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Black Feminine Identity: An Examination of Historical and Contemporary
Dramatic Texts through a Critical Race Theory Framework

by

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Bachelor of Arts
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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Theatre

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Dedication

First and foremost, I must give all possible praise and honor to *God*, who is the creator of all things great. I thank God for all of what I perceive to be success, thus far and in my future endeavors. In whatever form the Great entity takes, I am eternally grateful for each and every thing, small or immense, that has brought me to this point in my life. My *trifles* have led to triumphs and uncovered great mysteries about my potential that I could have never imagined. In the words of one of my most favorite R&B artists Ryan Leslie, “One thing I know for sure, one thing is mandatory; I owe it all to God, I give (Him) all the glory.”

Next, I must thank God for blessing me with three incredibly strong Black female characters in my life. It would be completely unacceptable for me to write a document about dynamic African-American women without acknowledging the *vairy* ones that influence my existence:

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Remi – Boo, you especially inspire me to be a role model, and I wish you twice as much success as I have already managed to achieve. It is my hope that you will greatly surpass me and make the world shudder at your significance as a mover and a shaker. *Pretty Young Thang*, you have no idea how much I love you and pray about your future and undeniable potential. "*It's gon' get you in trouble.*"

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I would like to conclude with thanking my amazing friends, many of whom have been by my *eccentric* side for years, as well as the more recent ones who quite possibly have no idea what they have gotten themselves into.

RIP to my homie *Briny Biscuit*. We shall meet again, my friend.

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Abstract

Race, class and gender exist as categorizations to distinguish and preserve privilege and identity in the United States of America. These societal constructs of race, class and gender often place African-Americans in comparison or in contrast to White cultural identities. Furthermore, these characteristics differentiate African-Americans as an “Other;” a categorical group in conflict with dominant White societal values and norms. African-American female playwrights Lorraine Hansberry and Lydia Diamond address established attitudes about race, class, and gender in their plays, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) and *Stick Fly* (2006) respectively. Their works present strong Black female characters that contend with the multiple layers of these categorizations. These characters embrace and resist the structures of race, class and gender as they define their identity both in concert with and in opposition to American society. This research explores the 50 year time span that separates these dramatic works and demonstrates how race, class and gender continue to support an unbalanced societal dynamic across time. Critical Race Theory (CRT) serves as a methodological lens through which Blackness can be viewed in comparison to Whiteness, and enables a more systematic examination of the qualities assigned to African-Americans as a result of perceived differences between groups. Additionally, feminist and Black feminist thought analyzes the ways in which a female identity is measured against a male identify and is informed by race and class. An analysis of Hansberry’s and Diamond’s work provides an illustration of how these dramatic characters contribute to an understanding of Black female identity, as well

as, how race, class and gender have collectively contributed to the lack of structural growth among this demographic from the mid twentieth century to the present day.

Table of Contents

Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Abstract	vi
Chapter One	
<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Chapter Organization</i>	3
<i>Statement of the Problem and Objectives</i>	4
<i>Selection of Literature</i>	4
<i>Methodology</i>	7
<i>Limitations</i>	8
<i>Review of Literature</i>	8
<i>Justification</i>	19
Chapter Two	
<i>Historical Context, Presenting: <u>A Raisin in the Sun</u></i>	21
<i>Evidence: Play Analysis</i>	24
Chapter Three	
<i>Contemporary Context, Presenting: <u>Stick Fly</u></i>	38
<i>Evidence: Play Analysis</i>	41
Chapter Four	
<i>Conclusion: Critical Connections and Suggestions for Further Research</i>	65

References.....71

Chapter One

Introduction

African-American females are a uniquely oppressed group in the United States; in a constant power struggle with individuals from every spectrum of the human race. In addition to racial disadvantage, Black women have consistently been, and continue to be, at a disadvantage to men within the constructs of society. With a historical timeline including the emancipation of slavery, the Great Migration, and the Women's Liberation and Civil Rights movements, African-American female playwrights might seemingly be compelled to address the progress made by their ancestors. Conversely, their work often illustrates both psychological and societal battles that suggest a holding pattern associated with their race, class, and gender. The pattern of inequality demonstrated in various plays by African-American females reflects the daily lived experiences of African-American women that the aforementioned historical events and achievements inadequately convey.

Scholar Barbara Christian emphasizes that though there are and should always be several ways of interpreting a text, the "...Trinity: race, class, and gender," are indivisible classifications of an individual's experience, and therefore, African-American women are in a continuous struggle with the implications of their classification in their everyday experiences (174). She also suggests that the established tradition has been a persistent issue for African-American female writers, in that it has often been a domineering force

that thwarts their progress in the field. Prior to the 1970s, works published by and that include Black presence were not readily accepted into a space in which they did not belong or had not been customary. Further, because of White male dominance in social categorization and literary success, some Black female writers are hesitant to write freely and “‘correct’ the norm” (180). Christian states that “We find ourselves confronted with the realization that we may be imitating the very structure that shut our literatures out in the first place” (15). Her critique is a “work of resistance” that seeks to surpass boundaries, “realize the potential in ‘perhaps’ and change the ‘now’” (78). However, she stresses that there is still much work to be done and that while some African-American women’s work has been included in academia, the institution in which it exists is still very averse to alteration. Abena Busia explains how Black women are “othered,” since they are “neither white nor male,” but “*both* black and female” (1). While she also states that “men are not ignored” in Black female’s writing, “the possibility of independence [is] a major theme in women’s literature.” (9, 17) Thus, Black women’s writing is often measured against that of others, and their literature often explores this dynamic in the quest for independence.

African-American female identity as shown in dramatic texts can be observed for the number of possible approaches to forces of oppression. Matters such as sexploitation, rape, and aesthetic appearance are explored in the texts of playwrights such as Parks, Shange, and Kennedy, whose works are often interpreted in terms of style and content. However, this study will focus on the dynamic between African-American women and men, as a result of gender roles and the established sociopolitical atmosphere. Though the previously mentioned writers’ work could be investigated for the female

characters' relationships to male figures, there is a particular prowess with which Lorraine Hansberry and Lydia Diamond realistically present the Black female, stylistically and content wise. Their plays, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) and *Stick Fly* (2006) respectively, demonstrate through comparison and contrast that while political measures have been taken to adjust the African-American woman's place in society, race, class, and gender persist as definers through a 50 year period, and continue in the present day.

Chapter Organization

Chapter One identifies the problem, objectives, method, and limitations of the study. Additionally, the selection and review of literature, as well as the justification for the study are discussed. Chapter Two introduces a historical and contextual background for *A Raisin in the Sun*. Next, a focused analysis of the Black female characters in the text is explored. Chapter Three similarly begins with a contemporary and contextual background for *Stick Fly*. A focused analysis of the Black female characters, and White female character, is examined. The fourth and final chapter concludes the document and aims to enhance the previous sections of text analysis by drawing some comparisons between the content of *Raisin* and *Stick Fly* as they address the issues of race, class, and gender highlighted by Critical Race and Black/Feminist theories, which is summarized in the first chapter. Additionally, Chapter Four suggests related areas that could be explored for further research.

Statement of the Problem and Objectives

This study is concerned with evaluating commonalities in the content of *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) and *Stick Fly* (2006) by analyzing Black female characters and their similar perspectives on societal constructs in their respective eras.

The objectives of this investigation are as follows: to explore and identify similarities in the work of Black female playwrights who make Black female characters their focal point; to investigate the ways in which Black women interact with other groups of the human race, especially Black men; to analyze the content of their plays as they contend with race, class, and gender; and lastly, to reveal the resemblance in content over a 50 year time span which confirms that race, class, and gender remain societal issues.

Selection of Literature

The plays selected for this study are based on four premises:

1. The texts are written by African-American female playwrights.
2. The texts were published in the historical and contemporary eras, respectively.
3. The texts feature mainly strong Black female characters, with the exception of one White female character in *Stick Fly*.
4. The Black female characters of the texts interact with male characters and contend with issues of race, class, and gender.

The selection of the literature is fitting for a discussion about the political hierarchy and social climate that determines gender roles and Black women's position in American culture. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a structure which critiques racism and power dynamics, and therefore views race, class, and gender as essential influences on one's existence. Initiated in the 1970s by law professionals, including Richard Delgado and others, this structure is a critique of the lack of progress made historically in how society views and behaves because of race, as well as class, and gender. CRT intends to not only highlight the issues of racism, classicism, and sexism in American culture, but also to bring awareness and work to actively improve upon these issues within a number of settings. Dramatic theatre has a political purpose beyond its fundamental nature to be informative and entertaining. Many women writers instinctively explore their role and position in society in the content of their plays, which can be interpreted through the lens of the three essential concerns: race, class, and gender. The texts of Hansberry and Diamond examine African-American female identity, as well as the relationship dynamics between African-American women and men. These plays are indicative of the authors' desire to present and possibly improve upon Black female existence and their expected gender roles as partly determined by their male counterparts.

Categorization undeniably defines one's experience in American society as color, economic status, and sex define entitlement, leaving "others" to "get in where they fit in", as the cliché goes. Since the beginning of their existence in the United States, African-Americans have been in a position of marginalization, striving to balance an uneven scale in a civilization that more times than not, fails to acknowledge the historical baggage and daily struggle that an African based identity entails. In Harrison, Walker,

and Edward's *Black Theatre*, playwright August Wilson describes how the term Black or African-American has multiple definitions, stating: it "not only denotes race, it denotes condition, and carries with it the vestige of slavery and social segregation and abuse of opportunity and truncation of possibility" (1). Wilson's statement confirms that African-Americans are constantly reminded of their pasts by skin color, and that their everyday experiences are still shadowed by all of their previous oppressions and history. Another African-American female playwright of the present, Suzan-Lori Parks herself describes this phenomenon about the Black experience further in stating, "We're [African-Americans] a people who are honored and damned because of the actions of one of our group. One of us stands for all of us" (Rayner & Elam 451). It is universally understood in the African-American community that one's accomplishments belongs to the entire race as powerfully as one's failures.

With this societal context, Critical Race Theory is a framework of "self-reflection [and] radical politics" with which to analyze the legal system in which African-Americans live and create their identity (West xi). Additionally, feminist theory reveals the established gender roles that shape the societal position of women in relation or opposition to men. Black feminism combines strains of these models further by investigating self-identification with an exclusive focus on the complex status of the African-American woman; a being that is the subject of double disenfranchisement. What ties all of these perspectives together is that each makes a comparison between at least one group and an(other): Black in comparison to White, male in comparison to female, and more specifically Black female in comparison to all. This relational process of othering is a societal construct that defines the African-American woman's status and

experience. Like the aforesaid theories, theatre, as experienced through reading and performance, can also be a way to convey particular attitudes about societal norms, and is often a statement of political analysis and call to action. Black female playwrights Lorraine Hansberry and Lydia Diamond uncover and explore the societal structure that CRT critiques, as well as implore their audience to consider an African-American woman's status and identity, as supplemented by the feminist theories. Following an introduction to Critical Race Theory and other related literature, their dramatic texts, *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Stick Fly* respectively, are explored for their commentary on the status of African-American female identity and all that accompanies that categorization.

Methodology

The analysis of Black female characters in the work of African-American female playwrights Hansberry and Diamond is the focus and approach of this study. This method includes an examination of literature about the historical and political context for Black women during the 1950s through the present day, as well as an investigation of literature about Black female writers. Additionally, texts which address theories and criticism related to the content these writers explore are discussed. The bulk of this document analyzes the scripts and relevant characters of *Raisin in the Sun* and *Stick Fly*. The last section makes connections between those texts. The following methodology is utilized:

1. To examine the ways in which Black female characters view themselves in association to the issues of race, class, and gender; as well as in their

relationships with Black male figures specifically, with the exception of one White female character

2. To identify patterns among African-American playwrights content, past and present, in the Black female characters of their work

Limitations

These particular plays by Hansberry and Diamond were chosen because of their portrayal of strong Black female characters. Some differences in the texts will be discussed only in the way that they illuminate the lack of progress made in the 50 year time span between them. Therefore, the content of these plays will be addressed for their similar approaches to race, class, and gender issues. The fact that these texts are similar stylistically was a supplementary reason for comparing the, in that the style contributes to the presentation of content, (though style and language will not be analyzed). There will be a brief mention of the plays' production success on Broadway, though this matter, as well as the examination of style and language, are areas to be explored in future research.

Review of Literature

Essential to this analysis of a historical and of a contemporary text by African-American female playwrights is a survey of works between 1950 and the present day. Though these plays take on various forms stylistically, they all share at least one essential trait: addressing the relationship of Black female characters with (Black) male characters and/or with their society in general. This common concern necessarily involves the ever present issues of race, class, and gender, which are vital to Critical Race Theory and

Feminist criticism. In addition to Lorraine Hansberry, other Black women confronted these issues in the 1950s amidst the riotous political scene and Civil Rights efforts. Beah Richards' one-woman show *A Black Woman Speaks* was first performed in 1950 with poetic language and style that specifies the very divergent life experience Black women have from White women as a result of societal constructs. In this piece that Richards performed herself, she also claims that there is a need for changing those standards and makes some suggestions toward that end. Alice Childress also challenges the established rules outlined by White male dominated society. In *Trouble in Mind* (1955), Black actress Wiletta confronts her white director regarding his idea of how Blackness should be performed, challenging the dated and demeaning stereotypes as a model for characterization. A later play by Childress, *Wedding Band* (1966), examines the difficulty of an interracial relationship between a Black woman, Julie, and a White man, Herman, as they are met with racism and the segregation policies of the early 20th century. Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964) is another work from this era in which Sarah is psychologically disturbed by her Blackness and the prevailing White culture that suggests there is a problem with her appearance. She is also haunted by her Black father who allegedly raped her mother, and passed along dominant Black features that prevent Sarah from what she perceives as the possibility of fitting into White culture.

The post Civil Rights era brings about more valuable interpretations by African-American female writers. Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf* (1975) is a choreopoem about "black women's need for self-affirmation and love... [with an] implied criticism of black men" (Wilkerson xxi). Kathleen Collins' 1983 play *The Brothers*, displays middle class Black women who

evaluate their societal status in their monotonous and subservient relationships with successful men who struggle with racial identity. The 1990s and early 2000s made way for writers like Suzan-Lori Parks and Lynn Nottage, whose work narrowly precedes Lydia Diamond's *Stick Fly* (2006). Parks' *Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* (1992) illustrates and redefines the distorted White version of the history of Black presence, as well as the significance and dynamic of the relationship between Black Woman and Black Man. *In The Blood* (1999), also by Parks, profiles an impoverished Black woman who has had five children with different men, who are not willing to help her or father their children. Though the *other* characters— Black men and White women— value her in private spaces, they exploit and reject her in public. Lynn Nottage's plays *Intimate Apparel* (2003) and *Fabulation, or the Re-education of Undine* (2004) portray Black female professionals in the early 20th century, and present day, respectively. Within the context of their individual societies, they contend with racial and caste division, as well as gender expectations in relationship to their male partners and other male characters. What unites all of these plays among others by Black female writers over the past 50 years is their investigation of Black female identity in relationship to race, class, and gender, the latter of which is usually measured in comparison to a male identity. Even though race, class, and gender relations have changed in various ways during this time span, there is still much room for a significant amount of progress, as the works of these African-American women express.

While the expansive list of plays mentioned above from 1950 to the present day provides an array of possibilities for analysis, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) and *Stick Fly* (2006), at the opposing ends of these eras, offer representations of Black female identity

before and after major efforts toward racial and economic progress. *Raisin* is set in subsidized housing in Southside Chicago, in which three Black female relatives live and interact with their brother, husband, and son Walter. *Stick Fly* is set in an upscale vacation home in Massachusetts in which two Black females and one White female interact with their partners and the father of the household. While the settings and economic status of the characters in these works are very different, similar issues in regard to race, class, and gender are brought to the forefront. Therefore, these works by Hansberry and Diamond, like the intermediate texts of others referenced, illustrate the enduring struggles of Black women from the mid-20th century to the present day.

A contributor to the categorization and societal disenfranchisement of Black people is the American legal system, which Critical Race Theory evaluates. In the Foreword of *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings*, scholar and political activist Cornel West explains how CRT “examine[s] the entire edifice of contemporary legal thought and doctrine from the viewpoint of law’s role in the construction and maintenance of social domination and subordination” (xi). Here, West suggests that while American law and policy make claims for equal treatment of all citizens, they often do not acknowledge the disadvantaged position of African-Americans in a society primarily ruled and dominated by Whites, the historical oppressor and overseer. Though many efforts have been made since the emancipation of slaves in the late nineteenth century, equality or objectivity has been harder to acquire than one might imagine. Considering that Black existence in America began with a subordinate relationship to Whites, it is discouraging; to say the least, that much of that dynamic persists in the present. Through scholarship and theoretical analysis, CRT hopes to challenge the notion of legal objectivity in a society

that has been and continues to be subjective and selective. In his preliminary remarks, West states that:

Critical Race Theorists put forward novel readings of a hidden past that disclose the flagrant shortcomings of the treacherous present in the light of unrealized— though not unrealizable— possibilities for human freedom and equality... Critical Race Theory is a gasp of emancipatory hope that law can serve liberation rather than domination (xi-xii).

Even though it has been a slow and steady struggle for African-Americans, Critical Race Theory provides inspiration that sooner or later, the tortoise will catch up to, or maybe even surpass the hare and win their own *race*.

Moreover, Critical Race Theory “attempt[s] to theorize the relationship between race and legal discourse” with an examination of “how law *constructed* race,” and has often created a hierarchy through its establishment of principles (Crenshaw xxiv-xxv). According to Critical Race Theorists, policy is the problem. Because laws are not in favor of people of color, the dominant race continues to be the ruling class that determines the prominent culture. In order to suggest measures for change within the legal system, CRT first identifies the issues that have created an unlevel playing field; ones which West describes as occurring chronologically.

This comprehensive movement in thought and life— created primarily, though not exclusively, by progressive intellectuals of color— compels us to confront critically the most explosive issue in American civilization: the historical centrality of complicity of law in upholding white supremacy (and concomitant hierarchies of gender, class, and sexual orientation) (xi).

Using race as a primary means of analysis, CRT has been able to address issues “in much the same way that Marxism’s introduction of class structure and struggle into classical political economy grounded subsequent critiques of social hierarchy and power” (Crenshaw xxv). In concert with West’s statement, it is not surprising that CRT has one

of its roots in radical feminism, which critiques Marxism and other sociopolitical constructs that tend to overlook gender biases in exploration of class differences. Once again commenting on authority, CRT utilizes “feminism’s insights into the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination” (Delgado & Stefancic 5). As many parallels can be made between it and CRT, Feminist theory will be explored briefly in the subsequent sections.

To emphasize that there is need for change in the present, Critical Race Theorists draw upon figures, influences, and movements of the past for inspiration. “Studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power” from the present day only would lack historical context without recognizing the impact of philosophers like Antonio Gramsci, and radical individuals like “Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, WEB Du Bois, César Chávez, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Black Power and Chicano movements of the sixties and early seventies” (3, 5). Law professors and professionals like “father figure” Derrick Bell, as well as previously quoted authors and others, began theorizing in the 1970s, with the first meeting held in Madison, Wisconsin in 1989, and have since continued their mission to challenge race relations and power dynamics (5). In addition to feminism, CRT “builds on critical legal studies... [from which] it borrowed the idea of legal indeterminacy—the idea that not every legal case has one correct outcome. Instead, one can decide most cases either way, by emphasizing one line of authority over another, or interpreting one fact differently from the way one’s adversary does” (5). This follows the model’s challenge of claimed objectivity; in other words, legal decisions are often made subjectively, favoring one fact over another, which

contributes to the state of unequal governance that is common in the legal system. It is the goal of CRT, to change this norm for imbalanced outcomes. Most importantly, Critical Race Theory has a “concern for redressing historical wrongs” in “the relationship between racism and economic oppression,” as well as in the establishment of gender roles (5, 12).

Another pioneer for the movement, Angela Harris, in her Foreword to *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, eloquently evaluates the group’s overall mission: “Critical Race Theory not only dares to treat race as central to the law and policy of the United States, it dares to look beyond the popular belief that getting rid of racism means simply getting rid of ignorance, or encouraging everyone to ‘get along’” (xviii). This notion of examining policy and power coincides with the feminist and Black feminist theories which will be succinctly discussed in the following sections. These previously mentioned theories enlighten and help deconstruct the main attraction— the analysis of *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Stick Fly*— in which two African-American female playwrights examine the societal constructs through which their prominent Black female characters live and navigate.

“Why do women carry two loads and men only one?” This powerful statement provides a concern of Black feminist thought as outlined by Gloria Wade-Gayles in her Foreword to *The Sexual Mountain and Black Women Writers* (xxi). As previously stated and analyzed through the lens of Critical Race Theory, African American people have historically been defined in relation to the dominant White culture, a racial and economic divide which undeniably shapes the Black experience. For centuries, racial and economic indicators, in addition to accompanying gender roles have considerably shaped African-

American women's presence as one of political engagement and complexity. As Gayles' statement suggests, Black women's existence is burdened with multiple roles, and their societal position is usually compared to that of other cultural categories; primarily Black men and White women. The primary classification by which women are placed at a disadvantage is their gender and sexuality, as women are traditionally expected to be subservient and complementary to men. This gender classification is, however, convoluted by the racial categorization that at times dominates the Black female experience. These are but a few of the many factors that Black writers, women in particular, instinctively explore in their work.

Barbara Christian was a major initiator and advocate for Black feminism from the mid-1980s until her premature passing in 2000. A major resource that was consulted for this study was her book *New Black Feminist Criticism*. Her work towards empowering Black women is highly influential in analyzing societal constructs as well as critical literature of the past and present in relation to race, class, and gender. She dug deep into the history of Black women's literature, uncovering texts that have long been ignored, and explored commonalities among their content with contemporary writings of the present. Examining the literature of the likes of Alice Walker, she highlights iconic Black female characters like Celie from *The Color Purple*. Celie's strength is realized in stating "I'm here." While this simple statement could be overlooked, just as all of the baggage that accompanies the Black woman's presence often is, it asserts that in spite of the way others behave toward her, she will continue to live and make her way amidst their ill-treatment. Further, she recognizes her own admirable qualities, and finds strength in loving herself. Walker's words so provoked readers that after the publication of the

novel, and an award-winning film, *The Color Purple* was recently made into a musical in which Celie's words are passionately expressed by R&B singer turned actress, Fantasia

Barrino:

I don't need you to love me. I don't need you to love...
I believe I have inside of me everything I need to live a bountiful life.
With all the love inside of me, I'll stand as tall as the tallest tree.
And I'm thankful for everyday that I'm given,
both the easy and the hard ones I'm livin'.
But most of all I'm thankful for loving who I really am.
I'm beautiful. Yes, I'm beautiful, and *I'm here*.

Here, Celie relays a number of important messages; that she does not need male affirmation to live a happy life, that she loves and believes in herself, and that she is beautiful and exists, regardless of by whom she is acknowledged. These lyrics reinforce Christian's mission both to reveal and define the often neglected African-American women's body of work as indeed present; as here. She helped the initiative to insert Black female literature into the White dominated canon and academia, an attempt usually trumped by other occasionally disregarded groups such as Black men and White women. Finally, she encouraged the overall investigation of the infamous trinity—race, class, and gender, which define the Black woman's experience, on par with these other categorized groups.

What makes Christian's text so valuable to my analysis of *Raisin* and *Stick Fly* is her discussion about a lack of accessibility to Black female literature, until a new wave of feminism and effort toward rediscovery in the 1970s. Christian explains how scholars such as Barbara Smith (*Toward a Black Feminist Criticism*), discuss that time period that came to be known as the "black women's renaissance" (Fabi 69). Smith is especially interested in "demonstrat[ing] how the literature expose[s] the brutally complex system

of economic oppression’ — that of sexism, racism, and economic exploitation which affect[s]... the culture of black women” (Christian 8). Christian explains that these three factors of societal identity and categorization are ones that greatly inform the work of African-American female writers. Further, she asserts that an understanding of the past is crucial to literary work and criticism in the present. With a purpose that would satisfy Critical Race Theorists, Christian “force[s] us to remember what we might have ‘wished to forget’” (Fabi 70). In concert with investigating contributions to the resurgence of African-American female literature, the mission of Christian and other Black feminists’ is to examine the texts of Black female writers and assess the similarities in these stories across time periods. This work provided me with a valuable starting point for analyzing the dramatic content of *Raisin* and *Stick Fly*.

Like Christian, Sue-Ellen Case rejects the sociopolitical tradition of male dominance that ignores women. Like the Critical Race Theorists identified in the previous section, Case recognizes that every individual brings her or his own predispositions to their body of work. While she recognizes the criticisms of subjectivity in feminist work, she highlights the advantages that come from disclosing one’s opinions, acknowledging that “it unmask[s] the invisible author and reveals her gender and her racial and class bias” (3). She also prizes the personal quality and communal experience which that approach accomplishes; in reference to her own text *Feminism and Theatre* she states, “I think my own white academic background permeates all of this book” (3). In agreement with Black feminists and Critical Race Theorists, Case and other feminists recognize that objectivity is an improbable illusion for measuring the experience of

individuals who are constantly consumed with and perceived through the subjective aspects of race, class, and gender.

Case's book "deconstructs the classics of the canon" as Christian's work does, though she is primarily focused on dramatic texts and theatrical performance (1). In addition, she helps define the three most thriving threads of feminist thought including Radical feminism, Materialist/Marxist feminism, and Black feminism; in relation to theatre. Radical feminism takes a political stance in its call for changing the patriarchal oppression of women and defining the female beyond its relationship to male (63-64). Because of the desire to redefine and establish its own voice, Radical feminism often manifests in a symbolic format in text or performance. Certain devices used in a radical feminist's work may include challenging the male gaze by representing the woman taking control of her own body, or by renaming herself/questioning her name. Similarly, Materialist feminists confront the history of patriarchal oppression in the constructs of class and gender roles (82-83). Though Marxist/Socialist feminism is also political, it can tend to be more stylistically realistic, in order to display facts and attitudes about women's socioeconomic position, such as a flawed marriage or relationship. And as Case so justly states, Black feminism is a combination of the above mentioned feminisms. She also relays the many layers of discrimination that accompany the African-American woman's status in comparison to other groups. "The woman of color bears the triple burden of gender, racial and class oppression, while the white woman benefits from her class privilege of color" (97). As a result of the many issues Black women struggle with, their narratives and presentation are necessarily expressive of their disenfranchised status on many levels.

Among countless other activists with a feminist mission, Christian and Case have challenged the tradition of women, Black or White, being dominated by men. Both uncover the historical sociopolitical oppression of women, and their work speaks to the possibilities of changing that position. Like the Critical Race Theorists their texts challenge the White male dominated sociopolitical structure that creates policies, gender norms, and other biases that disadvantage others. Additionally, these feminists' efforts serve to help redefine women in a positive and affirming way, as realized through their analysis of literature and performance. Moreover, Hansberry's and Diamond's dramatic texts speak to the Black female's experience and embody many of the qualities outlined above in order to address her societal standing and shape her identity.

Justification

While literature and plays from many eras have been deconstructed for what they reveal about the relationships between African-American female and male characters, a comparative analysis of that content in plays from the 1950s to the present day has not been explored. Specifically, *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Stick Fly* have not been matched with one another for their outlook on Black feminine identity. While *Raisin* has been deconstructed by many, scholarship about *Stick Fly* is virtually nonexistent. Further, literature and dramatic texts in general have not commonly been analyzed, if at all, through the lens of Critical Race Theory, which is the primary model for this study. CRT began as a framework for legal practice and political means, and though it has since spread to education and other fields, theatre does not appear to be one in which it is typically utilized, though it complements the prevailing Feminist theory nicely because of

the shared concern with class, gender, and in the Black feminist's case, race. Often scripts with similar content are analyzed through a feminist, or more specifically a Black feminist theoretical framework, which will supplement this examination. As women's presence, writing, and the field of theatre are undeniably political, the activist nature of Critical Race Theory seems appropriate for deconstructing these historical and contemporary representations of female status and identity, which has not progressed considerably since *Raisin* was first published in 1959.

As a middle-class African-American female, I bring my race, class, and gender bias to this project. Further, as a theatre and literary scholar, it interests me to add some analysis to the ever emerging areas of Black and feminist theatre. My definition of who I am is a result of societal ideals, as well as whom I have become through my scholarship, writing, and experience in the field. It is my desire to shed light on African-American female identity in *Raisin* and *Stick Fly* realized through the political perspective of Critical Race Theory, and supported by Black/Feminist theory.

Chapter Two

Historical Context, Presenting: A Raisin in the Sun

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore-- And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

~Langston Hughes, *Harlem: A Dream Deferred*

Unsurprisingly, these powerful words by the renowned Renaissance man inspired Lorraine Hansberry's theme for *A Raisin in the Sun*, with the title taken directly from the poem. Hughes, who championed the need for Black writers "to express [their] individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame," along with others in his camp, propelled the movement towards civil rights in the artistic and political spheres during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and following years ("Negro Artist"). Another prominent playwright who most likely influenced Hansberry's writing is James Baldwin, who also shared his perspective on the esteemed American dream. In an interview, he expresses his disgust with dominance and oppression, stating "The whole American optic in terms of reality is based on the necessity of keeping black people out of it. We are nonexistent except according to their terms, and their terms are unacceptable" (Troupe n. pag). Like many other writers of the 20th century, Baldwin artistically confronted much of American

law and politics, hoping his writing would influence change. Hansberry's work was in this tradition and continued the sociopolitical analysis initiated by other Black writers like Hughes and Baldwin.

As the metaphorical title suggests, Hansberry's purpose is to deconstruct the Black experience around the possibility of sweet triumphs amidst the sour obstacles African Americans meet in American society. Crafting *Raisin* around 1959, on the cusp of the Civil Rights Movement, Hansberry's text exhibits the myriad issues African-Americans confront in their pursuit of the American dream. Margaret B. Wilkerson endearingly introduces Hansberry's work, stating:

A Raisin in the Sun, destined to become an American classic, could not have been more timely. The Civil Rights Movement had shown Whites that they knew very little about the black nation in their midst. The guilt generated by the brutal terrorism against orderly demonstrators in the South turned Whites into a ready audience for a play about the Black struggle. This play presented a family with which whites were ready to identify. Hansberry's craftsmanship captured the heroism and frustration of a whole era and the heart of a divided nation (xx).

Revolutionary is one of many terms that adequately describes protests against Jim Crow laws and segregation, as well as other events that the civil rights movement birthed during the 1950s. And while the laws and cultural mandates of this turbulent time directly affected what was performed, these political structures certainly did not prevent *Raisin* from making it to the Broadway stage in 1959. Its impact was essential in a time when the country was in a state of upheaval, with racial tension at the root of a national dispute as Wilkerson's statement suggests.

Hansberry not only speaks to the condition of African-Americans, but explores their relationship to the Black community and with society at large. Wilkerson continues a discussion about the playwright's treatment of societal relationships, stating:

Hansberry... refuses to diminish the pain, suffering or truths of any one group in order to benefit another, a factor which makes her plays particularly rich and her characters thoroughly complex... Her universalism is not facile, nor does it gloss over the things that divide people. She engages those issues, works through them, to find whatever they may be, a priori, the human commonality that lies beneath (Bernstein 21).

Here, Wilkerson defines Hansberry's impact on theatre and suggests that perhaps her reception and the play's success was in response to its historical timing when African-Americans were unlikely to achieve such dreams. As described by scholar Philip C. Kolin, "*Raisin* is a paradigm of social realism" (3). Hansberry herself comments on the necessity to confront societal issues, claiming "It is, in fact, the examination of the truths of a civilization which invariably offers back to that civilization the rock-like notes of affirmation, significance, and beauty" (xxv). Through this proclamation, she asserts the need to evaluate the structure of the country in which she lives and creates her work, in order to reveal its flaws and its potential.

Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, it is possible to understand how *Raisin* analyzes many issues within America's White dominated society as experienced by a Black family in pursuit of progress. Adrienne Asch summarizes CRT's mission, in that it "views racism as not aberrant but the natural order of American life" (9). Her statement demonstrates why many Whites can afford the luxury of being unconcerned about race and economic status, while African-Americans rarely see their social status as being equivalent to that of Whites. In agreement with Hansberry's motivations in *Raisin*, Asch describes that "differences in skin color, gender, sexual orientation, and health status are not occasions for exclusionary or pejorative treatment" (9-10). Providing social commentary on the experience of Black people of the time period, Hansberry illustrates the life of the Younger family in 1950s Southside Chicago, whose dreams are constantly

deferred or challenged. Throughout the play, she carefully sheds light on the political and economic injustices of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as on the ways in which the established structures burden and disadvantage Black women, realized through the characterization of Beneatha, Lena (Mama), and Ruth.

Evidence: Play Analysis

Through the characterization of three Black women, Hansberry exhibits some of the social and cultural structure issues prevalent in mid-20th century American life. Exposing injustices of the country's governing system; *Raisin* realistically portrays an urban Black family who contend with the issues of race, class, and gender. Although many writers with a sociopolitical and/or feminist agenda tend to write in a non-realistic style with an episodic plot structure, some playwrights use the technique of realistic characterization to shed light on actual problems. Though this bourgeois or "mainstream" approach is often critiqued by radical feminists and other extremist groups for its inability to divert male defined constructs, it does allow for the development of "strong female character[s]" (Case 65). For example, each woman has a role in Hansberry's play. Beneatha is a sister, girlfriend, and student; Ruth, a wife and mother; and Lena, a mother and care provider. While an extreme feminist may negatively critique the women for ultimately relinquishing their control to the patriarchal figure of the story by giving the eldest son majority control over the deceased father's inheritance money, Hansberry provides an authentic representation of women's societal positions and relationships to men. With three African-American women at the core of her story, Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* uncovers civic problems with race, as well as gender and class in the 1950s.

An analysis of the text and its female characters provides an investigation of African-American women's identity in relationship to their male counterparts in terms of appearance and related gender expectations, naming/renaming themselves, and the division of burdens and responsibilities. Finally, the concepts mentioned above will be compared for the ways in which the resistance to or acceptance of them impact feminine identity.

Chronologically, Beneatha is the youngest, as well as the most spirited female character in Hansberry's play. A 20 year old Black female college student living in a cramped subsidized apartment space with her mother, brother, nephew, and sister-in-law, she embodies an intellectual Black woman of the time period. Conflicting views arise as the family discusses how their recently inherited insurance money should be spent. As the most educated person in the apartment, Beneatha would like to use a portion of the money to further her studies in medical school. A sibling rivalry occurs between Beneatha and her brother Walter Lee, and while each of them has selfish plans for their use of money, their reasons originate from financial need, more so than pure selfish desire. Walter hopes that investing in a liquor store with a friend will yield more return and help alleviate the family's financial strain, as well as give him the opportunity to start his own business and earn a significant salary. Beneatha's plan is to pay for medical school tuition and be able to give back to the family in the future by securing a job in the health profession. Though their individual goals may be selfish, their ultimate goal is to provide financial stability to their family from the investment. Arguably, Walter is a bit more selfish than Beneatha, since while Beneatha expresses that Mama has the right to do what she wants with the money, Walter is constantly counting up costs and trying to

estimate how much her medical school tuition would take away from the total. He interrogates her about the money by stating, “Have we figured out yet just exactly how much medical school is going to cost?” (Hansberry 1346) Conversely, Beneatha expresses respect for Mama’s approval and final decision on how to spend the inheritance money left by their father. She lashes back at her brother, ignoring his question and making an assertion of her own. “That money belongs to Mama, Walter, and it’s for her to decide how she wants to use it... It’s hers. Not ours— *hers*.” A masculine response from Walter follows, as he suggests the proper place for women, and displays his need to be right or in control: “Who the hell told you to be a doctor? If you so crazy ‘bout messing ‘round with sick people—then go be a nurse like other women—or just get married and be quiet...” (1346). This conveys Walter’s entrenched belief of women’s appropriate roles in disenfranchised positions. Walter cannot fathom his sister becoming a doctor rather than a nurse, as the former profession is male dominated. Moreover, he believes that the woman’s place is to simply complement the man; thus Beneatha should either be the doctor’s nurse if she must work, or be the man’s wife, if she takes her proper role in the home. Further, he argues that she should be quiet, because it is ridiculous for her to think that she can verbally challenge a man, who is the reigning head of the household, the workplace, and society in general. Beneatha, however, pays her brother no attention, and like most women, Black women in particular; she is concerned about how her financial decision will affect the rest of her family, rather than just herself and her immediate wants or needs. With her goal of being a doctor, she aims to challenge dominant White society and overcome economic disenfranchisement.

During the course of the story, Beneatha also vacillates between two very distinct suitors, including the native and proud African, Joseph Asagai, and the quite conservative, haughty George Murchison. Her gentlemen callers certainly represent opposite extremes of the stereotypical Black male during the riotous political scene of the late 1950s. The interaction among these figures explicates race, gender, and class relations of the era. Influenced by her native African boyfriend, Joseph Asagai, Beneatha shows much pride in her race, and is delighted when he gifts her with authentic Nigerian robes. He calls her an assimilationist (conformist) and criticizes her “mutilated” hair, preferring the natural look she was “born with” (Hansberry 1352). Recalling the day they first met in school, Asagai marvels at Beneatha’s concern for her heritage, chuckling while he impersonates her: “Mr. Asagai— I want very much to talk with you. About Africa. You see, Mr. Asagai, I am looking for my identity” (1352). In this instance, both of them reveal their individual perspectives about identity, particularly in regards to her race and ancestral heritage. Further, Beneatha’s gender is addressed to some extent when she averts what appears to be Asagai’s marriage proposal or request for a serious relationship. When she suggests that there should be more to a relationship than just financial stability, she is attempting to define herself and determine for herself the qualities she would like in a partnership. Not interested in being his possession or object of desire, Beneatha asserts that they should spend more time getting acquainted before defining the relationship. Amused, Asagai contests Beneatha’s sense of freedom, stating that “the world’s most liberated women are not liberated at all. You all talk about it too much.” Next he gives her a tribal name based on her lack of conformity to his desires: “Alaiyo... mean[ing] One for Whom Bread—Food—Is Not Enough” (1353). Though

race is essentially not an issue in Asagai's initial statement about the liberated woman, he displays the problematic dynamic of male entitlement. Further, while Beneatha shows some control in trying to establish her own self-identity, she is still given a name by Asagai. The name Asagai assigns Beneatha is affirming in the female empowerment sense, however, and reflects her choice to define herself separate from her relationship with him, and therefore, assert her own voice over his.

A liberated woman indeed, Beneatha also challenges the opinions of her other suitor, George Murchison, who expresses his distaste with her "eccentric" look before their date to attend a live theatre show in another part of Chicago. Trying to convince her to change incites an argument between the two, with race as the topic of its origin, in which Ruth, Beneatha's sister-in-law, attempts to be a mediator:

George: Look honey, we're going *to* the theatre— we're not going to be *in* it... so go change, huh?
Ruth: You expect this boy to go out with you looking like that?
Beneatha: That's up to George. If he's ashamed of his heritage—
George: Oh, don't be so proud of yourself, Bennie— just because you look eccentric.
Beneatha: How can something that's natural be eccentric?
George: That's what being eccentric means—being natural. (Hansberry 1357)

Throughout this dialogue, Beneatha expresses her disgust with her disenfranchised status, and the dominance of White societal norms, which determines the appropriate style of dress and decorum for events, such as, of all things, the theatre. George encourages Beneatha to suppress her "eccentric" and quite possibly authentic African-American culture, because he fears discrimination by White society. It is also possible that here Hansberry may even be commenting on her own work, and that although her play was produced on the Broadway stage during this time period, it was because it followed the proper restraints and was not too "eccentric" for the traditional audience. Reluctantly,

Beneatha conforms to his wishes and changes for the show, though they have a similar argument weeks later. She thwarts his advances as he complains about her wanting to talk all the time when instead, she should just be more concerned with her appearance. He states: “I want you to cut it out, see—the moody stuff, I mean. I don’t like it. You’re a nice-looking girl... all over. That’s all you need, honey, forget the atmosphere— Guys [are] going to go for what they see. As for myself, I want a nice— simple—sophisticated girl... not a poet, OK?” (1361) It seems that George’s main expectation is for Beneatha to stay pretty and be quiet. In this way, he attempts to silence her voice and prize her appearance over her mind. His chauvinist comments reveal traditional norms of male dominance that expect a woman to keep up a particular visual profile and speak only when spoken to. Unlike many of the conventional women of her time, Beneatha fights back, stating that knowledge is meant to be put to use, and ultimately declares that “George is a fool” (1362). Additionally, she tells her mother and sister-in-law that he is “shallow” and not someone she desires to marry, *if* she ever marries at all. Her comments shock both of the married women, who wonder why Beneatha refuses to just stay in her place and just be a good “little girl” (1349).

Beneatha shows strength in that though she may contemplate and even temporarily endure the ideas that Asagai and George propose, she ultimately makes her own decisions. She contends with her race in her interactions with each suitor in very different ways, as Asagai is very true to his native African heritage, while African-American George is preoccupied with the disillusionment and rejection of his race. Beneatha’s gender is a prime factor in that she is expected to concede to the men’s desires of what a partner should be, though she resists both of their ideals in order to

create an individual one. Beneatha prioritizes her voice, rejecting the names and ideas both men wish to impose upon her; she crafts her own self identity separate from what is anticipated and customary.

Another major Black female character, Ruth, is a woman of thirty, married to Walter Lee Jr., the man of the house (by default). While Ruth often rolls her eyes at Walter's sexist comments and erratic behavior, she is much less liberated and direct than Beneatha, in that she usually glares at him in disgust, rather than voice her alternate opinion. And while there are times that she does not agree with Walter on a particular issue, she sometimes reinforces conventional standards or beliefs professed by him and other male characters. Though maintaining peace seems to be her primary concern, she acknowledges her position and challenges oppressive male dominance or wrongdoing in some instances. Additionally, she shows independence in making some of her own decisions.

From the very beginning of the play, Ruth is in competition with Walter over raising their child and teaching him what acceptable behavior is, as well as in what ways their current economic situation affects him. After telling her son Travis to brush his hair, grab a jacket, and only take the allowance she set out for him on his way to school, she senses his disgust with her motherly instructions, which she teases him about: "Oh, Mama makes me so mad sometimes; I don't know what to do! I wouldn't kiss that woman good-bye for nothing in this world! ... Now whose little old angry *man* are you?" (1344). Hansberry reveals Travis' earlier annoyance with his mother's demands by describing his face as one "*fixed with masculine rigidity*," though he eventually gives in and does as she says, embracing her before he leaves. However, before he has a chance to

head out, Walter finds a way to affirm his manhood and assert control over Travis. When the boy asks for fifty cents, Ruth says, “we don’t have it” and instead of acknowledging his wife’s truth about their economic status, Walter replies “What you tell the boy things like that for?” and gives Travis the money from his pocket. After Travis takes the money and thanks his father, Walter reaches into his pocket and gives him “another fifty cents” for good measure. Nonchalant to the “*violent rays from his wife’s eyes*” in Travis’ presence, he states “You better get to school, *man*... That’s *my* boy” (1344). This exchange sets up the dynamic that Walter is in charge, and overrules Ruth in raising their son. And though Ruth makes her displeasure known with her visual reaction to Walter, she remains silent, partly because of her perceived position in the household, and partially in an attempt not to distress their son.

Though her approach is quite passive in comparison to Beneatha’s, she does not always let Walter run over her. When he questions her mood, she tartly answers “What is there to be pleasant about?” (1345). Unconcerned with her feelings, Walter continues to assert his masculinity, complain about their economic status and suggest that Ruth be his support system, to which she is not exactly in agreement. He interrogates her: “You tired, ain’t you? ...Me, the boy, the way we live— this beat-up hole— everything. So tired— moaning and groaning all the time, but you wouldn’t do nothing to help, would you?” Ruth is simply aggravated and tries to brush him off, stating “Walter, please leave me alone.” Instead of being sympathetic and reasonable, he begins a tirade about how the woman’s role is to complement the man.

Walter: A man needs for a woman to back him up... That is just what is wrong with the colored woman in this world... Don’t understand about building their men up and making ‘em feel like somebody. Like they can do something.

Ruth: (*Drily, but to hurt*). There *are* colored men who do things.

Walter: No thanks to the colored woman.

Ruth: Well, being a colored woman, I guess I can't help myself none.

Walter: (*Mumbling*) We one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds (1345).

Instead of uplifting Ruth and recognizing how valuable she is as his wife and as a mother, he insults and dismisses her as unimportant and unintelligent. Unfortunately, although Walter belongs to the same racial group as his wife, Ruth, he highlights the problematic dynamic of male domination that places the Black woman at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale. The fact that Walter mumbles his last statement, however, reveals his own recognition of his insensitivity in blaming the victim. Ruth, exhausted from his commentary, ignores his ignorance and internalizes her response, though she later takes full advantage of opportunities to expose his stupidity. For instance, she teases him when he later leaves for work, needing "money for carfare." Ruth slyly gives Walter an additional fifty cents since he has given his own money to their son, and teases him with the same words he used in an attempt to spoil Travis: "Here, take a taxi" (1345). Knowing he will lose this battle, Walter says nothing and leaves for work. While Ruth's responses are not as blatant as Beneatha's, she gets Walter to back down in her own way, which in this case, proves effective.

Limited living space does not afford the Younger family abundant room or privacy to conceal secrets, leaving Ruth to reveal her 2 month pregnancy after a trip to the doctor. Beneatha questions her outright: "You pregnant?" (Hansberry 1351). Though she covers it up by pretending to be happy for Ruth, Beneatha then asks actual and hypothetical questions about where she plans on putting the child, since there is already inadequate room for the family now:

Beneatha: Did you mean to? I mean, did you plan it or was it an accident?
Ruth: Mind your own business.
Beneatha: It is my business—where is he going to live, on the roof?
(*There is silence following the remark as the three women react to the sense of it.*) Gee— I didn't mean that, Ruth honest. Gee, I don't feel like that at all. I think—I think it is wonderful (1351-1352).

While Ruth can appreciate her sister-in-law's encouragement, she also understands her initial concern and the unfortunate implications of having another child in her current economic situation. Though she enjoys living with her mother-in-law, she is fully aware of the cramped situation to which she, Walter, and her son contribute. Walter's faulty business schemes and outbursts about money contribute to her frustration and reservations about adding to the family. He earlier stated, "I'm thirty-five years old; I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room—and all I got to give him is stories about how rich white people live..." (1345). Further, Walter disregards Ruth's suggestions on how spend their money. He tries to make their son happy, and presents himself as more comfortable and cultured than he actually is. Here, Walter also acknowledges his racial and socioeconomic standing in comparison to the dominant White ruling class— his motive for giving Travis more than they can actually afford is grounded in his fear that Travis will feel inferior.

Walter's distance and erratic manner have only made Ruth even more self-conscious and regretful. By the end of the act, Mama has become frustrated and puts an end to Walter's rude and restless behavior by exposing Ruth's pregnancy: "Son—do you know your wife is expecting another baby? (*Walter stands, stunned, and absorbs what his mother has said*). This ain't for me to be telling— but you ought to know... I think Ruth is thinking 'bout getting rid of that child" (1356). Sensing Ruth's odd behavior and other mysterious appointments, she calls his attention to the fact that Ruth seems to be

planning to have an abortion, in order to prevent further financial stress on the family. When Walter dismisses that as a possibility, Mama addresses his comments by highlighting the woman's place in society, stating, "When the world get ugly enough— a woman will do anything for her family. *The part that's already living*" (1356). Here, Mama speaks up for Ruth and her status as a woman at a time when her voice has been silenced by Walter and her current circumstances. Walter, reluctant to believe how he might have contributed to his wife's unfortunate decision, states "You don't know Ruth, Mama, if you think she would do that," to which Ruth responds "Yes I would too, Walter. I gave her [the abortionist] a five-dollar down payment." (1356) Though Mama and Ruth allow him ample opportunity to suggest an alternative action, Walter is essentially unable to express his reaction. Because he is more concerned with his current economic status than making definite plans for his future and does not outright oppose the abortion, Mama takes the reins and decides once and for all to use part of the life insurance money to put a down payment on a bigger house. In this instance, Ruth's pregnancy is not so much a happy moment, but rather, a stressful one that adds emotional and most of all, financial strain to the family. For the Youngers, an event that is usually joyful, such as a pregnancy, soon becomes unpleasant in that it only adds to their strained financial condition and is a constant reminder of their economic status and disenfranchisement.

The play also celebrates Mama's role as the African-American mother and head of the household, who is ultimately in charge of the finances and expected to make the most rational decisions for the family. Mama (Lena) Younger is made to function as both parents at the play's beginning when Big Walter Lee, the father, has died and left the

family with life insurance money. While the other members of the family have their own hidden agendas concerning what they would like to do with the money, it is Mama who has to put her foot down and make the best decisions for the family. Recognizing Mama's role in sustaining the family and handling all of their daily issues, Ruth proposes that Mama use the money to treat herself.

Ruth: You know what you should do, Miss Lena? You should take yourself a trip somewhere. To Europe or South America or someplace—I'm serious. Just pack up and leave! Go on away and enjoy yourself some. Forget about the family and have yourself a ball for once in your life... Shoot— these here rich white women do it all the time.
Mama: Something always told me I wasn't no rich white woman. (1348)

This remark by Mama reinforces her role in society, not only as a mother, but as an African-American mother, with less financial freedom than most White mothers during the 1950s. It sheds light not only on the economic disenfranchisement of African-Americans of this era, but on the fact that many African-American mothers had to provide for their families on their own, and therefore, did not have the privilege of taking trips wherever and whenever they wished. Mama's choice to identify herself as an African-American, and a woman reinforces her unequal position in society in comparison to Whites, especially to men.

Regardless of the disagreements and family tension throughout the play, everyone essentially values and obeys Mama. Her, as well as the rest of the family's main concern is about finances and their current condition in their cramped "rat-trap" apartment, as well as how to effectively use the \$10,000 in life insurance left by the father, Big Walter Lee (Hansberry 1348). For this family, money is not freely flowing and their use of this insurance check is of the utmost importance. It is to their relief that Mama uses the money to put a down payment of \$3500 on a bigger house. In Act 2, Mama finally trusts

Walter and gives him the remaining \$6500, with instructions for what to do with it. She discusses their unprivileged position in society and how important it is for him to do as she says:

I been wrong, son. I been doing to you what the rest of the world been doing to you... Monday morning I want you to take this money and take three thousand dollars and put it in a savings account for Beneatha's medical schooling. The rest you put in a checking account— with your name on it... It ain't much, but it's all I got in the world and I'm putting it in your hands. I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be. (Hansberry 1363)

What is a bit disappointing is that Mama releases her control by giving Walter control over the majority of the money. This important moment of trust, in which Mama hands over to Walter the family's financial livelihood, as well as the title of head of the household, later becomes devastating when it is discovered that not only has Walter disobeyed her advice by investing all of the remaining money in the liquor store, but also that his "partner" Willie has run off with it, never to be seen again. Though Walter respects his mother and wants to please her, his desire to be the breadwinner and fulfill the stereotypical male head of the household role ultimately overshadows his initial obedience. This leaves the family in the same position of economic strain they were in at the beginning of the play, with a feeling of loss and inability to attain financial progress. Fortunately, they refuse to let Walter's fiscal mishap "defer their dreams," and at the end of the play they proceed with moving into the house, hopeful that they will find a way to move forward with their lives and not let economic stress define their existence.

Though some plans are thwarted and some frustrating moments occur during the course of the play, the strong female characters find ample opportunities to define themselves and prevail despite their given circumstances. While these three Black women

understand their disenfranchised societal standing as a result of race, class, and gender constructions, they work against them to provide for their family and themselves. Beneatha actively pursues her education, works toward her goal to be a doctor, and expresses her contentment with not marrying if she so chooses. In this way, she aims to take control of her economic situation and her identity. Ruth demonstrates an awareness of her disadvantaged standing and even considers abortion to ease the overall financial stress on the family. She confronts Walter's disrespectful behavior and reminds him that she is more than capable of making her own decisions whether he approves of them or not. Mama establishes from the beginning of the play that she knows her role and economic standing in society, and therefore does not have the privilege of taking expensive trips around the world, when her family needs her most. She believes she can benefit from the life insurance money, and as the matriarch, initially takes control of how to spend it. Though she allows Walter to make a big mistake with a big portion of the money, she wisely first makes a down payment on a house to help move the entire family toward a better economic position. While Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* is by no means a radical Feminist work, the play demonstrates through complex characters and realistic circumstances, the challenges and possibilities of Black people, women, in particular, during the turbulent era of the 1950s as they contend with the issues of race, class, and gender.

Chapter Three

Contemporary Context, Presenting: Stick Fly

A play that makes you feel... *Stick Fly* is relatable with universal themes that go beyond race and class. It's about family and the secrets that unravel. No matter where you come from, or what you look like, this is a story [that] addresses the human experience.

~Alicia Keys, Introduction Letter for *Stick Fly*

Who better than Grammy award-winning singer, respected actress, performer, and philanthropist; “Superwoman,” Alicia Keys, to introduce Lydia Diamond’s powerful play, *Stick Fly*. A “Girl on Fire” who knows “A Woman’s Worth,” Keys fittingly produced and contributed music to *Stick Fly*’s premiere on Broadway in 2011. Performed Off-Broadway and regionally since 2006, and first published in 2008, the play has a resounding message about the implications of race, class, and gender 50 years after the equally prominent *A Raisin in the Sun* of 1959. While the work contains many themes, its representation of race and gender boundaries is especially effective. Although not much scholarship on the work has yet been published, the play is emerging and contributing to Black presence in theatre, as well as influencing society in general.

Diamond (1969) was raised by an educated Black single mother, and was constantly reminded of her race, class, and gender. Even in her youth, she began to explore these issues with her Barbie dolls, instinctively illustrating political dynamics and

societal relationships. Not exactly having a feminist or Critical Race Theorist agenda at the age of 8, she explains how natural interactions occurred when playing with her male and female dolls: “You don’t say, ‘I’m going to have Barbie say this, in order for there to be a metaphor,’ and ‘I’m going to have Ken say this, in order for there to be conflict.’ No, it just comes out” (Mandell 40). Though she did not think much of her early analysis of human interaction, it led to some degree of playwrighting by the age of 12. Now in her 40s, Diamond has several productions, including many performances of *Stick Fly* credited to her name. As her doll playing turned into dialogue, Diamond explains how her work comes from a very authentic place, in which she includes a bit of herself in each character; as well as vacillates between feeling both contentious and cognizant about her societal standing. “Truth as nakedness— that’s the only paradigm I ever had...I always wrote about the things that I felt most passionate about, around race and class and gender and things that we don’t know how to talk about” (Preston 18). These three recurring factors are present throughout the play and its message, as her non plastic characters come to life.

American politics and societal confines have changed significantly since the 1950s. While affluent African-American families like the characters exemplified in Diamond’s play are still not commonplace, they do exist in the present day. Though there is still work to be done in the areas of race, gender, and class equality, Black presence has evolved greatly since the Civil Rights era of *Raisin*. We are “Now, immersed in a sense of possibilities that the age of Obama has inspired,” as Rohan Preston expertly expresses it (20). Preston’s statement speaks to the progress that has been made from the mid-20th century into the present, enabling the twofold inauguration of a Black president and a

rising socioeconomic class standing for African-Americans. The efforts of the advocates for equality throughout history have contributed to the realization of well-off families like the LeVays in *Stick Fly*, who maintain a summer home in the pretentious Martha's Vineyard of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Stacie S. McCormick explains how Diamond's play investigates the concerns of African-American families that have endured throughout the years, and provides some comparison between the work of Diamond and Hansberry:

It is perhaps fitting that *Stick Fly* reflects Hansberry's historic work from contemporary perspectives on family, race, and class. While *Raisin* shows a family anxious to purchase their first house and move away from a life of domestic servitude, *Stick Fly* features the LeVays, an affluent African American family with multiple houses, including a vacation home on Martha's Vineyard... Although these works deal with class and African American identity from markedly different vantage points, their structural similarities demonstrate Hansberry's enduring influence on contemporary playwrights like Diamond. (441)

McCormick's comparison of these two writers understates the expertise with which both express important messages about the human condition, in particular for African-Americans.

While Diamond's play examines the identities of both men and women, Black and White; the way in which she captures female complexity is quite commanding. In a newspaper interview from 2012, she explains how simple, yet intricate her characters are, as she is not aiming for deep symbolism, but fundamentally, realism:

I am not saying anything about the Black man. Black, White, Asian, Martian—men are men, diverse in their attitudes about race, gender and culture. I don't think any of the characters in *Stick Fly* represent any one kind of man. They are all well-rounded individuals with viewpoints born of their experiences and perceptions. I do like that I have put on stage Black men who honor Black women and feel some allegiance to family... I don't think the female characters represent anything other than

themselves. I am glad that they are all complicated, funny and flawed. I do think they are strong women, and I love this about them. (Armstrong 18)

Though her cast is evenly composed of three men and three women, the latter characters are, as Diamond states, rather compelling. As in *Raisin*, there are three female characters that contribute to the development of the story. In this play, however, two are Black females, and one is a White female; which is equally if not more effective as the all Black female characterization in Hansberry's play. During the course of the play, the ever present issues of race, class, and gender will be demonstrated and discussed among *Stick Fly*'s female characters: Taylor, Cheryl, and Kimber, respectively.

Evidence: Play Analysis

Crossing race, class, and gender boundaries, *Stick Fly*, like *Raisin*, highlights the female presence with the characterization of three women in the early 21st century. The difference, and what adds another layer to the aforementioned trifecta, is that two of the female characters are Black and one is White. However, Diamond's play is also written in the style of realism, with a fairly straight-forward and linear plot structure. While gender expectations are implied throughout the script, racial and class differences are made especially apparent between the female characters, as well as between them and their male counterparts. While all three female characters are "strong women" as described by Diamond, their identities are defined partly in terms of their relationship to men. Their relationship with their partners, as well as with their father-figures, determines their sociopolitical status and distinct levels of self-awareness. Further, the contrasting background of each woman uncovers the complexity and definite intersection of race, class and gender. Taylor is the fiancée of affluent Kent LeVay, as well as the

neglected child of her passed pompous papa. As a Black woman, she is both delighted and disillusioned by the higher class society to which she was born and is marrying into, but weary of her past struggle and lack of male support. Cheryl is the stand-in maid for the family in the absence of her mother, who has worked for the LeVays for years. While she is educated, she is of a lower social class, and is also a Black woman who has grown up without knowing her father. Kimber is an intelligent, upper class White woman whose research investigates racial inequality. As the girlfriend of the other Black upper class LeVay— (Harold) Flip, and as the descendent of someone who married beneath them, Kimber realizes some disparities between her as a White person, in comparison to the Black female and male characters, as well as the presence of internal discrimination within her own race. While feminists may take issue with the way in which the female characters are defined in relationship to the male characters, the critical lens Diamond's script provides on race, class, and gender issues makes valuable comparisons. *Stick Fly* places three women at the center of the story and investigates female identity in relationship to the significant male characters, as well as to each other. Finally, the text offers a perspective on the effect established White patriarchal structure has on the female characters, as they conform to or rebel against its confines. Overall, Diamond's approach is best described by character Taylor, as one that "look[s] at everyone like they're bugs under a microscope," and "figure[s] out the patterns" (102).

Possibly intimidated by and disgusted with the "black elite" such as the "Hilton Head Howards [and] the Vineyard LeVays," Taylor Bradley Scott has both reservations about and visceral reactions to her racial and social class standing (Diamond 6). Abandoned by her highly esteemed father, Dr. James Bradley Scott at a young age,

Taylor is stuck between perceived privilege and sincere struggle, raised solely by her “single-mother college professor” (3). As a result of her multifaceted mentality, she strives to fit in with her fiancé’s family and the social setting that makes her uncomfortable. Taylor first met Kent at her father’s funeral. Though Kent (Spoon) was an admirer of “his politics,” he helps Taylor to overcome her resentment toward her father and the social class to which both he and Kent belong (8). When she expresses her mixed, though mostly negative, feelings about her father after the funeral service, Kent consoles her with similar misgivings about his own father.

Kent: Listen, for what it’s worth. I’ve lived with my dad my whole life and barely know him.

Taylor: Was that supposed to comfort me?

Kent: Maybe. Did it?

Taylor: Not what you said. The gesture maybe. (9-10).

This communication between them develops into a relationship in which Kent embraces Taylor and all of her complexity, and introduces her to his Vineyard class family. While Taylor admits that she still feels deprived in her upbringing in comparison to his, she is able to recognize some commonality between them.

Although Kent and Taylor are able to move past their upbringings and form a partnership, Taylor’s interaction with the rest of Kent’s family does not progress as smoothly. Throughout the story, she goes to great lengths to impress Kent’s father, Joseph, to make his brother, Flip envious, to alleviate their maid Cheryl of her duties, and to authenticate her Blackness to Flip’s White girlfriend Kimber. These moments capture the many layers of Taylor’s complex identity. She constantly operates like someone who has something to prove. Insecure from her conflicted upbringing, she is caught between bitterness and aiming to please. She wants acceptance from Joseph on three levels — as

the fiancée of his son; as an individual who aspires to belong in the upper class; and as a daughter seeking attention and appreciation from a father-figure. Raised by a working class single mother, she is also unsure of how to respond to Cheryl's domestic responsibilities as the maid. Not used to being pampered and waited on, Taylor feels the need to help Cheryl around the house, though Cheryl insists that she is fully capable and uninterested in her aid. Finally, Taylor is intimidated by Kimber's racial and class privilege as a White woman, and additionally irritated with the fact that she is Flip's girlfriend, for reasons that will be discussed in further detail in following passages. Overall, Taylor has many qualms she must overcome in her interactions with the other characters.

Initially, Dr. LeVay (Dad), ironically mistakes Taylor for Flip's girlfriend. Once he realizes his error, he addresses her with the utmost respect, in no way making her feel unwelcome or unworthy of becoming part of his family: "Ms. Bradley Scott... Beautiful doesn't do this exceptional creature justice. It's an honor my dear" (27). Taylor, however, is anxious and fumbles over her words in her introduction.

Taylor: Dr. LeVay.

Dad: Too formal. (*Beat.*) 'Dad' would be weird, huh? How 'bout you call me Joseph?

Taylor: OK, Doctor. (*Beat.*) Sir... uh, Joseph. ... Dr. LeVay, the house is beautiful...

Dad (*to Kent*): So, you're going to support your beautiful wife writing books now, I hear.

Taylor: Spoon is very talented. And I'm supporting myself just fine. You should really read his—

Dad: So son, you're a very talented fiction writer for whom I paid to get a law degree, a business degree, and a master's in sociology.

Taylor: Spoon just got a publisher.

Dad: Random House, Dell?

Kent: It's a small, reputable house...

Dad: Oh, small...

Taylor: Maybe Spoo— Kent told you? I'm doing a postdoc at Johns Hopkins. Entomology. (27-30)

While Taylor tries to advocate for Kent and come to his rescue, the conversation is cut short as Dr. LeVay is so preoccupied with Kent's inability to meet his expectations that he totally misses Taylor's comments and departs to the kitchen. This dialogue shows Taylor's attempt to validate her own worth as well as Kent's, which transcends the play and can refer to women's place in society. Since women are often viewed as the secondary species, she asserts that she can be the breadwinner even though she makes the choice to stick by her future partner and his goals. Additionally, Taylor is struggling with the rejection she feels being abandoned by her father, which hurt her not only financially, but left her emotionally unstable as well. Essentially, Taylor seeks male validation, as she desires Dr. LeVay's acceptance to relieve her of the economic and emotional void resulting from her own father's insensitivity.

In a tense conversation with Kent, Taylor explains the disappointment and insecurity that her father's lack of interest in her has created. Already taunted by racial prejudices, Dr. Bradley Scott's rejection encouraged Taylor to have complex feelings about class as well. Taylor explains how the dynamic between her and her father influenced her childhood and made her feel unwelcome in high class society:

It was just me and my mom and an apartment full of books. Books, and opportunity... never enough money. And my dad wasn't giving it up... His family had a driver, a Porsche, an SUV... and we're trying to get the Neon out of repo... . . . You know my dad got a place over in Oak Bluffs? I'm sure they still come. That's why I don't want to go out. I'm scared to death of running into his family. It's crazy, I know. But, I think this was a bad idea. It's too close, and it brings up all this stuff. One summer my mom gets this fellowship to teach in Japan, just for a month, and she asks my dad if I can spend part of the summer with him. You know what he said? 'It would be too complicated. We're going to the Vineyard.' Just like that, the Vineyard. (66-68)

While Taylor often slightly exaggerates the extent of her disadvantage and destitution, her father's behavior has significantly contributed to her outlook on her social standing. Her limited negative interaction with him has caused her to be uncomfortable in the settings to which she feels that does not belong.

One of the endearing qualities of the play is the conversations between Taylor and Dr. LeVay. After Taylor has an outburst exposing her inner neuroses about race and class, Dr. LeVay, also originally coming from a less privileged class, tries to calm her nerves by explaining his own background. To reassure her that she should not be intimidated by "the Vineyard" or by Kimber, he describes his own disadvantaged position and recalls the class distinction between him and his wife.

Dad: I don't believe all that festering in there is about that nice girl we've got visiting us.

Taylor: I just find it exhausting never having a space that's all mine... I got here, and this incredible house, and all these beautiful black folks... I've never been on the inside of all this, [a]nd it feels good... but it's hard, it's scary, because I wanna make a good impression. And then she [Kimber] walks in, like, like no big deal.

Dad: [*laughing*] Seriously you think she's not sweatin'? ... You want to be liked. That's a hard road to go. Flip's girl doesn't care.

Taylor: She's never had to. The world stops for women like that.

Dad: You're letting people fuck with your mind, little girl. Don't give anyone that much power. Nobody can make you feel inferior. I've been the head of this house, come to this island for the last forty years, put in hundreds of thousands of dollars of renovations... But there'll never be a sign out front that reads "LeVay." This will always be the Whitcomb house, and I'll always be the guy lucky enough to marry into the great Whitcomb dynasty...

Taylor: Then you understand.

Dad: I understand that you can be angry and not crazy. Just be a little more constructive. (81-83, 87-88).

Fortunately for Taylor, Dr. LeVay takes on the role of father-figure and essentially reminds her to relax. His statements reveal that Taylor is not the only person in the house

that has been confronted with class distinction, especially among the Black elite. Most importantly, he acknowledges that while established socioeconomic systems suggest that Whiteness and other qualities like lighter skin and financial means are marks of superiority, one can ultimately control of their own feeling of self-worth. Therefore, his overall message is that Taylor should not let other people, such as her father, Flip, or Kimber, get under her skin and make her feel undeserving.

Throughout the play, Taylor exhibits affinity toward people of the underclass like herself— Black housemaid, Cheryl, and is threatened by people who have privilege— Black lawyer Flip and his White girlfriend, Kimber. Uncomfortable with the idea of a maid, she unsuccessfully tries to help Cheryl around the house. Additionally, she confronts Flip about his dismissive behavior, questioning his relationship morals and latest girlfriend choice. Further, Taylor challenges Kimber on her understanding of poverty and Blackness in expressing her own experiences. Her interactions with Flip and both of these women are influenced by her father’s poor parenting, as well as her own perspective on race and class boundaries.

Taylor also struggles with the idea of being attended to by a Cheryl. Her initial discomfort is exemplified in her line “Oh... you’re the maid,” upon realizing that Cheryl is “working for the LeVays,” rather than Flip’s girlfriend whom Taylor first mistook her to be, and whom Cheryl herself wishes to be (19). Additionally, it speaks to Taylor’s discomfort in the LeVay household as she states “I usually clean when I want to fit in, but that’s Cheryl’s job, so I’m a little lost” (49). Since Taylor is unfamiliar with where things are in the house, as well as what Cheryl’s specific responsibilities are, she implies needing something from the kitchen in order to learn how to do for herself:

Taylor: Hi, Cheryl. Um, Spoon asked me to grab him some milk, I was just...

Cheryl: I'll get it.

Taylor: Oh, just tell me where things are. I'm perfectly capable.

Cheryl: Didn't think you weren't 'capable,' just though you wanted some milk. Fine, glasses up there. Milk in the fridge.

[Taylor *takes down two glasses and pours milk...*] (40)

While Cheryl seems perfectly content with her domestic duties, Taylor is continually bothered with what she perceives to be another Black woman in a subservient role.

Though Taylor has good intentions, her longing to assist Cheryl is sometimes overdone and insulting. The morning after the milk incident, Taylor once again annoys Cheryl with what should be a simple request for coffee:

Taylor: Do you mind if I put on a pot of coffee?

Cheryl: I'll do it. I usually wait until the first person gets up.

Taylor: I can do it... I don't mind.

Cheryl: Decaf or regular?

Taylor: Whatever's easiest.

Cheryl: You've made coffee before, right?

Taylor: Sure.

Cheryl: So you know one is the same as the other, right? (47)

Despite the fact that Taylor is trying to alleviate Cheryl's servitude, she often just makes the position seem more demeaning than Cheryl appears to think it is. This exchange is yet another example of Taylor's misgivings about race, class, and gender. Taylor sees herself and her mother in Cheryl, another lower-class Black woman serving and working for those of a higher status. Cheryl's job in the house is one that adds to Taylor's overall anxiety and feeling of being out of place among the LeVays.

As if meeting her fiancé's wealthy family was not enough pressure, quickly realizing she's had an affair with his brother certainly does not ease Taylor's awkwardness. It is instantly made clear that there is some kind of history between Taylor and Flip when she initially greets him by his first name "Harold?" in Kent's absence (16).

Though the two try to be respectful to the rest of the group, especially their partners, by keeping their interactions cordial, it does not take long for the others to catch on to the fact that they “go way back” (20). The extent of their relationship is not revealed until about midway through the play, after Taylor has unleashed all her inner beast on Flip’s girlfriend “Ember;” sorry, Kimber. (68). When they find themselves alone together in the kitchen, a glimpse into their short-lived romance six year earlier is uncovered. Earlier Flip revealed his own self-consciousness about class and race, in needing to do “a little ground laying with the folks” before introducing his (not actually) “Italian” girlfriend. Though amusingly enough, Flip flips on Taylor and tries to make her a villain for overtly expressing her feelings about very similar issues (19-20). In their cautious kitchen conversation, he attacks Taylor and her relationship with Kent “turn[ing it] into something so, ugly,” in an attempt to avoid her critique about his relationship with Kimber (69).

Flip: ...[y]ou seem to have no social restraint, which concerns me, since you’re going to be my little brother’s wife.

Taylor: Hey, be nice, I’m almost your sister.

Flip: No such thing. Right now you’re just the gold digger engaged to my brother.

Taylor: ...I love Spoon.

Flip: Trying to convince someone?

Taylor: ... You never called.

Flip: That was six years ago... Let it go. Damn. ‘Sides, you’re supposed to be the one in love with my brother.

Taylor: ...[y]ou made me feel so comfortable. Like I had never felt comfortable with anyone before. Except for when I met Spoon. You made me feel... wanted...

Flip: Don’t embarrass yourself.

Taylor: The truth embarrasses you?

Flip: ...you’re a beautiful, smart woman, and you’ll lay down with just anyone who’s a bit nice to you for gumbo and a cheap glass of wine? (69-71).

Their conversation continues, and Taylor explains how she ran into Flip on a personal retreat to Atlanta after just having a heated racial discussion with the professor and other students in her university honors forum. While Flip aims to humiliate her by expressing his nonchalance about their one-night stand, he explains that her self-confidence was a factor that contributed to his disinterest. Taylor has internalized negative feelings about her self-worth because of the established attitudes about Black women being both the inferior race and gender. Additionally, her confrontation with discrimination was exacerbated in her relationship with her own father, who made her feel unworthy of acceptance, by stating that “the Vineyard” was too complex for her presence or understanding. Seeking some semblance of love and affection, especially after her academic spat, she perceived Flip to be a possible sweetheart, but instead, he abandoned her like her dad, and added to her disappointment. To add injury to insult, he is now dating a White woman, which once again reminds Taylor of her status as a Black woman.

Finally, Taylor faces her arch nemesis, Flip’s White girlfriend Kimber. Their initial interaction begins in an awkward way as Kimber mistakes her for *the help*. Though her confusion is seemingly innocent, it also speaks to historical White assumptions that Black women are domestic servants.

Kimber: You must be Cheryl. Flip’s told me about you. Congratulations, about graduating...

Taylor: No. Taylor. Spoon, Kent. Harold, Flip’s brother’s fiancée.

Kimber: I’m sorry. So nice to meet you. (48)

Unsure how to introduce herself, Taylor jumbles her words and is insulted that she has been mistaken for the housekeeper. Though there were already reasons that the two might not hit it off, this mishap on Kimber’s part certainly does not contribute to their meeting of the minds. As the play moves forward, Taylor finds herself just as annoyed with

Kimber, as Cheryl is annoyed with Taylor. An educated woman who is troubled by her privileged status, Kimber's professed understanding of Blackness and inequality agitates Taylor. As Kimber talks about her academic background in "Political science with a focus on African American studies" and "achievement gap issues"... "with Black and Latino kids in the inner city," Taylor becomes infuriated and reflects back on her previously mentioned racial argument with her professor and fellow students (53, 62). Kimber's brooding about the poor conditions of the inner city and name dropping of Black feminists like bell hooks, as if she and Taylor were on the same page, further angers her and sends Taylor on a rampage about "the white people [that] finally drove [her] crazy" (60). After Kimber confronts Taylor about her privileged matriculation at an esteemed institution and about being the "daughter of a famous intellectual," she can no longer hold in her distaste for Kimber, whom she regards as just another inconsiderate "Becky" (55). Throwing around the name Becky in Kimber's presence is a sly insult, since it is a stereotypical/derogatory name given to White women because of the name's popularity among that particular group (Urban Dictionary). Once Taylor takes Kimber's comments to be directly personal, a verbal catfight begins and she lashes out in the worst possible way:

You don't know me... people like you can't see it. Your inner-city kids aren't supposed to succeed... As long as they stay ignorant and dependent on you, they won't have to mess up the white spaces. They let one or two of us in who've had enough privilege to almost play the game. Just enough to make us think we're special. It's a grand mindfuck. Then Kimmy here goes slummin' for five minutes and knows all about it.

[To Kimber] You can kiss my black ass is what you can do with your I'm-such-a-Goddamn-saint-inner-fuckin'-sanctum-of-rebellious-white-liberal bullshit. Don't you ever come at me like that. You need to get your white ass out of my world... [*Mumbling to herself*] Fuckin' I'll show Dad what

happens if he won't notice me... I'll fuck black and show them all, bitch.
(63)

Taylor's outburst not only voices her frustrations about Kimber, but also about Flip and Kimber's relationship. It also addresses the residual anger Taylor feels about her own sociopolitical status, as well as her relationship with her own father. Further, Taylor feels that Kimber has stolen her man (or men) in a sense, as she is involved with Flip, and engages in congenial conversations with both Kent and Dr. LeVay. Not only has Kimber won over Taylor's former flame Flip, she also speaks admirably about Kent's book, and is greeted with adoration by Dr. LeVay. Additionally, with her White privilege and affluent family background, she appears to fit in with the Vineyard LeVays better than Taylor does.

While Taylor and Kimber later reconcile, Taylor has effectively managed some sort of skirmish with everyone in the house in response to the ways in which each person requires her to confront her race, class, and gender. Dr. LeVay is the affluent father that fills the void of her own, to which she never had access. Cheryl is the maid that reminds Taylor of her own disenfranchised position, and in whom she sees traces of her mother and herself in having had to provide for themselves, as hers is possibly an occupation they would find themselves in without their education. Flip reminds Taylor of her inner struggle with self-worth within a society that constantly tells her she is at the bottom of the social scale. His negligence cuts deeper with the presence of his White girlfriend, Kimber, who Taylor perceives to have an advantage over her in the racial category. Finally, Kent is the one person who loves Taylor past all her flaws and insecurities, and consoles her with the fact that whether or not either of them fits in the Vineyard, they belong together and are worthy of each other's love and acceptance, which for Taylor is a

major concern. Additionally, the separate interactions that Cheryl and Kimber have with Taylor and the male characters speak to the effect of race, class, and gender boundaries from alternate vantage points.

After all is said and done, Cheryl seems to be one of the sanest, or at least tamest, individuals in the LeVay household. Coming from a working class background, she is the temporarily filling in for her mother, Ms. Ellie. Cheryl had a scholarship to a prestigious high school and saw the experience as an important opportunity to get into her first choice university. She talks about her educational prospects with Kent, who treats her like a sister, rather than a servant. At first, Cheryl does not mind Taylor, and even gives her approval. And although Cheryl has long admired and has a crush on Flip, she is not annoyed by Kimber or her Whiteness. While both brothers help and respect Cheryl, Flip is a bit more comfortable letting [her] “get it;” a quality that likens him to Dr. LeVay, as allowing others to clean up his mess also seems to be something he is perfectly content with (70). Generally, Cheryl has a calm disposition throughout the play, until she feels degraded by the other characters or negatively confronted with her race, class, and gender position.

Kent and Cheryl have a friendly sibling-like relationship, in which he neither tries to demean her position, nor do her job for her. He talks to Cheryl about going to college and having choices, such as Ivy League and high-status schools. She lists her options, stating “I applied everywhere... I wanna stay near Mama though, maybe NYU, Columbia... Princeton’s kinda far.” Kent is very encouraging by assuring her that she will “probably have [her] pick” (16). Initially, Cheryl thinks Taylor is a good match for Kent as she inquires: “so that must be your woman out there? She cute” (15). However,

she is later annoyed by Taylor's overcompensation as discussed earlier and finally expressed by Cheryl in her later tirade:

Taylor: It's fucked up because you all let her clean up your shit.
Cheryl: I didn't touch nobody's shit. Why you always want to make what I do shameful?
Taylor: I'm on your side.
Cheryl: No you're not. You spend the whole weekend up under me, apologizing to me, for me, over thanking me... like what I do embarrasses you... I do good, honest work that helps people... You just need to understand that I'm more a part of this family than you'll ever be. I've had a room in this house, in Aspen, and New York for as long as I've been alive. I think you've confused me for you. We're very different Taylor. I'm not trying to find my place... this is my home. (116)

Ultimately, Cheryl gets tired of Taylor invading her space and doing the most, so she decides to put her in her place. As Taylor was frustrated with Kimber for trying to understand her Blackness and socioeconomic position, so Cheryl is with Taylor for trying to overcompensate and understand hers. Their interaction also sheds light on the fact that although both she and Taylor are Black women, they do not necessarily share the same feelings or position about race and economic status.

“Cheryl! As I live and breathe. This is not the little girl I saw last year, surely not. Boys, there's a ravishing young woman toiling away in our kitchen” (28) Dr. LeVay greets Cheryl like his long lost child. Having known her since she was a young girl, they share some familial moments. Ironically, he mistakes her for her mother Ms. Ellie, early on when she offers him caviar in the kitchen, to which he responds:

Dad: Have you ever known me to eat anything raw, Ellie?
Cheryl: Cheryl.
Dad: Of course.
Cheryl: I think what you're looking for is behind the flour bin.
Dad: Then I guess you know what else I need. Pickled pigs' feet... Would you like to join me?
Cheryl: Oh God no! [*Beat.*] Thank you, sir.

Dad: That's funny. Too good for the finer things, huh? ... Your mother likes them cold, you know (38-39).

Here Cheryl and Dr. LeVay share his secret about eating his hidden soul food— pigs' feet and hot sauce, for which his family would shun him. He has a slightly suspicious Freudian slip in calling her Ellie, followed with a comment about what her mother likes to eat, though Cheryl does not consider that it has any direct connection to her. Though Dr. LeVay recognizes the implications of his race and class status throughout the play, his actions and words are sometimes operating from a double-, triple, possibly quadruple consciousness, as he sometimes asserts his Blackness, and other times tries to remain dignified and hide his pig feet. A prime example is his attempt to comment on the group's discussion about race and class relations that originated from Taylor rant about her women's studies class.

Flip: I'm not sure that class matters.

Dad: Son, I raised you better than that. This house has been full of octoroons and quadroons for three generations and you think our loving white neighbors wouldn't rather we move over to the bluffs with the other Negroes? Cheryl, could you top me off please, dear? (57)

While he acknowledges his position to some extent, Dr. LeVay's class issues are exemplified throughout the play once it is later discovered that he is Cheryl's father. Before Cheryl is made aware of this, Dr. LeVay boasts about her education and accomplishments, trying to quietly make up for his mistakes by paying her school tuition and providing anonymous financial support. He states, "Cheryl had a scholarship at the best high school in Manhattan... A black girl with a diploma from that school can go anywhere."(61-62) However, the fact that he has allowed Cheryl to wait on him, speaks to the complex and convoluted outlook he has on class status. Rather than really shake

things up and come clean about his affair, he continues to treat his own daughter as a servant to preserve his social status and alleged integrity.

Cheryl's composed demeanor is unraveled with the revelation that Dr. LeVay is her father. When informed of the matter by Ms. Ellie four years earlier, Dr. LeVay "set up a trust fund" for Cheryl, and passively began to provide for her academic success (126). Cheryl becomes irritated with her mother after telling her the secret over the phone, as she realizes that she is now stuck in the house catering to her father and half-siblings. She cries out, "I'm all by myself cleanin' up after the man, an' you choose now to say, 'Guess who your daddy is?' That's crazy" (75). Her very personal moment is interrupted when Kimber walks in the kitchen.

Cheryl: Oh shit... I gotta go... I'm gonna hear about that. That I said 'shit.'

Kimber: 'Shit' seems appropriate somehow.

Cheryl: ...Please don't say nothin' to nobody...

Kimber: I wouldn't.

Cheryl: Wakes me up, says, 'Guess who yo' daddy is,' and asks what I'm serving for breakfast. ... They all crazy. I don't know what to do.

Kimber: Are you asking me?

Cheryl: I don't see nobody else's bony white ass up in here... I guess you could say something, about something. Since you're here.

Kimber: I guess I could tell my daddy shit.... But it's complicated and I don't want to. Let's see. What don't we talk about in my family. My grandmother's brother married an Irish immigrant. In my world that's beyond unacceptable. (75-76)

While Cheryl is made to deal with her Maury Povich style "you are the father" reveal, this moment between her and Kimber illustrates the possibility of commonality between them, even though they have different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. This dynamic is interesting since Taylor so desperately wanted Cheryl to be like her, and although they have similar father situations, Taylor's reluctance to entertain the

possibility of others also being unfortunate, prompted Cheryl to be annoyed with her and point out their differences instead.

When Cheryl realizes that Dr. LeVay is her father, it rocks her world. What is also different about Cheryl as opposed to Taylor is that she was operating unknowingly all her life, in thinking that Dr. LeVay was just a man she and her mother worked for. While she tries to maintain her subservient role, because Dr. LeVay seemingly has no intention of telling what he knows, she eventually confronts him and the family about his secret.

...how the hell didn't not one of you sorry mothafuckas not figure it out... Because you don't think about nothin' but yourselves and your damn socioeconomic bantering, and bugs, and relationship dysfunction and shit... Eighteen years... Your daddy's been paying my tuition there since I started. Fought to have me accepted but insisted it remain on the DL... So, this is the thing that's the craziest. It wasn't that Mrs. LeVay was broken up about a kid who shares her own kids' gene pool washing her crusty sheets. No, the tragedy was that it got out... how can you live with yourself? (113-114)

With this big reveal, a modification of rapper Kanye West's infamous lyrics seems appropriate: "Eighteen years, eighteen years, and on her eighteenth birthday [she] found out [she *was*] his" ("Gold Digger"). This discovery links together the distinct class boundaries, connecting the working class Ms. Ellie and Cheryl with the privileged class LeVays. To uphold her high society status, Mrs. LeVay, who is never seen, threatens to sue Cheryl and her mother for ruining her reputation. This infuriates Cheryl, who unveils all of her feelings about the family and the long-held lie. Dr. LeVay's affair affects the entire family, and highlights the complexities of socioeconomic standing, even among individuals of the same race.

Overall, the play comes full circle once we find out why Dr. LeVay's character is simply called Dad within the text. This also makes his introduction to Taylor: "'Dad'"

would be weird, huh?” especially more significant. While he is obviously the father of Kent and Flip, he also takes on the role of father to Taylor, Cheryl, and Kimber in some way. There is a powerful moment between him and Cheryl that Taylor witnesses and provides commentary, based on her own experiences.

Cheryl: Eighteen years ago... I was a baby... I was really cute. And you couldn't see me, and love me, and want me? ...I just didn't matter? ...Your daughter? The first man who loves you is supposed to be your father... how can anyone ever love me right if you couldn't love me first? And I'm thinkin' I'm mad at the white girl, 'cause she took my men... but she didn't... they just don't see me. And I'm thinkin' I don't like Taylor 'cause she trying so hard to be seen. But I don't like her 'cause she like me. She got the same... holes in her. But all this time, it was you. I deserve to be seen.

Dad: I don't know what you want.

Cheryl: Then I feel sorry for you.

Taylor: She wanted you to say, 'I'm sorry... I love you... I'm here for you.' ...

Dad: I really should be going.

Taylor: Just tell me one thing. How do you do that? How do men make babies and then just, disregard them? ...What kind of sickness lets you just cut the inconvenient pieces out.

Dad: You're not talking about me, Taylor.

Taylor: ... Don't go. Stay and make it better.

Dad: ...I'm not your dad, Taylor.

Taylor: Please don't leave me— I can't lose another one... please... don't go. (126-129)

While the conversation started with Cheryl expressing her true feelings about Dr. LeVay's shocking behavior, Taylor relates with and empathizes with her by trying to advise Dr. LeVay on how to fix their relationship from this point forward. Additionally, Taylor sees Dr. LeVay as a future father figure to herself, so she is disappointed when it seems that he, like her own father, is planning to neglect Cheryl for fear that “it would be too complicated” (68). Similarly, if Kimber continues her relationship with Flip, Dr. LeVay will most likely become another father-figure for her. Kimber and Cheryl also shared the secret before it was revealed to the rest of the family, and compared their

“daddy shit” earlier in the play. Once Taylor advocates on her behalf, Cheryl is able to see that her internal anger and void comes from neither Kimber’s race and status, nor Taylor’s background and over-accommodation, but rather from the absence of a father figure in her life.

The final female character to explore is Kimber, who has been previously discussed in relationship to the other characters. The only White character in the story, she laughs at the fact that the family thought she was Italian, and refers to herself as “Straight-up WASPs;” meaning either White Anglo-Saxon Protestant or White Affluent Schooled Person (Diamond 52; Urban Dictionary). Though she hails from a pretentious and privileged family, she understands the implications of race and class, and the inherent benefits that come with her Whiteness. Though her critical stance on these issues initially offends Taylor, her approach attracts Flip and impresses Kent. As mentioned earlier, her ability to be understanding and identify commonality is something that appealed to Cheryl. Her presence in the story highlights class and race as dominant issues and causes everyone to confront them in their interactions with each other.

In a discussion about Kent’s book, Kimber talks about how much she related to the content. Taylor tries to keep up with them and insert her opinions, but there seems to be an understanding between them to which she is not quite included.

Kimber: Kent, I’ve been wanting to tell you how much I really enjoyed your novel... It reminded me of some of my own family dynamics... A good writer communicates across worlds by effectively communicating the specificity of his own world.

Taylor: I think the strength is in how universal the story is...

Kent: No, Taylor, I think she’s right. It’s only universal because I’m specific about the characters, the relationships...

Kimber: I’m just saying, I was moved... your imagery was amazing, and the ease with which you segue from one setting to the next. And the

landscape, like a metaphor for the fragile state of Michael's psyche. (52-53)

In her very flattering words about his book, Kimber establishes some camaraderie between herself and Kent. This connection goes beyond Flip's girlfriend getting along with his brother, as it highlights the somewhat common ground White women and Black men share in terms of societal standing. Additionally, this dynamic is one that leaves Taylor out as a Black woman. As White is the superior race, and men are the superior gender, Kimber and Kent are able to bond at a level to which Taylor is not capable. Further, Kimber has at some point, successfully gained the attention of both of the Black brothers, Flip and Kent.

Another point of contention throughout the play is the relationship between Kimber and Flip. They acknowledge in their own way how their race adds a layer of complication to their relationship, as a result of past and present societal expectations. Flip is anxious about his family meeting his White girlfriend, so he originally claims she is Italian in order to make her appear more ethnic and less of a possible shock to his Black family. Kimber also recognizes that she is judged for dating a Black man, and that it angers both Black and White people. In a conversation with Flip she bluntly states:

Kimber: We fuck and pretend people don't hate us for it.

Flip: We fuck and get off on that people hate us for it.

Kimber: You know Taylor's right. I was looking forward to talking you to the club and kiss you on the tennis court, and swimming in the pool— ... [but] it's not fun anymore. Never was. It's really a lot like... just picking a fight because it's there... [I want] [s]omething normal... (85-86)

Though Kimber is fully aware of the implications of dating a Black man, as a White woman, she has grown tired of either acting as if the racial difference does not exist, or flaunting their relationship just to anger the people who do not necessarily agree with it.

While she knows she cannot ignore race, she desires a somewhat normal relationship in which the main goal is not to get a rise out of others, but rather to enjoy her partner's company. As Black women are a group Kimber feels often has issues with interracial dating, she explains her overall concern with simply being in love to Cheryl and Taylor. What is somewhat interesting is that Cheryl's skeptical thoughts about it are not revealed until the very end of the play when she states:

Cheryl: I do hate that you're with him.

Kimber: Oh, I hadn't noticed.

Cheryl: ...So why do you like our men so much?

Kimber: Did I say I like your men? No. I like your... I like Flip. I love Flip... Flip's fine... the way only a fine black man can be fine... But people want to think it's just that... which is just, insulting on so many levels I can't even begin... I get why it would piss off black women, or white men. But it can't be my problem. All I can do is understand it, and sit in it. But I won't apologize. You'd be insulted if I did.

Cheryl: Blonde and pretty opens a lot of doors, but you'd want to have brown babies? Why?

Kimber: I want to have the babies of the man I love. They'll come out whatever color they come out, I will love them because they will be my babies. (124-125)

While Kimber can accept how her Whiteness infuriates people who are not privy to interracial partnerships, she is determined not to apologize for loving whomever she pleases. Although she is more than capable of holding her own ground throughout the play, she has to, in a sense, justify her relationship to Cheryl and Taylor, and convince Flip that there should be more to their connection than picking fights with people who are stuck in a racist or self-segregationist mindset. Further, though Cheryl and Taylor are both women, their difference in race cause Kimber to have to explain some of her choices as a White woman, that the two of them might not have made or do not quite understand as Black women. Finally, Kimber and Flip come from a similar privileged background

but she aims to make him realize that while race will always be a factor, this difference between them does not have to be the sole focus of their relationship.

Because of the tension about race, class, and gender difference, a major rivalry develops between Kimber and Taylor. While both are intelligent and forward-thinking individuals, it would seem that they would be able to connect on some level. However, their racial difference, once again provides them dissimilar perspectives on life that often triggers them to bump heads. Fortunately, by the end of the story, they are able to have a racially charged discussion and agree that society has inadequate expectations of women's intelligence and capabilities in general. Taylor first recalls being a young Black girl with exceptional potential, but that her White teachers thought satisfactory was all they should expect from her. Kimber then gives a comparable example of how a young white girl may be discriminated against in a similar way.

Taylor: So, I'm ten. I'm testing at like college level on the verbal skills... I come home with this report card that says, attendance, superior; penmanship, outstanding; math skills, could use improvement; reading, satisfactory... Mommy hits the roof... So we go to the school and she's hot. Really angry. And the teacher is like, 'How is satisfactory a problem? Satisfactory is fine.' ... And finally my mother says, 'what do you have to do to make sure my child's working up to her potential every second of every day?' And the teacher looks at me and looks at Mommy and says, 'But she is.' And Mommy says, "Satisfactory is not Taylor's potential.' And that was my last day at that school...

Kent: The point is the teacher couldn't wrap her mind around black and above average coming in the same package.

Kimber: But, for purposes of discussion, let's say you're the cutest, sweetest, prettiest little white girl in the school. In fact, let's make you Becky... And pretty much as long as you stay clean and smile at the teacher, which is easy because she's already smiling at you, and as long as you get along with your peers, which you do, because sadly, they've all been taught to value physical beauty above all else, and I'll even give you that you're good natured and passably intelligent. OK. I bet your parents won't question 'satisfactory,' if in fact they're even in the country long enough to see your report card. Because it just doesn't matter, your destiny is decided, as long as you coast and don't fuck it up, your fine.

Taylor: Because satisfactory is all Becky needs.

Kimber: Because satisfactory is all that is ever expected of her. (103-105)

While it takes Taylor some time to mull it over, she is eventually able to recognize the possibility that she and Kimber could have something in common, regardless of their racial difference. Though their gender camaraderie is implicit, the likeness in societal expectations of women as “satisfactory”, whether Black or White, is conveyed quite effectively in this example. As the cliché goes, Kimber and Taylor both learn not to judge a book by its cover and by the end of the play, have a meeting of the minds and develop some amount respect for each other. This is seemingly a theme for the play overall, in that many of the characters turn out to be different than their race or class standing might suggest.

Although this play has many moments of friction and opposition, it offers a number of perspectives on the issues of race, class, and gender through its three female characters; two Black, and one white, with varying backgrounds. While each character is very cognizant of their societal status as either a Black or White woman, they find ways to work against the institutions of oppression, and shape their identity, their relationships, and their partnerships, in their own individual ways. Taylor establishes herself as an intellectual, and beyond “satisfactory” Black woman. She pursues her relationship with Kent and finds her place among the LeVays, even though they were raised with different class backgrounds. She also comes to terms with her father’s ambivalence toward her, and though she at times seeks some affection from the other male characters: Flip, Kent, and Dr. LeVay; she accepts that she has been able to come into her own without him. Like Taylor, Cheryl has been able to go to pretentious schools and get a respectable education. Initially, she is more content with her working class social standing, though

the absence of her father is also a factor that bothers her. However, once she is informed that Dr. LeVay is her father, she is made to rethink her socioeconomic identity, and how to move forward knowing her ties to privilege, though it seems that Dr. LeVay does not intend to be more than a financial presence in her life. Kimber expresses her disgust with her privilege and the bubble only “satisfactory” expectations place her in. While her relationship with Flip was not pursued in order to insight a riot, she recognizes that their bond does not conform to societal standards. Additionally, her desire to be anything extraordinary eludes the customs of her race, class, and gender background. Though *Stick Fly* is far from radical Feminism, since the identity and experiences of the female characters are based partly on their relationships to their male counterparts, the text’s intricate view of realistic figures and situations illuminates the ways in which race, class, and gender are still issues in the present day.

Chapter Four

Conclusion: Critical Connections and Suggestions for Further Research

As both *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Stick Fly* illustrate, there is no unilateral experience for Black women. However, the societal confines through which these women are expected to navigate have often produced similar responses within a 50 year time span. While some significant events have taken place from the 1950s-2000s, race, class, and gender remain essential social issues that significantly impact Black women. Though the Women's Liberation Movement was initiated in the early 20th century, Black women's rights were not truly prioritized. This lack of voice among African-American women in particular led to a mid-20th century effort among Black men and women for civil freedoms such as the right to vote. The Civil Rights era was burgeoning in 1959 when Hansberry wrote *Raisin*, as the text highlights how racial discrimination especially defined one's existence, and affected their class standing as well. Societal norms also contributed to gender expectations and how women were expected to behave based on their relationships to their male counterparts. Conversely, *Stick Fly*'s first performance in 2006, follows not only years of activism for Black voting rights, but narrowly predates the election of a Black male president in 2008. Further, the text follows the 1970s/1980s Feminist movements that aimed to redefine women's societal position. Unfortunately, Diamond's work reveals that despite these progressive efforts, some forms of race, class, and gender discrimination that were present in the 1950s still exist today and greatly

influence Black women's experience. While Black people are no longer overtly subjected to racism and classism, there are still many instances in which the historical establishment of White male privilege places them at a disadvantage, and additionally subjugates Black women.

This study of *Raisin* (1959) and *Stick Fly* (2006) was engaged with a few concerns in mind: exploring and identifying similarities in the work of Black female playwrights who make Black female characters their focal point; investigating the ways in which Black women interact with other groups of the human race, especially Black men; analyzing the content of their plays as they contend with race, class, and gender; and lastly, revealing the resemblance in content over a 50 year time span which confirms that race, class, and gender remain societal issues. This conclusion complements the previous sections of text analysis by drawing some comparisons between the content of *Raisin* and *Stick Fly* as they address the issues of race, class, and gender highlighted in the above mentioned theories. Additionally, it suggests some related areas that could be explored for further research.

While 50 years have passed between the publishing of the two plays and their Broadway productions, the Black female characters still find themselves trying to establish and define themselves in relationship to *others*. *Raisin* displays the many roles of Black women in characters Beneatha, Ruth, and Lena, who are of a lower class standing. As sister, wife, and mother of Walter Lee, these figures speak to the Black women's experience in relationship to Black men. Additionally, Beneatha expresses her independence from the gender expectations placed on her by her two suitors, Joseph and George. *Stick Fly* also highlights Black women's relationships to their fathers and

partners, though there is the presence of financial means in this modern viewpoint. Taylor especially, feels a void from the abandonment of her father, and seeks acceptance from brothers Flip and Kent, and her soon to be father-in-law, Dr. LeVay. She also defines herself and her experience as separate from that of White women, as she has another of disagreements with Kimber, about her societal station as a Black woman.

Both plays contend with race, class, and gender in their own way. They especially are effective at recognizing class differences within the Black race. While both plays acknowledge the struggle of Black men, particularly with the characters of Walter and Dr. LeVay, they bring women to the forefront in their interactions with the male characters. Both Beneatha and Taylor especially make overt comments about racial inequality in addressing their societal standing. For instance, Beneatha, coming from a lower class, is confronted with George's upper class mentality and views on socially acceptable decorum on a trip to the theater. Beneatha challenges George about his stance on eccentric or culturally Black being unacceptable among the company of a majority White audience. Further, both he and Walter challenge Beneatha's desire to be a doctor, which was not a common profession for women in the 1950s. Similarly, Taylor is neglected by her father, who does not anticipate her fitting in with his new family and their vacation home in the high class Vineyard. Cheryl also remains in a similar position to Dr. LeVay, who kept his status as her father a secret, and though he has financially provided for her, intends to stay emotionally disconnected. McCormick explains how this event was crucial to the play's meaning and recognition of class difference.

Dismantling the roles and structures that kept her invisible, she declared, 'I deserve to be seen.' In this moment, Cheryl both unified and embodied the diverse storylines and complex identities of the play... The experience of 'seeing' Cheryl... captur[es] an unexplored aspect of African American

life: the struggles of those transcending class boundaries and negotiating new forms of marginalization in the process (444).

Once it is revealed that she is his child, class boundaries intersect and Cheryl is *seen*, she is no longer only in the domestic space. Thus, the (lower class) Black woman, a figure that is often not seen, becomes an obvious presence, which is a goal for Diamond, as well as Hansberry, and other Black female playwrights.

A performance review of the 2011 Broadway production of *Stick Fly* by Stacie S. McCormick expresses the fact that even though these plays by Hansberry and Diamond provide distinct viewpoints from different eras, each is valuable in studying African-American identity, especially that of Black females: “While the relations of race, class, and gender have clearly evolved since Hansberry’s ground-breaking play, it is clear from *Stick Fly*, that such negotiations will continue, and one hopes, again be staged on the Great White Way” (McCormick 444). It is interesting that while both Hansberry and Diamond wrote plays with similar content, the latter seemingly had a more difficult time being produced. Emily Mann, artistic director of a 2007 production in New Jersey describes how “*Stick Fly* was ready to go” afterwards, but that it was impossible to “get producers ...to look at it” (Mandell 44). She claims that director Kenny Leon was a major advocate for Diamond’s work and continued to sell it to producers until it received its 2011 premiere on Broadway. Leon states “I thought it had great roles for six incredible actors... I thought the subject matter would be of interest to traditional Broadway audiences, and that would combine with the black upper-class who could afford the tickets...” (Mandell 44). The support of Mann and Leon is crucial to the work of a Black female playwright like Diamond, who is striving to tell *her*-story and is up against the

dominant White culture, in which these narratives are often not commonplace and sometimes discouraged.

Some suggestions for further research include: exploring what other plays by African-American female playwrights have and have not been staged on Broadway in the last 50 years, and analyzing how the content and style may be a contributing factor. Another potentially relevant topic for study is to find and compare the content of texts from this time span that have been anthologized or widely published. Additionally, it would prove useful to analyze other texts throughout the time span of the 1950s to the present and identify what issues African-American females are primarily concerned with in addition to, or separate from race, class, and gender, if at all possible.

It is interesting that race, class, and gender inequality, three issues examined in Critical Race Theory, are often explored and written about in plays, though this framework has not often been identified as a tool to analyze the texts of Black female playwrights. This absence of research could be a result of availability and accessibility, or simply a general lack of existence of Black texts. Further, it may be quite possible that if these research analyses exist, they have not been published as Black feminist scholar Barbara Christian suggests in *New Black Feminist Criticism*, and Black female playwright Suzan Lori Parks notes in her *Elements of Style*. Also, it appears to be the case that what scholarship does exist about Black inequalities is disseminated among a select audience, censored and peer-reviewed for its perceived potency, and rarely actively affects the actual group about which it is written. What is unfortunate about academic publishing and Broadway production of Black women's writing, as well as the texts of other people of color, is that success in these arenas often means catering to the White

dominated society that the work critiques in the first place. Therefore, the writers are caught in a sense of double consciousness, as noted by DuBois, similar to the way in which they navigate in society. While they strive to change the system by which they are oppressed, they must meanwhile acknowledge and to a certain extent endure existing societal parameters for journal publication and commercial success – always looking at oneself through the eyes of others in order to present their controversial content.

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