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***Oklahoma!* & Gender Roles**

The world of musicals is created in such a way that it becomes really difficult to decipher the hidden motives of a particular musical. Although musicals might seem to be created with a mere purpose of entertainment, it always contains copious hidden messages that can only be visible once it is analyzed carefully. One such musical that is not only produced for the sake of entertainment, but to accentuate a larger message is the production *Oklahoma!* created by Hugh Jackman. In *Oklahoma!*, viewers are exposed to a reality of social differences that highlights the stereotypical norms between men and women where one can lucidly see how the female characters are delineated as somewhat of an “outsiders” due to their assigned roles within the society.

Susan C. Cook, a professor at the School of Music and Women’s Studies, writes the article “Pretty Like The Girl: Gender, Race, and Oklahoma!” to underscore how the musical *Oklahoma!* incorporates different tactics/elements in order to delineate social differences between each genders and represent the “otherness” within the musical. Cook publishes this peer-reviewed article, in the 21st century, to target and apprise young experts about how choreographic, ethnicity, and gendered artifices are utilized in a musical to showcase the profuse social issues within a society. In her writing, she uses logos to mention how the musical

Oklahoma! employs the strategy of juxtaposition between characters to define social differences amongst same and opposite genders, such as in the case of the characters Curly and Ali Hakim and Laurey and Ado Annie. She informs the readers that juxtaposition is a tactic used in order to insinuate how characters are either glorified or disparaged inside a society as they adhere to the assigned role types given to them, suggesting various injustices are present in society that demolishes gender equity. Lastly, Cook uses ethos to raise awareness to young viewers/readers about how it is common to exert meters, pitches, dialect and tones inside a musical to deplore individuals based on their genders, making them the “outsiders”. These strategies worked well in attaining the role of gender in the society and helped Cook inform viewers that artifices were used in *Oklahoma!* to veil the darker side of society.

Although *Oklahoma!* was created by Rodgers and Hammerstein, there were other collaborators playing a fundamental role such as Agnes de Mille. It is said that she plays a principal role in the production of the musical, as she is credited for the show’s dark side, providing a counterpoint to much of Hammerstein’s work. The author Kara Anne Gardener, an Associate Dean at the Minerva Schools, writes the article “Agnes de Mille: Telling Stories in Broadway Dance”(Kingdom, Oxford University Press (2016), 21-46) with a mission to present, to musical experts, the unmediated facts about the creation and techniques used while producing *Oklahoma!* Gardener specifically targets aspiring directors, playwrights and musical experts who show delight in examining the prosperity and history of musicals. Her purpose of writing this scholarly article is to delineate the aspects of de Mille’s choreographic contributions that have enhanced every aspect of *Oklahoma!* For example, Gardener mentions how de Mille uses dance methodology to embellish the plot of *Oklahoma!* and expose gender roles while in the process of

character development. In her writing, she uses pathos to imply how choreography used in musicals helps express the emotions of individuals as they express their sexual desires. She also states how since the production was around the 1940s, issues such as racism, white superiority and sexism were prevalent, which makes it even easier for musicals to incorporate themes revolving around gender roles. Gardener finally uses ethos to represent stage and dance directions directed by Mille, to integrate sexuality and gender role/types onto the show by stating the various social issues, mainly the role of females.

In musicals, producers usually tend to have quite liberal values within most areas of their production, however there are times where they focus on the conservative perception, such as the role of women in society. This seems to be evident in *Oklahoma!* as it is discussed in the peer-reviewed article [“I Enjoy Being A Girl”: Women In The Plays Of Rodgers and Hammerstein](#)” written by Richard M. Goldstein. In his writing, Goldstein targets audiences with interest in studying music, lyrics and dialogues and informs them about how musicals often have a more conservative perspective while representing the place of women in a society. He makes the use of logos to indicate how songs, dialogues and music becomes a popular tactic to segregate roles of characters inside a society. For example, he mentions how one can easily identify the heroine in a musical just by looking for a female singer of a waltz, indicating that singing tactics are also used to show social differences. The author, Roger Cushing Aikin, an Associate Professor at Fine Art of Creighton University, also writes the article [“Was Jud Jewish? Property, Ethnicity, and Gender in Oklahoma!”](#) with a mission to inform reviewers of musicals about the technique used to create *Oklahoma!* makes the sexual and social complexities an enigma by putting the “veil” of romance plot. For example, he discusses how Curly acquired the

title to Laurey after winning some property. Even though it might seem as if he won the land for the sake of Laurie, it hints to the fact that women don't get a say. Musicals represent women as almost the archetype of property, as they have no roles in decision making. Aikin successfully defines the social complexities with gender roles by stating how women can be acquired just how land can be acquired by men, thus making awareness of gender equity inside *Oklahoma!*

To further examine *Oklahoma!*, authors state how salient it is that male characters play the superior role than that of the females. In the popular source "[Sexualized Saturdays: Oklahoma! A Sexist Classic!](#)" Lady Geek Girl, using pathos, discusses how in the musical, only the male figures are given the right to be entitled to the female characters. The author writes this blog to inform the general public about how sexism is prominent within the musical as viewers get to see how the females are being tossed back and forth to the male characters. This is represented when she mentions the circumstances of Laurie, trapped between two men, and Addo Annie, slut-shamed for being free with sexuality. Contrary to the gender role of women, the males are seen as judgement free, regardless of their acts. Similar to Lady Geek Girl, the author Stacy Wolf, in her popular article, "[A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical!](#)" addresses to the general audience about how Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals pertain a woman character who needs to be taught a lesson, and that lesson is usually taught by a man. This tells that women have been generalized in popular culture, impeding them from having their own stand.

Musicals are created for entertaining people, however there is always a reality that lurks under the surface of entertainment. As the many authors examined the musical *Oklahoma!*, it

became eminent that it is a production where there is a bigger reality than what is shown to the viewers. After the authors delve into each element and techniques used while its creation, viewers and readers get to see the social complexities, specifically complexities in gender roles, that are hidden behind the curtain of a romance plot. It becomes lucid that *Oklahoma!* not only showcases a plot filled with joy and laughter, but also pertains to an ambiguous plot where we see the darker side of society filled with social differences such as gender roles!