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Male Dominance and female exploitation: A study of female Victimization in William Shakespeare's Othello, Much Ado about nothing, and Hamlet

Lisa Ashley Corbett
Clark Atlanta University

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ABSTRACT

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

CORBETT, LISA ASHLEY

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MALE DOMINANCE AND FEMALE EXPLOITATION: A STUDY OF FEMALE
VICTIMIZATION IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S OTHELLO, MUCH ADO
ABOUT NOTHING, AND HAMLET

Advisor: Dr. Viktor Osinubi

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This study is a feminist-based reading of three of William Shakespeare's works: *Othello*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Hamlet*. The reading, although borrowing from the feminist perspective, is not a full-blown feminist reading of Shakespeare's works. The focus of the study comprises the social circumstances and the misogynistic actions of the male characters and how these impact on the lives of the female characters. The relationships between the male and female characters are often characterized by physical and psychological victimization and their feelings of misery and shame, and even total destruction of life (as in the case of Desdemona and Ophelia). The three Shakespearean plays portray male rivals who take part in significant roles that cause destruction of well-established relationships. The men allow their egos to persuade their decisions, attack their internal emotions, and demolish virtuous women who are forced to become victims of political intrigues and machinations. Shakespeare shows two types of women throughout the plays: women who refuse to submit to men and demand equal rights, and submissive women who carry out the roles of an Elizabethan woman. Those who followed the roles of the Elizabethan woman, which is to be submissive to men, also demonstrate that bowing down to patriarchal rules does not guarantee happiness for

women. In fact, it may actually lead to their domination and victimization. Furthermore, all female characters, whether submissive or not, suffered the consequences of male dominance and victimization. However, the females who lived up to the women roles of the patriarchal society suffered more than the women who fought against male dominance.

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VICTIMIZATION IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *OTHELLO*, *MUCH ADO*
ABOUT NOTHING, AND *HAMLET*

A THESIS

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THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ENGLISH

BY

LISA CORBETT

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary critical literature, the images of women, which William Shakespeare constructed in his plays, have become a subject of interest and controversy, and much of this attention is due to the feminist or feminist-based re-readings of Shakespeare's works. The present study, although not a strictly feminist reading of selected Shakespearean works, has borrowed some of the insights of feminist criticism to examine Shakespeare's portrayal of women in three plays *Much Ado About Nothing* (a comedy), *Othello*, and *Hamlet* (which are both tragedies). All of these works have been chosen deliberately for this study because of what they reveal about women and social order in the Elizabethan society. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Shakespeare uses comedy to manage the social disruptions that strong women cause in the social order, whereas in *Othello* and *Hamlet* he employs the play's tragedy to accomplish the same purpose. The selected Shakespeare's plays, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*, all contain plots where male domination provides a context in which women must navigate their existence. The "male ego" in these plays is so intense that it causes commotion, destruction, and death. During the Elizabethan era, the male ego was firmly rooted in patriarchy. Women were expected to be meek and subordinate; they were as much the man's property as they were his personal belongings, and a woman had no legal independence and no rights to freely express herself.

The ill treatment that some women characters endure in *Much Ado Do About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet* is in large part the result of men's fear of losing control of their women, and by implication, their male authority. In the three plays, women characters become victims not only of male domination but also of the male ego, a psychological inner consciousness that is often nurtured by cultural norms and mores. The three plays show the presence of male domination and the exploitation of women.

Although *Much Ado About Nothing* depicts the story of a group of high-ranking soldiers, we find that the highest of these soldiers, Claudio, victimizes his bride-to-be, Hero. The victimization begins when Don John decides to ruin everyone's happiness as he comes up with a scheme to make Claudio think that Hero is cheating in their relationship by dressing Margaret, Hero's maid, in Hero's clothing and displaying her near the window with another man. When Claudio sees this false display he promises himself that he will humiliate Hero in front of everyone on their wedding day. Claudio keeps his promise and humiliates Hero in front of her family and friends. Consequently, Hero becomes a victim of Claudio's ego. She is dehumanized as a result of a false accusation. Shakespeare's plot for *Much Ado About Nothing* is very similar to the one in *Othello* in which Othello victimizes his wife, after being tricked by evil Iago into believing his wife, Desdemona, has been disloyal to him.

In the first Act of *Othello* we find that Othello is noble, well known and respected, yet he murders his wife, Desdemona. Othello is led to believe, based on Iago's plot, that his wife has been disloyal. Although Desdemona has lived up to the role of a submissive and domesticated wife forced upon her in this patriarchal world, Othello

allows Iago, the captain of Othello's army, to persuade him to kill Desdemona. Iago creates a plan that later destroys Othello's marriage. A handkerchief becomes Iago's instrument of victimization. Iago plants the handkerchief in Cassio's room, as "evidence" of the latter's affair with Desdemona. When Othello demands "ocular proof" that his wife is unfaithful (III.iii.365), Iago states that he has seen Cassio "wipe his beard" (III.iii.444) with Desdemona's handkerchief—the first gift Othello ever gave her. Othello, then vows to take revenge on his wife and on Cassio, and Iago vows to help him. When Othello sees Desdemona later that evening, he demands the handkerchief of her, but she tells him that she does not have it with her and attempts to change the subject by continuing her suit on Cassio's behalf. This makes Othello furious, and he storms out. This incident leads to Othello striking and killing Desdemona for a crime she did not commit. He does this because he assumes that Desdemona has failed in carrying out the duties of what is expected of a woman in the Middle Ages. By failing to conform to the expectations of her time, Desdemona has denounced Othello's ego—at least that was the assumption of her male-dominated society. In order to restore his own ego, Othello kills Desdemona.

Similarly, Shakespeare's Hamlet also demonstrates how the male ego victimizes women and the result is often tragic. Prince Hamlet's ego derives from finding out that his mother, Queen Gertrude, has married Hamlet's uncle Claudius, the dead king's brother. To Hamlet, the marriage is foul incest. Claudius has had himself crowned King even though Hamlet was his father's heir to the throne. Hamlet suspects foul play. When his father's ghost visits the castle, Hamlet's suspicions are confirmed. The Ghost complains that he is unable to rest in peace because he has been

murdered. He entreats Hamlet to avenge his death, but to spare Gertrude, to let Heaven decide her fate.

Hamlet's male ego coerces him to vow to avenge his father's death.

Therefore, he wears a mask that enables him to witness all interactions in the castle. Hamlet's observations cause him to wonder if the ghost is truly his father's spirit or the spirit of the devil trying to test him. Hamlet agonizes over his cowardice because he is unable to cease his cruel thoughts of killing his Uncle Claudius. In order to test the Ghost's sincerity, Hamlet enlists the help of a troupe of players who performs a play called *The Murder of Gonzago* to which Hamlet has added scenes that recreate the murder which the Ghost had described to Hamlet. Hamlet calls the revised play *The Mousetrap*, and the play proves a success. As Hamlet has hoped, Claudius' reaction to the staged murder reveals the King to be conscience-stricken; consequently, Hamlet resolves to kill him. Hamlet allows his ego to take control of his thoughts and actions, causing him to be responsible for several deaths.

As Hamlet continues to feed his male ego by trying to avenge his father's death, he causes six deaths. The first death is Polinus, Ophelia's father. Claudius then has Hamlet exiled and plans for him to be killed by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in England. However, Hamlet discovers the plot for his death and kills both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet's actions and irrepressible male ego eventually lead to Ophelia's psychological depression. Ophelia is suffering from the loss of her father Polinus and Hamlet's diabolic actions. Therefore, Ophelia drowns while singing sad love songs about her relationship with Hamlet. Ophelia can not

stand the sight of Hamlet's insanity, and her father's loss, thus, causing her to believe that it is her loyalty to her father that has caused Hamlet to act in this manner. Hamlet's ego has caused Ophelia to believe she has lost Hamlet's love, leading her to commit suicide.

Ophelia's brother, Laertes, tries to avenge the death of both his father Polinus and his sister Ophelia by plotting with King Claudius to kill Hamlet. Laertes and Hamlet engage in a sword fight and Laertes is killed. Before Laertes dies he informs Hamlet that he too will die soon because he has been cut with a poisonous sword. Queen Getrude has assumed that Hamlet is winning the sword fight and has drunk a toast to her son from the poisoned cup Claudius had intended for Hamlet. Finally, Hamlet stabs Claudius with the poisoned sword and then pours the last of the poisoned wine down the King's throat. Satisfying his male ego, Hamlet declares that the throne should now pass to Prince Fortinbras of Norway, and he implores his true friend Horatio to accurately explain the events that have led to the bloodbath at Elsinore.

The three plays, which form the basis of this study, explicate the social circumstances, actions, and the misogynistic actions of the male characters, leading to the physical and psychological victimization of the female characters and their feelings of misery and shame, and even their total destruction (as in the case of Desdemona and Ophelia). The three Shakespearean plays portray male rivals who take part in significant roles that cause destruction of well-established relationships. Don John, Iago, and Hamlet contrive scandalous schemes that result in the victimization of innocent women. Hero, Desdemona, and Ophelia who all portray the "woman's perfect role," which is to be submissive to her man, are first praised for their loyalties and then humiliated because of

false accusations. The male egos in Iago, Don John, Othello, Claudio, and Hamlet influence the direction of action in these plays. The men allow their egos to persuade their decisions, attack their inner emotions, and demolish innocent women who are forced to become victims.

CHAPTER II

THE VICTIMIZATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS

Victoria Time, in *Shakespeare's Female Victims: Criminology and Fiction*, argues that although Wolfgang's (1958) study, and the theories promoted by Von Hertig (1948), Mendelsohn (1956) and Schafer (1968), suggest that sometimes victims may actively prompt their own victimization, some Shakespearean characters illustrate the fact that in some instances victims play no role in their victimization, and that they may become victims because of their sociological characteristics—for example, being females. The victimizations of these characters are best understood by exploring the reasons that motivate the offenders to victimize them. Time's argument is relevant to Hero's, Desdemona's, and Ophelia's victimization. Neither one of the characters commits the crime of which she is accused, but all are made victims because of false accusations. It is the male ego that prompts both incidents of victimization in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Othello*.

Shakespeare's victim Hero, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, is not only a victim of one man's ego but of two men. Her very own *lover* Claudio is guilty of victimizing her, for throughout the play, Claudio never once asked Hero, the woman he supposedly loves, if she is guilty of disloyalty or unfaithfulness. He automatically assumes that since his male friend has told him the news then the information must be correct. Claudio is

misled by Don John's ego. When Don John finds out that Claudio and Hero are about to get married, he is upset because Don John is in love with Hero. Therefore, both his inner feelings and ego are destroyed and to restore his ego he and Boratio, a close friend of Don John develop a diabolical plan.

Boratio: Go then, find me a meet hour to draw Don Pedro and the Count Claudio alone. Tell them that you know that Hero loves me... They will scarcely believe this without trial. Offer them instances, which shall bear no less likelihood than to see me at her chamber window, hear me call Margaret "Hero," hear Margaret term me "Claudio," and bring them to see this the very night before the intended wedding, for in the meantime I will so fashion the matter that Hero shall be absent, and there shall appear such seeming truth of Hero's disloyalty that jealousy shall be called assurance and all the preparation overthrown.

Don John: Make the arrangements, and I'll do it (II.ii.26-43).

It is evident that Don John's plan was carefully thought out to guarantee the restoration of his ego. He wanted both Hero and Claudio to feel the disappointment he felt when he found out about their wedding, so he blatantly manipulates the truth in order to stop the burning agony of his ego. At this point in the play, Claudio's ego is also hurt because he feels like he has been humiliated and misled by his soon-to-be wife. His ego is crushed and he will not stop until the humiliation is final. He then decides to get even with her to satisfy his male ego by announcing to everyone on their wedding day that she is a strumpet. It is his ego that allows him to make bad decisions that victimize his partner.

Doerner and Lab explain, “the offender, when striking out against his or her spouse, is venting frustration or anger at other people or things he or she cannot deal with directly” (142). Claudio cannot deal with the fact that his soon-to-be wife may not be completely loyal to him. So he, like Don John, decides to hatch a plan to make Hero suffer, thereby restoring his own fragile ego. Claudio verbally abuses Hero and does not offer her the chance to explain or defend herself.

The culture of male domination in this play is so severe that once Claudio is told that Hero has been unfaithful to him, he immediately abandons his soon to be wife. Claudio does not think twice about what he has heard. As Claudio begins to dehumanize Hero, by questioning her loyalty, Hero asks “And seemed I ever otherwise?” (IV.i.52). Although he is aware of Hero’s “good” reputation, (a reputation that follows the characteristics of how a woman is supposed to act according to men’s beliefs and conjectures during the Elizabethan period) he never confronts Hero about the false accusations. Patricia Evans’ article, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*, suggests that the first category of verbal abuse is withholding. A marriage requires intimacy, and intimacy requires empathy. If one partner withholds information and feelings of affection then the marriage bond weakens. The abuser who refuses to listen to his partner denies her experience and leaves her isolated. This prevents any possibility of resolving conflicts because of the blocking and diverting of emotions going on in one partner (48). This form of emotional abuse is what Claudio uses to victimize his lover, Hero. Claudio believes that Hero has been unfaithful, therefore he doesn’t tell her that he is hurt, instead he transfers those hurt emotions and uses them to exploit her.

Claudio: Sweet Prince, you learn me noble thankfulness.

There, Leonato, take her back again.

Give not this rotten orange to your friend.

She's but the sign and semblance of her honor.

Behold how like a maid she blshes here!

Oh, what authority and show of truth...

All you that see her, that she were a maid

By these exterior shows? But she is none.

She knows the heat of a luxurious bed.

Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty (III.i. 27-39).

Lacking any information or the opportunity to explain herself, Hero becomes victimized by an egocentric lover.

Luckily, the male ego in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* is dealt with before anyone gets killed. In *Othello*, however, the situation escalates very rapidly and not only is Desdemona a victim of the male ego, she also dies in response to it. Desdemona's innocence makes her victimization more excruciating. Othello has never witnessed any conduct of Desdemona's that is suggestive of infidelity. According to Victoria Time, "In a society of male dominance, Iago can only properly redress the slight by Othello of not according him the position of lieutenant through ridiculing Othello's wife's morality" (84); as Iago concocts his devilish plan, he is aware that using Desdemona as a pawn to avenge his hatred for Othello is the surest route to take in order to bring about Othello's downfall (85). As a result of Iago's devilish machinations, Desdemona is victimized by two men—her husband and his sworn enemy. The conniving

plan that Iago creates makes Othello jealous and this causes him to become violent toward Desdemona. Othello strikes her in public and all she states is “I have not deserved this” (IV.i 52), and she graciously proceeds to entertain her husband’s guest. Later, as she begs for time to have one last prayer, Othello smothers her.

Gasping her last breath she mutters, “O falsely falsely murdered! A guiltless death I die” (V.ii.125). When Emilia asks her who her killer was Desdemona responds:

“Nobody; I myself. Farewell: Commend me to my kind lord: O, farewell!”(V.ii.127).

Even as Desdemona dies in the hands of Othello, she takes the blame, as if she has done something to precipitate the violence. In trying to explain this terrible tragedy, R.S. White suggests that because Desdemona declares that “nobody” is her killer “she is recognizing that Othello acted in legal parlance, with diminished responsibility owing to provocation of which she is not aware” (92). Desdemona marries a man who is well known for his accomplishments at war, so her silence could be that she is trying to live up to the characteristics of a good wife or simply because she was afraid to stand up to Othello. Whatever Desdemona is trying to do does not really mitigate the foolishness of Othello’s actions and the fragility of his ego.

Ironically to Othello’s liking, Desdemona is initially talkative and always well-spoken. Juliet Dusinberre, a feminist scholar, argues that she relates the wondrous romance of their courtship by Othello, and in doing so she persuades them of the integrity of her choice. She spars wittily with Iago while they await Othello’s arrival at Cyprus. She gently badgers Othello on behalf of Cassio. But when abused by Othello, she becomes the Silent Woman, not because she lacks verbal resources, but because she cannot understand nor will she give utterance to words without reality to her. To Othello:

“I understand a fury in your words, / But not the words” (IV.ii.32). When Desdemona is the dead Silent Woman, fixed forever in her alabaster beauty and her cold chastity, she personifies that marmoreal ideal of female perfection upon which Othello has felt so dependent that he kills the real woman to rescue that ideal. The real woman, as the bitter irony of later events show him, had the living, speaking perfection he once saw in her a lady of high and plenteous wit and invention. Desdemona’s victimization consists of verbal, emotional, and physical abuse, false accusations, and ultimately murder. Although she in no way instigates her own victimization, she blames herself for it, much like Ophelia in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

Shakespeare shows in *Hamlet* another female character that is victimized by the male ego. Although Ophelia is not falsely accused of sleeping with another man, she is victimized by Hamlet’s unmanageable ego which causes him to kill. Hamlet kills Ophelia’s father and causes her to fall in a state of depression.

Ophelia: O, what a noble mind here o’erthrown!

The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,

Th' expectation and rose of the fair state,

The glass of fashion and the mould of form,

Th' observ'd of all observers, quite, quite down! (III.i.150-54).

Shakespeare begins to show Ophelia’s depression which is caused by her father’s death and Hamlet’s madness. As a result, Ophelia becomes mad. Although at one level this decline into madness sets Ophelia up indisputably as a victim figure, this madness can also be seen as Ophelia’s active rejection of patriarchal restraint. However the depression

and madness that caused Ophelia's death is the product of Hamlet's machinations.

Hamlet initiates Ophelia's psychological depression by demonstrating irate behavior and Ophelia suffers by blaming herself. According to Liz Lewis, although it has been claimed by critics that Hamlet is unique among Shakespeare's tragic heroes for not being the blame for the tragic play, if we are to consider the death of the heroine as part of this tragedy then surely we must question Hamlet's innocence. In his treatment of Ophelia, Hamlet fluctuates between protests of undying love and cruelty demonstrated by his cold and accusing speech in the nunnery scene:

Hamlet: That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.

Ophelia: Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty

Hamlet: Ay, truly, for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof.

I did love you once.

Ophelia: Indeed, my lord, you made me believe.

Hamlet: you should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so inoculate. Our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.

Ophelia: I was the more deceived.

Hamlet: Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?

I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious,

with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in,
imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in (III.i.110-125).

In short, Hamlet denounces his love for Ophelia based on his mother's actions. Hamlet believes all women are whores and refuses to love Ophelia. His male ego causes his rage and the insanity of his woman, while also using Ophelia as a tool in his plan for revenge.

Hamlet first tells Ophelia he loves her, but when she returns her expression of love, he immediately recants. He takes back his declaration because he senses a weakness which will not satisfy his male ego and will indeed discourage him from the plan he has to avenge the throne. Hamlet has made it a point to drive Ophelia mad because he believes she has enlisted in the war against him, but after all, Polonius is her father; what else could she do? The irresolvable conflict of loyalties to Polonius and to Hamlet ultimately drives her mad. Hamlet fails to consider the pain Ophelia goes through trying to please both him and her father. Instead his male ego leads him to believe that he, like his father has been betrayed by the woman he loves.

Ophelia, the dominated daughter, is completely dependent on the male figures in her life. Although we see a flash of her potential self in the beginning of the play, when we learned that Ophelia has entertained Hamlet without supervision and her father (Polonius) and brother (Learthes) advise her to not trust Hamlet or indeed any man. They tell Ophelia that she is naïve and that her behavior is unsuitable. Ophelia, convinced by their claims that she has mistaken Hamlet's love, assumes that her father and brother necessarily know best and replies simply "I will obey" (III.i.). Shakespeare shows that it

is this obedience of Ophelia's that leads to her own destruction, and illustrates that when the guiding male is like the cynical Polonius or unperceptive Laertes, the fate of the subordinate female is considerably threatened. Ophelia obeys the male figures in the play because it is her duty as a woman. Disobedience would be damaging to the male ego and might lead her to being brutally punished or killed. As readers we realize that whether Ophelia decides to be obedient or disobedient, her victimization can not be prevented.

Hamlet's mistreatment and victimization of Ophelia evolves from Hamlet's mother, Queen Gertrude. Queen Gertrude has transgressed the patriarchal bounds of femininity by marrying so soon after her husband's death and not remaining in passive grief and obedient devotion to his memory. This provides Hamlet with a model of women's inconstancy. His bitterness leads him to believe that all women are untrustworthy. R.S. White suggests that Hamlet projects upon Ophelia the guilt and pollution he believes exists in Gertrude's behavior. Regardless of how one may view his culpability, Ophelia suffers as a result of Hamlet's chauvinist views of womanhood.

According to James Andreas' article, *The Vulgar and Polite: Dialogue in Hamlet*, Hamlet's appearance, as described by Ophelia, is that of a Haleskin and the incident is a carnivalesque effort to subvert the official speech culture that Ophelia is associated with. Moreover, throughout the play the exchanges between Hamlet and Ophelia are characterized by the vulgar/polite dichotomy. Andreas argues that Hamlet's attack on Ophelia is an effort at self devalorization, an attempt to destroy the heroic image that he has occupied in her mind, an image of reinforcing the official role as chief courtier and heir. Hamlet's ego leads him to seek to have a radical devalorization, a complete debasement of identity. However, Hamlet's problem is that even though the Hamlet that

used to exist has vanished and has been replaced by a villain, Hamlet the courtier lives in memory. Therefore, Hamlet's devious actions are perceived as his being madly in love as opposed to his trying to avenge the murder of his father. Here Hamlet chooses his male ego over love.

The Shakespearean works we have been discussing so far are clearly relevant to today's society. According to The National Clearing House Fact Sheet, which demonstrates how often a woman is abused, a woman is beaten in the United States every eight seconds (4). The question is how do women protect themselves from becoming victimized by male dominance? Studies show that most abusive men turn to violence when they feel they are not in control of the women and they use violence to make themselves feel dominant in the relationship. In an article titled "*Domestic Violence: Reasons Why Men Abuse and Batter Women and Women Don't Leave the Relationship*," Sherry Romero informs us of some of the characteristics of an abuser:

The abuser/batterer sees women as objects. He does not view women as people. He has no respect for women as a group. He sees women as property sexual objects. Abuser/batterer has low self-esteem. He feels powerless and ineffective. Although he may appear to be successful, inside he feels inadequate. An abuser/batterer finds external excuses for his behavior. He will blame his violence on having had a bad day, alcohol or drug use, his partner's behavior or anything that comes to mind to excuse his violent actions. He may be charming and between his acts of

violence. Outsiders may view him as a nice guy. An abuser/batterer may display some warning signs such as: a bad temper, cruelty to animals, extreme jealousy, possessiveness, verbal abuse and/or unpredictability (4).

All of these characteristics mentioned above fit Othello, Claudio and Hamlet. They believe they have lost control of their women and this is why they turn to violence. Othello, Claudio, and Hamlet evolve as products of their environment. They live in a society where a man is partly judged by how well his woman comports to standards of decency. The thought of their wives committing adultery lowers the decency of these three noble men. These men are overwhelmed by the thought of their women going astray, so they turn to violence. A man like Othello, hailed for his valor at war, could find no other way of reinstating his masculinity but violence against his wife. Wife beating is often a result of sexual jealousy and the need for mate retention. Othello and Claudio demonstrate their jealousy while they plan their wives' punishments. For example, as Othello plans Desdemona's death, Othello makes known those plans, and what he thinks of women alleged to be unfaithful:

She's gone; I am abus'd and my relief
must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage
that we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad,
And live upon the vapour of a dungeon,
Than keep a corner in the thing I love
For other's uses. (III.iii. 334-39).

Othello's ego transforms him from a loving man to a murderous rascal as he caters to his ego. Both Claudio and Othello are able to blame their abuse on reaction to offensive behavior. They believe that their women have committed adultery; therefore it is necessary and acceptable to mistreat these women. Similarly, Hamlet can blame his abuse toward Ophelia on the fact that his mother has committed adultery with his uncle. Although these men have really hurt their partners, the victimization of Hero, Desdemona, and Ophelia is never questioned by other male characters in the three plays because the men are themselves blinded by the ethos of male domination. It is not surprising, therefore, that "the only characters who believe Hero's innocence are Beatrice, and the Friar, who is outside the network of men exchanging women" (Suzuki 130).

During the Middle Ages, the church was also instrumental in molding the way women conducted themselves and what was expected of them. With beliefs of women's fallibility (based on the Biblical story of Adam and Eve) so entrenched in the thinking of most people in the Middle Ages, it is not surprising that women were looked upon as inferior and embodiments of evil (Pitt 15). Even after the privilege of formal education was extended to them, they were still considered subordinates of men. A number of people also tried to debunk this idea of women being subservient to men. According to Juliet Dusinberre,'s article *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, "The Humanist Agrippa protested against men which assume Authority to themselves over Women by virtue of Religion, and do prove their Tyranny out of holy Writ" (78).

It is not clear what Shakespeare thinks of women. What is clear is that in his plays, he depicts women in many different ways, in part mirroring the values and the mores of society at the time; for instance, Desdemona is the submissive wife who takes care of her husband and their home; Portia is the brilliant lawyer, and Lady Macbeth, the power-hungry wife. It is noteworthy that although some of Shakespeare's plays have settings other than England, he frequently alludes to English law (Time 99).

Shakespeare's awareness of the patriarchal conceptions of roles for men and women helps to create the conflicts we see in three plays. Perhaps if the roles of the two genders were not so different Hero, Desdemona, and Ophelia would not have been victimized. Othello, Claudio, and Hamlet would then be able to view Hero, Desdemona, and Ophelia as their equal, which would allow them to confide in their women, just as they confided in their male enemies, Iago, Don John, and Horatio. Because Othello, Don John, and Hamlet view women as inferior, the surrender to the male ego and male dominance causes the dehumanization and murder of three innocent women.

The dehumanization and murder of Hero, Desdemna, and Ophelia are the results of the abuse caused by the male ego. According to Irene Matiatos, author of *The Verbal Abusive Partner*, verbal abusers are usually men. Like Hamlet, Othello, and Don John, they are likeable and present themselves well. They will also offer plausible explanations to counter their spouse's seemingly irrational complaints against them. What is wrong is that verbal abusers are "always right!" The pattern is typical: abusers justify their displays of anger or disrespect by blaming the partner. The spouse is over-responsible, emotional, and codependent. He acts out—and when this occurs, she is likely to concede. The verbally abusive relationship differs from normal relationship patterns in distinct

ways. There is an imbalance. In normal relationships, partners take turns poking at each other. In the abusive relationship, the abuser almost always provokes, and the abused partner almost always defends. The provocation is always offensive, and it is virtually transparent. The abuser's self-absorption and expectations spawn imbalance: The relationship is one-sided and is exclusively focused on meeting the emotional needs of the angry person. Irene Matiatos' theory on verbal relationships take heed to those in Shakespeare's plays *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*. All of the men verbally abuse their women and the imbalance in the relationship is evident. Don John humiliates Hero by calling her a strumpet and telling everyone in town that she has been with other men because his male counterparts have led him to believe she has been unfaithful (IV.i. 26-40). As a result of Iago's devilish scheme, Othello calls Desdemona a devil and tells her that he can not trust her, then demands she get out of his sight (IV. i. 193-95). Hamlet belittles Ophelia and sends her to the nunnery to show his cynical feelings about women, showing a particular obsession with what he perceives to be a connection between female sexuality and moral corruption (I.ii.146-50). Othello, Don John, and Hamlet all share the issue of being absorbed by their male egos. All of the men hold the power, which causes Hero, Desdemona, and Ophelia to blame themselves for their abusive partners and accept victimization in their relationships.

In an examination of ancient matrimonial laws, Dobash and Dobash (1978) explain that:

The man is the absolute patriarch who owned and controlled all Properties and people within the family. A wife was obligated to

obey her husband, and given the legal right and moral obligation to control and punish her for any “misbehavior” including adultery, drinking wine, attending public games without his permission or appearing unrevealed in public (432).

It seems plausible that Hero, Desdemona, and Ophelia were aware of these particular rules concerning marriage, which is why Desdemona and Hero never challenge their husband’s false accusations or mistreatment. They are aware that being insubordinate may cost them their lives. For example Hero never defends herself against Don John’s false accusations and although he is not her husband she knows that it is forbidden for her to go against a man’s word. She is aware of her role as a woman and would not dare to insult the male ego. If a woman did challenge her husband she was labeled “insubordinate”, and this resulted in severe mistreatment, which would still make her a victim of male domination. In these kinds of situations women would have no choice but to submit themselves to their husbands and live under the rules established by male dominance.

According to Dr. Irene Matiatos, a psychologist, the matrimonial laws mentioned above seem to hold true in other cultures as well. After Matiatos examined practices in other cultures, she surmises that husbands who murdered their wives normally did so for the following reasons:

1. Their wives had left them or threatened to end the relationships;
2. They suspected or knew that their wives were being unfaithful;
3. Their wives had refused their sexual advances.

(Counts, Brown, and Campbell 36).

These cultural universals demonstrate the power that men have over women in many cultures. In many places around the world, men dominated (and still dominate) women everywhere. There were not too many females that would take the risk of being disobedient or speaking what was on their mind. Although it was uncommon to see women with the courage to voice their opinions, there were some women who refused to be made victims of the male ego.

Shakespeare's three plays *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet* also represent the Elizabethan Theory by demonstrating through the female characters that women are subjected to roles which are mandatory for them to carry out in order for them to be married. These women did not attend school or receive any education. Instead they were coerced to learn how to manage a household and become skilled in all housewifely duties. Her education would have been purely of domestic nature in preparation for the only real career option for a girl—marriage! All Elizabethan women were expected to marry and be dependent upon a man throughout their lives. Therefore, it is safe to state that society has caused women like Desdemonia, Hero, and Ophelia to be victimized, since Elizabethan women have been raised to believe they were inferior to men. This perception of female subordination was so prevalent that "The church believed and quoted the Bible in order to ensure the continued adherence of this principle" (Chambers 128). Elizabethan women like Desdemonia, Hero, and Ophelia were expected instantly to obey not only their fathers, but also their brothers and any other males in their families. Any act of disobedience on the part of a woman resulted in whippings. Resistance or disobedience was seen as a crime against their religion and also placed shame on their

family's name. This reality explains why Hero, Desdemona, and Ophelia accept their victimizations and never claim their innocence.

Both Ophelia and Desdemona play the role of the "innocent lady" in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Othello*. The roles of these characters provide a sense of completeness, faithfulness, and obedience to the leading male figures. In both plays, these innocent ladies end up dying due to a false rejection of love. Othello kills Desdemona because he believes her love is false, and Ophelia dies ultimately because she reads Hamlet's mask of madness as rejection. These deaths exemplify the pattern of harmony turning to chaos in both of these plays, and provide proof of the decay that is spreading to everyone in Venice and Denmark.

Because of the use of the male ego and victimization of these women, one must ask why is it that in both plays *Othello* and *Hamlet* both men outlive their women? According to Liz Lewis, a feminist scholar, the protagonist "outlives Desdemona's chastity", which he finally acknowledges and outlives Desdemona herself. Why should Othello's reputation for prowess and courage outlive Desdemona's inward virtue? Why should Hamlet's rage and madness outlive Ophelia's integrity and obedience? It is suggested that both Othello and Hamlet throughout most of the play focus on the betrayal of their women; however they have in some light also betrayed their women with distrust and the inability to see their unseen essence, an essence that was both chaste and loving. The murder of these women may be seen as a consequence of the men's failure to properly assess the women's inward integrity. Both Desdemona and Ophelia live up to be perfect Elizabethan women yet still fall victims of male dominance.

According to Irene Dash, author of *Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays*, Shakespeare recognizes that men and women encounter the same realities, but their perspectives differ. His strong and sometimes defiant women allow him to examine what effect a society, which denies women their rights to personal freedom, has on them and the societal relationships they engage in. The images presented of men's fear of speech in women are also countered by an image that is more reassuring: the idealized Silent Woman (341). In literature, we see her as "the Good Matron of emblem lore, the bourgeois wife who stands with her foot on the box (she is stalwart), her hands carrying keys (she is prudent), her mouth gagged. She is aristocrat in sonnets, the mysterious Courtly Lady whose exquisite remoteness keeps her idealization intact. This woman is the ideal Elizabethan woman. However, women who are talkative and less submissive are a disgrace to men. As a result to the Elizabethan Theory, Shakespeare uses the Silent and the Garrulous Woman, to explore or portray societal values and mores, while complicating the women's traditional valuations.

CHAPTER III

THE STRUGGLE OF DISOBEDIENT WOMEN

In Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, there is an example of a female character attempting to overcome her role as an Elizabethan woman. This character is named Beatrice. In the opening scene of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice demonstrates the strength of her sharp tongue by stabbing Benedick with insults.

Benedick: God keep your Laddyship still in that mind, so some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate scratched face.

Beatrice: Scratching could not make it worse and 'twere such a face yours were.

Benedick: Well, you're a rare parrot-teacher.

Beatrice: A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours (I.i.106-11).

Benedick, in return, is furious because a "woman" is not supposed to speak to a man in that manner. However, for the first half of the play "the vocal Beatrice refuses the subjection of femininity ... by placing herself among the men and wielding phallic wit as aggressive as they" (Friedman 4). Beatrice believes that she has the right to voice her opinions as freely as men. This makes her different from both Desdemona and Hero, who allow themselves to be victims of male domination and the destructive forces of the male ego. Beatrice speaks what is on her mind whether she is "granted" the right or not.

Leonato subsequently warns Beatrice in Act II scene one that she will never get married if she does not learn to become submissive to men:

Beatrice's resistance to marriage is partly based on her knowledge of the unequal balance of power between the genders, which prevail with it. Beatrice does not question that wedlock, if she chooses it requires such subservience. She laments that there are no men of superior substance, by whom she may be overmastered without considering it a insult and to whom she could make an account of her life without being debased (Dusinberre 275).

Even Benedick, her future husband, describes his perfect lady (Act II scene iii lines 30-33), as not only rich, wise, virtuous and fair, which Beatrice is, but also mild, which she is not. Benedick admits that he can appreciate female speech in a pleasant and innocuous form, but he cannot abide by the acute unrestrained voice of an assertive woman (II ii 33). Dusenberre argues that Beatrice is all ego and superego who must learn to integrate the energies of the id; she must be tricked into admitting her love for Benedick. Beatrice and her witty real-life counterparts do indeed make refreshing comment on a conviction about wit as a masculine attribute and on the male ideal of the silent, submissive woman. However, Beatrice simply does not want to be victimized like her cousin, Hero. She feels she is entitled to the same rights as a man, but she is also aware that men dominate the world so her disobedience may subject her to living an unmarried life forever.

Beatrice is trapped by the circumstances of the Elizabethan women. She is not submissive and does not believe she is inferior to men. However, she is aware that there

is not a happy future for her if she does not marry. According to O'Connor, the role of unmarried Elizabethan women was domestic service or to spend their lives in a convent (78). Much like today, the majority of women look highly upon marriage; and as much as Beatrice tries to act as if marriage is not important to her, she proves just how imperative marriage is in her society. Beatrice is forced to make the choice to remain independent and lonely forever, or to submit to the roles of the Elizabethan women and be married. Beatrice chooses to be married by transforming herself into an inferior partner to a man and becoming submissive to men much like Hero and Desdemona.

Once Beatrice professes her love for Benedick and they agree to get married, Beatrice changes. After Beatrice and Benedick kiss at the wedding Beatrice is silent for the remainder of the play; it is hard to believe that Beatrice has become submissive after all. The fact that she remains silent throughout the remainder of the play suggests that she has agreed to her patriarchal rules. According to Time's article *Shakespeare's Criminals: Criminology, Fiction and Drama*, an alternative reading might be that Shakespeare clearly gave Beatrice an expressive and compelling voice with which to object the subservience of the female sex but that in doing so he sets up a formidable "straw woman" whose mouth he stops in the final scene (25). When Beatrice submits willingly to male control, her surrender indicates that masculine domination is natural, correct, and necessary for all.

The disobedient Beatrice, like Desdemona, Hero, and Ophelia has also been made a victim of male dominance. Although her victimization is not as harsh as the dehumanization and the murder of other women in both plays, she is still forced to submit to a man in order to get married. She knows that without this she will be lonely forever.

As much as Beatrice tries to stay true to what she believes she is still subject to failure. Her subordination in a male-ordered society is so effective that she has no other choice but to play her gendered role in the patriarchal society where men are the rulers. Although she is victimized toward the end of the play, it may be argued that her sharp tongue and witty personality are what save her from being completely humiliated or murdered, like both Hero and Desdemona. One would think that a woman going against all of the rights and privileges of patriarchy would be the woman humiliated or murdered, but it is ironic that three women who have always followed the rules of male domination are sentenced to the worst kind of victimization and a woman who has always been blatantly disobedient escapes severe victimization.

Shakespeare's female character Queen Gertrude in *Hamlet* is blatantly disobedient, and in turn, her disobedience gives her a sense of power. Queen Gertrude, widow of Hamlet's father, remarried to Claudius, has a type of conditional strength. When she and Claudius marry, that alone is an act of transgression against the Elizabethan view of morality. Her marriage so soon after her husband's death would be subject to ridicule and gossip among her subjects; however, she too takes a chance with that action. She is fully aware of the potential repercussions, yet she takes such a fairly big chance. This decision creates chaos in the entire play. As previously stated, Elizabethan women were loyal to their husbands and it was frowned upon for them to remarry once widowed. Similar to Shakespeare's character Beatrice, Gertrude also commences the play as a strong woman who lives by her own rules. She makes the conscious decision to fulfill her own desires (marrying her dead husband's brother) as

opposed to trying to be the perfect Elizabethan woman. She actively seeks to fulfill her own desires, which are station and affection. She has the tendency to use men to fulfill her instinct for self preservation. Her choice to satisfy her inner conscious rather than do what is best in a difficult situation makes her similar to the male characters and different from Hero, Desdemona, and Ophelia.

Although Queen Gertrude is quite different from Hero, Desdemona, and Ophelia, she also becomes a victim to the male ego in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. According to Amanda Mabillard, Gertrude's victimization is also a result of the rage deriving from Hamlet's male ego (2). She argues that although Hamlet lashes out at her with all the rage he can muster, Gertrude remains faithful to him, protecting him from the King. Although her love for Claudius is wrong by moral standards, she is now his queen, and remains loyal to him. We see that she has the potential for great love –she wants to protect Claudius from the mob, and she cares deeply about Ophelia and Polonius, and is concerned for Hamlet in the duel even though she has no idea that it is a trap. It is Gertrude's underlying propensity for goodness that redeems her. Her men forgive her for her shallow, sensual nature and her addictions to comfort and pleasure because they see that she is innocent of premeditation. It is sad but fitting that Gertrude meets her end drinking from the poisoned goblet, demanding that she taste what is in the pretty cup, “as trusting as a new-born babe” (Mabillard 2). Gertrude's desire to be true to both her husband and son causes her to be victimized.

As Gertrude changes from the independent woman who likes to fulfill her desires and tries fulfilling the role of an Elizabethan woman, she meets her death. Gertrude is aware that it is her duty to adhere to the rules of her husband. She knows that women are

to obey the men in their lives. Although Hamlet truly despises her because of her alleged affair with Claudius, she is forever bound to Hamlet because of her role as an Elizabethan Woman, which requires that all women submit to men. Gertrude is very similar to Shakespeare's character Beatrice, of *Much Ado About Nothing*, because both Beatrice and Gertrude start off making their own decisions and then lose themselves by converting to the expected roles of Elizabethan women. Beatrice converts to the Elizabethan role because she falls in love. She understands that she must obey certain rules to get married to Benedick. Beatrice is aware that it is deemed unbecoming for a woman to be lonely for the rest of her life. Queen Gertrude converts to being loyal to men because she truly loves both her husband and her son. She wants to be as true to both of them as possible because she is aware that being loyal to the men in her life is a quality that Elizabethan women possess. Loyalty is the only trait that Gertrude tries to live up to, in hopes of being considered a lady worthy of the Elizabethan woman title.

Dusinberre argues that masculine dependence in Elizabethan culture is signaled in Shakespeare's plays and those of his most enlightened contemporaries by the strategies of keeping even the most independent and attractive heroines in her place in the scheme of things, a scheme obviously hierarchical and patriarchal (263). Women are happily granted freedom when they function to refresh, integrate, and balance, but not when they threaten to upset those structures. Dependence of men upon women then can only be safely acknowledged when women can be trusted to nurture, protect and redeem the men in question. For example, it is acceptable for women to educate their sons, or for women to nurture the wounds of a soldier and help him recover. However, it is not acceptable for

women to disagree with men or present differing views on society because such a digression is not seen as a womanly quality. Although The Elizabethan Theory expects women to be loyal, domestic, and noble, this theory is another form of male dominance.

CHAPTER IV

THE MALE EGO AND MALE DOMINATION

Indeed, the men in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet* find ways to make their women suffer so the males can function as the men they are expected to be. Without women following the rules, men cannot be viewed as “real men.” Male domination is the controlling force throughout these plays. Such a controlling force is why Beatrice and Queen Gertrude are viewed differently from Hero and Desdemona. Even before the plot opens for Beatrice to marry Benedick, Beatrice is not viewed as a woman that a man would want to marry. This is because of the wit and the courage she displays. She makes it clear that she is as intelligent as any man and that women deserve equal rights. Although it may not always be clear what particular intentions Shakespeare had in both plays, one can assume that he is criticizing the main characters, Othello and Claudio, because they are described as men of nobility, strength, and intelligence, yet they are portrayed to be so naïve.

Shakespeare seems to be implying in both plays that male domination can result in catastrophic events. The presence of the “male ego” is what causes conflict. Every man is trying to cater to his ego, instead of making wise decisions. Claudio appears to be making a wise decision by trying to marry Hero, but the decision is turned on its head when he allows himself to be influenced by the false accusation directed against his soon-

to-be wife. His ego makes him engage in the emotional abuse of Hero. Male domination clearly plays a huge part in the victimization of the women characters in the three Shakespearean plays. If male dominance were not present in the plays there would have been three happy endings instead of one.

It is frightening to imagine what a country like the United States would be like if the Fourteenth Amendment was not passed granting women rights. Would women be victimized like Hero, Ophelia, and Desdemona? Perhaps, women would still be expected to speak only when spoken to, and a woman's opinion would not matter. Today, women are still suffering from the patriarchal rules that were established many centuries ago. For example, women who perform the same jobs as men are paid less than men because of their gender. Although male dominance is not as severe today as it was in the days of Shakespeare, it still exists; women are still expected to carry out certain roles as mothers and wives, but it is not uncommon for a woman to be the head of a household, or even demonstrate leadership qualities. As a result of great strides in human rights, women are no longer required to abide by old patriarchal rules which encouraged male domination.

Shakespeare's plays suggest that he is extremely sensitive to the important role of women in society. Although women had little respect in the social order of Elizabethan society, Shakespeare recognizes women as a real and significant part of society. Therefore, both of Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies analyzed in this study feature many existential struggles of women, one way or another. Although women do not constitute main characters in these Shakespearean plays, they play important parts. For example, the tragedy *Othello* is unlike many other Shakespearean plays, in that the leading female characters are wiser than the main male characters because they offer

reason to the chaotic world of their leading men. For example, Emilia continues to convince Othello of Desdemona's innocence, but Othello will not listen to her reasoning. Desdemona, despite Iago's innuendo, is an ideal wife to Othello. Both women continue to carry out their roles in the relationship despite the chaos. Contrarily, Iago with his devilish plans and Othello, with his uncontrollable jealousy, are consumed by the chaos and this causes them to victimize Desdemona, a woman who reflects goodness and sanity. Therefore, Shakespeare utilizes both plays *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, to shine light on the misrepresentation of the so-called "strong and loyal" men in both plays by allowing these men to fall to fall victims of their egos and male dominance.

Shakespeare employs the plays to demonstrate the effect of male domination on women. For example, the mistreatment that women characters endured in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, is caused by the thought of men losing control of their women and the prevailing fear of diminishing male dominance. In the three plays, women characters are easily made victims not only of male domination, but also of "male ego" formulated by male dominance. Queen Gertrude, in *Hamlet*, is just an innocent bystander within the battle of the various men fighting to murder for revenge, but she is the one poisoned. She plays no role in her own victimization and has no justification for being poisoned; she is simply the "weaker" sex caught in the crossfire. There is an obvious trend of female victimization that is quite ironic: the main female characters die regardless of whether they are killed purposely, unintentionally, or are responsible for their own deaths; they are all victims of malicious schemes, betrayal, and unbearable heartbreak. Shakespeare capitalizes on the machismo of the male characters,

leading to the physical and verbal victimization of the female characters and their feelings of misery and shame, and even their total destruction. Shakespeare brings difficulties of male dominance to the reader's attention by exemplifying how a high ranked soldier, noble man, and a potential king fall victim of little scheme which is also the result of male dominance. If male dominance wasn't as prevalent in the three plays the male characters would not have had to accept the words of their male counterparts. Instead, they would have confronted their wives and mother with the issue. The fact that Shakespeare took the initiative to create chaos in the plays which is caused by the male characters, and led to the female characters victimization suggest that Shakespeare wanted to point out the consequences and chaos of an unequal society and the results of too much male ego and domination?

Women have no choice but to deal with the "male egos" in their world, which gives them no ability to control whether they are made victims. Hero, Desdemona, and Ophelia are subjected to harsh treatment because of the machismo of their male counterparts, which leads to the physical and emotional mistreatment of women. A woman may think that practicing the role of a "good wife" will make her partner love and respect her more. In actuality, Shakespeare proves through his plays, *Othello*, *Much To Do About Nothing*, and *Hamlet*, that bowing to patriarchal rules does not guarantee happiness for women, for it may actually lead to their domination and victimization.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Although times, cultures, and roles for women have changed since the 16th century Elizabethan Period, one can suggest that men have not changed drastically. It is evident that men still feel that their wives should obey and respect their wishes. Contemporary women are now able to go to school, work, and be as independent as men. Previously, women were subjected to carrying out household duties and obeying male authority, which determined whether they were considered good women. Shakespeare shines a light on the victimization of women and exemplifies the consequences that women endure if and when they disobeyed their men. Shakespeare utilizes characters like Hero, Desdemona, and Ophelia to get this message to the reader. But now the question is: How could Elizabethan women like Hero, Desdemona, and Ophelia have prevented their victimization?

Desdemona, Hero, and Ophelia could have prevented the severity of their victimization if these women would have taken the initiative to fight against the male-ordered society by announcing their innocence. It is plausible that if the women would have fought for their innocence, they would not have subjected them to such harsh treatment because they would have heard their claims of innocence. For example, Beatrice was often criticized for her sharp tongue and wit, yet she was always heard by men. Although it is true that Elizabethan women were punished for disobedience, one

may argue that punishment is a lot less harsh than being murdered. As previously mentioned, Shakespeare utilizes the character of Beatrice to show the reader how women have the ability to manipulate men while escaping harsh victimization. Of course, it is true that once Beatrice married, she stopped insulting and ridiculing men. However, it is her wit and the strength of her character that saves her from ever being victimized throughout the play. One can suggest that had Desdemona, Hero and Ophelia decided to fight for their innocence they might have survived their victimization even if they had to suffer male scorn in the process.

In Shakespeare's tragic plays *Othello* and *Hamlet*, both Desdemona and Ophelia are subjected to death because of male authority. Both women are verbally abused prior to their tragic fall. However, the outcome for Hero is not death. Could the reader praise the witty and persistent Beatrice for this accomplishment? It was Beatrice who fought for Hero's innocence. She believed Hero to be a virtuous woman (even when everyone in Denmark is in doubt of Hero's character). Beatrice goes as far as persuading Benedick to kill Claudio in the name of their love as revenge for humiliating her cousin, Hero. Beatrice acts on Hero's behalf because she knows that Hero is not strong enough to overcome this punishment. Through both Beatrice and Hero, Shakespeare provides the reader with two types of women (the fighting character and the submissive character) in *Much Ado About Nothing*. One woman is the typical Elizabethan woman that falls in line with the roles of patriarchy, while the other woman is a woman that goes against the rules of male domination. The woman that follows the rules of male domination becomes victimized by those rules. Conversely, the woman that goes against all of the male dominating rules continues to live life freely and at her own leisure.

In today's society, violent victimization of women is a serious public health issue that is frequently encountered in family practice. Between 3% and 22.7% of women report violence by partners each year in large community samples, emergency departments, and community medical practices. Several large-scale studies have shown a correlation between violence by partners and women's health. Women's health tends to improve when they are no longer abused by their partners (Dobash 430). Concern about the health consequences of violence from male partners toward women has reached such awareness in the health community that many health organizations have issued calls for domestic violence screening for all women patients. Despite these efforts, male dominance continues to rise in today's society. In fact, examples of male dominance are also reflected in professional environments. Women are always paid less than men for performing the same jobs and they are expected to carry out household roles even when they work. This has been the role for women for years. Women were always expected to care for children, perform household chores, and tend to their husbands. The role of men is to work and provide for their family. Although these roles seemed fair in earlier years, it seems as if women's roles have increased while the roles for men have remained the same.

Similarly to Shakespeare's characters like Hero, Desdemona, Ophelia, Beatrice and Queen Gertrude in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*, women today are still being victimized by male egos and male dominance because of the different roles that society has imposed on both men and women. Women are still expected to be submissive, domestic, and obedient of their partners. These roles commenced before the

16th century and have continued in large part as a way of life. Men use these roles as a guide to measure their partners up against an imaginary model of perfect domesticity. However it becomes problematic when she does not fit the criteria of a good woman, which is when signs of victimization may occur. Male dominance and female victimization is such an important issue that portrayal of societal roles that Shakespeare presents in the three plays *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet* help to shine a light on the predicament of women in the Elizabethan Period, However these kinds of gender-biased treatment still exist today.

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