

Consequences of Being a Modern Teen

Scene

Pitch black with a single light. Enter Rose.

Rose: (to audience) A troubled girl. Product of her own upbringing. Gentle spirited, but tortured nonetheless. These are just a few of the ways they reflect upon me, as if they knew. But how do you really ever know what thoughts are running through somebody's head? Do people say they knew because it's the truth, or to lessen the blow of their own ignorance? My name is Rose, and much like those whom I held close, you don't know me. Perhaps you've seen my image on the news, but considering our bustling society, it probably slipped your mind. It doesn't matter now, what's important is that you came to understand why I did what I did. Some would consider my story less cautionary and more sensational. In reality, I'm simply telling my story in all its truth. You have to decide what it means in the context of yourself and the surrounding world. If I censored the truth of my situation, it would be an injustice to that sentiment. Now, let's start at the beginning.

(The background is lit up, revealing a small bedroom. In it, there are very few luxuries. There is little more than a crib, along with some baby supplies on a nearby table. Underneath the crib is an assortment of dolls. Enter Mother, who is holding a tightly wrapped babies in her arms)

Rose: (to audience) There was nothing especially notable about me in my earlier years. Like every other girl, I was born, wrapped up in a neat, little, pink blanket, and sent home in the arms of my mother.

(turns to Mother)

Rose: (to Mother, with tears and a slight smile) She always told me I had her fighting spirit. Every night, she would put me to bed with a lullaby that had been in our family for generations. One day it would be my turn to sing it to my child, she told me. It was her who I decimated most in all this.

(Rose turns back to the audience)

Rose: (to audience) She tried to give me some semblance of a normal life. With each passing Christmas, my family of dolls gained a new member. Weekends were filled with baking powder and cups of sugar. Sometimes, I would even get into my mom's makeup, doodling sporadically on my face with her cherry red lipstick. After all, the boys at school wanted a pretty girl at their side. And my mom was the most beautiful woman I knew. For years to come, she was the perfect image of a contemporary woman in my mind.

(Background seamlessly switches behind Rose as she speaks. Exit Mother and her baby. Rose is now standing in front of a high school classroom filled with students.)

Rose: (to audience) Overtime, I started to see the world in the same vein as my mother. *(Rose takes seat at one of the desks)* Funny enough, the world itself also shared the same views me and my mother had on womanhood. Dreams of being a princess to my own handsome prince. But,

those same thoughts started to become corroded, or at least I thought so. When I got to high school as a freshman, my mother was no longer there to dictate my thoughts. It was now me against the world, with no barrier. I wish I could say I was prepared, and I thought I was, but life has a funny way of sneaking up on you. My interests started to shift from makeup and cooking to biology and physics. Instead of longing for a romantic partner, I now wanted to pursue the wonderful world of science. There was just an ineffable infatuation with the subject that I could not satisfy. As a result, my priorities shifted away from societal norms towards this new found passion. While I lost a few friends on the way, I finally found out who I truly was as a person. Unfortunately, that also I meant I started to see the cracks in my social indoctrination. While this process happened overtime, the moment I truly realized the falsehoods in my life was when I had a conversation with my friend Sommer.

(Enter Sommer, who sits down at a desk next to Rose)

Sommer: (to Rose) Hey Rose! How are you?

Rose: Good, how about you?

Sommer: Fine, I guess. Just having some issues.

Rose: Like what?

Sommer: Well, my boyfriend has been kinda on my ass about how I look lately.

Rose: How so?

Sommer: It started yesterday after lunch. We were walking back to my house and he commented on how I looked in that dress I wore to prom. Of course, I was flattered. But then he started

going on about how I should be wearing this and that dress. I mean, I value his opinion when it comes to how I dress, but its weird that he wants to be in control of it.

Rose: I mean, you can do the same thing with him. He just wants you to look your best, it is a fair sentiment. *(Rose turns to audience)* I was disgusted with myself the moment the words left my mouth. Here I was, telling a vulnerable, teenage girl to essentially modify her self-image in order to satisfy her high school boyfriend's sexual appetite. *(Rose turns back to Sommer)*

Sommer: I don't know, maybe you're right. I just wanna do whatever it is that'll make him happy, you know? I just don't wanna lose myself in the process.

Rose: Honestly, you're just lucky you have a boyfriend. There aren't any guys who into girls that like science and all that nerdy, academic shit.

Sommer: You just need to dress up a little bit more. Guys like a girl who always looks her best. When we're old enough, I can even have my dad give you a nose job. He's a plastic surgeon.

Rose: Uh, why exactly do I need that?

Sommer: I mean, you don't necessarily need to. But, it wouldn't hurt to take a little bit off the sides. I think you'd look much better with a slimmer nose, it suits you better.

(Bell rings, class starts)

Rose: (to audience) How do you think it feels as a 14 year old to be told that your nose is too big? That your only chance with a guy comes at the expense of literally molding your body into the idealistic version of a woman? It was absolutely humiliating. Suffice to say, that was the last time I had any meaningful conversation with Sommer.

(Background returns to original pitch black. Exit Sommer and other students)

Rose: (to audience) As time went on, I settled in more and more into the harshness of high school. When I wasn't studying up on bio, I was out on the lake with the school rowing team. Rowing was by far the best hobby I ever took on. There's nothing like the weird duality between thrillingness and calmness you feel while you're out there. If I could, I'd spend every second of everyday on the water. But, I also adored it because it was the first decision I was able to truly make on my own. I wasn't dressing up nicely to impress a boy or cook well for the approval of my mother; everything I put into rowing was wholly motivated by myself. Freedom like that did not come along often. One downside to this, at least in the eyes of others, was the physical effect it had on my body. See, rowing takes a great deal of upper body strength. So, overtime, I was a very toned individual in that area. But that's not what most guys want. Maybe it's because they feel intimidated when they're not the *(Rose uses air quotes)* "strong" one in the relationship. Anyhow, that meant I didn't really date much for most of high school. In all honesty, I didn't really care. I was confident in my physique. Yet, at the same time, that's not how it seemed to everyone else. And, as a result, I would often find myself telling other girls it was some sort of curse and that I wish I had their figure instead. Even though I was happy, even proud, of the appearance I had created, there was still a part of me that wanted to fit that socially accepted image of a woman. That struggle never really went away. For the better part of high school, I was able to somewhat maintain the pride I had in my body, while also hiding it from the world. But, as senior year came around, I started to break down. Looking back, I never got to have my first kiss or relationship because of the image I had created for myself. So, when I was invited to

a party by Sommer, I knew something had to change. Even though I had my own sense of independence, I also wanted the same experiences that every other girl coveted in their youth. That night, I transformed back into the little girl that my mother had raised. I released my blonde, flowing hair from the bun I had so tightly kept it in. Instead of jeans and a t-shirt, I opted for an elegant dress that only went down to my knees. My makeup was caked on with precision. Everything about me had become the perfect image of a sexy woman.

(Background changes to a living room at a house party, full of other kids. Exit Rose. Enters Sommer and Jake)

Sommer: (to Jake) I cannot believe I convinced Rose to come to this party. She is the last person I ever thought I would see at a place like this.

Jake: Yeah, I mean, she seems pretty intense about school and stuff. I'm not sure what why this party of all parties would convince her.

Sommer: Honestly, I'm not sure either. But, she seems to be having a fun time, if you know what I mean.

Jake: What makes you say that?

Sommer: I saw her going into the other room with Zann. Alone. If that doesn't mean she's getting down to business, I don't know what does.

(Background changes to a dimly lit bedroom. Exit Sommer, Jake, and other kids. Enter Rose and Zann)

Rose: (to Zann) Look, I haven't really done anything like this, so is it okay if we go slow?

Zann: Yeah no, of course.

(Both sit on bed close together. Slowly, they start kissing each other with building passion. After a few seconds, the background fades to black. Exit Zann. Enter Rose)

Rose: (to audience) And, I'm sure you know how the rest of it goes. As for the physical experience itself, it really was not worth it. In the moment, I realized how meaningless sex was without the spark of real intimacy. I had rushed to do something, just because every other girl had done it by now, at the expense of truly enjoying the experience. I had sold myself out as a pawn to the normalities of society. I will never forget the back breaking shame I felt when we were finished. I left right after, without even saying so much as a word to Sommer. When I got home, I just went upstairs and cried for hours on end. There is no worse suffering than to be stuck between your own self-identity and the person society wants you to be. Without ever being fully one or the other, the pain is endless. And for me, it didn't. In fact, this is just about where my story ends. After that night, everyone knew what had happened. I guess Zann was the wrong guy to trust, not that there were many better alternatives. Quickly, my reputation as a self-respecting woman who didn't fall under the norms for my gender was destroyed. With one foolish act, guys stopped seeing me as an academic peer and more as another girl to fuck in a one night stand. Bafflingly, I was no longer a prude to girls, but a slut. Just because I didn't think I needed a relationship for sex. Everyday in that wretched school was a living nightmare from then

on. I lost myself. And there was no way for me to recover. I couldn't win by subverting society's norms, nor by following them. I was doomed to always be an isolated, unhappy outcast. And that's why we're here. At approximately 7:43 AM, my mother found me unconscious on the floor. I had died from a self-induced overdose of pain medication. The note I left behind had only one simple line: I never could be that Barbie girl.

(Lights fade out. End.)

Analysis Section

My drama, “Consequences of Being a Modern Teen,” is a genre-switch of the poem “Barbie Doll” by Marge Piercy. In it, I’ve decided to center the performance around the main character, Rose. Throughout the drama, she both reflects the original poem’s message about women conforming themselves to society’s standards while also reflecting the added struggles of a contemporary teenage girl. This is done through the implementation of extended monologue, meaningful setting, suggestive subtext, and symbolism.

From the beginning, the purpose of Rose being a reflection of our current society is made clear by her addressing of the audience. Instead of alienating the viewer as an outsider looking in, she spends time speaking directly to them in order to show how this narrative is applicable in their lives as well. They’re apart of the same world, whether they like it or not. It sets the overall theme of the performance from the very beginning, while also setting a definition for the vague “happy ending” (28) every woman gets at the end of the poem. Based on Rose’s dialogue, her suicide is heavily implied from the very beginning. For the audience, this sort of ending is interpreted as depressing and tragic because of the dark background she stands against that evokes a feeling of void and isolation, which seems contradictory to a “happy ending.” However, as we will discuss later, this tragic event is designed to be highly interpretative by the audience. But, this introduction at least defines Rose’s “happy ending” as her suicide, even if that is not initially seen as a joyful event.

In the next scene, the poem’s idea of gender roles being taught to children from a young age is fleshed out through the setting and Rose’s description of her childhood. Instead of being

the center of attention on a black background, Rose is transitioned into a scene with her mother holding her as a baby. There are references to the poem's images of gendered stereotypes, such as the dolls under the bed and the pink cloth that wraps Rose. It is particularly important to note the absence of a father. In fact, there is no reference to Rose's father throughout the entire drama. This is because the entire play revolves around the tremendous impact gender norms have on women in society, something a father would not be able to grasp. Furthermore, having the mother as Rose's only person to look up to growing up reinforces the idea that these stereotypes are perpetuated by generational upbringings. Had the mother been raised without them, so would her daughter. Rose's monologue also shines light on some of these gender norms. The mother wanting Rose to sing the same lullaby to her children and to cook well is a representation of the traditional woman that she wants Rose to become. Additionally, her lack of interaction with her mother in the scene is representative of her isolation from the traditional woman, considering how she used to hold her mother in such high esteem. As the story unfolds, however, Rose becomes a woman who both proudly defies these expectations while feeling conflicted about how her difference comes off to those around her. The subtext of this scene is not that Rose and her mother directly oppose each other; rather, their separation is representative of the ongoing conflict between accepting gender roles and embracing gender freedom.

After this scene, we are taken to a high school classroom from Rose's freshman year. The purpose of this setting is to mark the point at which she transitions from the traditional to contemporary woman, given the atmosphere of personal development that high school fosters. After the shift in scenes, Rose's friend Sommer is introduced with the issues she's been having with her overbearing boyfriend. His desire to control her attire is emblematic of how patriarchy

functions in the poem. In the case of the poem, this is an interpretation of the line “she was advised to play coy.” (14) While “coy” is defined as being shy or modest (OED), here the word is used to connote a sense of obedience that comes with being a traditional woman. And, for Sommer, this means following the advice of Rose to follow her boyfriend’s commands in order to appease him, despite her reservations. Though, as Rose points out, this is when she finally hears the lies she had been taught and decides not to be apart of the systematic oppression of the traditional woman anymore, which explains her dramatic monologue about being an abnormal woman.

Finally, there is the scene in which Rose temporarily gives into her persistent urge to be a normal, teenage girl by dressing up and having sex at a houseparty. After this happens, she feels tremendously guilty, as she has now destroyed the proud, independent image she had created for herself as a woman, just so that she could fit in with the rest of her gender as a “normal” member. Eventually, this tarnishment of her reputation leads to her suicide, as she wants to be that independent woman she once was again, but society will no longer let her, as they drag her further into the idea of a traditional woman. Because of this, Rose kills herself because she is forever tortured by the mistake she has made. This is in line with the ending of the poem, where the traditional woman has “consummation at last.” (27) In the poem, this line is intended to be a reference to a woman’s achievement of the perfect traditional woman in death, as the society that buries her reflects upon them as such. However, I took this in a much more literal sense as the actual act of sex. Considering the societal pressure kids are under (from their peers) to engage in sexual activities at earlier ages than ever, sex has fallen from a symbol of love to a right of passage for societal acceptance. In her momentary desire to feel this acceptance, Rose is willing

to give up her socially repugnant features, much like the girl in the poem “cut[s] off her nose and her leg.” (19) Given the poem's villainization of physical attributes, like large arms and legs, Rose covering her strength and dexterity with beauty products and makeup is symbolic of these sacrifice in features. Furthermore, the point of her dress being slightly revealing also reinforces the idea that she was trying to be sexually provocative to gain this “consummation.”

The final line of the drama, in which she claims “I never could be that Barbie girl,” is symbolic of the larger issue at hand here. It both encompasses the main theme of the poem while commenting on society as a whole. While she rejected features of the traditional woman (or, in this case, Barbie girl) such as makeup, cooking, and dolls, she still ended up unhappy compared to her complacent peers. It begs the question: is it so bad to be a Barbie girl like everyone else, or is the valliance that comes with being independent too valuable to give up, even when faced with unhappiness? That is a decision that is purposefully left up to the audience to decide.

As previously mentioned, the play is both a reflection of the sentiments in the original poem and the society we live in today. While the relation between the poem and play have already been covered, we still need to address how the drama constructs its societal criticism. The entire play is built upon the true story of a 13 year old girl named Rosalie Avila who killed herself in 2017 due to continual bullying and harassment.¹ This is why the main character is named Rose, as she is made to resemble Rosalie in parts of the overall plot. One of their main similarities is their shared reasonings for suicide. Like Rose, Rosalie was often called a slut or similar names as a way of insulting her,² even when that was not truly reflective of her overall

¹Hansen, Lena. “Teen Rosalie Avila Hangs Herself After Enduring Years of Bullying.” 6 Dec. 2017, people.com/chica/teenager-rosalie-avila-kills-herself-bullying/.

²Adams, Char. “Bullied Teen Who Killed Herself Apologized for Being Ugly, Didn't Want Any Photos at Funeral.” 20 Dec. 2017. people.com/human-interest/bullied-teen-suicide-photo-funeral/

personality. Additionally, both shared a similar connection between their mothers, looking to them as picturesque versions of what they were to become. Though, Rose eventually loses this connection.

Furthermore, there is a larger commentary about the depiction of suicide in popular media. In the beginning, Rose discusses how some people would consider her story more sensational than educational, but that in spite of such criticisms, the audience should derive their lesson from her story. This is a response to the growing criticism of shows such as “13 Reasons Why” that depict suicide and the events leading up to it.³ Rose is used as an advocate for telling these stories, as her entire character is built to be a warning for the dangers of imposing gender norms on young women. Rose is connected to the poem in that she is initially a product of society's expectations of a woman, yet deviates from that initial motif by later rejecting those ideas rather than being complacent with them for her entire life.

³Moore, Lindsay. “Child Psychologists Respond to '13 Reasons Why' Portrayal of Suicide.” 7 June 2018, www.jconline.com/story/news/2018/06/07/netflix-renews-13-reasons-why-but-psychologists-fear-its-influence/680672002/.