



THE MYTH OF GENDER IDENTITY AND AMERICAN FAMILY SYSTEM: A FEMINIST CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF EDWARD ALBEE'S "WHO IS AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?"

Ms. Kainat Arshad

MS Scholar, University of Sialkot.

Kainatbajwa035@gmail.com

Ms. Madiha Saeed

PhD scholar, Government College Women University, Sialkot

apmadiha@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Sabboor Hussain

Incharge Graduate Research, Department of English, University of Sialkot

sabor.hussain@gcwus.edu.pk

Abstract:

This research qualitative in nature has been conducted with an aim to explore those socio-cognitive factors which shape gender identity. Gender identity and the struggle of one gender to gain control and dominance over other are the major concerns of this article. The feminist critical discourse analysis of Edward Albee's three acts play Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf is based on Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model. The analysis revealed that gender identity is nothing fixed and characters keep on assuming different gender identities as per prevailing situation. Van Dijk's concept of cognitive interface helped to establish the idea that characters' cognition served as a bridge between social structures and discourse structures. These discourse structures in turn reveal the identity a character performs in a certain situation. This study has roots in Psychology, linguistics and Sociology.

Key Words: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, Gender related Myths.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Gender-related problems have always been of great interest to the writers and philosophers of all ages. This age-old issue has, by now, got several dimensions added to the primal concern of gender equality. The attacks by one gender and counterattacks by the other have given rise to several gender-related myths prevailing in the society. These myths have acquired universal importance involving human nature. The fields defined for both genders are different, but they should not be graded based on superiority or inferiority (Bukhari and Ramzan, 2013). The Discourses created to support and negate such myths, in turn, have become subjects of research. The researchers are all the more interested in analyzing the texture of a text to glean meaning, thus bringing to surface the ideology at work behind seemingly innocent and harmless words. The liberal, radical and social views on gender equality are no more than myths created by specialized discourse.

Marriage and domestic partnership are just other myths supposedly ensuring women's security. Marriage has been regarded as an institution all over the world. It bounds a man to provide food, love, and security to a woman, but in most cases, this myth is shattered where either the roles are reversed or not defined at all. The privilege of leading is predominantly confined to male segments of society in almost every aspect of life. Under this condition, the women have always faced discrimination in education, job opportunities, and decision making in almost every matter (Web Page). Their discretion is most often not trusted. There are many factors responsible for

this phenomenon. This study uses feminist discourse analysis to look deep into the myths related to married women in particular, and all the women in general.

Gender equality is a highly negotiable myth in every society, be it Eastern or Western. The writers in every society consciously or unconsciously dwell on this myth. Edward Albee, a great American writer, is highly acclaimed for his absurd plays. Absurd characters create absurd discourse. The analysis of this discourse is all the more revealing, focusing on the characters caught in universal situations like the futility of specified roles of men and women in society.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to decode myths and dig out reality through an impartial analysis of all the assumptions, misconceptions, and myths about females. Women show leadership qualities, but their methodology may vary from that of men. The female wisdom can be deeply rooted than that of a man but is never acknowledged by the patriarchal society (Web Page). The women are feeble biologically but not necessarily mentally and emotionally. This study focuses on developing a realization that such differences need to be embraced, not judged. This study is a journey into the patterns of structured myth, creating discourses to find the real position, role, and status of women as opposed to myths.

1.3 Scope of the study

This study is multi-dimensional. Though the primary focus has been on feminism handled through discourse analysis, the study nevertheless touches upon several nuances. This study, to some extent, addresses the myth regarding the family as an institution. It highlights a strong Man as head and a weak woman as a subordinate. It also touches upon regression in familial ties evident through ongoing communication. From the investigation of myths related to gender discrimination, this study questions the societal standards of ascribing masculine and feminine gender roles to social actors. It also considers human cognition a vital factor in gender relations. This study can be helpful for researchers in the field of Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology.

1.4 Limitations of the Study

The in-depth study of the selected discourse opens up new vistas of meanings, which cannot be dealt with in one paper. The present study is about the gender-related myths created and broken through certain discourses, and it leaves the field open for other researchers who wish to take up the psychological or sociological dimensions for study.

1.5 Delimitations of the Study

Edward Albee is a writer par excellence. He raises his voice against the stale values of American society and remains a champion of absurd theatre. He produced some two dozen dramas in five decades. All of his works are critically acclaimed, but this study has been delimited to one of his great success "Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf"; his most representative work as far as the topic under discussion is concerned. This three-acts play demystifies the aura related to female subjugation and oppression. It also offers apt evidence for the flouting of myths as exposed through language in use.

1.6 Aims and Objectives:

The present research aims at differentiating reality from myth related to gender identity. It also aims at developing a clear understanding of the status of women in a patriarchal society. Feminism, with its tall claims, is yet to be crowned with its cherished objectives. This study looks forward to developing awareness that myths blur the visions of reality about issues like

gender identity and gender superiority. These myths, therefore, must be avoided. The objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the reality of gender-related myths from “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” by Edward Albee.
2. To try to establish gender identities in the selected text.
3. To delve deep into the dynamics of discourse to approach reality about gender trouble.

1.7 Research Statement:

Ever since the creation of Man, gender inequality has been a matter of general concern. This concern developed certain myths. These myths on a close analysis appear to be a far cry from reality. The unveiling of mythical stereotypes is essential for a clear understanding of social conditions at large.

1.8 Research Questions:

This study is an effort to find answers to the following questions.

1. How does the feminist critical discourse analysis explore the authenticity of gender-related myths in “Who’s afraid of Virginia Woolf?”
2. How are the genders proclaimed powerful or powerless through the analysis of discourse they produce in Albee’s selected drama?
3. What are the socio-cultural discourse dynamics that help shape and break gender stereotypes in the text under discussion?

2 Literature Review:

Feminism professes gender equity. It expresses an urge for women to be treated equally at different levels of social and familial interactions (Britannica Encyclopedia, 2019). Feminism, for Rogers (2013) is the advocacy of equality of men and women in social, economic and political spheres of life. Though it all started from the West initially, it professes ideals found acceptance all over the world. In literal terms, feminism promulgates women's rights based on the equality of human beings. Feminism occurred on the world stage due to discrimination against women. Discrimination against women has been in existence since time immemorial. We read that before Islam, baby girls were buried alive. Discrimination against womenfolk is still present with varying degrees (Britannica Encyclopedia, 2019). However, the same is fast diminishing with the increased literacy in the world around and the efforts made at the UN level. After a long period of subjugation and subordination, women began to realize their talents and demanded their rights. This emancipation process includes different movements, and the development of these movements was not a result of a series of haphazard events. Instead, it was a product of systematic efforts made over a certain period (Habib 2005). These efforts were directed towards one single goal: women empowerment. The eras of this struggle for women's rights show a marked difference in approach ranging from a non-existent feminist thought to a gradual buildup of feminist activism. This whole struggle can very conveniently be divided into three waves. Wave is a metaphor used to show the progression of this thought process, which ultimately was heard by the world. These waves made the women demand their right to vote, inheritance, divorce, and childbirth. Black women’s rights were also safeguarded (Habib, 2005). The latest version of feminism exists in the form of the fourth wave, which is nothing but just social media activism. The current wave, however, has faced severe criticism. A loud and

influential collective voice was raised against sexual abuse and harassment in the form of a worldwide movement under the slogan "Me Too". This movement was a great success as many celebrity women became vocal about sexual assault that they suffered (World Time Magazine, 2019). It all started with a hash tag in 2017 on social media. The objective was to make people realize the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment of women, especially at the workplace.

The inception and development of feminism motivated authors, critics and philosophers to investigate issues like gender identity and patriarchy. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1895) considered marriage an institution established to develop power relations in order to keep women weak and de-humanized. Kate Millet (1970) voiced politics involved in the traditional social concept of patriarchy. She asserts with force that patriarchy is not a social but political institution. The purpose of this concept is to create such relations in which one is privileged and the other is marginalized. Such unbalanced relations hold good unless and until, the powerless refuses to acknowledge power structures.

According to Helen D. Gayle President and CEO of CARE, there are ten myths about the women, which include: the place of women is in the home, girls cannot do Math and Science, she asked for it and women crack under pressure, etc. In many countries of the world, these myths cause a large portion of society to stay back. These myths strongly influence people's minds that they do not send girls to school and leave them uneducated. Nevertheless, to date, it remains a proven fact that dauntless individuals with all their efforts have drilled holes in the edifice of age-old myths, and their only purpose is to have a society free of gender bias. This gender inequality can also be seen at workplaces, where women suffer a lot compared to males. It has also been noted that there are very few opportunities for women compared to men because the jobs that women do have little room for promotions (Da La Rica, 2005). Many female managers are doing such kind of jobs, which are based on their interpersonal skills. According to Gavray (2004), "jobs done by females in most organizations are considered less valuable when compared to operational, technical, and financial activities mainly conducted by men". There are very fewer chances of promotions or career development for the women who occupy these positions and also less compensated as compared to men who occupy the same posts (Lemiere & Silvera, 2008).

The post second world war decades were not for American social structures. Many myths of superiority and domination gone un-noticed and accepted unconditionally were now under severe criticism especially the idea of masculinity and manhood (Kimmel: 2017). The disillusionment of masculinity being a trait of warriors added to the problem of gender identity: the issue that was going to become a big trouble. These decades witnessed the emergence of two very strong movements: the women's movement and the civil rights movement. People now openly questioned the predominant notion of traditional masculinity and demanded equality in all fields. The sub-groups of culture now developed their own new standards and claims of identity and manhood. Psychology delves deep into human consciousness and asserts (Deaux: 1985) that the term sex and not gender is to be used to refer to the biological differences between male and female. Gender stands for all those psychological associations in human cognition which give rise to traits of masculinity and femininity.

This research is a serious effort to de-construct the gender-related myths. Butler (1999) adds a new philosophical dimension to the complex question of sex and gender. He argues that though

sex is a biological phenomenon, yet gender is a cultural construct. The society establishes gender identities in binaries. Males produce sturdy and robust discourse, thus attributed to masculine genders. This unjust attribution probably is responsible for the lesbians who have risen as a third gender in response to this compulsory heterosexuality. According to Butler, gender, if not masculine, categorizes specific sex as 'subjects'. Considering this, there is only one gender, and that is female. Butler asserts that in every situation, the gender identity is related to the power, whosoever is dominant in a situation is masculine. The idea of gender, therefore, is in a state of flux all the time. The doer of an action is continuously in the making depending upon the situations and cultural contexts.

These cultural contexts are the domains of Discourse Analysis. In his book *Discourse Analysis* (2004), Norman Fairclough opines that discourse means a 'particular view of language'. It also refers to language as a social life phenomenon, interacting and being constructed by other elements. Discourse Analysis, according to Fairclough, is much more than mere linguistic analysis; it in itself is a process of moving to and fro about a target which he calls text with an honest focus to find out the order in the discourse which connects it to the network of social life. John Flowerdew (2013), in his book *Discourse in English Language Education*, elucidates the fact that discourse analysis explores structures and functions of language in a particular context. It is here in these contexts that language is used to create bias and specific ideology regarding women (Cameron:1992)

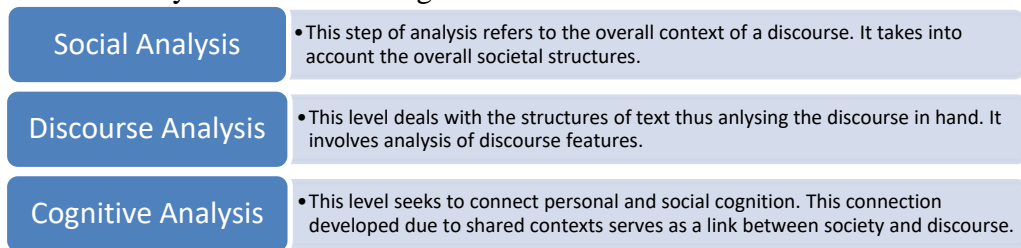
A very important issue that lies within the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis is that of Identity. Flowerdew (2013:183) opines that identity is not fixed. It is fluid and always in a state of flux. It keeps on changing with a change in the role an individual performs in private and social affairs. It also changes with the passage of time. This key issue of identity acquires paramount significance in our social interactions. The individuals' identity is a product of how they present themselves and how their identity is perceived by others. It thus, becomes a binary construct depending on cognition and society. Identity, therefore, is not an attribute which is there already; it is rather constructed through such dimensions as time and space. These gendered identities are also responsible for the 'latent attributes' of lexical variations found in the discourses produced by men and women. Bamman, Eisenstein and Schnoebelen (2014) conducted a study on gender, language and social network connections. Gender identity becomes ambiguous when sought through configuration of language. It leads to the opinion that gender is one of those social categories which are not absolute. They are rather performances and change with change in situation.

Michelle M. Lazar (2007) raises the question about the need for feminist discourse analysis. Apparently, there is nothing common in feminism and discourse analysis, but the bonding between them can help the deprived half of the society by voicing their discourse loud and clear. Feminist discourse analysis can explore several avenues of social experience concerning gender, power, and ideology. In her research article, Elspeth Tilley (2018) takes into account the growing significance of this research method, which has now become an umbrella term. It has developed subfields of inquiry like material feminist analysis of discourse and black feminist discourse analysis. Irrespective of discourse type, all feminist discourses become one as far as the objective is concerned, and that is to make the unheard heard, and invisible, the visible.

3 Research Methodology

This research, qualitative in nature, will use the conceptual framework of Judith Butler's doctrine (1999) of gender as an unfixed identity. Genders exist in binaries and get identity under opposition. The research methodology for this study is Textual Analysis conducted on Edward Albee's "Who is afraid of Virginia Woolf?" Norman Fairclough and Isabella Fairclough (2015) hold that "*Textual analysis is a necessary part of discourse analysis and discourse-based interpretive political analysis*" (2015, p. 190). They believe that previous discourse analyses can be enhanced by incorporating textual analysis. For them, the texts are 'multi-functional'; these can be a form of action, a representation, a revelation of identity. The textual analysis identifies and connects all the various functions performed by texts (2015, p.187). It is, therefore, that an in-depth analysis of text would be conducted using Feminist Critical discourse analysis as a research approach. Feminist Critical Discourse analysis in contemporary times has acquired the status of an umbrella approach that is multi-disciplinary and can be applied to various disciplines like Psychology, Sociology, Media Studies, Gender Studies, and so on (Tilley: 2018). Feminist Critical discourse Analysis will help surface the switching over roles manifested through language use in certain situations. It will help identify how and when language is used to empower, intimidate, and belittle the participants involved in a communicative act. It will also elucidate how gender roles are changed with a change in discourse and vice versa.

The textual analysis will be conducted using Teun A. Van Dijk's famous Socio-cognitive model. CDA, for Van Dijk, is a robust tool to detect power play as exposed through the written or spoken form. Moreover, CDA is instrumental in revealing a significant part of the speaker's ideology, identity, gender, aims, and mostly political position. This socio-cognitive model facilitates the analysis at the following three levels.



Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model

This model develops the relationship between the cognitive phenomenon and the discourse structures. This triangular model brings psychology, critical linguistics, humanities, and social sciences into play. (Van Dijk, 2009, pg.62) Using this model can help the researcher understand and analyze the mental makeup of social actors involved in social interactions.

The plays written by famous American playwright Edward Albee have been taken as the population for this research study. Out of this population, his most seminal work *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, has been chosen as a sample. So, the primary source for this research is Edward Albee's three acts drama "Who is afraid of Virginia Woolf?" The secondary sources include the scholarship from theorists, researchers, and academicians. Internet resources and peer guidance also seek to explore dimensions attached to the contention. The discourse produced by all the four characters has been analyzed to investigate gender-related myths, thus bringing out the perceived versions of reality.

Data Analysis:

Critical discourse analysis is a powerful tool used to investigate the abuses of power, as revealed through written and spoken discourses. This research uses Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive model to bring the often raised and yet unresolved issue of gender identity and the dynamics of power related to masculine identity. The construction of identity has been concerned with various disciplines like sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and CDA. Interestingly, the latter has come to provide linguistic, cognitive, and social methods for analyzing identity construction. Identity is nothing fixed; it is always in a state of flux changing over time, and according to the prevailing situation. The discourse under consideration is an apt example of the contention mentioned above.

The socio-cognitive model by Van Dijk is one of the well-known frameworks used for critical discourse analysis. This model includes three levels that facilitate the analysis. The first level is Social Analysis, which is often referred to as overall societal structures which means, a thorough analysis of the context. The second level of the model is Discourse Analysis. This level deals with the form of the text (including structure, syntax, lexicon, and semantics). The third level or dimension of this model involves Cognitive Analysis. In this level, Van Dijk believes that personal and social cognition is the bridge between society and discourse. This socio-cognitive aspect makes Van Dijk's framework different from other frameworks in Critical discourse analysis.

The discourse selected for detailed analysis is Edward Albee's early play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. This research study's primary focus is to develop an understanding of how the main concerns related to gender, language, and power find their representation in discourses produced by human beings. It also tends to find the degree to which gender identities are interchangeable not based on the biological differences, but the roles performed by social actors in certain situations. The study also reveals the fact that masculinity at times merges or opposes femininity and comes near or drifts away from the traditional and socially defined gender roles. The present analysis is deeply rooted in the characters' psychology expressed through their struggles and behaviors. Using the patriarchal domination as the dominant social and cultural context, the characters of Albee engage in a never-ending battle to gain command through verbal and physical strategies. All these aspects of analysis have been investigated using Butler's lens of gender identity and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model, thus conducting a systematic analysis.

The play "Who is Afraid of Virginia Wolf" by Edward Albee shows the complications of the married life of a middle-aged couple, George and Martha, and also a young couple, Nick and Honey. One late evening George and Martha receive an un-humorous younger couple, Nick and Honey. They visit them for the first time, but the hosts are not hesitant at all to let the guests know about their bitter, unhappy, and frustrated married life. The arrival of the guests and the continued verbal fight of George and Martha signify that they are fed up with norms of society and are in no mood to perform the fake roles that society demands them to play.

The whole play takes place on the college campus of New England in the home of George, a Professor of History at the college. The play begins with the returning of George and Martha from a party held at Martha's father's house. Both of them are in a quite drunken state, and Martha tells George that some guests are coming to their home after some time. George reminds her that it's 2'0 clock in the morning, but in reply, Martha sings, "Who is Afraid of Virginia Wolf", to the tune of "Who is Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf". The guests come right at the time when Martha yells at him, "Fuck you". Their guests, Nick and Honey, show that they regret to



come here. Nick, a new Biology Professor at President's College, praises the President's attitude towards him. Martha is pleased with all this since she has always been proud of her father. Martha appears to be an obedient daughter but also a demanding wife. She wants her husband to be as successful as her father. Their social lives are connected with their professional lives. Due to the preferences of Martha's father, they often have some guests.

George informs Nick and Honey about their son, who will be 21 the following day. They try to show comfort, but the bitterness is also rooted in their expressions. George and Martha talk about their marital issues, but Nick is not interested in involving in others' matters. As the story comes toward the end, Nick and Honey realize that they have a fictitious son about whom George and Martha were talking. It is all imaginary and fictitious. After that point of realization, Nick and Honey leave their house. Towards the end of the play, all the illusions are revealed. Now the audience feels hope in their relationship, which was full of bitterness and aggressiveness. It seems that Martha is trying to accept their relationship, which does not seem possible. When George asks "is Martha all right", she replies with "Yes, No", which shows a bit of mixture towards the resolution. Now George and Martha have to face the reality of life despite all the illusions and fantasy. Both of them wear masks to hide the bitter reality, and Martha scares to face society's reality. The end is in a tense mood when George sings, "Who is Afraid of Virginia Wolf"? Here she confesses for the first time that she has a fear of Virginia Wolf. This is the first time when she reveals any kind of weakness about how to face society. At this time, Martha hopes that she can love George and lead a peaceful life with him without any illusions.

During the whole game of power and dominancy, the whole play shows Martha's orders, shouting, vulgarity, and disrespect to her husband. At the start of the play, Martha catches her audience's attention by her rough language and vulgar behavior. From time to time, she belittles George by telling him, "you don't know nothing" and also "you don't do anything". They always try to hurt and humiliate one another, like when Martha says, "I swear... if you existed, I'd divorce you". She has a tendency to control him. At certain times, she behaves like a child by her style of talking as when she says, "I'm thirsty" to catch others' attention. However, she never presents herself as a loving and caring wife. She compares George with her great father while at the same time George also makes fun of his father when he says, "Your father has tiny red eyes... like a white mouse". At certain times George calls her a "Monster" as she acts like a "monster", while at some other times, she represents herself as a sweet, calm, and loving wife. It all, therefore, turns out to be a game of ever-changing identities.

In the beginning, George seems to follow her wife's all the orders like a very obedient person, just like a woman or a wife. He remains quiet even when she orders and tries to humiliate him. However, later on, he acts aggressively and also makes objections. Even, he performs a joke by trying to kill Martha. Later on, his character portrays physical aggressiveness at certain times. Here he takes up a true masculine identity according to the immediate context he finds himself in. Towards the end of the play, he changes everything the way he wants.

The concept of Butler's theory of performativity is present in the usage and philosophy of language. The basic idea of performance elucidates that establishing gender identity is like role-playing, and this type of language clarifies this complicated concept of performativity (Dent and Whitehead, 2000). Martha and George perform their roles, along with their verbal actions, to show that they are make fun of their gender roles. It seems to reinforce Butler's claim that human beings are always involved in the gender playing game. In fact, no fixed gender role is performed

by characters; both genders (masculine and feminine) portray these performances despite being a specific gender. Taken in this respect, all the characters in the play perform masculinity and femininity in a certain way.

Thus, the shifting of gender roles provides an excellent example of Butler's idea that genders do not exist in their original form but do only the socially constructed ones. They follow society's norms and values, so they have to perform the way society or prevailing situations demand. So, there is a state of dynamicity in the characters of the play. By noticing the characters of the play, it can be realized that George mimics femininity while Martha mimics masculinity. The whole play conveys the fact that genders can only come into existence by their performance.

As far as George and Martha's characters are concerned, they appear to be consciously trying to mimic their gender roles in terms of performing parody. They try to portray themselves as society and culture expect from males and females in terms of their behavior. So, gender roles are defined by the norms of society. Martha often blames George for his incompleteness concerning their relationship and failure in his career. Their incapacitated yet sympathetic relationship resounds in the imaginary story of their fictitious son— a handsome young boy.

Besides George and Martha, there are also other characters in the play which appear in disruptive performances like Honey, who initially seems to be a very humble and sweet housewife. When she comes into the house, Martha asks her "how she is", she replies, "I'm perfectly fine", she always tries to be calm and humble when others are hurting her. Later on, in the play, her character changes from calm to aggressive. She often remains in a drunken state and shows her inner dissatisfaction of not becoming a mother. She takes up activities that are associated with the dominant masculine gender.

Nick is an athlete and has a healthy and well-shaped body, yet he does not perform like a 'man'. He cannot satisfy Martha, and she tells him, "you are a flop", "you are no man". Actually, all the characters of the play perform their roles of 'man' and 'woman'; they are not actually like that. In the beginning, George is portrayed as a powerless man who is being humiliated by his wife. However, as the play progresses, his character becomes gentle and harsh.

Similarly, Martha portrays herself as a vulgar woman who always shouts and orders her husband, but towards the end, she tries to display her love for her husband, which she continuously denies from the beginning. Honey's personality also varies from the beginning of the play towards the end, from a very calm and loving lady to a demanding one. All the characters in the play show a change in terms of their genders. The psychology of characters also changes from the beginning towards the end. At the end of the play, all the imageries and illusions sort out with the real picture of the society that is very harsh.

The characters are able to tease each other because of the socio-cognitive aspect of their communication. The play offers much scope concerning the shared social consciousness of American society at that time of history. That was a time of economic stability, but there existed a yearning for fulfillment as far as the societal and familial accomplishments were concerned. The concept of a happy family revolved around a happily married couple with a son. Martha and George bear that the social norm of a happy marriage and pretend to conform to this idea. The play reveals the tormented side of human psychology, which makes the social actors' revolt against conservatism and social conformity. This non-conformity makes identities ambiguous. The absurdity of identity is revealed through biting remarks and meaningless conversations. These conversations manifest dysfunctional identities. This fact brings out another reality that

Martha being a woman, has to depend on her father before marriage and on her husband after marriage to keep her identity intact. The patriarchal society never offers her a scope to develop her own identity. She is the weak sex who needs a male identity. Martha, however, challenges her husband's superior identity as a male. Aristotle believed that men had more teeth than women, but here Martha is seen saying, "I've got more teeth than you've got".

The struggle for power between husband and wife can be seen from the very start of the play. The very first sound that is heard is a woman's laughter off-stage. Each character in this play produces a different discourse. George is coherent and elegant. Nick is seen getting his superiority established through his inflated conversation. His speech can very quickly be judged. Honey has a disturbed mental condition that very often trails off. Martha probably is the most interesting character who can be seen in direct opposition to societal and familial norms. She openly renounces and challenges male dominance's futility in these words, "I'm loud, and I'm vulgar...and I wear the pants in the house because somebody's got to". Thus, she becomes an epitome of Butler's idea of masculine identity that whosoever is powerful has masculine identity irrespective of biological bifurcation. Her dialogues move from the swearing and foul-mouthed cries to the melodic sound of a tender, silver-tongued poet when she speaks about her son. Here she adopts the identity of a loving mother. Identity as a flexible entity and can be traced when towards the end of the play, the roles are reversed, and traditional identities are resumed. In the end, George can be seen singing "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf", to which Martha replies, "I am". As soon as the traditional identities are resumed, Martha recedes into the cocoon of insecurity and frailty. She now needs that sense of security and safety, which is traditionally attached to the masculine gender. Here George attains masculine while Martha attains feminine gender identity.

Conclusion:

Van Dijk's model focuses on the cognitive interface between two structures: society and discourse. In his viewpoint, there is no direct link between these structures, and these structures affect the minds of language users. These structures are embedded into the cognition of social actors who can then relate them in text and talk. This human cognition thus developed is responsible not only for our actions but also for communication. A socio-cognitive approach to discourse maintains that social realities are first constructed and imbibed into the minds of social actors who conform to these constructed realities through their words and actions (Van Dijk: 4). *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf* also emphasizes that gender identity is a socially constructed reality and does not require a specific natural form. Albee takes courage to destroy all the lines drawn between fixed categories of gender, thus strengthening the Butlerian idea that every individual is a blend of different genders. The fluidity of gender identity finds manifestation in how the different characters behave at different times and in different contexts. The essence behind switching to gender binaries is the power play. The powerful one is Man, and the weak one is a Woman. Albee's characters, therefore, are not men and women; they instead play men and women.

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