, I did yours! It's your duty as my loving and accepting sister.

VALERIE: Yah but, a sterilization shower. Isn't that a bit much?

CHERYL: If I remember correctly...

JANET: Which she usually does...

CHERYL: I believe you said your shower was "a day of celebration!" Well so is mine! Pill-less worry free living from now on ladies. Cheers.

(THEY all clink glasses.)

JANET: Wee wee mon Cheri.

VALERIE: *(laughs hysterically)* Jeezus...I haven't heard that one in a long time.

CHERYL: (*cringe*) Hey, I've got a better one...wait for it...sterile Cheryl. Huh?

VALERIE: That's so crass.

CHERYL: Up your (*slaps her butt*) Valerinie Beanie!

JANET: Seriously? (*laughs*)

VALERIE: Urgh. Have you talked to Sean about your *reason* for celebration?

JANET: You're such a downer!

VALERIE: I'm just asking.

CHERYL: Yah I did. Wasn't going to keep that from him.

VALERIE: And...?

CHERYL: "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

VALERIE: That good huh.

JANET: I told her she should peruse doctor "snips" office; find a kindred spirit.

VALERIE: Oh come on, seriously...most of those guys are married anyway.

CHERYL: And how would you know!?

VALERIE: I may have looked into it.

(*CHERYL and JANET both look at HER shocked.*)

Hey I did my time, I popped out three kids...it's the least he can do.

CHERYL: Go sis!

(*CHERYL and VALERIE high five and laugh.*)

Since you brought it up...I still have Sean's plane ticket...if you want to go with me.

VALERIE: Uh, even if I wanted to, which I'm not saying I do, you know I can't leave Richard and the kids that close to Christmas. That's just...well, that would be a disaster.

CHERYL: Bring them along.

VALERIE: Yeah right, that's...

CHERYL: Dad and I talked it over already and we'll both pitch in and pay for them all to come.

VALERIE: What?

CHERYL: Come on. Your kids deserve at least one visit with their grandfather.

JANET: Kids do thrive in an environment of extended fam...(looks at VALERIE) I'll stop now.

VALERIE: But that's so much money. I couldn't let you do that. If he wanted to foot the whole bill I might go for it. He owes me that much at least.

CHERYL: Don't worry about it. I have loads of cash I just don't know what to do with.

(Chuckles when she sees VALERIE'S reaction)

It's fine, Dad knows a guy...a travel agent guy.

(VALERIE laughs then goes silent.)

CHERYL: Val...?

VALERIE: I'll...I'll talk to Richard, I'm sure he can get time off. *(smile)*

(CHERYL smiles back and squeezes VALERIE'S hand.)

CHERYL: Hey, did you know that our great...great aunt on Dad's side was named Olivia.

VALERIE: Baby steps sis.

CHERYL: Sorry. *(beat)* So what's on the agenda?

VALERIE: I have no idea what you're supposed to do at these things?! I just made it up.

CHERYL: Good enough for me. As long as we get to eat the chocolate bars and not just sniff them.

JANET: Hear hear.

VALERIE: Well, I planned on us going to a movie.

CHERYL: No Disney.

VALERIE: N-o-o-o-o Disney. I get enough of that at home!

CHERYL: Amen sister!

(THEY all clink glasses. Fade to black.)

END OF ACT III

Chapter Four

Finding a Voice

The failing of feminist theatre is not that it examines the socially constructed role of the mother, but that it simultaneously excludes the voices of childfree women: “[they are] an object, not a subject” (Thurer 299). Thus, one way to express the uniqueness of female experience and to refute the notion of essentialism is to represent childfree women in a central subject position. Highlighting non-traditional reproductive choice through “analysis, critique, and rearticulation” [sic] (DiQuinzio 2) questions the fundamental social expectation of motherhood, and challenges traditional assumptions that are erroneous and not based on empirical evidence. Theatre is apt at creating this re-articulation and critique through its aforementioned cultural influence. Performance that diverges from the standard essentialist doctrine can give visibility and voice to childfree women, which in turn, allows for an ideological shift that accepts “nonmaternal identities in thought and language” [sic] (Ireland 134).

Although exposing pronatalism through the elements of associated stigma and marginalization are all still present, Act III emphasizes Cheryl’s determination to find a voice. Throughout the play Cheryl has not emphatically stated her position on having children, but instead others have “talked for, and at” her (83). This lack of communication is meant to emphasize the marginalization of her childfree status, and juxtaposes Cheryl’s internalized fantasy of Sean and her desire for fulfillment through an absence of motherhood at the beginning of Act III. In essence, she conceptualizes her life within the sphere of marginalization, making transparent the key aspects of both divergent ideology and experience. Fittingly, Cheryl’s dramatic crux specifically involves openly engaging with loved ones who judge her decisions. Even in the midst of emotional turmoil over Sean’s conventional reaction, Cheryl enacts her

right to choose through the act of saying “No” (77) regardless of the consequences. Cheryl’s loud and unapologetic voice is legitimized further by her central position in the play as main protagonist.

The complexity of the play’s characterizations is meant to reveal the complicated and diverse nature of reproductive choice. For instance, Valerie’s memory sequence parallels Cheryl’s memory re-enactment in Act I. This parallel is meant to underscore distinct motivations for both women, but there is a regenerative quality as well. By creating a loop, there is a closure of the ideological distance that initially keeps the sisters apart. And unlike in Act I, Cheryl joins her sister within the memory as a symbolic gesture of understanding; she says “I get it now” (90), even though Cheryl’s childfree decision remains intact. Now, it may be argued that utilizing a theme like the “mother-daughter relationship[s]” (Goodman 206) within Valerie’s memory sequence aligns more with the traditional representation of women; however, given the emotional and structural context of the scene, this memory metaphorically communicates the flawed formation of motherhood expectation. Cheryl is able to acknowledge a more complex motivation behind Valerie’s propensity for motherhood, while continuing to voice her own counter position. Further complexity regarding Valerie’s duplicitous behaviour is addressed by Cheryl as well. When she states, “[s]o you’re judging me for the same things that you like about me? That’s just plain...stupid” (Holvick 90) Cheryl is subverting the contradictory nature of childfree appraisal.

It should be noted that even though many theatrical scholars agree that feminist theatre can actively affect audience perceptions, Butler argues that the fourth wall hinders the ideological impact. The implication is that even if the actors indicate a different type of feminine’ the audience will negate that representation for one they already prescribe to and deem

“real.” However, in this case Butler is referencing feminist theatre that makes use of Brechtian techniques exclusively, and as such, diffuses the social context that exists between “performance and life” (278). However, utilization of differing techniques, such as the mix of Brechtian elements within an overarching structure of realism found in *The Last Taboo*, may lessen the impact of such a dichotomy. By melding a realistic portrayal with unconventional techniques that activate the audience, mainstream appeal may be strengthened, and thus, foster more effective cultural modification. Morell argues that this type of complex representation “helps normalize and validate reproductive refusal” (“Saying No” 316), and subsequently, may aid in the decline of childfree marginalization as it becomes more visible. Furthermore, the ability to challenge social dogma does not stop at the theatrical production itself. Dolan indicates the importance of theatrical criticism, which “works as a political intervention” (289), beyond the physicality of the stage. Literary and cultural critique of theatrical scripts works to insight further analysis, which may act as a catalyst for changing dominant pronatalist and essentialist views on procreation.

Through illumination of some of North America’s systemic essentialist ideologies and subversion of key judgmental assumptions, *The Last Taboo* attempts to dismantle the ingrained aspects of disregard, disbelief and deviance that Gillespie argues plagues childfree women. Just as Valerie must come to terms with her sister’s reproductive choice, society as a whole must also begin to embrace the diversity of childfree women, especially considering the growth rate of the childfree population. If not, the cycle of exclusion, marginalization, and stigma reinforcement will continue to categorize non-mothers as deviant and abhorrent no matter what significance their lives may have outside of procreation. As Cain asserts, “[u]ntil all women are respected for whatever choice they make, *we are not liberated*” [her emphasis] (152). Both mothers and non-mothers lose if all aspects of female experience are not addressed. Remember that female

devaluing prompted feminist theatre to give voice and subject position to women's narrative, and the impact of that development changed how mothers were represented. It is now time for childfree narratives to come to the forefront as well, not in replacement of, but in tandem with traditional representations. Even Scott admits that if feminist theatre does not "change, evolve, and constantly work on redefining itself [it] would not be very feminist" (221). Due to pronatalist ideology, it is understandable how motherhood became valorized; however, the significance of childfree women can no longer be overlooked. Childfree women deserve to be included in the "feminist paradigm" (Hird 13), and the first step is giving them a voice and subject position through a re-visioning of feminist theatre practice, which can ultimately displace the doctrine of pronatalism.

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