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The Language and Culture of a Dream: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study has analyzed the culture and language of the American Dream in *Blue Surge*. It shows the effects of the formula of success and the competition presented by this dream; and, how it produces neurotic individuals trying to cope with the competitive society by means of neurotic strategies. This study has used Karen Horney's theories and strategies. Horney says neurosis is engendered from the conflicting values of the competitive culture such as the absence of means to fulfill goals which are set for the individuals and harsh childhood experiences. The paper has analyzed the main characters' languages, their psyches, and their defensive strategies according to Horney's theories of Neurotic needs, which consider cultural elements as an important factor in producing neurotic individuals. The results show that the members of this society, the rich and the poor, all become neurotic individuals who are searching for defensive strategies, since individuals are living a social life and cannot escape its consequences.

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1. Introduction

Rebecca Gilman deals with cultural and social issues in her plays. This playwright tries to explore big issues of the contemporary society in her plays as well. One of the most important issues that appear in her play, *Blue Surge* (2001), is the American Dream. This dream presents a set of ideals and opportunities for people to reach success.

In her works, Gilman does not try to present any solution but expects the audience to be engaged in the issues she portrays (Jones, 2000; Smith, 2008). Smith (2008) continues by mentioning that “although there is a limited number of scholarly studies on Gilman’s works, she presents worthy materials (social issues like abuse, violence, and manipulation) to make her audience think about them besides being entertained” (p. 2).

One of Gilman’s “issue plays” is *Blue Surge* (2001). It discusses issues of culture and social classes, the American Dream, and prostitution (Smith, 2008). It is the story of Sandy, a young prostitute, and Heather who work under the title of being masseuses and bond with policemen named Curt and Doug who, respectively, wanted to arrest Sandy and Heather, at the beginning of the play. Beth is Curt’s upper-middle-class girlfriend, who reprimands him of not trying hard to get a raise at his job. All in all, Curt sees himself as a follower of his dreams as well as Sandy, who is now her own boss and does not have to pay commission to a pimp. They are trapped in living the American Dream, which has been set for them, and they are going to achieve it regardless of the means, no matter how hard the road gets.

The American Dream has always been important in America and for the American people. This dream had played a big role in Americans’ social life and culture. At the same time, Americans have always placed a very high value upon social life, emotions and success; “communication of emotions is a fundamental aspect of social life” (Keshtiari & Kuhlmann, 2016, p. 72). The concept of the American Dream and its culture exerts an enormous influence on American social life and culture. The promises of wealth and success made by the American Dream are powerfully appealing. It offers these enticements to

everyone alike, to the poor to become rich and the rich richer, to the native-born or the immigrant, and to women and men. This dream constitutes a better, richer, and fuller life for everyone and provides equal opportunity for all regardless of their circumstances of birth or position (Adams, 1931). However, according to Cadwell (2006), this portrayal is transformed from idealism through realism to cynicism. The influences of this ideology on people’s minds and identity are studied, and the conclusion shows that the dream is just a product of Americans’ imagination and it is not real (Samuel, 2012) and that they are not living in a classless society. The American Dream makes people class conscious. Isherwood (2002) mentions that Gilman raises the audience’s class consciousness in *Blue Surge*. He continues that,

[T]he limits that America’s unofficially stratified society imposes on the lives of its citizens are soon put before us when it’s revealed that Curt’s girlfriend, Beth, is a member of the upper middle class ... her displeasure with Curt’s lowly cop status is also fairly obvious.

Blue surge shows characters that are trapped and cannot escape poverty like Sandy who gives in to prostitution, or like Curt, who goes down the hill while he aspires upward mobility (Isherwood, 2002; Sierz, 2011).

The characters of *Blue Surge* are the emblems of what the American Dream and its culture have taught Americans during generations, and it shows how it affects their lives and more importantly, their psyches. Analyzing the characters’ language and psyches from the two aspects of social and psychological issues at the same time is significant. Moreover, the characters’ psyches are studied according to Karen Horney’s theories of Neurotic needs (1937, 1942, & 1950) which consider cultural elements (e.g., competition) as an important factor in producing neurotic individuals. Therefore, Horney’s theories (1937, 1942 & 1950) are used to analyze the psyches of the characters of the play especially Curt, Sandy, and Beth who are using different defensive strategies in dealing with the competition produced by the American Dream.

2. Methodology

Literature, culture, and psychology when studied hand in hand can present a comprehensive analysis of human minds. Karen Horney is among the Neo-Freudians who added newer social and psychological dimensions to Freudian analysis. According to Horney (1937), Freud has attributed great priority to the biological factors in analyzing the psyches. "This tendency [Freudian analysis] has led psychoanalytic writers to believe, for example, that wars are caused by the working of the death instinct, that our [American] present economic system is rooted in anal-erotic drives ..." (Horney, 1937, p. 282). On the other hand, the Neo-Freudian psychoanalysts such as Karen Horney, Erich Fromm, and Harry Stack Sullivan adopted cultural orientation in their studies concerning psychological conflicts such as neurosis. Horney (1937) suggested that the sociological aspects should be adopted to explain the formation of neurosis in individuals' psyches.

According to Horney (1937, 1950), neurosis is engendered from the conflicting values of the competitive culture such as the absence of means to fulfill goals which are set for the individuals (1937) and harsh childhood experiences (Horney, 1950). To relieve tensions, neurotics use defenses in dealings with other people, and utilize interpersonal defenses (Horney, 1942, 1950), which are as follows:

1. Compulsive moving toward people, the self-effacing solution, in which compliant individuals seek to be loved and approved by the powerful partner.
2. Compulsive moving against people, the expansive solution, in which aggressive individuals seek mastery, power, social recognition, and prestige.
3. Compulsive moving away from people, resignation, in which the detached individuals seek freedom, self-sufficiency, and personal achievement.

Therefore, in order to analyze the interpersonal relations among characters considering the cultural effects of competition and success ethics of American Dream, Horney's theories would help this study.

3. Analysis

3.1. The Culture of the American Dream and New Formula for Success and Competition

America, from the early time of the Puritan settlement, had the dream of hope, happiness, social prosperity, and a better life for all people; and finally, the dream of an empire. Through the centuries, Americans considered success in their work and life. This success was not only in having money but in all aspects of their social life.

Across all social classes, there is a strong faith in the American Dream and the possibility to become rich. Becoming rich implies moving up the ladder of social class. New York Times published an excellent series of articles (e.g., DePalma et al., 2011), offering thoughtful commentaries on how the construct of class interrelates with health, marriage, religion, education, immigration, status, and culture in the United States. In this report, the analyst writes that in the survey conducted for the series, respondents identified occupation, education, income, and wealth as the four major components of the class. Yet class, except in a few myth-making exceptions, is arguably the single most important element in achieving the American Dream of the good life of affluence and happiness.

Contrary to what would appear on the surface, data from the study shows that class mobility has become more stable since the 1970s. According to Horney (1950), the downward mobility and not even stability is seen in Curt's life who wanted to achieve the American Dream by means of being connected to her fiancé by not leaving her despite her rude attitude toward him and his friends, albeit it was useless. Beth's rude behavior is shown from the beginning of her entrance toward Dough, Curt's friend by not considering him as a friend and not inviting him to her birthday party (Gilman, 2001). Curt wanted to get a raise through hard work at the police station, but could not. Eventually, he thought studying at college and higher degrees would help him achieve higher social class; nonetheless, he was not allowed to study in the major he liked. At the end of the play, his condition is worse than before without even hope of moving upward the social ladder now that he has lost his fiancé. Sandy, too, can only see her way to financial security by

returning to prostitution through eliminating the middleman.

The early idea of the American Dream was an ideological response arising from the poor masses, as Adams (1931) points out, to the quickening rate of inequality. This early version of the American Dream was an ideological mechanism of hope that allowed the economically poor to believe that they could be equal to those who had accumulated enormous fortunes. The American Dream was, therefore, a delusional articulation of the masses in their quest to attain instantly equal status with the affluent, powerful and famous. The beauty and power of this concept cannot be underestimated. The American Dream had the same effect, as it does today, on the economically limited masses: it makes them work hard all their lives believing that they will get as rich as their bosses. Sandy tells Curt that she is still a hooker, but now she is her own boss. She keeps all the money and is doing fairly well.

Within a couple of generations, the first ideas of the American Dream of having a place to call home had evolved into the idea of getting rich quickly. The Industrial Revolution with its ever-increasing need of all sorts of services raised "a spirit which demanded riches overnight instead of by the efforts of a lifetime of toil" (Adams, 1931, p. 146). Thus, the American Dream evolved more attuned to the economic conditions rather than to spiritual or cultural concerns. It seems that Sandy wants to achieve money and status faster at the expense of her dignity, for other jobs are not waging like prostitution, and she may not even achieve that success via working other jobs like waitressing.

Cullen (2004) gives a short but interesting definition of the American Dream. He mentions that the term the American Dream "today appears to mean that in the United States anything is possible if you want it badly enough" (p. 5). In the course of the story, Sandy and Curt want to achieve their goal so badly that they do anything at any cost to achieve it. Sandy has been and remains a prostitute because she wants to make money and compensate for all the years she was poor doing this lucrative job. Curt, also does whatever he can to be in the loop of the rich. He is in relationship with Beth, who is of a higher class, with whom he has nothing in common. He dreams about becoming a

college student someday so that he can get the job he wanted. He lives in his illusions and will not stop until he achieves it, because he wants them "badly enough" even if at the end of the play where there is no evidence of his moving to the higher levels of the social mobility now that he has been trapped in debt and a dead-end job, he hopes for a better future. They both want to be successful at any cost.

Chenoweth (1974) discusses the American Dream from a socio-economic viewpoint. He argues that the conceptualization of the American Dream as the degree of success achieved is a measure not of people's success, but rather, it is a measure of the influence of its ideology. Success is perhaps the most important component of the American Dream. In fact, success is the yardstick for measuring the degree of achievement of the American Dream. At its root, "the success ethic encourages supremacy not equality" (p. 10). So for a person to win, the others should lose. Eventually, society is made up of some people that are successful and rich, and some people who are poor feeling inferior to those rich people. According to Horney (1937), this brings up the concept of competition. Beth and her family are rich, and she thinks everyone can become rich. That is why she always reprimands Curt for not trying hard to become rich. Curt, on the other hand, knows that he cannot become rich and successful, and he always feels inferior at the presence of rich people and sweats. Such beliefs are presented in his language as well in the excerpt below.

CURT. Her husband's a case. The guy has what? A Ph.D.? In what?

BETH. Italian Renaissance History

CURT (to DOUG). He doesn't have a job. He just sits around all day while his wife works.

BETH. It's hard for academic couples to find two jobs at the same place.

CURT (to Doug). They spend their whole summer at Cape Cod.

DOUG. Oh yeah?

BETH. His family has a house there.

CURT. He is rich. (Gilman, 2001, p. 21)

Curt is always trying to prove himself to the people around him, pretending that he is not a loser and finds himself competing with her fiancé's family and friends. He envies them

when they are not even working in the same field and counts other people's money. Almost in all societies, "money is depicted as [a] factor in the widening of [the] social class" (Zabihi, Ghader, & Eslami Rasekh, 2013, p. 110).

3.2. Characters' Psyches and the American Dream (Curt, Sandy, & Beth)

According to Horney (1937 & 1950), there are two main factors involved in producing neurotic individuals, one is a competitive culture, and the other is a bad childhood. Success is perhaps the most important component of the American Dream. At its root, the success ethic encourages supremacy, not equality. This brings up the concept of competition. The American Dream as an ideology, which advocates priority to success, in any case

emphasizes competition among individuals. The basic hostility that emerges from competition results in feelings of isolation. These feelings of being alone in a potentially hostile world lead to intensified needs for affection, which cause people to overvalue love. As a result, many people see love and affection as a solution to their problems. Genuine love can be a healthy, growth producing experience, but the desperate need for love provides a fertile ground for the development of neuroses. (Horney, 1937, p. 85)

All three characters of the play, Beth, Sandy, and Curt, are living this competition and reacting toward it via their own very defensive strategies so that they can survive.

The other factor that Horney (1950) mentions, which affects developing neurotic individuals, is bad childhood experiences. Childhood is where the vast majority of life and neurotic problems stem from. "The main reason why a child does not receive enough warmth and affection lies in the parent's incapacity to give it on account of their own neuroses" (Horney, 1937, p. 80). She mentions that when a child does not feel belongingness to someplace, it creates basic anxiety, so he tries to idealize himself. This self-idealization grows into a more comprehensive drive by the help of the search for glory; the need for perfection, neurotic ambition, and vindictive triumph. In the following parts, the characters' competitive

environment and its effect on their language and psyches are analyzed; in addition, each character's psyche with his/her childhood experiences especially in the case of Sandy and Curt who had a rough childhood is also presented.

3.2.1. Curt; Using Self-effacing and Expansive Defensive Strategies

Curt's language and psyche can be best analyzed by considering childhood experiences and competitive ethics of society. Moreover, the competition can be traced in the play through Curt's interactions with two women, one from the lower class, like him, Sandy, and the other from the upper class, Beth.

Curt describes his childhood home only a few times when his ideal illusions are shattered. He did not grow up in a loving environment, so the basic anxiety that grows in him leads to his need for power. When talking to Sandy, he talks about his family and his childhood troubles stemming from his unstable life and lack of respectable father figure in his life. Such painful experiences are retold in the excerpt below and are evident in the language of the play.

My dad was a grave robber...He worked on the grounds crew, at a cemetery in Milwaukee, and he and the other guys, before they scaled up the graves, they would steal jewelry from the corpses She [Curt's mother] divorced him, and we changed our names, and we moved here. (Gilman, 2001, p. 35)

In another place, he talks about his mother's perpetual sickness and the dogs she never took care of them. In the excerpt below, it is evident in Curt's language how he describes his childhood house.

Curt. When I was a kid, I could never have anybody over to my house, because my mom was sick all the time. It made her so depressed she just never got off the couch basically. But she had five dogs, and she couldn't get off her ass to let them outside. She'd just let them go down in the basement. In the winter she'd crank up the heat, I'd come home from school, open the door ... roasted shit. (Gilman, 2001, p. 52)

Curt says that he feels inferior and sweats when he sees wealthy people, including Beth. Rich people make him feel inferior. Therefore, he tries his best to take control of his life against being inferior by having big aspirations. He has internalized the idealized world for himself; becoming educated at a community college, marrying a rich girl, getting retired at the Police Station, and starting to work at a nature center.

Neurotics want to achieve their goal without considering the limitations on their way (Horney, 1937). The important factor they should consider is the availability of opportunity. It is widely believed that unlike gender and race, class membership is flexible (Jackman, 1994).

The American economic system is built upon the premise that one can get ahead regardless of background. For centuries, immigrants have been lured by the promise of equal opportunity, an idea so strong that it contributes to the denial of class. Beth believes that everyone can and should follow her example. She pushes Curt to improve himself by seeking a better job. Curt tries to believe in it too, but in the end, he realizes it is not true.

Curt tries his best to achieve his goals and is involved in a big competition that everyone is involved, that is, becoming the most successful person. So, when he sees the rich and realizes that he cannot be successful like them he becomes infuriated and starts envying them. As he mentions that he goes to their homes to make reports of the stolen items; he realizes that these rich people cannot even remember what has been stolen. A sign of, not being important or not noticing the loss of household items. This is the reason he criticizes them because of their difference. Therefore, in order to become one of them, he tries to marry one, Beth.

3.2.1.1. *Curt's Interactions with Beth*

Curt is engaged to rich Beth. He mentions it several times to Beth and also in talking to Sandy. The difference between Curt and Beth is explicitly mentioned when Curt says that "We [Beth and I] come from different backgrounds...which is good" (Gilman, 2001, p. 39). He feels inferior to Beth since she is an upper middle class. Such an attitude is manifested in his language when he indicates that she only marries to surprise her classy friends with him

CURT. I think sometimes I'm cop that you met at a bar. And you're marrying me because you're still looking for some way to shock your friends. Because who would ever think you'd marry some jackass cop? I mean, what could be more shocking than marrying a guy who was raised by wolves. (Gilman, 2001, pp. 64-65)

He went after someone rich so that he can move to the upper class. His search for power is illustrated by the shortcut he takes, that is, marrying someone rich to be in the loop of rich and successful people. According to Horney (1942), individuals show different defensive strategies when facing anxiety. Curt uses self-effacing solutions when feeling inferior, which happens almost all the time. In other words, he shows he needs to be loved so that Beth will not dump him and he will not lose the social ladder for his upward mobility. He has the neurotic need for a powerful partner on whom he can rely. This justifies the morbid dependency he has on Beth. Curt's morbidly dependent relation is initiated by the unfortunate choice of a partner. The self-effacing Curt actually does not choose but instead is "spellbound" by her money and superiority (Horney, 1950). Thus, he views his minimum wage salary as a disappointment to Beth, and it is reflected in his language when he mentions that he is trying for better job opportunities.

CURT. Beth, I'll talk to the captain, okay? I'll do what I have to do. But, I really— I don't want to feel like, if I don't get this job, you're going to leave me or something. (Beth stops)

BETH. I'm not going to leave you.

CURT. I'm seriously doing the best I can here. Whether you think I am or not. (Beat). (Gilman, 2001, p. 28)

Therefore, the fear of losing her makes him insecure, which is portrayed throughout this dialogue with her.

CURT. You're mad.

BETH. I'm not. I'm just tired.

CURT. Tired means mad.

BETH. I'm not. Okay? ... I'm not going to leave you. (Gilman, 2001, p. 28)

In the end, this spellbound is clearer when he mentions that he has been compliant because he

feels inferior around Beth and her family and friends. In act two, scene three, after they have broken up, he tells her, “No matter how hard I try I am never going to be as good as you”.

When someone in the relationship has a morbid dependency on the other, it may be the result of the other person’s exploiting strategies. Curt is tired of being compliant because of his fiancé’s social status. He cannot follow the right path, which is set for him, so he breaks up with her in the end. Even in the end, he is blaming himself and his past for not supporting her dreams for him. He then realizes that all he tried to achieve was an illusion and he cannot be a member of the rich’s loop even though he tries hard to fit in because he is of different backgrounds. In act two, scene three, after they have broken up, he tells her, “No matter how hard I try, I am never going to be as good as you” (Gilman, 2001, p. 64). The complaints of his situation as a poor person all his life and more importantly its effect on Beth’s life is reflected in his language when he says,

CURT. I’m not on track. I’m letting you down. Because you have a program for me, or a timeline I’m supposed to be on. Like by this point I’m supposed to be lieutenant or captain or...mayor, I don’t know. But whatever it is I’m not doing it. I’m falling behind. I don’t have any money. I’m not getting anywhere in my job. I’m just not shaping up the way I’m supposed to, am I?

....

CURT. Then -(shakes his head)- who the hell am I? I mean, if that’s not who I am, then why am I sitting here in this fucking, pathetic, shithole of an apartment? Why don’t I live in some mansion somewhere? Why don’t I have a Ph.D. in Italian-Renaissance History sitting on my ass eating—pine nuts, going to Cape Cod every summer? If it’s not who I am then why am I so fucking poor? (Gilman, 2001, pp. 64-66)

3.2.1.2. Curt’s Interactions with Sandy

Curt, who cannot be fitted in Beth’s loop needs to be loved somewhere else; so, he takes refuge in Sandy’s heart by becoming her savior and exploiting her. In his language, it is reflected that how he is emotionally distanced from Beth and close with Sandy when he is describing his relationship with Sandy to Beth.

CURT. No, I don’t know. I just, it was nice, for a change, to be able to talk about things I can’t talk about with you

BETH. Like what?

CURT. Like, things about my past and stuff.

BETH. What, exactly?

CURT. Things. About my mom.

BETH. What about your mom?

CURT. Her house. Her dogs.

BETH. I already know about that. You can talk to me about that.

CURT. Other things too. That you don’t want to know. They’re gross to you.

BETH. Could you give me an example?

CURT. Just things I don’t think you’d understand. Because you’re rich. (Gilman, 2001, p. 63)

Curt on several occasions mentions that he is trying to help Sandy; “she [Sandy] is somebody I wanted to help her” (p. 55).

CURT. I don’t know. I just ... (stops playing. Takes a deep breath), I just wanted to help. I know you’re not twenty-one, first of all. And you seem smart. And like a basically decent person. If what you said was true, and you’ve only been working at that place for three months, then maybe you’re not attached to that? I don’t know. I just thought maybe I could help you find something else to do. (Gilman, 2001, p. 32)

Moreover, Beth asking about her, he says: “I liked talking to her [Sandy]. I felt really comfortable around her. We didn’t fight. I’m always fighting with you [Beth]” (Gilman, 2001, p. 62).

According to Horney (1937), Curt uses the defensive strategy of moving against Sandy, which seems love at first sight, but it is to exploit her. Curt dictates the details of what she should do and ensuring her that he will protect her while he can barely afford his own life. Such an attitude is evident in his language and behavior as mentioned in the excerpt below.

CURT. Get a hotel somewhere and when you get there, call me. If you want, I’ll meet you. We’ll figure out what to do.

SANDY. Why are you doing this?

CURT. I’m hoping you’ll like me enough to quit [prostitution]. That you’ll trust me. That I can help you so you won’t just fall back into this the second things get tough.

Sandy. I'm sorry. I just didn't have any money.

CURT. (shoving the envelop [stolen money] at her). Well now you do. And after things cool off, you can come stay with me. Beth is gone. (Gilman, 2001, p. 72)

He is doing exactly what Beth has done to him, exploiting Sandy by the stolen money, not even his own money, to control her actions so that she will not work as a prostitute anymore. His need for power over her is portrayed when he says, "I'm hoping you'll like me enough to quit. That you'll trust me. That I can help you" (Gilman, 2001, p. 72). In other words, Curt uses an expansive solution which shows itself in his appeal of mastery and especially his narcissism. He sees himself superior to Sandy because, first of all, they are both poor and share the same lower class family background; he has nothing to be ashamed in front of her. Also, he feels morally superior to him by being a policeman while Sandy is a prostitute. Consequently, he knows more than she and she should listen to her.

However, in the end, being exhausted of being dominator to Sandy and dominated by Beth, he confesses how he ruined his life and threw away his working years by stealing money to help sandy. His assertions are evident in the excerpt below,

CURT. I just wanted something good for myself. But I didn't think through. Usually, I plan things out. But you make a plan, it doesn't work, you make a new one, it doesn't work. And all that planning ... it made me tired (Beat). (Gilman, 2001, p. 84)

3.2.2. *Sandy; Using Detachment Strategies*

When Curt and Sandy share personal information, they discover that their childhoods were somewhat similar. They were both raised poor and had parents who were less than ideal.

Moreover, her poor condition is elaborated in the language of the play when she says.

SANDY. That would make me sad (Beat). At my graduation, you had to wear a dress under your gown. And I saved up and bought this red dress? I thought it looked really good. It even had a belt that came

with it. But when I got there, like all the other girls had on these super nice dresses and all of a sudden I was looking at mine, and it was like, the belt didn't look like plastic (pause). I don't know. My nicest thing was not even anywhere near as nice as their cruddiest thing. (Gilman, 2001, p. 52)

Both Curt and Sandy have to struggle through life, falling into one pit after another, picking themselves up and trying again. They are the underdogs of life. Sandy's mom has been married five times. And the kids from her recent partner moved in with them and disturbed their life, so she had to move. The poverty is portrayed vividly in Sandy's language when describing her mom's house and how she had to move out of her house.

SANDY. One day I woke up and there were five new people in the house. And my mom told me I'd have to share my room with Denise and her kid. But Denise, is like a convicted drug dealer? Does she have one of those things on her ankle? And she can't leave the house? She's just always sitting in my room watching TV. And she doesn't care of her kid at all. I mean, he smells bad. She never gives him a bath. And nobody's paying rent, or helping out with groceries.

Therefore, not growing up in a loving condition. According to Horney (1950), she develops feelings of being inferior to those around her and in order to cope with these feelings she tries to achieve her goals which are mostly financial in her case, in the quickest way possible. Financial success has long been a symbol of status, and is a central component of the American Dream (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). That is why she chooses prostitution as a job. She likes what she does because this helps her achieve her goals sooner with the money she earns and the only part of her job that she does not like is turning over half the money she earns to the owner of the massage parlor. Therefore, the single thing she would change about her life would be to own her own place.

Unlike Curt, who is trying to fit in the loop of the rich and use them as a means to get to the higher social level, Sandy stands up on her own two feet and tries to rise above her station in life without any one's help. Such independence is evident in her language when she tells Curt on

various parts of the play that “I don't need your help” (Gilman, 2001, p. 35).

Therefore, when Curt moves toward the rich, she moves away from all the rich and poor. She only cares about finding a way to achieve more money so that she can find financial stability in her life. The detached personality is independent and searches for perfection and prestige; these qualities are evident when she rejects Curt's help (exploitations) and when she only thinks about not paying the pimp in the future and becomes her own boss. Her detachment is evident in her language while speaking to Curt, who admonishes her for prostituting and Heather, who has. She swears at them and storms out of the room (Gilman, 2001, p. 60). In this dialogue, Curt blames her for not quitting stripping.

CURT. Five hundred dollars. How did you do it?

SANDY (quiet). One worked all day.

CURT. I spent all day in the car. All day driving around—I didn't know where you were.

...

CURT. I did not once drive out Route 29 and I did not once think of looking in there because I did not once think you would be stupid enough to go back there. (Gilman, 2001, p. 60)

So she leaves everyone (moving away and feeling detached) to gain the perfect life she is seeking.

SANDY. Fine then. You know? Fuck you. You tell me what I should've done now but you weren't there, and you don't know!

...

HEATHER. I'm getting my stuff tonight.

SANDY. Fine. Fuck everybody (She exits. Beat). (Gilman, 2001, p. 60)

3.2.3. Beth; Using Expansive Strategies

Gilman's focus is on the working class, but she uses the character of Beth, Curt's girlfriend, to show contrast and to make her point about the differences between the two classes. Beth has the luxury of time. Her days are not spent in a meaningless job or worrying about her next meal and how she will pay the rent. The first lines out of Beth's mouth demonstrate her sense of superiority and lack of compassion toward Curt's friend, Doug. According to Horney's

categorization, she uses expansive strategies (moving against people) by means of being a narcissist. The narcissist is his [Beth's] idealized image, and he seems to adore it. This basic attitude gives him [Beth] a seeming abundance of self-confidence that she [Beth] knows better about everything (Horney 1950, p. 194).

Beth's self-conceited attitude toward her surrounding is manifested in different lines of the language she uses. “To understand language, one must understand the speaker's intention” (Lang, Wang, Xie, & Chen, 2014, p.43). She ignores Doug as his fiancé's friend while he shows friendly behavior toward her. Such an attitude is revealed from their first encounter in the play.

DOUG. Beth! (He goes to hug her, she pretends not to see him and moves to CURT). (Gilman, 2001, p. 19)

And it is manifested further when she has not invited him to her birthday party

DOUG. Where're you guys going?

CURT. To a party.

DOUG. Cool.

CURT. Just some of Beth's friends.

DOUG. Your friends seem cool.

BETH. You know we'd ask you to come, but it's going to be really low-key. You know, just a bunch of people sitting around. It's going to be really boring.

CURT. Yeah.

DOUG. Whose party?

BETH. Mine.

CURT (overlapping). Beth's.

DOUG. Oh. (small beat). well hey, happy birthday!

BETH. Thank you.

DOUG. I didn't know, or I would have baked you a cake.

BETH. That's so sweet. (Beat). (Gilman, 2001, p. 20)

And when Doug offers to spend some time with them, she rejects him on behalf of both Curt and herself (Gilman, 2001, p. 26). She starts off with a criticism of Curt's friend and police partner, Doug. Once she finishes with Doug, Beth moves on to disparage a local restaurant that caters to people who do not have much money to spend when they go out to eat. She insinuates that this particular restaurant is no better than a McDonald's. She also implies that

the people who go to this restaurant do not have good taste. They do not, in Beth's opinion, know the difference between a salad made with iceberg lettuce and one made with gourmet mixed greens, typically served in better-class restaurants. As a narcissist, Beth cannot accept any criticism against her (Horney, 1950), so when Curt argues against her comments about prostitution, she becomes angry and replies "Okay", she says "You know more about hookers than I do. Okay? Fine. Congratulations", insinuating that she knows more than he does of matters that are more significant.

In her relationship with Curt, Beth feels superior to him, and that is why she went out with him in the first place. She uses expansive strategies to control the life around her, especially her morbid dependent partner, Curt, by exploiting him and telling him what is good or bad for him. Such controlling and domineering behavior is manifested when she uninterruptedly asks about his promotion at work (Gilman, 2001, pp. 22-23). She blames him for not trying hard enough to be successful, and this is vividly shown throughout her dialogue with Curt when she is pushing further his raise while he tries to evade it because he is not qualified enough according to the Police Department policies.

BETH. So, did the captain say anything about your making lieutenant?

CURT (small beat. Hates having to admit it). He said it's not looking good. I'm not looking like "lieutenant material". (Gilman, 2001, p. 22)

When she sees an opportunity lay in front of him to get the raise at the expense of putting the blame on, tells him to be aggressive as Horney suggests in her Expansive Strategies so that he can get a raise.

BETH. If Doug wants to go talk to the captain though— (To DOUG). I mean if you really feel like it was your fault. (Gilman, 2001, p. 23)

Her expansive attitude is revealed when she snaps at Curt who is behaving against her approval, and she gets mad (Gilman, 2001, p. 27).

Curt also knows that Beth is controlling him and it is reflected in his language toward the end

of the play when he honestly declares how frustrating his relationship with Beth has been.

CURT. But you won't let me go. You have to have me around. And I keep wondering why because I know it's not because you love me. It's not because I'm the best thing in your life or I make your world or any of that crap. Because you hate who I really am. My whole past. My whole life. that stuff you're proud of? That's me pretending I'm somebody else. Everything else about me makes you want to puke...because you cant feel good about yourself unless there's somebody in the room for you to look down on (Gilman, 2001, p. 68)

Eventually, all these characters, Beth, Curt, and Sandy, are searching for success one way or another.

4. Concluding Remarks

As the analysis shows, the American Dream influences the language, culture, and social aspects of the characters' lives and all the characters of the play are living in a competitive society which produces neurotic individuals. The study shows how characters, Curt and Sandy, struggle to achieve the affluence and happiness of upward mobility. On the other hand, Beth's comfortable life is illustrated since she is an upper middle class who cannot imagine how hard can it be for a poor person to attain a good life and how at what costs they can attain it; or in other words, being a prostitute in Sandy's case.

In this study, the two factors which generate the neurotic characters are delineated based on Horneyan theories. They are horrible childhood experiences and a competitive culture, which expects success at any cost. Both of these conditions are elaborated in this study by bringing excerpts from the characters' memories, which are retold during the course of the play. Curt's father is a grave robber. He had a sick mother to support and thousands of dollar bills to pay for her treatment.

In order to survive, these neurotics try their best to cope with the life around them. There are mainly three different strategies that they use, each of which has its own special way of coping with life. Curt uses self-effacing strategies toward Beth by moving toward her since he

feels insecure as her poor fiancé. He is submissive to her demands.

On the other hand, he uses expansive strategies toward Sandy to exploit her and be her savior by reminding his superiority to her both financially and morally. Both Curt and Sandy are searching for financial stability in the ways they can; including prostituting legally and marrying a rich girl. Sandy moves away from people when in the end, she leaves them all because she has a goal of financial stability in her life and detaches from everything to reach the goal. Curt's fiancé, Beth, a spoiled rich narcissist girl is also a neurotic in the competitive society that fulfills her neurotic needs by means of expansive strategies (moving against people), by having someone morbidly dependent like Curt to exploit and take control of his life. Also, when he does not obey her, she snaps. She feels superior to Curt and his friend, Doug which is manifested clearly in the play and does not approve him to be Curt's friend. Yet, he disobeys her in the end, and they break up. Thus, all these three characters living in the American society suffer from neurosis and in one way or another with no avail try to redress it by resorting to expansive, and detachment strategies.

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