


DEFIANCE, DENIAL, AND DEFEAT:
A CHARACTER ANALYSIS IN SELECTED PLAYS WITH
AN AIDS-RELATED THEME


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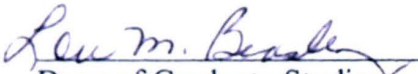

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Chandler Elizabeth, who first inspired me,
to Eddie, whose unconditional love sustains me, and
to Madison Morgan and Kennedy Grace, who challenge me to be a better person.

There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance.

In a word, there are three things that last forever: faith, hope, and love;

but the greatest of them all is love.

I Corinthians 13

	The Worried Well	84
	Life Experiences	91
	Historical Accuracy	95
6.	CONCLUSION	99
	Recommendations for Future Research	103
	REFERENCES	105
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	111
	VITA	114

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ABSTRACT

This project examined patterns of development in characterizations found in the following selected plays with an AIDS-related theme: *As Is*, *The Normal Heart*, *Angels in America: The Millennium Approaches*, and *Jeffrey*. Previous research by Gregory D. Gross and George Newtown briefly explores characterization in three well known AIDS plays (*As Is*, *The Normal Heart*, and *Safe Sex*), and David Roman has written an article about AIDS plays which briefly focuses on character development in four plays (*Pouf Positive*, *The Lisbon Traviata*, *I Could Go On Lip-Synching* and *AIDS!: The Musical!*) There has not been a body of literature, however, whose primary focus is on character types in selected AIDS-related plays.

This project investigated methods of developing characters who have AIDS or who are HIV-positive within the dramatic situations of the selected plays. It also examined characters who are not yet infected with the disease who are in the selected plays. The study is unique: it analyzes key character types in relation to concepts of defiance, denial, and defeat. This study is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of all stereotypes or character types inherent in AIDS plays. However, through methodic exploration of those mentioned, it analyzes the three concepts discussed. In addition, this study attempted to identify selected patterns of development created during the AIDS epidemic. Through this study, the reader has the opportunity to gauge the theatre world's response to a medical epidemic that has in the past created and continues to create ramifications and reverberations on a social, political, ethical, spiritual, and emotional level in the theatre community and in America.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose and Scope	2
Definition of Terms	3
Review of Literature	4
2. THE NATURE OF AIDS	14
The Origins	15
The Basics	16
Society and AIDS	20
AIDS and Theatre	26
3. DEFIANCE	29
The Establishment	30
Acts of Love and Hope	43
Historical Accuracy	49
4. DENIAL	52
AIDS, Death, and Mortality	53
The AIDS Crisis	61
Homosexuality	66
Historical Accuracy	70
5. DEFEAT	75
Stricken with AIDS: Diagnostic Defeat	76

Chapter 1

Introduction

Let it be known to all those who have for some reason not known it previously, that theater is rated “X.” You are not safe there. The theater is for those people who are willing to be challenged, who expect to be challenged. You have an obligation to protest if you are not challenged there. Don’t go to the theater to be titillated, go to be shocked, good and healthily. To be moved intelligently and honestly and with integrity...Don’t come to the theater expecting us to conform to the community standards of morality. That’s not our job...If you can’t stand up under the mandate of art, turn on the television set. Go to a movie. Stay home (Bradley, 1992, p. 370).

With these words, Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Lanford Wilson challenged theatre audiences of the future. His thoughts on the power of theatre stemmed from a controversy that arose as a result of a Southwest Missouri State University production of *The Normal Heart*, a drama by Larry Kramer that addresses issues surrounding Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, better known as AIDS. Lanford Wilson’s perception of the role of theatre is illuminating and relevant in relation to the AIDS epidemic and the theatre practitioner’s obligation to become an effective communicator. He eloquently and candidly states what the majority of theatre practitioners are empowered by and bound to: moving the audience with intelligence and truth.

The theatre world addressed the issue of AIDS with the same eloquence and candid nature that Lanford Wilson possesses in its relationship to the AIDS epidemic.

Although key issues have been addressed, literature on the impact of the AIDS epidemic on the theatre world through the evaluation of specific character types is limited. The purpose of this thesis is to examine specific patterns of development in characterizations found in selected plays with AIDS-related themes. This study should have value because there is no critical mass of literature whose primary focus is character types in AIDS-related plays.

Purpose and Scope of the Study

This thesis will investigate methods of developing characters who have AIDS or who are HIV-positive as they are found within dramatic situations. It will also examine characters within the selected plays who are not infected with the disease but who fall into the categories analyzed. This project will chronicle the patterns of character development that have emerged from the following selected plays: *As Is*, *The Normal Heart*, *Angels in America: The Millennium Approaches*, and *Jeffrey*.

As Is and *The Normal Heart* are representative of two well known early mainstream responses to the AIDS epidemic from the theatre world, whereas *Angels in America: The Millennium Approaches* and *Jeffrey* are representative of two well known mainstream responses written almost a decade after the initial response to the AIDS crisis. All four plays had successful runs in New York. This study is unique: it analyzes character types and concepts of defiance, denial, and defeat. The thesis is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of all character types and concepts inherent in AIDS plays. However, through methodical exploration of the three types mentioned, it will attempt to identify selected patterns of development as they have been created during the AIDS epidemic. It is the aim of this study to determine whether the three character types, as

they embody the aforementioned concepts, are accurate representations of persons with AIDS as the epidemic progressed from the early phase to almost a decade of knowledge and existence later. In addition, the study will attempt to determine whether one of the selected character types emerges with more frequency than the other types during the course of the epidemic as seen through the four plays under review. There also will be an attempt to determine whether the patterns coincide with the common perception of AIDS in society corresponding to the plays and years in which they were presented.

Today, society has begun to take the position that AIDS is not an issue of what is right and wrong. The more the disease has spread, the easier it has been for society to accept this perspective. Middle America has seen beloved and respected figures such as Rock Hudson and Arthur Ashe contract the disease and die. Sports icon, Magic Johnson, admitted to being HIV positive in the early 1990s and has lived to share his experiences with the illness. These facts have brought the fear and anger of AIDS to massive numbers of Americans. As a result, people understand now more than ever before that AIDS can affect those with whom they work, those with whom they live, and even those they love.

Definition of Terms

To assist the reader in this study, the following terms will be defined to clarify their meanings. When using the acronym, AIDS, as in "AIDS-related plays," it shall refer to the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, a serious disease of the human immune system that is caused by infection with HIV. Indeed, HIV is often used synonymously in connection with AIDS.

HIV, the human immunodeficiency virus, can be any number of retroviruses which may develop into AIDS. This study will consider HIV-related issues to be evaluated in tandem with the AIDS-related issues in plays.

There are many terms, phrases and slang that are inherent in plays with an AIDS-related theme. Although they may be known to people who are familiar with this genre of plays, to facilitate a better understanding for the general reader, these terms will be defined.

PWA is defined as a person or people with AIDS. Occasionally, one may see a variation of this such as PLWA, which is a person or people living with AIDS. These initials became part of the popular usage as the AIDS epidemic continued and as people began to express hope for survival.

The “gay plague” is an expression found in several works which refers to the mass media term for AIDS when it was first discussed. Other terms found in this thesis are gay, fairy, queer, and queen. Within the context of this study, all of these terms refer to homosexual men. Such slang can be negative or positive in nature, depending on the situation in which the terms are used.

The term, “mainstream,” signifies that which is the prevailing direction or influence. For the purposes of this study, it is what is accepted as the norm. Other terms also may require brief comment during the course of this study.

Review of Literature

An exhaustive review of literature reveals a theatre world that did not respond immediately to the AIDS crisis. The first play with an AIDS-related theme, *Night Sweat* by Robert Chesley, was produced in 1984, three years after the first diagnosis of the

disease. Although there have been many AIDS-related plays since this first one, few have made it successfully to the mainstream stage to be viewed by the American public. Literature has been written about the disease in our society and about the disease as it is found in creative works.

In Michael Feingold's introduction to Elizabeth Osborn's anthology of plays with AIDS themes, *The Way We Live Now: American Plays and the AIDS Crisis*, he compares the disease to a tragic form of a play. People with AIDS, he claims, assume roles of tragic proportions through suffering and death, leaving behind other people or characters to experience numbness and grief (1990, p. xi). Feingold's analysis of the disease is supported in the scripts as they chronicle the rise of AIDS in America. The epidemic is not always a result of one's own actions; nevertheless, the individual must take responsibility for playing host to the disease. It is also a social problem which deals with the human condition whether or not one may be placed in categories or labels associated with the AIDS epidemic. Feingold, therefore, is largely accurate when he describes plays with AIDS-related themes as tragic. The classic Greek tragedy, *Oedipus*, is an example Feingold relates to the issue of tragedy and AIDS. Oedipus' actions were individual, yet they affected a nation. AIDS affects individuals, our nation, and the world.

Portrayal of characters in AIDS plays and their patterns of development illuminate society's response to the epidemic. Throughout plays with AIDS-related themes, one may find the following dominant concepts: defiance, denial, and defeat. Concurrent with these concepts is a body of literature about stereotypes and prototypes in AIDS-related plays. However, this examination of the growth, or lack of growth of characters is limited, and examples of accurate, fact-based representations of the

characters in connection with the trends of the AIDS epidemic are almost non-existent. An examination of the three existing concepts of defiance, denial and defeat will provide insight into society's response to the epidemic.

With general concepts in mind, Gregory Gross (1992) studied three plays that contained AIDS-related themes: William Hoffman's *As Is*, Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart*, and Harvey Fierstein's *Safe Sex*. His article examines the fear of persecution, oppression and the disease that is evident through the characters utilized in each of these plays. According to Gross, "The slow horror of suffocation dominates characterization in these plays. All three playwrights lace their drama with Nazi images and the characters draw overt parallels between the Holocaust and AIDS" (p.63). The result of the parallel of which Gross wrote may be described as a defeated character type. *As Is* and *The Normal Heart* both provide tragic figures in the form of gay men who are blamed for the disease they have, and for their lifestyle.

Gross' article focuses on the political nature of the early plays. It also addresses the images and similarity between AIDS and the Holocaust as demonstrated through the events of the plays. He delves into the homosexual aspect of the characters in the three plays and the "balancing between desire and dread" (p.66) that the characters experience. In contrast, although some of these elements may be briefly addressed, the primary focus in this study will be the specific examination of the concepts of defiance, denial, and defeat as manifested in the four plays selected for examination. Gross does not comment on the concepts to be evaluated in this study.

Another piece of literature that explores the characterizations of people with AIDS both in theatre and television is an article written by George Newtown (1990).

His evaluation of theatre examines the same three plays that Gregory Gross critiqued. Newtown agrees with many of Gross' thoughts, but he goes a step further in his examination. He posits that "AIDS plays continue to be hard-pressed to present many-faceted female characters as Pre-AIDS drama did" (p. 214). In addition to his belief that the characters parallel the Holocaust, Newtown adopts the Greek tragic concept that Feingold embraced. Furthermore, Newtown contends that the heroes of AIDS dramas function as surrogates for the rest of society. Newtown believes the characters are helpless, moral, sympathetic, in pain, and under the universal preoccupation of love and overcoming our greatest fear: death (p. 215).

Another article that deals with the character types represented in AIDS-related plays takes a completely different approach. Camp evolved as an outrageous response to the serious nature of the majority of AIDS-related plays. This movement attempts to find humor in association with AIDS. In 1987, Robert Patrick wrote *Pouf Positive*, a humorous AIDS play. Further evidence of camp lies in David Roman's article (1992) that explores the evolution of the camp character type in AIDS plays. This movement into camp was a gay movement, and, according to Roman, it was an attempt to "demonstrate how the theatre can accommodate both entertainment and activism, or more precisely, how camp can serve AIDS activist politics through the medium of the theatre" (pp. 305-327). Although Patrick's play and Roman's article place considerable focus on AIDS, their approaches, e.g., the use of comedy and the analysis of comic literature, differ from the one that is embraced in this study.

Most literature concerning character analysis in AIDS-related plays is found among journals and periodicals. However, there are anthologies of plays with an

AIDS- related theme or a homosexual theme that may devote a fraction of their introduction or foreward to the subject of AIDS, characters and drama. In contrast, one book that does spend time addressing the subject of AIDS plays in some detail is *The Art of AIDS* by Rob Baker (1994). This book devotes four chapters to the theatre and to the AIDS epidemic. Although it does not specifically evaluate the character types selected for this work, it does discuss, although briefly, all four of the plays selected for this study. It does not undertake methodical comparisons of the four plays, yet it draws a parallel and discusses *As Is* and *The Normal Heart* together. Parallels between the two plays may be found in much of the research discovered in this literature review. Both plays were produced in New York within six weeks of each other at the beginning of the epidemic, and they are often analyzed together despite the fact that the approach they take to the AIDS epidemic is different.

In his book, Baker discusses the responses from all aspects of the arts community to the AIDS epidemic. Although it is not all-inclusive, it examines popular, mainstream plays as well as lesser known works of value. Baker contends that the first strong statements about the epidemic came from the theatre world. "The onstage depictions of the epidemic have continued to be among the most outspoken and most successful examples of AIDS art...radical voices such as Kramer and Hoffman pioneered the challenge to the status quo in 1984 and 1985 regarding the issue of AIDS" (p. 176). He provides insightful opinions on the epidemic and the responses to the plays that resulted from the crisis. Baker also gives interesting background information on the playwrights of the AIDS-related plays he discusses in chapters of his book devoted to the theatre.

As previously mentioned, there are numerous sources that compare or discuss *As Is* and *The Normal Heart* in tandem. In *Out Front*, Don Shewey (1988) discusses the two plays in his introduction. *As Is* is included in the collection of contemporary gay and lesbian plays. According to Shewey, the two playwrights “took the lead in promoting education on AIDS and concern for the afflicted, a social obligation that the press, the government, even made-for-TV movies were slow to pick up on” (p. xxiii). Another article which analyzes the two well known plays discusses the questions the plays evoke regarding promiscuity, suffering, and mortality. This article, “A Common Bond of Suffering: Shows About AIDS Make Good Drama As Well As Propaganda,” also delves into the political nature of the two AIDS-related plays (Henry, 1985, p. 85).

Richard Grenier (1993) renders an atypical analysis of plays with an AIDS-related theme in his article, “The Homosexual Millennium: Is it here? Is it approaching?” Grenier claims that plays with an AIDS-related theme are misleading the American public about the real impact of a homosexual culture. According to Grenier, AIDS is not the major threat it has been portrayed. AIDS-related plays are really about the “Jewishness” of their authors (pp. 52-57). Although this article mentions all four of the plays that will be examined in this thesis, it never discusses the character types which will be explored in this study.

In Edmund White’s article (1997), “Journals of the Plague Years,” he includes *As Is*, *The Normal Heart*, and *Angels in America* as some of the most memorable plays dealing with AIDS over the past 15 years. He does not mention *Jeffrey*. White claims AIDS is “especially suited for the forum of theater as theater has been a place for religious commemoration and the debate over public values, and even today plays can

memorialize as well as polemicize” (pp. 13-18). White offers the common comparison of the AIDS plays he discusses as similar to the theatre of the Greeks as a result of the suffering and tragedy the AIDS-related plays expose. White believes such exposure has not been prominent in American theatre, but he contends that it should be.

There are only two other works that approach analyses of AIDS-related plays in a similar manner in which this study will unfold. In 1992, Dean Robert Yohnk wrote a dissertation, *The Drama of AIDS: An Analysis of Selected AIDS-Related Plays Written During the First Decade of the Epidemic, 1981 – 1991 (Immune Deficiency, Activist Art)*. This dissertation examines twelve AIDS-related plays and the themes, characters and plots of these plays. It does not, however, examine *Angels in America* or *Jeffrey*. Robert Francis Boccardi (1994) also wrote a dissertation concerning AIDS-related plays, *An Examination of Selected American Plays Produced in New York City between 1984 and 1993 Related to the Issue of AIDS*. Unlike this study, Boccardi’s dissertation analyzes plays that have been produced but does not evaluate character types.

The review of literature to this point has focused on works specifically related to the theatre and AIDS-related plays. Theatre’s function as a mirror to society in connection with AIDS-related plays may also be examined by reviewing sample literature dealing with the issue of the role of the public’s response to AIDS. Such information can provide an index to the accuracy of characterizations within the plays under examination. Moreover, the information can serve as a barometer to the public response to this genre of work.

There are several studies that deal with public opinion concerning AIDS. However, four that have been examined for this thesis are especially relevant. Eleanor

Singer, Theresa F. Rogers and Marc Glassman's article (1991), "Public Opinion About AIDS Before the U.S. Government Public Information Campaign," examined the effect of a massive public information campaign on AIDS designed by the Centers for Disease Control in 1988. The study examined public opinion before the campaign through Gallup surveys and then tested public opinion after the Centers for Disease Control campaign. The results provided information that concluded the effects of the campaign were minimal. It is interesting to note that the Centers for Disease Control did not take action until 1988 (pp. 161-179). The disease was first discovered in 1981.

The second public opinion resource that is relevant to the current study was conducted by Horst Stipp and Dennis Kerr (1989). The article, "Determinants Of Public Opinion About AIDS," makes a valid argument that the research conducted regarding the issue of AIDS should focus on the concept that anti-gay attitudes stand between media information and public knowledge and opinions. The study submits the idea that anti-gay attitudes constrain the ability of the media to effectively communicate information about risk factors and how the disease is transmitted (pp. 98-106). Plays selected for study are from the homosexual view point and presented to mainstream America via New York productions. Public opinion regarding the disease is an interesting component to the popularity and acceptance of AIDS-related plays.

In addition to the aforementioned public opinion resources, the findings in the following articles also are relevant to this study. Eleanor Singer, Theresa F. Rogers, and Mary Corcoran's article (1987), "The Polls – A report AIDS," examines public opinion polls early in the course of the epidemic (pp. 508-595). Singer, Rogers and Jennifer Imperio (1993) create an article which re-examines the public opinion from the previous

research. “The polls: poll trends: AIDS – an update” specifically addresses public opinion regarding AIDS later in the crisis in comparison to public opinion early in the epidemic through polls (pp. 92-114). The article attempts to illustrate changes that varied in public opinion from the findings of the first study.

Public opinion notwithstanding, it is a common ideal that theories should accurately explain life and correspond with reality. Critical and scholarly evaluation of literature that exists on the subject of character portrayal in AIDS-related plays can contribute to this ideal.

As demonstrated through the review of literature on the subject of AIDS-related plays, there is a void in scholarship that the current study can help fill. Other works have not examined the three important concepts in the four plays that will be explored in this thesis. The examination of patterns that exist in plays with an AIDS-related theme can heighten the awareness of representation of people with AIDS in the theatre world. The heightened awareness also can enable the theatre practitioner to identify and provide portrayals of people with AIDS that illustrate the current epidemic trends. Accurate representation by theatre practitioners can, in turn, intensify the audience’s awareness to the AIDS crisis.

The purpose and the scope of this project have been clarified, and the pertinent literature has been reviewed. Chapters three, four, and five of this thesis will address the concepts of defiance, denial, and defeat and the character types that embody these concepts as illustrated in the following plays: *As Is*, *The Normal Heart*, *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*, and *Jeffrey*. To gain a better understanding of AIDS, it is crucial to examine the basics of the disease that spawned an epidemic and volumes of

responses to this epidemic. The following chapter will discuss the nature of AIDS.

Although it is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of the disease, it should facilitate a better understanding of the basics of the disease, the conditions of society when the disease was introduced to America, the disease as an epidemic, and how AIDS influenced the world of the theatre.

Chapter 2

The Nature of AIDS

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was first diagnosed in America within the homosexual community in 1981. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) first reported on AIDS at this time for the purpose of identifying it as an epidemic. Later evidence has revealed that there were unidentified cases in the late 1970s in America as well as in sub-Saharan Africa in 1959 (Perrow & Guillen, 1990, p.15). Five young men were treated in the Los Angeles and San Francisco area for the disease. Simultaneously, cases began to emerge in New York. Before it became known as AIDS, it was identified as Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID), due to the fact that only homosexual men had been diagnosed with the symptoms of the disease. Only a small number of diagnoses were for people who were not homosexual; therefore, the focus became the gay community (Hopp and Rogers, 1989, pp. 2–5). By 1982 it had become evident that the disease was not restricted to the gay community, and the name was changed to AIDS (Shilts, 2000, p. 171).

Changing the name from GRID to AIDS resulted in a minor sense of relief from the stigma of the disease for the homosexual community. The change also made the heterosexual community aware of the vulnerability they had to the AIDS epidemic, even if it was on a smaller scale than that of the homosexual community. When the disease was detected in the United States, it did not receive significant attention. The medical community focused on the disease. The general public, however, was largely unconcerned due to the homosexual focus the disease had been given. It was a

homosexual issue and, therefore, one that many Americans dismissed as an issue of little or no importance.

AIDS was, and still is, an ethical issue for society. The disease forces individuals to intensely examine their own ethical beliefs. Theatre also may do this by encouraging people to scrutinize basic values and biases. Before the disease had spread to epidemic proportions, it was an ethical issue of what was “right” and “wrong” behavior in the minds of many. That concept lingers.

Contemporary theatre’s response to the issue of AIDS is an excellent example of the role theatre plays in community life. The relationship between society and theatre on the subject of AIDS requires a fundamental understanding of the disease. There is an immense body of literature which provides information about the disease. Information in this chapter provides a basic understanding of the disease, its epidemic nature, societal issues in America during the AIDS crisis, and how AIDS has influenced the world of theatre.

The Origins

Scientists do not have concrete evidence that explains the origin of AIDS. Numerous hypotheses and theories have circulated through society and the medical community. One theory is the speculation that a retrovirus associated with HIV that was specific to non-human primates was somehow transmitted to humans via exposure to monkeys. A fragmented version of this theory posits that the polio vaccines produced 20 years ago for use in Africa were contaminated with the monkey retrovirus. When humans were inoculated with the virus, it mutated and evolved into HIV (Frumkin & Leonard, 1994, p. 7). Speculation that HIV has always existed but only recently

materialized, as well as the theory that HIV is an entirely new organism, also exists (Levert, 1987, p. 2).

The Basics

AIDS is a specific set of medical conditions which occur when the body's immune system no longer has the ability to deter disease. The immune system in an individual with AIDS is compromised to the point that infections normally handled by the body without incident have the ability to kill. In one of the earliest books that addresses the issue of AIDS, Dr. Jeanne Kassler (1983), a prominent physician in the field of gay men's health, states, "AIDS is the first known naturally occurring breakdown of the body's immune system. Without a working immune system, no one survives for any length of time" (p. 2). The immune system is the body's internal defense mechanism against infection and cancer. It is a network that separates what it perceives as the invading enemy and destroys it.

Absent a strong immune system, many symptoms of AIDS can emerge. The following are possible symptoms of AIDS: persistent fever of 100 degrees or higher without explanation that lasts for weeks or months; unexplained weight loss of more than ten pounds; swelling of the lymph-nodes; severe and chronic fatigue; diarrhea; shortness of breath and dry cough; oral thrush; skin spots, such as Kaposi's sarcoma; night sweats; and neurological problems, such as personality changes, depression, hallucinations, memory loss, and seizures (Kassler, 1983, pp. 11-14).

As difficult as the aforementioned symptoms may be, the offending virus can create even greater problems. According to Suzanne Levert in *AIDS: In Search of a Killer*, "most medical experts agree that AIDS is caused by the virus known as Human

Immunodeficiency Virus, or HIV. Viruses are microorganisms that cause various diseases which range in severity from minor to life-threatening” (1987, p. 1). HIV was isolated and identified by French researchers in 1983. It is believed that HIV began to spread extensively in the late 1970s and early 1980s. HIV exists and flourishes in human bodily fluids.

The four bodily fluids that carry HIV in a high enough concentration to infect others are blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk...these are high-risk bodily fluids...Although saliva does not carry HIV in a high enough concentration to pose a threat, the possibility of blood-to-blood transmission does exist. Cold sores or bleeding around the teeth after brushing and flossing allow entry and exit points for the virus to travel to or from the bloodstream. HIV through any form of kissing has never been reported. Because HIV can not survive outside human bodily fluids, it can also not be transmitted through touching or such contact. HIV will not survive in food, drinks, or on surfaces such as water fountains or toilet seats...there has never been a report of the virus being transmitted through such casual methods (Tonks, 1996, p.39, 41, 51).

Although the preceding explanation makes a clear distinction between the two terms, the connection between HIV and AIDS is so close that they are frequently used synonymously by mainstream America. A person may be HIV-positive and never develop AIDS. No clear explanation has been given by the medical community and scientists that illustrates why one person may develop AIDS, whereas another may be HIV-positive but free of symptoms for years.

Although HIV-positive persons may not always be easily identified, the location of identifiable HIV-positive persons was no secret in the early years. Initially, more than 70 % of HIV-positive cases were gay men from large urban cities. Kassler claims, “The clustering of AIDS in a particular group and in certain geographic locations was the first clue that AIDS had an environmental cause – either an infectious agent or some other aspect of shared-lifestyle” (Kassler, 1983, p.2). However, within one year of defining the demographic group at-risk as homosexuals, other risk groups began to emerge. Intravenous drug users began to display symptoms of the new disease. A group of Haitians demonstrated signs of the illness, despite the fact that there were no homosexuals among this group of 34 and only one intravenous drug user. A few weeks after the Haitians emerged as a risk group, hemophiliacs who had received blood transfusions were added to the list (Kassler, pp. 3–4). It became clear to the scientists and physicians who encountered the new disease that a crisis of unprecedented proportions to this generation was on the horizon. In marked contrast, most patients with other new diseases, such as Legionnaire’s Disease and Toxic Shock Syndrome, recovered from these illnesses.

Although the groups at risk of contracting AIDS or HIV are still primarily the same, there has been a marked increase in heterosexual cases of HIV. Homosexuals represent 42 % of new HIV cases, whereas heterosexuals represent 33 %. (CDC, 2003, p. 3). The gap has closed significantly since the discovery of HIV and AIDS. To cite one example, AIDS is the leading cause of death for African-American women aged 25-34 (United Nations AIDS Organization, 2003, p. 2).

Just as HIV cases within select groups have changed, so has the rate of growth. The AIDS epidemic grew at a rate of over 80 % each year from its discovery until the mid-1980s. It has now stabilized, showing a slight 2% increase in 2002. The Centers for Disease Control have enacted comprehensive prevention efforts to slow the epidemic in America. Although there are approximately 40,000 new cases of infection annually, the programs sponsored by CDC have demonstrated tremendous progress (CDC, 1998, p. 2). One of the many events curtailing the increase of infection was the use of the highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) which gained prominence in 1996. The number of AIDS-related deaths has continued to decline, and AIDS prevalence (the number of people living with AIDS) continues to increase.

Of all HIV infections in 2001, 39 percent progressed to AIDS within twelve months of diagnosis of HIV...In 2001, the cumulative number of Americans diagnosed with AIDS throughout the course of the epidemic was 816,149; of those, 467,910 had died...In 2002, the rate of AIDS diagnosis in the United States was 14.1 per 100,000 population. (CDC, 2003, pp.1-6)

The numbers disclosed by the CDC are staggering. Diagnoses of AIDS have increased in recent years. Thirty states have passed confidentiality laws that prohibit name disclosure. Fear of the disease and discrimination hindered testing efforts early in the epidemic. The anonymity provided by confidentiality law imbues persons with the necessary security to acknowledge and disclose the disease without the previous substantial fear of repercussions from society. Nevertheless, problems surrounding disclosure of the illness

remain. The law is of no use to individuals who harbor such fear of AIDS that they will not permit themselves to be examined.

In addition to the problems posed by the fear of AIDS, prompt and proper diagnosis of the disease is further complicated by the prospect of financial ruin. Levert (1987) claims, "The estimated treatment of each AIDS patient, from diagnosis to death, has cost between \$50-100,000 and \$500,000 depending on the number of medical factors...the financial burden of AIDS will have reached nearly \$15 billion by 1991" (p.115).

It is clear, therefore, that the human toll is significant. Although 23 years have passed since the CDC made its first report on AIDS as an epidemic, it is still considered to be an epidemic in America. Demographics may have changed since the onset of the crisis, but the ramifications as illustrated through the numbers provided by the CDC are unsettling.

Society and AIDS

Initially, mainstream America was not concerned about the discovery of AIDS or HIV. The majority of media did not make significant attempts to include information regarding AIDS to the public. It was deemed a "gay-plague" and, as such, it was not newsworthy for America. Ronald Reagan was serving as the President of the United States when the disease was discovered. His conservative platform and family values agenda did not include mass messages pertaining to the homosexual subculture in America. Homosexuals were still "others," people you heard about, yet did not often see, and rarely discussed.

The national mass media not only avoided the discussion of AIDS, it was disturbed by visual symptoms it was certain mainstream America did not want to see. Such symptoms may include lesions from Kaposi's sarcoma and the skeletal wasting of the body. A host of articles and books earmark one event as the turning point in national sentiment concerning the issue of AIDS and its newsworthiness: the 1985 death of screen actor, Rock Hudson. Beloved by the nation as an icon of rugged, handsome manliness, America was shocked to learn that not only had this mainstream treasure died, he had died of AIDS.

After the death of Rock Hudson, there was a significant increase in media attention to AIDS. In the same year Hudson died, America was introduced to a young school boy, Ryan White. Suffering from hemophilia, he was thrust into the national spotlight at the age of 14. He had contracted AIDS through transfusions of tainted blood. Because of a lack of knowledge of AIDS, and fearful that their own children could contract the disease from young White, other parents did not want their children to attend school with him. Although few persons understood the disease at that time, AIDS had rapidly become a familiar and forbidding household word.

Because AIDS had emerged as a terrifying subject, the public initially responded more to perception than to scientific knowledge, resulting in a society in crisis. Cindy Patton (1990), professor, journalist, and noted author on the issue of AIDS, addresses the problem this situation posed in *Inventing AIDS*:

Systematic scientific coverage of the epidemic, dating from about the First International AIDS Conference in Atlanta in 1985, quickly informed people that AIDS existed; however, the emergence of a core of media

experts increased the gap between producers and consumers of scientific knowledge. In their efforts to translate science, reporters fell prey to elisions and simplifications. Terms like ‘the AIDS test,’ ‘promiscuity,’ ‘AIDS carrier,’ and ‘inevitably fatal’ distorted the scientific facts and their social implications. Media science frequently articulated pre-existing stereotypes in a new, objective-sounding language. (p.26)

Labels emerged that would remain throughout the course of the epidemic. The growing number of individuals with the disease was classified as “innocent” or “guilty” in media accounts of the epidemic.

Mainstream American society infused additional positive and negative attributes to the disease. Richard Grenier (1993), noted journalist and author, discusses the application of religious concepts to the AIDS crisis:

In a world with God, there are explanations or at least comforts for suffering. In a world without God, however, suffering must be either meaningless or caused by some malign agency. Since it would be intolerable to believe the suffering caused by AIDS is meaningless, the temptation to blame someone else becomes impossible to resist... Individual sufferers have faced death from AIDS bravely, but the cultural response to AIDS has overwhelmingly been one of grievance and complaint. (p.54)

Indeed, there have been numerous religious references to the AIDS epidemic as it is compared to biblical plagues on people by the wrath of God for their actions. Pat Buchanan viewed AIDS as a consequence of moral bankruptcy and Jerry Falwell

pontificated that AIDS was God's judgment on a society that did not live by His rules (Sontag, 1989, p. 61).

The concept of AIDS as a plague dominates the literature of the epidemic. When physicians were in the initial stages of discovery, the American College of Physicians and the Infectious Diseases Society of America issued a paper analyzing quarantining as a method of containment for the epidemic (Frumkin and Leonard, 1994, p.132). The ethical and unsound medical ramifications prevented this notion from becoming a reality for those stricken by the disease. The suggested quarantine was unsound medically and ethically because the method of transmission as well as complete demographics for at-risk groups had not been sufficiently established. Sufficient details did not exist to warrant quarantine. The desire for quarantine was fueled by hysteria and fear. This early notion is responsible for many allusions to the Holocaust and concentration camps for those addressing the AIDS crisis.

Susan Sontag, a cancer survivor and well-known author, discusses AIDS and the metaphors society chose to associate with the epidemic in her book, *AIDS and its Metaphors*. She makes the following point regarding AIDS and the plague references:

It is usually epidemics that are thought of as plagues. And these mass incidences of illness are understood as inflicted, not just endured.

Considering illness as a punishment is the oldest idea of what causes illness...Hippocrates, who wrote several treatises on epidemics, specifically ruled out 'the wrath of God' as a cause of the bubonic plague...illness as interpreted in antiquity as punishments, like the plague in *Oedipus*, were not thought to be shameful...diseases, insofar as they

acquired meaning, were collective calamities, and judgments on a community. (1989, p. 45)

Sontag's view resonates with clarity what many failed to see once the issue of AIDS surfaced in mainstream America. If America could blame "others" for the AIDS crisis, judgment became a moot point. The disease was not society's responsibility, but the individual's. Alienation reigns: it does not affect mainstream America, it affects sub-cultures and deviants. It is not America's fault; it is the subculture's fault. Such accusations started before 1985. Even when the disease was discovered, it became a point of accountability to place the origin of the disease elsewhere. It was important that the disease originated in Africa or in Haiti or anywhere as long as it was not in America (Boccardi, 1994, p. 12; Frumkin & Leonard, 1994, p. 7; Kassler, 1983, p. 9; Shilts, 2000, p. 3, 7, 34; Sontag, 1989, p.61). Assigned blame was intended to keep mainstream America guilt-free. The blame and lack of accepting social responsibility is confirmed in the concept that was perpetuated early in the crisis and has maintained momentum throughout: "If I am not gay and not an intravenous drug user, I am safe from AIDS."

Not only was there a desire to blame others for the presence of AIDS in American society, there were other social consequences. Patton (1990) addresses the social aspect of AIDS in America. She claims, "The epidemic gained its social meaning in relation to deep prejudices about race, class, gender, sexuality, and addiction. Public ignorance about AIDS and community response to the epidemic fueled discrimination and thwarted education about risk" (p. 25). Clearly, discrimination and stigma are factors in the introduction of the disease to American society, and they remain factors to examine when

dealing with the issue of AIDS. Stigma and discrimination prevent growth, both as an individual and as a society.

If society has pre-conceived ideas that are deeply rooted in social and ethical issues, such as views on the major risk groups of AIDS, then educating America on the trends of the AIDS crisis may be undermined by such pre-conceived ideas. Although educational growth in risk groups has been demonstrated through the decline in the number of infected people, the public at large may be difficult to educate due to a continued stigma and discrimination surrounding AIDS transmission.

Whereas the heterosexual community was slow to react to the epidemic, the homosexual community in major cities across the nation rallied and formed groups before the epidemic had a name. Two major groups focused on aiding and educating the homosexual community: the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) in New York and The Shanti Project in San Francisco. Playwright and activist, Larry Kramer, spear-headed the New York group of concerned gays in January of 1982. This group witnessed many deaths and sudden declines in the health of numerous young gay men at a rapid rate. GMHC believed their health needs were not being met, and the medical community could not explain the disease. With 40 concerned, well-educated professionals and artists, and \$6,000, they organized to respond to AIDS in relation to prevention and care. In the initial stages, it was the first and only organization dedicated to education, prevention, and counseling services to gays in New York. Within 10 months after its birth, GMHC had over 300 volunteers and was training up to 50 new volunteers each month (Perrow & Guillen, 1990, p. 107).

The counterpart to GMHC, The Shanti Project, was originally in Berkeley in the late 1970s and designed to provide counseling for people dying from cancer. With the advent of the new “gay-plague” in San Francisco, The Shanti Project moved to San Francisco and changed their focus by serving those dying from AIDS. The social climate in San Francisco was more accepting and liberal than that of New York regarding the issue of AIDS. The gay community in San Francisco had the support of and funding from the local government. The Shanti Project flourished. It offered counseling as well as living quarters, shopping, and housekeeping services to those stricken with AIDS (Perrow & Guillen, 1990, p. 114).

AIDS and Theatre

Just as the GMHC and The Shanti Project created new organizational frontiers dealing with the AIDS crisis, the playwrights who were active early in the epidemic were pioneers of a different breed. The gay community answered the artistic call to respond to the epidemic with vivid illustrations of the lives of those affected by AIDS. When AIDS was in its initial stages of discovery, the perceived lack of action from society and the government prompted the gay community, including gay artists, to become more cohesive. They banded together to educate and protect themselves from the mystery illness that claimed lives in overwhelming proportions. Ignited by the fear of the unknown, homosexual playwrights were eager to share cathartic ventures into the realm of the AIDS crisis. Plays were created as responses to the new disease that invaded their community and brought death and destruction. Such creative outlets also were intended to facilitate an understanding of the disease. The rapid rate at which AIDS claimed lives in the gay community manifested itself in the artistic world as a creative, cathartic time

bomb in the form of AIDS-related plays. Death literally surrounded homosexual playwrights. The desire to ensure not only a dramatic record of AIDS-related events for society, but the determination to inform others in America about the disease, burned in the poignant works of the early AIDS-related playwrights.

The evanescence found in the microcosm of theatre is similar to that of life. The experience is of relatively short duration, yet the impact of one life may resonate for years. It was viewed as an act of defiance to create works that chronicled the devastating effects of AIDS in the subculture of homosexual America. According to Dean Robert Yohnk (1992) in his dissertation, *The Drama of AIDS*, he discovered “during the early years of the AIDS epidemic, dramatists began to create theatrical images which attempted to embody and depict the tragic effects of AIDS on their communities and world” (p. 142). Artists dealing with AIDS and their own mortality demonstrated an urgent tone. “Hear, see, help-do not let us die in vain,” appears to be the mantra of the early AIDS-related plays. In 1985, William Hoffman (*As Is*) and Larry Kramer (*The Normal Heart*) wrote AIDS-related plays produced in New York within six weeks of one another. Mainstream America met AIDS through the very different approaches of the two playwrights.

In contrast to the early days of the AIDS crisis, cultural tolerance is demanded on numerous levels in society today. Since the early 1990s, Americans have realized there is a price to be paid for a lack of what is referred to as “political correctness.” Theatrical productions create unusual mixes of tolerance and challenge.

Whereas Hoffman and Kramer were driven by the urgency of the new horror of AIDS, Tony Kushner (*Angels in America*) and Paul Rudnick (*Jeffrey*) had the element of

retrospection to guide their plays. Writing almost a decade after the first AIDS-related play offerings, the devastation of AIDS was still evident for Kushner and Rudnick.

However, the changing cultural tone of America also is apparent for these playwrights. At this point in America, the protection of minority groups is on the agenda and political correctness is of paramount concern for mainstream society.

In addition to changes in the cultural tenor of America, the duration of the disease changed. Although individuals in the early phase of the epidemic died at rapid rates, advances in the search for a cure were evident by the time Kushner and Rudnick wrote. People still died quickly; however, there also were many documented cases of people living up to a decade with AIDS.

The foregoing differences between the playwright's response to AIDS and the American society's response to AIDS are clear. Their separate reactions to the AIDS epidemic are reflected in several concepts that are found in AIDS-related drama. Chapter three will ascertain the existence and analyze the role of defiance in *As Is*, *The Normal Heart*, *Angels in America*, and *Jeffrey* in an attempt to establish how historically accurate the playwrights have been in their treatment of the subject of AIDS.

Chapter 3

Defiance

Defiance has existed in drama for centuries and serves as a vital element in many plays. Classical drama, as in the works of Sophocles, contains elements of defiance. In *Oedipus*, the title character performs an act of defiance resulting in the death of his father. Furthermore, Antigone performs an act of defiance in the play of the same name when she disobeys Creon by burying her brother. These two examples from classic Greek tragedy serve not only to illustrate that the concept of defiance is used in drama, it is also expressed in various ways. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines defiance as “the act of defying, putting in opposition, or provoking to combat; a challenge; a provocation; a summons to combat; bold; a disposition to resist or contend” (1997, p.204). Generally, the concept of defiance manifests itself in drama in the form of an action. This action may range from that of man versus nature to the defiance of a child against a parent. Defiance is embedded in human nature and, therefore, it provides substantial material for drama.

Just as defiance is embedded in human nature, the concept is also illustrated in the AIDS-related plays selected for this study. The thorough examination of the four plays selected, *As Is*, *The Normal Heart*, *Angels in America*, and *Jeffrey*, reveals the concept of defiance. Although other examples of defiance may be found, such as defiance through the use of humor and defiance as manifested in actions related to the homosexual community, this investigation focuses on two significant examples of the concept in the selected plays.

The first significant example to be illustrated is defiance as an action against the establishment. The establishment may be seen in the AIDS-related drama under review as the government and mainstream society. The second example of the concept of defiance to be examined in this study is found in hope and love against the specter of death. The four plays will be examined in the chronological order in which they were produced in New York. Each of the concepts of defiance shall be explored through the dialogue and movement established in the selected plays.

The Establishment

Whereas the establishment has been described as the government or mainstream society, it is important to note that conventional tenets of American religion, such as the belief in God, will also be considered as part of the establishment for the purposes of analyzing the concept of defiance in this study. The concept of defiance as illustrated through challenges to the establishment may be seen in the play *As Is* through the actions of the character, Rich. Rich is a homosexual man who has AIDS. The play deals with his diagnosis, his reaction to the diagnosis, and the reactions of those involved in various relationships with him. The major relationship examined in the play is the relationship between Rich and a former lover, Saul. Rich has returned to Saul after practically everyone else in his life has deserted him because he has been diagnosed with AIDS. Rich's isolation from society prompts several acts of defiance in relation to the establishment. Initially, his defiance is directed at God for allowing him to be stricken with the death sentence of AIDS. In a scene early in the development of the play, Rich is screaming in defiance to God, "Let Him cure me! You hear me... Cure me!" (p. 518). Stage directions have Rich shaking his fist to God in the sky during this exchange. This

act of defiance can be viewed as a challenge and an example of the frustration that the disease and the alienation from society have had on Rich.

Just as Rich is alienated from society, playwright William Hoffman also gives examples of other characters with AIDS who have been alienated and, therefore, react defiantly to the establishment. In a scene where Rich is at an AIDS support group, the character, PWA2, discusses his job as a scientist programming robots how to use language. Once his co-workers discover he has AIDS, they ask him to leave. They are afraid they will “catch” the disease by working with him. Defiantly, PWA2’s last action before he leaves is to program a robot with the following:

PWA2: Good morning. This is Jack-but you can call me Jackie-your fabulous new android model 1069. If you wish to use me-and I love being used-press one of those cunning little buttons on my pecs. Go on, press one-or are you afraid of me, too. (p. 531)

PWA2 is expressing defiance in his anger at the lack of knowledge of how AIDS is transmitted by mainstream society, a common occurrence when AIDS was first introduced to America.

Just as PWA2 has difficulty in his workplace and expresses himself defiantly, Rich continues to express defiance toward the establishment when he is placed in the hospital for the first time. PWA2 was treated with ignorance of the disease by his co-workers. Similarly, Rich must face the ignorance of his brother, a member of mainstream society, who is straight. Brother comes to Rich’s hospital room wearing a surgical mask, gown, and gloves. When Rich sees him, he states, “Unless you’re planning to come into intimate contact with me or my body fluids, none of that shit you have on is

necessary” (p. 541). Whereas PWA2 dealt with the pain of isolation from his co-workers, for Rich, the ignorance and isolation is magnified and more difficult to deal with in his brother’s lack of knowledge and hesitance to have contact with him. It is interesting to note that Hoffman chooses to call Rich’s sibling, “Brother,” instead of giving him a name like Jim or Joe. By refraining from giving him a proper name, Hoffman suggests that Brother is representative of all straight brothers in society. Another example of Rich’s defiance toward the establishment is in evidence when he rails at the nurse in the hospital and refuses care. He tells her to “go find another statistic for the Center for Disease Control” (p. 537). Rich is relaying the thought that the CDC did not care about the health of homosexuals afflicted with AIDS as much as they cared about obtaining statistics.

As Is was written early in the epidemic and demonstrates through Rich the defiant belief that the government did not care about the disease because it was primarily in the homosexual sector of America. Characters from *As Is*, therefore, illustrate the concept of defiance toward the establishment as dictated by society, the government, and God.

In a similar, yet more intense style, Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart* reveals defiance toward the establishment. Whereas Hoffman’s piece is fictitious in nature, Kramer’s play, *The Normal Heart*, is a semi-autobiographical account of his early AIDS activist efforts. As George Newtown, author, states, “Kramer angrily recreates the story of his efforts to enlist the support of New York city officials for generalized AIDS treatment” (p. 214). Newtown accurately depicts the piece as an angry recreation. Kramer’s defiance toward the government is clear throughout the piece. Most of the tone of the play is defiant, especially toward the lack of action by the government and

mainstream society as perceived by Kramer through his main character, Ned Weeks. There are several specific examples of the co-existence between reality and fiction throughout the play based on Kramer's own comments through personal interviews and his writing (Boccardi, 1994, p. 148). Kramer wrote letters to various newspapers such as *The New York Native* (1983) and *The Village Voice* (1983), claiming the establishment as well as the homosexual community were failing to adequately address the AIDS crisis (Boccardi, 1994, p. 150). Although there are elements which are autobiographical in nature, Kramer also relies on dramatic invention in the creation of Ned Weeks and his defiance toward the establishment.

One of the first major examples of Ned's defiance toward the government is illustrated in his tirade on his first date with Felix. Ned rants about the comparison between the Holocaust and AIDS. His thought is that the similarity between the lack of action by American Jews to help those destroyed by Hitler is, in effect, the same thing going on in America during the AIDS crisis. His defiant cry toward society claims that, "everybody has a million excuses for not getting involved. But aren't there moral obligations, moral commandments to try everything possible" (p. 52). This explosion of anger is an integral part of Ned's character. It expresses his core values. Many of Ned's interactions throughout the play deal with his defiance toward the establishment. Another example of his defiant attitude toward government is seen in the letter Ned writes to a paper and from which he quotes:

Ned: It is no secret that I consider the Mayor to be, along with the *Times*, the biggest enemy gay men and women must contend with in New York. Until the day I die, I will never forgive this newspaper and this Mayor for

ignoring this epidemic that is killing so many of my friends...I hear it's becoming known as the Ned Weeks School of Outrage. (p. 73)

By Ned's own admission, his outrage and defiance permeate the play. There is no city official who remains clear from the wrath of Ned's accusations of failure to help the gay community during the crisis.

In addition to the comments against the Mayor and the newspaper, Ned expresses his indignation against the Mayor's assistant, Hiram. In the play, Ned forms a group similar to the group Kramer formed in real life, the Gay Men's Health Crisis. The name of the group is never mentioned in the play; however, the structure and purpose are the same - the need for education and aid to gay men with AIDS. Once the group Ned has helped create in the play has finally secured a meeting with Hiram, Ned goes head-to-head with the Mayor's assistant:

Ned: Two-hundred and fifty-six dead. And I know forty of them. And I don't want to know anymore. And you can't not know any of this!...

Hiram: Now you listen to me! Of course we're aware of those figures. And before you open your big mouth again, I would like to offer you a little piece of advice. Badmouthing the Mayor is the best way I know not to get his attention...

Ned: Hiram here just said they're aware of the figures. And they're still not doing anything. I was worried before that they were just stupid and blind. Great! Now we get to worry about them being repressive and downright dangerous...How dare you choose who will live and who will die! (p. 88).

The preceding interaction is an excellent example of how the frustration at the perceived lack of action from the establishment created a defiant reaction in Ned's character. Kramer uses Ned's rage to propel him through the action of the play from incident to incident in defiance of society's mishandling of the AIDS epidemic.

Kramer does not limit the defiance toward the establishment to Ned's character. In an interesting twist, a member of mainstream society expresses defiance toward members of her own community for their lack of action to the AIDS crisis. The character of Dr. Emma Brookner is another example of the characterization of defiance toward the establishment. As a polio survivor confined to a wheelchair, this New York physician sees many of the early cases of AIDS. She urges Ned to use his voice as a writer to inform the gay community about the disease as well as to advise them of the dangers in their community regarding transmission of the disease. She is a staunch supporter of life. She does not discriminate with her clients, whether they are straight or homosexual.

In Dr. Emma Brookner, Kramer has created a complementary counterpart to Ned. They are both passionate about saving the lives of people stricken with AIDS and keeping others from acquiring the disease. Near the end of the play, Dr. Emma Brookner has a lengthy monologue in which she is with an examining doctor attempting to obtain funding for AIDS research based on the numerous cases and documentation in her possession. She discusses her outrage at the politics involved with early AIDS research when her request is denied:

Emma: How does it always happen that all the idiots are always on your team? You guys have all the money, call all the shots, shut everybody out, and then operate behind closed doors. I am taking care of more victims of

this epidemic than anyone in the world...How can you not fund my research or invite me to participate in yours?...Any way you add all this up, it is an unconscionable delay and has never, never existed in any other health emergency during this entire century...We could all be dead before you do anything. (p.109)

Dr. Emma Brookner's rebellious voice against the very establishment of which she is a member is an excellent example of Kramer's ability to illustrate defiance that exists within the microcosm of the medical profession and society. Although Ned is the primary agent of defiance toward the establishment, the creation of a member of the establishment challenging the establishment is an effective tool Kramer utilizes to illustrate that action is not limited to the homosexual community.

Just as Rich in Hoffman's *As Is* dealt with societal defiance as it relates to a gay man and his straight brother, Kramer also addresses the result of the strained relationship between Ned and his straight brother, Ben. The two characters have been arguing about the life of homosexuals and the issue of AIDS. Ned desperately seeks the approval that Ben chooses not to give him. For Ben, the issue is as simple as a matter of acting responsibly and following certain sexual rules to remain safe from the disease. Ned agrees to an extent, yet feels that Ben sees the two of them as very different, even though in his mind they are the same. In an act of defiance against the brother he loves completely, he flails at his brother and society with the following:

Ned: I'm beginning to think that you and your straight world are our enemy. I am furious with you and with myself and with every goddamned doctor who ever told me I'm sick and interfered with my loving a man.

I'm trying to understand why nobody wants to hear we're dying, why nobody wants to help, why my own brother doesn't want to help. Two million dollars - for a house! We can't even get twenty-nine cents from the city. You still think I'm sick, and I simply can not allow that any longer. I will not speak to you again until you accept me as your equal. Your healthy equal. Your brother! (p. 71)

Ned's desire to be seen as healthy and normal in the wake of facing the AIDS epidemic is paramount to his maintaining mental health. His love for his brother is strong, yet his conviction to fight society's belief that the abnormality of homosexuality caused the AIDS crisis is stronger. This may be seen as his most defiant act of the play, for it may cost him the interaction and love of his brother. Defiance against the establishment via government and society provides a disturbing dilemma for Ned where his relationship with his brother is concerned.

At the other end of the spectrum regarding the issue of defiance and the establishment is Roy Cohn, one of the main characters from *Angels in America*. Tony Kushner has loosely based his character on the real Roy Cohn. According to Stephen J. Bottoms in an article in *Theatre Journal*, the real Roy Cohn "was a talented but unscrupulous lawyer who played a significant role in several of the most dramatic episodes of post-World War II American history" (1996, p. 167). Although Kushner retains some of the elements of Cohn's life in the play, he makes it very clear in his foreword that he has taken dramatic license with the character he has created. Both the fictitious and the non-fictitious Cohn were homosexuals who preferred to keep their sexual preferences confidential and who died of AIDS. In addition, both of them were

masterfully skilled at manipulating the political arena of their time. Cohn, the character, works amazingly well by defying the very establishment of which he is a member. Once Cohn has been diagnosed with AIDS and becomes aware of his impending death, he discusses death with his protégé Joe, a devout Mormon lawyer. In his discussion, he tells Joe he isn't afraid of death and relays the creed that has sustained him:

Roy: What can death bring that I haven't faced? I've lived: life is the worst...Love; that's a trap. Responsibility; that's a trap, too. Like a father to a son I tell you this: Life is full of horror; nobody escapes, nobody; save yourself...Don't be afraid; people are so afraid; don't be afraid to live in the raw wind, naked, alone...Learn at least this: What you are capable of. Let nothing stand in your way. (p. 58)

This example shows the defiant spirit that exists in Cohn and the desire for self-preservation which motivates him. He is a man driven by defiance in order to achieve whatever he wants. Cohn thrives on the ability to manipulate the system through acts of defiance.

Another example that demonstrates the defiance Cohn exhibits toward the establishment is illustrated during a dinner between Cohn, Joe, and Martin Heller. Cohn constantly makes Heller acquiesce to him during the dinner, even though Heller knows Cohn has broken the law by borrowing half a million dollars from a client. Cohn describes his defiance toward the government:

Roy: The whole Establishment. Their little rules. Because I don't know no rules. Because I don't see the law as a dead and arbitrary collection of

antiquated dictums, thou shall, thou shall not, because I know the Law's a pliable, breathing, sweating...organ...(p. 66)

Cohn exudes defiance in almost every breath he takes and speaks in the play.

Interestingly, despite his obvious defiance against the government and society of which he is a part, he is a man of high authority with the ability to get what he wants from the system he defies.

Whereas the previous characters mentioned in this vein have been isolated and alienated, Cohn is embraced for his power and defiance. Cohn's pride in his defiance toward justice and the government is further solidified when he discusses his role in the execution of Ethel Rosenberg:

Roy: If it wasn't for me Joe, Ethel Rosenberg would be alive today, writing some personal advice column for *Ms. Magazine*. She isn't. Because during the trial, Joe, I was on the phone every day, talking with the judge...Was it legal? Fuck legal. Am I a nice man? Fuck nice. They say terrible things about me in the *Nation*. Fuck the *Nation*. You want to be Nice, or you want to be Effective? Make the law, or subject to it.

Choose... There are so many laws; find one you can break. (pp. 107-110)

Cohn's defiance knows no boundaries. His tirade against the establishment leads him to believe he is not only above the law, he creates the law. Cohn realizes he is villainous and treacherous and relishes the power his defiance against the establishment has provided him.

Whereas Cohn feels no penalty for the defiance he exudes toward the establishment, other characters who display the concept of defiance through their actions

toward the government and society differ in their responses. Joe is married to Harper, yet he has homosexual feelings that he has repressed his entire life. Much of the inner struggle for this character lies in his desire to shed the outer layer of what he perceives as normality for the drives within. When he meets a fellow worker, Louis, an openly gay man, his desires for defiance against society stir and move closer to the surface.

Joc: I just wondered what a thing it would be...if overnight everything you owe anything to, justice, or love, had really gone away. Free...To shed your old skin, every old skin, one by one and then walk away, unencumbered, into the morning...I can't be this anymore...

Louis: Want some company? For Whatever? Sometimes, even if it scares you to death, you have to be willing to break the law. Know what I mean? (pp. 72-73)

This undercurrent of desire for defiance does not take long to break the surface with action from Joe. He takes Louis' offer as an initiative for intimacy and decides to defy his Mormon upbringing and risk his job security and advancement for the feelings he has had his whole life. Joe says to Louis, "Oh, boy... Can I... I... want... to touch you. Can I please just touch you...um, here? (*He puts his hand on one side of Louis' face. He holds it there*)" (p. 116-117). This act of defiance will have tremendous ramifications for Joe. As he challenges the system of beliefs he has clung to, he experiences the world in a much different manner. He unleashes his defiant homosexual desires. At this point, Joe does not realize that Louis' boyfriend is dying of AIDS and that Louis has abandoned him. Joe exhibits defiance against the establishment, yet with different consequences from those of Roy Cohn. Kushner's ability to display characters of various backgrounds

dealing with the concept of defiance toward the establishment creates rich drama that is multi-layered.

While *Angels in America* is packed with defiance toward the establishment, *Jeffrey* does not display many examples of this concept of defiance. The only play that may be considered a comedy, *Jeffrey* takes a completely different approach to the issue of AIDS-related plays. Paul Rudnick has created a play dealing with the AIDS epidemic in comical styles that range from the farcical to romantic comedy to dark comedy. Even though the play is comedic in nature, it does not belittle the issue of the AIDS epidemic nor bypass the concept of defiance through actions regarding the establishment. Jeffrey, the main character of the play, has led a rather promiscuous life as a gay man. He is not stricken with AIDS; however, his extreme fear of the possibility drives him to drastic measures. In the age of AIDS, he makes the defiant decision to become celibate, to give up sex, intimacy, and love (p. 11). This act is defiant due to its extreme nature. The government and mainstream America did not promote a complete change in lifestyle for the homosexual community. Rather, they promoted “safe sex” to stop the AIDS epidemic. Celibacy and forgoing intimacy of any kind is defiance, even for mainstream society. Another example of Jeffrey’s defiance of society is clear when he is approached by two thugs and attacked for being gay. The two thugs make crude comments to Jeffrey, harass him, and plan the attack:

Thug #2: You think you’re better than us?

Jeffrey: I’m a waiter.

Thug #1: They let you touch food? Put your faggoty fingers on it?

Jeffrey: Yes they do. I touch it all the time. I spit in it.

Thug #2: Jesus. What restaurant?

Jeffrey (sizing up the THUGS): Pizza Hut.

Thugs #1 and #2 (very grossed out): Uck! Damn! Shit!

Thug #1: Let's dust his ass...

Jeffrey: You have weapons. So do I.

Thug # 1: I got a knife. What do you got?

Jeffrey: Irony. Adjectives. Eyebrows. (p. 49)

With this exchange, Jeffrey is held and beaten by the thugs, but not before he tries to fight back by biting the leg of one of the thugs who thinks he will get AIDS from the bite. This dialogue generates the concept of defiance of the establishment on more than one level. The thugs are defying society by breaking the law and attacking Jeffrey because he's gay. Jeffrey is conceptually defiant as he fights the thugs both intellectually with his choice of words and physically. Although outnumbered, he refuses to be killed by defiantly biting the leg of his assailant. Jeffrey has illustrated he has a fighting nature.

In addition to the fact that Jeffrey is a fighter and has decided to live life as a pseudo-monk, he is pursued by a love interest, Steve. Jeffrey is on the verge of surrendering to Steve's advances for romance when he discovers that Steve is HIV-positive. His reaction is to return to the idea of celibacy. Pained by Jeffrey's decision based on his own HIV-positive status, Steve speaks to Jeffrey in biting sarcasm that escalates in a moment of defiance against the establishment, driven by his frustration at the barriers that society has erected due to AIDS:

Steve: I'm on my way to the tenth floor to see the AIDS babies...As a volunteer. The last time I was up there, there were eight. They were all

abandoned, or their parents had died. And no one would touch them – the nurses were all scared, or busy. The first baby I saw was just lying there, staring, not even crying. But when I held her she finally smiled and gurgled and acted like a baby. We're all AIDS babies, Jeffrey. And I don't want to die without being held. (pp. 60–61)

Not only are Steve's comments defiant toward the lack of ethical commitment by society and the establishment as manifested in the negligent nursing staff, it also speaks to defiance of the establishment via another approach. Mainstream society often pictures the homosexual community as one lacking love and intimacy and driven by promiscuity. Steve's point that everyone is an AIDS baby that wants to be held and does not want to be alone, crosses the societal stereotypes which often arise. It also brings the human condition to everyone in society. Through this passage, the playwright creates an opportunity to demonstrate that all human beings can relate to Steve's defiance and desire for intimacy. This desire for nurturing and intimacy also develops into the second concept of defiance to be examined, that of acts of love and hope against the presence of AIDS.

Acts of Love and Hope

Whereas the concept of defiance regarding the establishment may be a more traditional approach to what one may consider defiance, the ability to love and hope in defiance of impending death is a compelling concept. As the drama *As Is* progresses, this concept emerges. The love Saul, Rich's former lover, has for Rich becomes an act of defiance against the possibility of death for Rich. Saul wants to help Rich live. Rich has asked Saul to buy pills for him so he may end his life and his pain. In Saul's attempt to

comply, he realizes he still has hope for Rich and he believes his love can help the two of them endure the horror of AIDS:

Saul: ...A phrase came to my head: The Lord taketh and the Lord giveth.

Rich: You blew your punch line...

Saul: Don't you see. I just don't have the right to take your life or mine... Hang in there, Rich...

Rich: My future isn't exactly promising.

Saul: I'll take you as is. (p. 548)

It is intriguing that Hoffman has Saul turn the phrase. By doing so, the reader may see that, although much has been taken from Rich, much is given. He is blessed with unconditional love in the face of death when Saul takes him "as is." There is hope. Hoffman's play ends with a truly defiant act of love and hope as Saul, who has not tested positive for AIDS, climbs into the hospital bed with Rich to become intimate with one another (pp. 550-551). Newtown claims this act is "heroic-the act of one who knows the risks and accepts whatever his incomprehensible fate might deal him" (p. 218).

It can be seen that unconditional love and hope are springboards for a better quality of living for anyone, but perhaps especially for those with a terminal illness. The concept of love and hope in defiance of death is a triumph over the inevitable fate that those with AIDS, as well as the rest of society, must eventually face: they must face their own mortality.

While defiance through love and hope is clearly evident in *As Is*, it is also apparent in *The Normal Heart* to a certain degree. Most of the heart-felt passion of the primary action in Kramer's play is political in nature, directed, as previously mentioned,

at the establishment. The subplot of the play, however, centers on Ned's relationship with Felix. A reporter who believes in love and helps Ned believe he is capable of love, Felix develops AIDS during the course of the play. With all of the play's political overtures, this aspect of the script is often neglected. This part of the plot, nevertheless, is vitally important to the discussion of AIDS-related plays and, more specifically, to the concept of defiance through acts of hope and love. As Gregory D. Gross explains in his often quoted article, "Coming Up for Air: Three AIDS Plays," Ned is desperate for love and a relationship (p. 64). In this desperation, he applies the same passion devoted to his activism to the success of his relationship with Felix. The various levels at which Ned is able to deliver zealous passion serve as credit to Kramer's skills as a playwright. Whereas the macrocosm sees the activist passionate Ned, Felix witnesses a Ned no one else can imagine. When the usually optimistic Felix is dejected at the prospect of dying, it is Ned who offers defiance and hope in the following interaction:

Felix: Whoever thought you'd die from having sex?

Ned: Did Emma also tell you that research at the NIH has finally started?

That something is now possible. We have to hope.

Felix: Oh, do we?

Ned: Yes, we do. (p. 116)

This illustrates that even though Ned has been shouting gloom and doom to society, he, in his humanity, defiantly clings to hope. The tables have turned and Ned is providing love and hope in the face of death instead of frightening statistics. Ned's enthusiastic defiance shakes Felix back to optimism. In the next scene of the play, Felix meets with Ned's brother, Ben, to make final financial arrangements when he states the following:

Felix: I'm going to Rumania to see their famous woman doctor. A desperation tactic, Tommy would call it. Does flying Bucharest Airlines inspire you with any confidence? (p. 120)

Felix may refer to it as an act of desperation, yet it also signifies the reluctance to give up hope for life even when death is imminent. Such hope defiantly keeps death from permeating the spirit of the living, even if they are living with a death sentence.

The final defiant act of hope and love in *The Normal Heart* is demonstrated when, on Felix's deathbed in the hospital, Felix and Ned marry as Felix dies (pp. 121–122). Ned refuses to let death triumph over the love he has experienced for the first time in his life. The deathbed marriage is a demonstration of the triumph of the human spirit.

Like *The Normal Heart*, *Angels in America* introduces several defiant acts of love and hope. Prior, a character who has AIDS, exhibits an act of defiance through hope when he speaks of a voice he has been hearing. His friend, Belize, an African-American nurse who was a former drag queen and lover of Prior's, is concerned and urges him to tell the doctors. Prior responds:

Prior: No, no, don't. Please. I want the voice; it's wonderful. It's all that's keeping me alive. (p. 60)

Prior has been deserted by his love, Louis, yet finds hope and a reason to live in a voice he hears. Clinging to hope helps Prior deal with AIDS. Belize respects Prior's wishes and keeps what he considers hallucinations to himself because he believes it is helping Prior. Finally, it is revealed that the voice Prior has heard since the advancement of his disease is actually that of an angel. *Angels in America* concludes with the Angel crashing through the ceiling and stating:

Angel: Greetings, Prophet;

The Great Work begins;

The Messenger has arrived. (p. 119)

With this, the play ends on a defiant note of hope through the presence of the angel. There is an extensive volume of literature discussing angels and the Angel in *Angels in America*. For the purposes of this study, the angel may best be described in the *Mississippi Quarterly* when author James Fisher (1995) discusses the importance of angels. "Angels are significant spiritual symbols... They watch over humanity as unspeakable harbingers of hope and death" (p. 13). Fisher's explanation of angels speaks to the concept of defiance via an act of hope. The Angel represents a messenger from God delivering hope and love in defiance of death.

In contrast to *Angels in America*, the final play for examination of the concept of defiance as depicted through acts of love and hope, *Jeffrey*, has more examples of the proposed concept. Most of the gay men in this play have handled the AIDS epidemic well and are attempting to lead healthy, happy lives while enduring a plague. One of the key figures in the play, Sterling, is Jeffrey's best friend and a flamboyant interior designer. Although males in such occupations are frequently perceived to be predictable and stereotypically homosexual, readers immediately realize there is depth to Sterling. He has learned to live, love, and hope in the age of AIDS (p. 14). Other characters share the same zest for love and hope as Sterling. In an entertaining scene spoofing spiritual gurus and talk show hosts, Jeffrey discusses with Debra his fear of intimacy and love. Debra is described by Rudnick as "the evangelist as pop star," (p. 34) and she

immediately begins to work the crowd. She speaks of the importance of unconditional love (p. 34) and eventually simplifies it for Jeffrey and the audience.

Debra: Here's the low down on evil: it's the absence of love. Ta-da.

That's it. Case closed. Where you don't have love, illness makes a home.
(p. 37)

When Rudnick has Debra say evil, one may easily insert the term AIDS and get the same message. This is an excellent example of how potential defiance through the act of love may be useful in defeating AIDS, even if only in a spiritual sense. Rudnick uses another comedic example of this concept of defiance in a scene where a desperate Jeffrey consults a priest who, in turn, makes several passes at Jeffrey. Despite the presence of comedy, the essence of the scene is easily found when Father Dan attempts to explain love and hope in the wake of the AIDS epidemic:

Father Dan: Of course life sucks; it always will – so why not make the most of it? How dare you not lunge for any shred of happiness... So maybe you need a rubber or a surgical mask or a roll of Saran Wrap... There is only one real blasphemy – the refusal of joy! Of a corsage and a kiss! (p. 69)

His message is simple: live, love, and be happy. This is a defiant concept, considering the devastation of AIDS, and it is a surprising one coming from a priest. The power of defiance through hope also manifests itself when the ghost of Darius, Sterling's boyfriend who dies from AIDS, comes to visit Jeffrey to convince him to take a chance and hope and love again.

Darius: I'm dead Jeffrey, you're not... Go dancing. Go to a show. Make trouble. Make out. Hate AIDS, Jeffrey. Not life... Just think of AIDS as ...the guest that won't leave. The one we all hate. But you have to remember... Hey – it's still our party. (p. 84)

Of all the defiant efforts and simplistic attempts to convince Jeffrey to defy AIDS through hope and love, it is Darius' words that motivate him. The concept of hope and love is finally instilled in Jeffrey, and as the play ends, he decides to take a chance on life, love, and hope with Steve (p. 87–89). Defiance as manifested through the acts of hope and love have enabled the characters in AIDS-related plays to live, to survive, and to spiritually, if not physically, triumph over the specter of death that is a result of the AIDS crisis.

Historical Accuracy

Although specific examples of the two concepts of defiance have been identified, it is also imperative to examine the historical accuracy of these depictions to determine the playwright's accuracy in character portrayal in the treatment of AIDS. To achieve this goal, several public opinion polls as well as books which chronicle the AIDS epidemic during the time frame of the four plays selected for inspection have been examined. When dealing with the concept of defiance versus the establishment, the playwrights were accurate in the depictions of events and character traits which may have occurred during the time frames examined. When the PWA2 addresses the fact that co-workers wanted him to leave, this may be found in reality by the numbers from public opinion polls which were very close in relation to the percentage of people who felt PWA's should be quarantined (Singer, Rogers, & Corcoran, 1987, p. 592). There is also

support which indicates the CDC made phone calls to obtain statistics from individuals in hospitals while the individual's physicians neglected them (Shilts, 2000, p. 141). The character of Rich makes just such claims in *As Is*.

Just as historical accuracy may be found within Hoffman's play, the same is true of Kramer's *The Normal Heart*. Earlier discussion revealed that the majority of the play was semi-autobiographical. Kramer may have changed the names, but most of the incidents were pulled directly from his life and experience as an early AIDS activist in New York through the formation of the Gay Men's Health Crisis. Even Kramer's Dr. Emma Brookner was based on real-life physician Dr. Linda Laubenstein (Shilts, 2000, p. 531).

In a similar manner, as Kramer built his play around non-fictitious events from his own life, Kushner created an authentic characterization of Roy Cohn as seen through historical documentation. Dramatic liberties aside, the depiction is similar to the non-fictitious Roy Cohn.

Whereas Kramer and Kushner drew from non-fiction, Rudnick's characters are inventions of his own creation. However, they too hold historical accuracy based on public opinion polls. When Jeffrey is confronted by the thugs and they discuss eating where someone gay works, the polls from 1987 show that seventy-four percent of those polled would not eat at an establishment where a worker was known to have AIDS (Singer, et al., 1987, p. 588; Stipp & Kerr, 1989, p. 100). Although the historical accuracy may be shocking, when Steve discusses the AIDS babies in *Jeffrey*, polls show that the public at the time had little sympathy for people with AIDS (Rogers, Singer, & Imperio, 1993, p. 113) and the AIDS epidemic had not significantly increased sympathy

toward gays (*Newsweek*, 1994, p. 45). Therefore, based on the current examples and documentation, evidence has been given which suggests the depictions regarding the concept of defiance in the four selected plays contain valid historical accuracies.

Chapter four will continue the examination of concepts inherent in the four AIDS-related plays through investigation of the concept of denial. An attempt will be made to discover the existence of the concept of denial in the plays selected for this study to ascertain its existence and its viability as it relates to historical accuracy.

Chapter 4

Denial

Human nature dictates the use of defense mechanisms in a variety of circumstances in order to protect the conscious mind from threatening feelings and perceptions. The use of denial as a defense mechanism is documented throughout the course of history and in early drama. Oedipus embarks on a path of denial as he seeks the truth regarding Laius' death. He embraces denial through the course of the play until the truth may no longer be repressed. In the biblical period, the apostles feared death by their association with Christ prior to his crucifixion. The fear manifests itself through denial (Matthew 26: 67–75). Denial is also one of the primary defense mechanisms Freud discussed in his psychoanalytic theory. The use of denial provides a temporary resolution to various forms of external or internal conflict. As a defense mechanism, denial operates to shield the person or group in denial from painful or unacceptable self-awareness (O'Connor, 2003, p. 1–3). Situations occur in life daily where denial appears in the form of personal choices, interpersonal communication or events.

Just as life presents opportunities for denial, when the concept is applied to AIDS-related drama, it mirrors the reality of the defense mechanism. AIDS-related drama uses the concept of denial to offer a coping mechanism for the devastation of the AIDS epidemic. In order to cope with the fear of death as a result of an AIDS diagnosis, characters embrace denial as means of survival. The four plays examined in this study reveal three manifestations of the concept of denial. The first concept exposed is the concept of the denial of the diagnosis of AIDS, which is perceived to result in death. Therefore, this denial of diagnosis also encompasses a denial of death and mortality. The

second form of denial in the selected plays is the denial of an AIDS crisis. This concept focuses on the denial of a problem of epidemic proportions within the microcosm of the gay community as well as the macrocosm of mainstream society and the government. Finally, the concept is demonstrated in the denial of one's homosexuality. Although other examples of denial may exist, these three categories form the most significant corpus of material surrounding the concept of denial for this study. The chapter will follow the same guidelines as previously detailed in chapter three. The four plays will be examined in the chronological order in which they were produced in New York. Each of the concepts of denial shall be explored through the dialogue and movement as documented in the selected plays.

AIDS, Death, and Mortality

The refusal of man to acknowledge and accept his own mortality is a common aspect of human nature. In an age and country where the life expectancy rates continue to increase and technological advances in plastic surgery and the medical arena seemingly turn back the hands of time, there appears to be a strong interest in denying death and mortality. Death is an uncomfortable reality in many people's lives. This fact is magnified to a higher degree when individuals face a life-threatening illness, such as dealing with a diagnosis of AIDS. According to Kassler, an expert on gay men's health issues, "Most people go through common stages before they finally come to terms with their illness. At first, there is a strong impulse to deny the diagnosis" (1983, p. 33). With the potentially disfiguring aspects of AIDS, the possible loss of friends and family, and the likelihood of eventually losing control of one's potential destiny, it is understandable why many embrace denial when diagnosed with AIDS.

With this concept of denial in mind, it is easily transferred into the characterizations inherent in AIDS-related drama. The denial of AIDS and death may be seen in the play, *As Is*, through several examples. Denial in this play is not reserved exclusively for those with a diagnosis of AIDS. One of the first examples of denial is provided by Rich's family and friends, who in chorus, deliver reasons why he cannot have AIDS. One such reason is based on appearances. Rich's business partner claims he cannot have AIDS because he just ran a marathon (p. 509). If you look healthy, you cannot be sick. This example illustrates the focus on appearance that drives many to conceal the AIDS diagnosis through the concept of denial. Eventually, the denial that Rich has AIDS yields to excuses by the aforementioned to stay away from Rich due to his probable death as well as their fear of infection. The blatant fear of their own mortality due to exposure to AIDS through contact with Rich manifests itself in the following:

Rich: Chet, please, I need you!

(Rich tries to put his arms around Chet. Everyone except Saul pulls back terrified.)

Chet, Brother, Lily, Partner, Doctors: Don't touch me! (Beat.)

Lily: Please forgive me!

Chet: This thing has me blown away.

Brother: If it weren't for the kids.

Partner: I don't know what the hell we're going to do. (p. 511-512).

The emphasis has shifted from denying Rich has the disease to focusing on keeping death away from touching and somehow tainting them. When he was first diagnosed with

AIDS, Rich openly discussed the disease with his friends, family, and co-workers. He did not realize the potential ramifications of disclosing his condition to those who were close to him. The thought of rejection from individuals he believed he knew was inconceivable. The subsequent alienation and isolation from his peer group as a result of his disclosure drives Rich to a state of denial of his diagnosis of AIDS. The truth of his reality is too painful to accept and Rich plummets into denial. This is apparent in a scene at an AIDS support group session:

Rich: I'm not sure I have it anymore. I feel guilty saying this, like somehow I'm being disloyal to the group. I'm getting better, I know it... But anyway, I feel great. I feel the disease disappearing in me. Only a small percentage of those with the swollen glands come down with the rest. I'm going to *not* come here next week. I'm sorry. (p. 531)

Rich desperately wants to believe he will survive, therefore, he denies the possibility of death to himself and to others in the support group. This defense mechanism is an attempt to cope with the loneliness that the diagnosis has imposed on him through the loss of his network of friends, family, and co-workers.

Just as Rich exhibits denial that is both projected at the group and at himself, another character present at this session, PWA4, explains that she, too, must deny she has the disease. However, her denial is due to the fear of alienation from her core group of supporters and their lack of understanding. This is similar to the experience Rich had earlier in the play:

PWA4 (a young housewife, eight months pregnant): At least when I come here I don't have to lie. Like 'Bernie's doing better. I'm fine.'... I mean

who's there to talk to in Brewster? These things don't happen in Brewster. Police officers don't shoot up heroin, cops don't come down with the 'gay plague'-that's what they call it in Brewster...Have a chat with the minister? 'Well, Reverend Miller, I have this little problem. My husband has AIDS, and I have AIDS, and I'm eight months pregnant, and I...' You guys know what I mean. You're the only people in the world who know what I mean. (p. 531)

In PWA4, Hoffman has created a character unique to the dramatization and societal acceptance of the time. As the character mentions, AIDS was considered a gay disease. PWA4 must deny her condition. As illustrated through dialogue, her diagnosis of AIDS would not be understood in her community. She implies the only place she is free from denial is in the support group sessions she attends.

The final major example of denial in *As Is* occurs in the Hospice Worker's closing monologue when she refers to denial twice, once in reference to Rich and again in reference to her own feelings:

Hospice Worker: I have a new AIDS patient, Richard. He still has a lot of denial about his condition. Which is normal. I think most of us would go crazy if we had to face our own deaths squarely...I don't know anymore. Sometimes I think I'm an atheist. No. Not really. It's more that I'm angry at God: how can He do this? (Pause.) I have a lot of denial, I am angry, and I bargain with God. I have a long way to go towards acceptance. (p. 551)

Through the characterizations, dialogue, and movement in the play, Hoffman has demonstrated that the concept of denial in relation to a diagnosis of AIDS, the prospect of death and mortality, is not limited to those infected with the disease. Hoffman creates a world where everyone is susceptible to the concept of denial as a defense mechanism during the AIDS epidemic.

Whereas Hoffman's *As Is* creates numerous examples of the concept of denial of the disease, death, and mortality through various characters and situations in the drama, Kramer's *The Normal Heart* contains only one example of this concept. When Felix first shows Ned what he believes is a symptom of AIDS, Ned discusses the issue with Dr. Emma Brookner:

Ned: ... Late Friday night he showed me this purple spot on the bottom of his foot. Maybe it isn't it. Maybe it's some sort of something else. It could be, couldn't it? Maybe I'm overreacting. There's so much death around. Can you see him tomorrow? (p. 80)

Throughout the play, Ned has demonstrated his knowledge on the issue of AIDS. He has worked tirelessly to engage the homosexual and heterosexual communities in the acceptance of AIDS as an epidemic. Additionally, he has taken action to educate others concerning AIDS. Interestingly, when the issue directly affects someone with whom Ned is in love, denial is one of the first reactions to the disease and its possible consequences. Kramer poignantly illustrates that where the concept of denial and AIDS is concerned, no one is immune. Even when equipped with a wealth of knowledge and passion to defy the AIDS epidemic, the impulse to deny the disease and death is part of the human condition.

Similar to the example of Ned and Felix in *The Normal Heart*, the concept is revealed in *Angels in America* when Prior first discloses to Louis, his lover, that he has AIDS:

Prior: (He removes his jacket, rolls up his sleeve, shows Louis a dark-purple spot on the underside of his arm near the shoulder)

Louis: That's just a burst blood vessel. (p. 21)

Although the symptom Prior has is Kaposi's sarcoma, one of the most recognizable symptoms of AIDS, Louis' instinct is to deny the possibility of AIDS. Louis continues to deny the diagnosis and eminent death of Prior throughout the play and tells him "he is not about to die" (p. 39). Louis never accepts the possibility of death for Prior. It is incomprehensible to him and he cannot live with the remote possibility. His denial motivates him to leave Prior in order to escape the sentence of death by AIDS.

Another example of denial of the diagnosis of AIDS manifests itself in the character of Roy Cohn. As a prominent politician, Cohn prefers to keep his sexual preference confidential. His denial of his own diagnosis is unshakable. In a complete scene with his long-time personal physician, Henry debates the issue of his AIDS diagnosis and association with homosexuality (p. 43–46). The scene escalates and Cohn's denial results in the following statement:

Roy: And what is my diagnosis, Henry?

Henry: You have AIDS, Roy.

Roy: No, Henry, no. AIDS is what homosexuals have. I have liver cancer. (p.46)

Cohn is determined to deny the diagnosis of AIDS and attempts to force his physician to agree with his state of denial. Externally, Cohn will continue to deny he has the death sentence of AIDS. He would rather have liver cancer than have others see him as stricken with a disease that carries the stigma associated with AIDS. Although there is a death sentence, minimal stigma is connected with dying of liver cancer.

Just as there was a common thread of denial of death for non-infected lovers in *The Normal Heart* and *Angels in America*, a similar pattern emerges in the final play to be examined, *Jeffrey*. Sterling and Darius, a couple, are Jeffrey's best friends. When attending a funeral of a friend who has died of AIDS, Darius, who has AIDS, calmly discusses what he wants at his memorial service. Sterling momentarily denies the possibility of Darius dying:

Sterling: You are not having a memorial.

Darius: I mean, like, in a million years.

Sterling: You are not going to get sick. I thought I'd made that clear.

(p. 56)

Darius may appear to be well, yet the disease inhabits his body and no one knows when it will claim his life. Sterling realizes this; yet, just as the other characters have denied the possibility of death as a result of a loved one's diagnosis of AIDS, he, too, submits to the defense mechanism of denial.

Another example of this form of denial is illustrated in the relationship between Steve, who is HIV-positive, and Jeffrey. Although Jeffrey knows that Steve is ill, he makes the following statement when the two finally agree to date:

Jeffrey: But Steve – first you have to promise me something.

Steve (exasperated): What?

Jeffrey: Promise me...you won't get sick.

Steve (after a beat): Done.

Jeffrey: And you won't die.

Steve: Never. (p. 88)

Both Jeffrey and Steve know the ramifications of AIDS. For a moment, however, at the on-set of their new relationship, they choose to deny there is a possibility of anything other than happiness ahead for their relationship and their lives. The reality is too difficult to accept and denial once again becomes a mode of coping with the potential devastation of losing your life or your loved one.

The final example of denial of the diagnosis of AIDS, death, and mortality is seen when Steve discusses his reluctance to immediately divulge his illness to Jeffrey when they first met. He explains:

Steve: ...I've been positive for five years. I was sick once, my T-cells are decent, and every once in a while, like fifty times a day- an hour-I get very tired of being a person with AIDS. A red ribbon. So sometimes...I forget. Sometimes, I choose to forget...Can you understand?

At all? (p. 47)

The overwhelming knowledge of his own eminent demise through a terminal illness creates an urge in Steve to occasionally deny that death awaits him. As he mentions in this passage, he has had only one external episode of illness in five years. The fact remains clear, however, that one may look healthy despite having been diagnosed with AIDS. It is an illusion that does not last indefinitely. AIDS can kill. It is this inescapable

reality that drives characters in the selected AIDS-related plays to seek shelter for a brief respite in the form of denial.

The AIDS Crisis

Although each of the four plays under examination reveals elements of denial, examples of denial of an AIDS crisis exist only in *The Normal Heart*. The political tone of the play may explain the generation of the proposed concept of denial. Kramer's play focuses on the activist efforts of his main character, Ned Weeks, and the difficulties inherent in engaging both the homosexual and heterosexual communities in a call to unity to combat the AIDS crisis and subsequent epidemic. A total of fifteen examples of denial in the microcosm of the gay community and the macrocosm of mainstream America exist within the play. For the purposes of this study, several key examples will be explored to demonstrate evidence of denial by rejecting the existence of an AIDS crisis.

The first example speaking to this concept in the microcosm of the gay community is found early in the progression of the play. Ned is visiting his brother, Ben, at Ben's law office when the following exchange occurs:

Ned: My friend Bruce and I went out to Fire Island and over the whole Labor Day weekend we collected the grand sum of \$124.

Ben: You can read that as either an indication that it's a beginning and will improve, or as a portent that heads will stay in the sand. My advice is heads are going to stay in the sand.

Ned: Because so many gay people are still in the closet?

Ben: Because people don't like to be frightened. When they get scared they don't behave well. It's called denial. (p. 42)

Although Ben is not gay, he candidly explains with clarity the problem of denial within the homosexual community. Fear fuels denial. The homosexual community, as previously mentioned, was the first to suffer from the AIDS crisis in America. The fear of the devastating effects of the disease prompted many in the gay community to deny the very existence of a health crisis related to any aspect of their homosexuality.

Another example of this concept of denial is illustrated within the group Ned co-created. The motives of the group of gay men were to educate and assist those in the gay community where the issue of AIDS was concerned. Kramer creates a rich dramatic situation, illustrating a conflict within the members of the group. Their attitudes toward the very disease they have united to confront are evident in the following interaction:

Ned: Why is anything I'm saying compared to anything but common sense? When are we going to have this out once and for all? How many cases a week now?

Mickey: Thirty...forty...

Ned: Reinhard dead, Craig dead, Albert sick, Felix not getting any better...Richie Faro just died.

Mickey: Richie!

Ned: That guy Ray Schwartz just committed suicide. Terry's calling all his friends from under his oxygen tank to say good-bye. Soon we're going to be blamed for not doing anything to help ourselves. When are we going to admit we might be spreading this?...

Tommy: (Holding up his cigarette.) It's my right to kill myself.

Ned: But it is not your right to kill me. This is not a civil rights issue, this is a contagion issue. (p. 100)

As this passage of dialogue demonstrates, there is not only denial within the microcosm of the homosexual community, but also within the smaller group created to inform others about the crisis. Most members of the group embrace denial and take a cautious position when they are members of the predominant group at-risk of infection from AIDS.

Although Ned urges them to action, members of the group and the homosexual community are deep in denial of a crisis worthy of life-style changes.

Just as the denial is evidenced in the microcosm of the homosexual community, it is also predominately displayed in the macrocosm of mainstream America. Kramer focuses on the denial of the existence of a crisis by his local government officials in New York when, in the play, the gay men's group meets with the mayor's assistant for the first time:

Ned: We have been trying to meet with the mayor for fourteen months...Have you told the mayor there's an epidemic going on?

Hiram: I can't tell him that!

Ned: Why not?

Hiram: Because it isn't true.

Bruce: Yes, sir, it is.

Hiram: Who said so?

Tommy: The government.

Hiram: Which government? Our government?... Since when?

Mickey: The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta declared it.

Tommy: Seventeen months ago...

Hiram: Well, you can't expect us to concern ourselves with every little outbreak those boys come up with. And could you please reduce the level of your hysteria? (p. 87)

Local officials in the play were in denial even when presented with the fact that the CDC had declared an AIDS crisis. The concept of denial on a local government level protects from potential allegations of failure to act appropriately. If they deny the existence, then no action is necessary. It also protects from the potential embarrassment of having so many members of a subculture group, such as homosexuals, as a part of your community. Denial in Kramer's play is not limited to the local government. From here, Kramer moves into an attack on the denial of the CDC to provide accurate numbers of those who are ill with AIDS.

Mickey: (Hanging up.) That was Atlanta. They're reporting thirty cases a week now nationally.

Bruce: Thirty!

Tommy: The CDC are filthy liars. What's wrong with those boys? We log forty cases a week in this office alone.

Bruce: Forty?

Tommy: Forty.

Mickey: Thirty.

Bruce: (Trying to decide how to log this on the wall chart.) So that's thirty nationally, forty in this office alone. (p. 98)

The discrepancy documented from the gay men's group in New York and the numbers provided by the CDC illustrate denial that the problem is as large as it truly is. By denying accuracy and keeping the figures lower for the general public, hysteria may be kept in check as the federal government assesses the scope of the epidemic.

The final example addresses the differences in the lives of those in the gay community dealing with the crisis and the lives of mainstream America, still in denial of the crisis:

Ned: We're all going to go crazy, living this epidemic every minute, while the rest of the world goes on out there, all around us, as if nothing is happening, going on with their own lives and not knowing what it's like, what we're going through. We're living through war, but where they're living it's peacetime, and we're all in the same country. (p. 104)

Ned, therefore, assesses the denial of a problem by mainstream America: because their lives are not directly affected by the crisis, the crisis does not exist. The striking image of war and peace within the same country emphasizes the impact denial can have. Contrary to the claim of critics that *The Normal Heart* spends the duration of the play searching for someone to blame for the AIDS crisis (Sinfield, 1999, p. 322), the preceding examples of denial illustrate Kramer's clever creative ability to build layers of denial from all aspects of society. Kramer weaves denial of an AIDS crisis into his drama, which speaks to the culpability of an entire society in denial of the AIDS epidemic.

Homosexuality

Although examples of the concept of denial of the AIDS crisis only manifested itself in *The Normal Heart*, examples of the final concept of denial to be examined emerged in *The Normal Heart* and *Angels in America*. The concept of denying one's homosexuality directly relates to the fear of acceptance from mainstream American society. According to Richard Dellaroma (1994) in his book *Apocalyptic Overtures: Sexual Politics and the Sense of an Ending*, "Since the advent of AIDS, the tendency of gay men to be regarded as a source of contagion has exacerbated their alienation" (p. 167). The alienation stemming from the AIDS crisis may have led many gay men into a state of public denial to maintain personal and professional relationships.

The initial instance of denial of homosexuality in *The Normal Heart* occurs when the gay men's group meets to organize a major mailing of information to members of the gay community. The group had decided not to put the word "gay" on the outside of the envelope to protect the anonymity of its recipients. A heated exchange is the outcome when the envelopes arrive and many are stuffed before the group realizes the word "gay" is on the outer part of the envelope. The exchange reveals the importance, even to the president of the group, Bruce, in maintaining anonymity.

Bruce: We can go through and scratch out the word with a Magic Marker.

Ned: Ten thousand times? Look, I feel sympathy for young guys still living at home...but most men getting these...Look at you, in your case what difference does it make? You live alone, you own your own apartment, your mother lives in another state...

Bruce: What about my mailman?

Ned: You don't expect me to take that seriously?

Bruce: Yes, I do! (p. 59-60)

Even as the president of a group dedicated to delivering information about the AIDS crisis, Bruce cannot allow anyone outside the inner circle of the gay community to know he is a homosexual. His fear of his mailman possibly knowing illustrates the extreme extent of the external denial of homosexuality he has adopted in order to survive in mainstream America. Kramer uses Ned to further emphasize the degree of denial members of the group exhibit based on their fear of alienation or retaliation from mainstream America. In the following example, Ned explains to Dr. Emma Brookner why more information on the disease is not reaching the gay community:

Ned: Bruce is in the closet. Mickey works for the Health Department: he starts shaking every time I criticize them – they won't even put out our leaflets listing all the symptoms; Richard, Dick, and Lennie owe their jobs somehow to the Mayor; Dan is a schoolteacher; we're not allowed to say his last name out loud...I warned you this was not a community that has its best interests at heart. (p. 78-79)

Denial of one's homosexuality based on fear is deterring the distribution of life saving information to the community needing it the most. As earlier implied, the potential alienation has prompted homosexual denial that is deeply rooted in the psyche of homosexual men in America.

This deeply rooted denial is also evident in several characters in *Angels in America*. The first example illustrates the dual lives many homosexuals lead. When Louis attends his grandmother's funeral, he apologizes to his lover, Prior, for not being

openly affectionate when his relatives are around (p. 19). The duality of personal and private lives of homosexual men is demonstrated in Louis' statement to Prior. His family must not see his homosexual side; therefore, he denies it when they are present.

A majority of the examples of denying homosexuality in *Angels in America* revolve around the married Mormon couple, Harper and Joe. Immediately, when the character of Harper is introduced, the reader realizes she is unstable. Harper's character delivers an emotional roller-coaster, providing highs and lows for the reader to experience. Addicted to pills, she exudes denial on many levels. The concept of denial of a problem in her marriage as a result of her husband's hidden homosexuality manifests itself intermittently throughout the course of the play. In one early exchange with Joe, she claims that they are "Pretend-happy. And that's better than nothing" (p. 23). Harper continues to deny her husband's homosexuality even when she is confronted with it in a pill-induced vision with Prior:

Prior: Your husband's a homo.

(Pause.)

Harper: Oh, ridiculous....Joe's a very normal man...(p. 33)

Harper cannot handle the truth of her husband's homosexuality; therefore, she has created a world of denial. When Harper finally manages the courage and strength to overcome her denial and ask Joe if he is homosexual, Joe, too, is in a state of denial about his homosexuality. Joe has repressed his homosexual feelings his entire life in an attempt to be a good functioning member of mainstream America.

Joe: Does it make any difference? That I might be one thing deep within, no matter how wrong or ugly that thing is, so long as I have fought, with everything I have, to kill it... (p. 40)

Joe's denial of his homosexuality is ingrained. His life has been a testament to denial of self. When he is confronted with this, he begins to unravel and the walls of self-denial begin to disintegrate. As his marriage appears to be ending, Joe eventually gains the will power to explain his homosexuality to Harper (p. 77) and to admit it to his mother, Hannah. Joe calls Hannah from a pay phone to tell her he is a homosexual and is greeted with denial from his mother. She tells him to stop being ridiculous and will not discuss the idea that her son is homosexual (p.75-76). The reality of losing relationships once admitting homosexuality promotes denial. Joe has denied his homosexuality in order to maintain relationships with his wife, mother, church, and to maintain his career. Once he has admitted his homosexuality, he is hospitalized two days for a bleeding ulcer. Kushner leads the reader to believe that Joe's denial of his homosexuality has such tremendous ramifications it creates an ulcer. There are physical as well as emotional and societal ramifications for divulging homosexuality.

The final example of denial of homosexuality in *Angels in America* is found in the character of Roy Cohn. When Cohn learns he has AIDS, he emphatically denies that it is a result of homosexuality to his physician, Henry. Roy's denial of his homosexual nature is intense. His dislike of homosexuals is clear and although there is no mistake that he has experienced homosexual encounters, Cohn attempts to explain why he is not a homosexual to Henry:

Roy: Your problem Henry, is that you are hung up on words, on labels, that you believe what they seem to mean... This is what a label refers to. Now to someone who does not understand this, homosexual is what I am because I have sex with men. But really this is wrong. Homosexuals are not men who sleep with other men. Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a pissant anti-discrimination bill through City Council. Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows. Who have zero clout. Does this sound like me, Henry? (p.45)

Cohn's statement expresses the idea that is a basis for many homosexuals who decide to keep their sexual preference confidential for the fear of how mainstream America views homosexuality. Extreme and powerful fear dictates the denial of homosexuality experienced by these characters. Fear is a primary force generating the concept of denial in the plays under examination.

Historical Accuracy

Examples detailing the three concepts of denial have been identified. The exploration of the historical accuracy of the concept of denial as manifested in the dialogue and movement discussed in this chapter will facilitate a better understanding of character portrayals depicted in the four AIDS-related plays under investigation.

Hoffman's depiction of denial in *As Is* remains true to the historical implications regarding the concept of denial. His characters follow the classic traits the medical community has documented following the diagnosis of a terminal disease (Kassler, 1983, p. 33-34). In addition to the historical accuracy of the medical concept of denial, Hoffman has maintained accuracy regarding the perceptions of mainstream America

during the period in which he wrote. When PWA4 discusses her denial of the disease to her community, it is an accurate account of societal views of the time. The populace at large believed that it was a gay disease (Rogers & Ginzberg, 1989, p. 5). Although stories of IV drug users contracting the disease had emerged, mainstream society would not have imagined that a police officer would fall into that category. Therefore, the stigma and denial that PWA4 expresses is accurate.

Just as Hoffman has remained historically accurate in his portrayal, Kramer has delivered historical accuracies based on his own experiences in *The Normal Heart* as they relate to denial. In his critically acclaimed book, *And the Band Played On*, Randy Shilts (2000) includes information from several interviews with Kramer as well as information based on letters and articles Kramer wrote to various agencies and papers. In addition to his documentation regarding Kramer, his account of the AIDS epidemic is based on hundreds of interviews with people immersed in the crisis from its origin to 1987. The discussion of the denial of the gay community to acknowledge the epidemic through the meager §124 is based on true events in Kramer's life (Shilts, 2000, p. 91–92).

In similar manner, there is a denial of the epidemic in which people claim they have the right to do whatever they wish to their body. This may be found in reality in the case of patient zero, Gaetan Dugas. Dugas was the notorious airline steward from Canada who continued to have promiscuous sexual encounters after he was diagnosed with AIDS. He would show his lovers his Kaposi's sarcoma lesions after encounters and tell them maybe they would catch the gay cancer, too. When he was questioned, his

reaction was much like Tommy's in Kramer's play. He claimed that it was his right to do what he wanted to with his body (Shilts, 2000, p. 196–197, 200).

Further proof of historical accuracy within *The Normal Heart* may be found in the confrontation between Hiram, the mayor's assistant, and the members of the gay men's group which was based on actual events of the Gay Men's Health Crisis group (Shilts, 2000, p. 109). There also are records in the discussion of the CDC. Shilts documents accounts which illustrate failure of the CDC to act against the epidemic. Shilts also documents that the number of cases was altered to match the amount of funding they requested to research the epidemic. The CDC did not want to appear to be negligent where the issue was concerned and they wanted to curb potential widespread panic (Shilts, 2002, p. 244, 292, 556). The illustrations of historical accuracy dominate the selections of denial evidenced in *The Normal Heart*. Kramer provides a candid look at events during the initial phase of the epidemic.

Whereas Kramer and Hoffman provide non-fictitious examples of the concept of denial, Kushner relies on a mixture of reality and fantasy to address the concept of denial in his examples from *Angels in America*. Kushner addresses the issue of duality and it is based on historical accuracy. Many gay men have denied their homosexual lives to the public, friends, and family, while they led secret lives as homosexuals (Shilts, 2000, p. 26-27, 251). Such denial has enabled men to lead lives free from the fear of isolation and persecution as a result of their sexual preference.

Kushner also displays historical accuracy in his depiction of Roy Cohn, who denies he has AIDS and demands to be diagnosed with liver cancer (Shilts, 2000, p. 585-586). In addition to the accuracy of Cohn's denial, Kushner also accurately depicts the

description of Kaposi's sarcoma, or KS (Kassler, 1983, p. 13). This manifestation of AIDS is one of the most common symptoms. Its accurate description lends further validity to the characters portrayed as stricken with AIDS.

Although the characterization of Harper assumes elements of fantasy when she has pill-induced hallucinations, Kushner creates realistic tension within the marriage based on the denial of Joe's homosexuality. Overall, Kushner's examples of the concept of denial are historically accurate.

Just as the previous playwrights examined have utilized historical accuracy in the characters through the dialogue and movement of their plays, Rudnick relies on the reality of denial as a coping mechanism. Furthermore, when Steve indicates his illness has been asymptomatic for almost five years, there is historical accuracy in his portrayal. There are documented cases that illustrate infection without symptoms for ten years and longer (Tonks, 1996, p. 6-7). The accuracy of this example is crucial, for it does not mislead the reader where the facts of AIDS are concerned.

Although dramatic liberties are expected in theatre, the element of truth in information about the disease is crucial for AIDS-related plays. Misleading the reader can result in misinformation reaching the public and spreading. Documentation and evidence in this study indicates the representations regarding the concept of denial in the four selected plays contain credible historical accuracies.

The assessment of concepts intrinsic in AIDS-related plays will continue in chapter five through an analysis of the concept of defeat. As with chapters three and four, an attempt will be made to discern the existence of the concept of defeat in the plays

selected for this study to establish its existence and its legitimacy as it relates to historical accuracy.

Chapter 5

Defeat

The AIDS-related drama selected for examination in this study explores the devastation the AIDS epidemic creates in America. Earlier examination has revealed concepts of defiance and denial as they relate to AIDS and are presented in the plays under study. The third and last concept to be examined, defeat, invokes assorted contrasting images. Some find victory in defeat; others merely see an unsuccessful ending. The focus of the concept of defeat for this investigation does not reveal victory. AIDS and defeat occur at a time in life when most of those affected by the disease should be celebrating accomplishments normally achieved in early to mid life.

Just as defeat is found in other aspects of life, the characters in AIDS-related plays also reflect the concept of defeat as they are forced to struggle with circumstances that are unnatural to the way of life known prior to the AIDS epidemic. Modern medicine in America virtually eradicated many of the diseases, such as polio, that had stricken prior generations of young adults and children. The current generation, in contrast, has not been well equipped to deal with a disease of the magnitude of AIDS. The mystery and nature of AIDS are manifested through AIDS-related drama and characterizations in several ways through the concept of defeat. The four plays selected for this study reveal three major examples of this concept.

The first example of the concept of defeat relates directly to the diagnosis of AIDS. For the purposes of this study, this example of defeat is limited to characters who have AIDS or have been diagnosed as HIV-positive. The second example includes those who may be classified as the "worried well." The characters in this category have not

contracted AIDS and have not been diagnosed as HIV-positive. This category demonstrates how defeat can exist in the lives of those who have not been diagnosed. Their good health notwithstanding, their lives are substantially and negatively influenced by the impact of AIDS. The final example of defeat is unique in that it is not specifically related to the AIDS epidemic. Moreover, it is found only in *Angels in America*. In this case, defeat is found in life. Other less consequential types of defeat may exist in the four selected plays, but these three types are the most dominant in the plays. The protocol established in preceding chapters will continue in chapter five. The four plays will be examined in the chronological order in which they were produced in New York. The three concepts of defeat selected for investigation shall be explored through the dialogue and movement acknowledged in the selected plays.

Stricken with AIDS: Diagnostic Defeat

The burden of the diagnosis of a terminal disease creates tremendous strife in what is to be the remainder of one's life. The knowledge of impending death looms and those stricken with a terminal disease go through various stages of acceptance (Kassler, 1983, p. 33-34). The stress of being diagnosed with AIDS is amplified due to the social stigma associated with its diagnosis. The loss of hope for a future encompasses all aspects of many AIDS sufferer's lives. The ability to cope with loss is difficult. The difficulties in dealing with the losses associated with AIDS often create a sense of defeat for those who have the disease. The characters in the four plays selected for examination express defeat as a direct result of their diagnosis and ensuing events.

Defeat from diagnosis manifests itself in the first play for examination, *As Is*, in the character Rich. When Rich is introduced, he is immediately projecting the concept of

defeat in his interactions with Saul. As they discuss ownership of items to be claimed as a result of their breakup six months ago, Rich increasingly gives items to Saul that are obviously his (p. 505-509). At the end of this verbal exchange, Rich informs Saul he has AIDS. At this point, Hoffman interpolates various people onstage from Rich's life via actions similar to those of a Greek chorus. Through the dialogue of his friends, family, business partner, and lover, Hoffman delivers a lengthy list of reasons why the people in Rich's life have decided to avoid him (p. 509-511). Rich and the reader are aware the true reasons are rooted in his AIDS diagnosis.

Rich's isolation as a result of virtually total abandonment results in his sense of defeat. Saul offers Rich the opportunity to stay with him. The pain of abandonment as a result of AIDS is clear when Rich responds:

Rich: Paper plates, Lysol, face masks – no, I'd prefer to live alone, thank you. (p. 512)

His defeat is evident through his willingness to rid himself of all possessions as well as his resignation to a life where he is alone. His defeat as a result of his diagnosis escalates until he exclaims:

Rich: Maybe I ought to wear a sign around my neck and ring a bell:
'AIDS, I've got AIDS, stand clear!' ... Or maybe I should dig a hole in the ground, douse myself with kerosene, and have a final cigarette. No muss, no fuss... (p. 513)

The hopelessness of his situation consumes him and he flails at Saul out of his own frustration with his impending death and the loss of interpersonal relationships.

Hoffman continues to provide painful examples of potential romantic partners fleeing once Rich explains he has AIDS (p. 514–515). His feelings of defeat eventually lead to suicidal thoughts:

Rich: No use getting hysterical...Poor bastards that got it: cancer, pneumonia, herpes all over. I mean, I'd kill myself if I had to go through all that shit. Get a gun and perform fellatio on it...Slash my wrists with the grain...Subway tracks?...Or maybe I'd mix myself a Judy Garland: forty reds and a quart of vodka. (p. 516-517)

Rich has mentally succumbed to AIDS. He believes that suicide may be his best option. His alienation from having a semblance of a normal life is a result of his diagnosis of AIDS.

Hoffman spends the majority of the play incorporating examples which illustrate the reasons behind Rich's feelings of defeat. He continues with additional evidence that displays the lack of support from other aspects of Rich's life:

Rich: One thing. I'm embarrassed. I'm just about broke. The doctors. Tests.

Saul: I thought you were insured.

Rich: They're pulling a fast one. (p. 525)

The humiliation and devastation continue to mount for Rich. Seemingly, all aspects of his life have been damaged as a result of his diagnosis of AIDS.

Hoffman creates a vivid image of the concept of defeat due to diagnosis of AIDS throughout the play in the events surrounding Rich as he shows what may happen when

one is diagnosed with AIDS. Hoffman continues to build the image of desolation when he proceeds with the earlier suicidal thoughts Rich displayed:

Rich: Now listen: you tell him you want something to make you sleep and Valium doesn't work on you, but a friend once gave you Seconal-

Saul: No! I won't do it!

Rich (pressuring Saul relentlessly): I tried hoarding the pills here, but every night the nurse stays to watch me swallow them down.

Saul: I can't do that...I won't listen.

Rich: If you love me, you'll help me. I have something that's eating me up. I don't want to go on. I'm scared to go on. (p. 540 – 541)

The external events generating Rich's defeat have been illustrated. The characterization shifts to the internal havoc AIDS creates which reiterates the concept of defeat as a result of AIDS.

The descriptions of the destruction of AIDS and Rich's defeat are further explored when Rich rejects Saul's offer to help him live. He states:

Rich: What's so hot about living when you're covered with lesions and you're coming down with a new infection every day... (p. 547)

AIDS and its devastation encompass all aspects of Rich's life and helps trigger his defeat. Rich has been destroyed by the actions of those he cares about as well as the mental and physical toll of the disease. Consequently, the diagnosis of AIDS defeats him and he is initially consumed by it.

Just as Rich is defeated through a diagnosis of AIDS, characters in *The Normal Heart* also display comparable examples of the concept of defeat as a result of a

diagnosis of AIDS. At the onset of the play, Craig delivers a gloomy forecast for his own future with his diagnosis at Dr. Emma Brookner's office:

Craig: (Coming out of Emma's office.) I'm going to die. That's the bottom line of what she's telling me. I'm so scared. I have to go home and get my things and come right back and check in. Mickey, please come with me. I hate hospitals. I'm going to die... (p. 33)

His comments are fraught with a defeat that overwhelms him due to his diagnosis. The stunning realization that a diagnosis of AIDS means death and defeat continually emerges in characters that have been diagnosed.

Defeat is also significantly represented in Ned's love interest, Felix, in *The Normal Heart*. Once an optimistic counterpart to Ned's often pessimistic views on life in an age of AIDS, he changes when he is diagnosed with AIDS. The disease takes a tremendous physical and mental toll on Felix and leaves him defeated in its wake:

Ned: Why are you sitting on the floor?

Felix: I fell down trying to get from there to here.

Ned: Let's put you in bed.

Felix: Don't touch me! I'm so ugly. I cannot stand it when you look at my body. (p. 115)

The physical ailments are magnified by the mental image Felix has of his body. While Felix is still broken and defeated on the floor, examples of defeat resulting from an AIDS diagnosis continue to emerge:

Felix: No! I've had over forty treatments. No! - I've had three, no four different types of chemo. No! - I've had interferon, a couple kinds. I've

had two different experimentals. Emma has spent more time on me than anyone else. None of it has done a thing. I've had to go into the hospital four times – and please God don't make me go back into the hospital until I die... (p. 117)

Felix is exhausted from the disease and the attempts to slow or cure it. He is emotionally and physically spent. His hopeless situation has materialized as defeat.

Just as defeat as a result of the diagnosis of AIDS has been identified in *As Is* and *The Normal Heart*, it also emerges in *Angels in America*. A month after Prior has first been diagnosed with AIDS he appears in a dream scene:

Prior (Alone, putting on makeup, then examining the results in the mirror; to the audience): 'I'm ready for my closeup, Mr. DeMille.' One wants to move through life with elegance and grace... One wants... But one so seldom gets what one wants, does one? No, one does not... One... dies at thirty, robbed of... decades of majesty. Fuck this shit. Fuck this shit. (He almost crumbles; he pulls himself together; he studies his handiwork in the mirror)

I look like a corpse. A corpsette. Oh my queen; you know you've hit rock-bottom when even drag is a drag. (p. 30-31)

Although intermixed with elements of humor, Prior admits that he is beaten. In only one month, AIDS changes his life drastically. Later in the same scene, he reveals more of the defeat he is experiencing:

Prior: I don't think there's any uninfected part of me. My heart is pumping polluted blood. I feel dirty. (p. 34)

This example speaks to the concept of defeat as a result of AIDS on two levels: Prior is describing both the physical distress of the illness and the emotional upheaval AIDS delivers.

Emotional defeat is explored further when Prior expresses the turmoil he suffers when his boyfriend, Louis, deserts him:

Belize: How long have you been here?

Prior (Getting suddenly upset): I don't remember, I don't give a fuck. I want Louis... where the fuck is he? I'm dying, I'm dying, where's Louis?

(p. 60)

Complications from AIDS have forced Prior to stay in the hospital. He feels isolated and is frightened by the physical and mental damage that AIDS is creating. Louis eventually arrives at the hospital, only to inform Prior he's moving out because he cannot handle Prior's illness.

Prior (Shattered; almost pleading, trying to reach him): I'm dying! You stupid fuck! Do you know what that is! Love! Do you know what love means? We lived together four-and-a-half years, you animal, you idiot.

(p. 79)

Kushner's stage directions explain the subtext motivating the dialogue. Prior is shattered, devastated that at a time when he needs love the most, his boyfriend flees.

Mirroring examples of defeat of this nature provided earlier, the devastation and defeat continue to escalate. Once Louis has left the hospital room, Prior is free to let his façade of anger down in order to display his true defeat as he says:

Prior: I hurt all over. I wish I was dead. (p. 81)

The hopelessness is overwhelming when coupled with the terror of the diagnosis and its consequences in the interpersonal aspects of life. The damage continues for Prior physically as he displays numerous painful symptoms of AIDS (p. 97-98). Prior's experiences dealing with the manifestations of external and internal examples of the concept of defeat mirror those of the characters discussed from *As Is* and *The Normal Heart*.

A contrasting approach to the concept of defeat as a result of a diagnosis of AIDS may be seen in Steve, in the final play under examination, *Jeffrey*. Steve has displayed no external symptoms of the illness with the exception of one episode five years ago. The defeat Steve experiences as a result of his diagnosis is primarily a consequence of the behavior and attitudes of others toward him.

Steve's repeated rejection by people in his life, specifically Jeffrey, leads to biting sarcasm to mask defeat. He encounters Jeffrey at the hospital and is motivated to react with a flamboyant display of sarcasm directed at Jeffrey's lack of interest due to Steve's terminal illness (p. 57-60). At one point in Steve's tirade, his defeat emerges as the following occurs:

Jeffrey: I admire your spirit. And your humor.

Steve: Don't admire me! Fuck me! Admiration gets me an empty dance card, except for the chest X-rays and the occasional march on Washington.

Admiration gets me a lovely memorial and a square on the quilt. (p. 60)

Steve's sarcasm is a result of his reality. Although he may appear to be healthy, his disease has created a no-win situation for him where personal relationships are concerned. He has attempted to maintain a life of hope and is constantly faced with

defeat. Steve is defeated as a result of Jeffrey's rejection of affection and the possibility of a relationship.

The concept of defeat as illustrated through the diagnosis of AIDS, therefore, is demonstrated in each of the four plays. Defeat, it seems, is a constant companion for those stricken with AIDS.

The Worried Well

Whereas defeat is a constant companion for those diagnosed with AIDS or those who are HIV-positive, it also may be found in the people who interact with those who have AIDS. The individuals who incorporate the worried well have not tested positive for AIDS.

The theory of "the worried well" is prevalent in the medical world and also relates to conditions other than AIDS. According to Rick Sowadsky (1999, p. 1), communicable diseases specialist for the Nevada state health division AIDS program, "The term refers to people who are either convinced they have a disease even though they display no symptoms or, they are terrified of being diagnosed with the illness." This category of the concept of defeat may be partially attributed to the intense fear and lack of knowledge regarding AIDS. Individuals in the time period established for the plays examined were provided little information, misinformation, or there was failure to obtain information that existed. Additionally, dwelling on the illness can create more suffering than the illness itself (Sontag, 1989, p. 11).

The worried well focus a tremendous amount of energy and time to dwelling on or worrying about the possibility of illness. Although the defeatist attitude of the worried

well may not be embraced completely and at all times, when it spirals out of control, it leads to the concept of defeat.

The first illustration for investigation in this category may be found in two examples with Saul in Hoffman's play, *As Is*. Saul is the only person Rich is able to rely on during his personal crisis dealing with his diagnosis of AIDS. However, there is a monologue early in the progression of the play, before Rich admits to Saul he has AIDS. It provides an example of Saul as one of the worried well:

Saul: I've been upset...I visited Teddy today at St. Vincent's. It's very depressing...He's lying there in bed out of it...Jimmy died, as you must have heard. I went out to San Francisco to be with him the last few weeks...He was in a coma for a month...Harry has K.S., and Matt has the swollen glands. He went for tests today...I haven't slept well for weeks. Every morning I examine my body for swellings, marks. I'm terrified of every pimple, every rash. If I cough, I think of Teddy. I wish he would die. He is dead. He might as well be...I feel the disease closing in on me. All my activities are life and death. Keep up my Blue Cross. Up my reps. Eat my vegetables...The New Wave is the corpse look. I'm very frightened...(p. 509)

Saul details the reasons that propel the worried well to a state of defeat. The concept of defeat is easy to understand, given the circumstances Saul faces. The uncertainty of Saul's situation depresses him and leaves him somewhat defeated. He is surrounded by death and the possibility of death.

The conditions in the age of AIDS force Saul to question his own health, although he displays no symptoms. His homosexual lifestyle and past escapades are also addressed as an undercurrent of defeat when he discusses his past with Rich:

Saul: Brian died last week... And he and I soaked in the same hot tub, making a kind of human soup... (p. 524)

The vivid visual image of the human soup is an element that contains an undercurrent of defeat for Saul. Gay bathhouses were notorious for illicit sexual activity and bodily fluids may transmit AIDS. Saul fears repercussions from his past although he exhibits no signs of the disease. In both of the foregoing examples, fear leads to a defeatist attitude.

In addition to Saul in *As Is*, there are several characters among the worried well in *The Normal Heart* who, consumed with fear, exhibit defeat. One such example in *The Normal Heart* is Mickey. Mickey is a founding member of the gay men's health group and the health department in New York employs him. The political wrangling between the gay men's health group and city officials regarding the AIDS epidemic has defeated Mickey, who does not have AIDS. What begins as a heated exchange about differing policy views for board members of the gay men's health group escalates into desperation for Mickey (pp. 98-104). The devastation created by the AIDS crisis has propelled Mickey to the edge. He is surrounded by confusion, fear, and death. As an employee of the health department, Mickey receives constant questions about AIDS, and he is expected to know the answers. The failure of the health department to invest time in the AIDS epidemic leaves Mickey helpless. He does not have the answers he and other members of the gay community desperately seek.

Whereas Mickey is primarily defeated as a result of the stress from his job, his AIDS activist work, and the fear of the disease, Bruce's source of defeat surfaces through another form. He fears he is a carrier killing those he loves as his third lover has succumbed to the disease in a most horrific manner described in the following passage as Bruce shares the memory with Ned:

Bruce: Albert loses his mind, not recognizing me, knowing who he is or that he's going home, and then, right there, on the plane, he becomes...incontinent...And when we got to Phoenix, there's a police van waiting for us and all the police are in complete protective rubber clothing...by the time we got to the hospital where his mother had fixed up his room real nice, Albert was dead. (Ned moves toward him.) Wait. It gets worse. The hospital doctors refuse to examine him to put a cause of death on the death certificate, and without a death certificate the undertakers wouldn't take him away, and neither would the police. Finally, some orderly comes in and stuffs Albert in a heavy-duty Glad Bag and motions us with his finger to follow him and he puts him out in the back alley with the garbage. (p. 105-106)

As this example illustrates, there is a constant barrage of devastating situations. Despair and the fear of the disease bombard characters associated with at-risk groups. The concept of defeat in the worried well, who are consumed by fear, is a result of the situations they encounter and the experiences of the situations propel them into utter defeat. Although he is well, Bruce is beaten by the events surrounding the death of his lover, who had AIDS.

Just as Bruce, in *The Normal Heart*, submits to the power of AIDS and is defeated, Louis, in *Angels in America*, accepts defeat as he deals with the ramifications of AIDS through his lover, Prior. Louis' internal makeup does not allow him to cope with unpleasant situations well. As he learns of his lover's illness, not only does he retreat from Prior, he also retreats from his sense of obligation to face the destruction of AIDS:

Prior: I had an accident.

(Louis goes to him.)

Louis: This is blood.

Prior: Maybe you shouldn't touch it...me...I... (He faints.)

Louis (Quietly): Oh help. Oh help. Oh God oh God oh God help me I can't I can't I can't. (p. 48)

The images Kushner displays provide a clear vision of the circumstances which propel Louis to a defeatist attitude. After witnessing the bloody scene with Prior, Louis loses hope for the future. When a nurse attempts to calm his fears, Louis dismisses her optimism about Prior (p. 50). He cannot accept the reality of AIDS and continues the emotional plunge as defeat engulfs him.

The concept of defeat manifests itself in the darkness Louis begins to embrace. His traits are those of the worried well. He embarks on a dangerous self-destructive path as a result of the despondency Prior's poor health has generated.

Although he knows the dangers of illicit sexual encounters in the age of AIDS, Louis leaves the hospital and immediately seeks a violent tryst in the park with a complete stranger. This culminates in the ultimate expression of defeat as Louis says:

Louis: What?

Man: I think it broke. The rubber. You want me to keep going?...

Louis: Keep going.

Infect me.

I don't care. I don't care. (p. 57)

Kushner's graphic scene forces the reader to acknowledge the shocking degree to which defeat has consumed Louis. His actions are unbelievable and repulsive; however, they clearly demonstrate the concept of defeat as illustrated through the actions of those who are not infected. Despite being uninfected, they are lost as a result of the AIDS epidemic.

Whereas Louis' examples of defeat among the uninfected are designed to be serious and sober, examples found in the final play for review, *Jeffrey*, do not utilize the same techniques. In high contrast, a number of examples from Rudnick's play focus on humor as a defense mechanism to the defeat Jeffrey experiences. Early examples of the concept of defeat among the worried well revolve around the humor of Jeffrey's determination to completely abstain from sexual relationships, romance, and love (p. 7, 13, 17, 27).

Although humor is the catalyst in the actions of the play and in the character, Jeffrey, defeat is unmistakably the undercurrent driving Jeffrey to formulate drastic changes in his life. Jeffrey's friends attempt to change his extreme perspective on the AIDS crisis. He has friends in healthy relationships where one partner has AIDS and the other is not ill. When the core network of friends have finally convinced Jeffrey to give love a chance, he learns his romantic interest is HIV-positive (p.32-33). This catapults Jeffrey to his extreme determination to live defeated, refusing to take any prospect of

assuming a life with love. Jeffrey speaks of his decision as if it is not significant; however, his actions and subtext relay the undercurrent of defeat that motivates his decision.

Jeffrey also relies on dialogue to convey his defeat as he discusses living in an age of AIDS:

Jeffrey: Okay, what am I so afraid of? Him getting sick? Me getting sick? Why is the idea of a simple dinner now like an evening of Russian roulette? (p. 39)

Rudnick spends the majority of the play using Jeffrey as a comedic vehicle for the defeat the AIDS crisis created.

As the play progresses, the façade dissolves and Jeffrey openly articulates the fear and the hopelessness of his defeated nature as a result of the AIDS crisis. Jeffrey attempts to explain his fears to Steve, who has continued to pursue a relationship with him:

Jeffrey: I'm sorry you're sick! And I'm sorry I lied! I'm sorry it's not ten years ago, and I'm sorry that life is suddenly...radioactive!

Steve (after a beat, staring at Jeffrey): Apology accepted.

(Steve exits.)

Jeffrey (exploding): I hate sex! I hate love! I hate the world for giving me everything, and then taking it all back! (p. 48)

Jeffrey has finally admitted his fear and his hopelessness. The concept of defeat is illustrated through his actions and his dialogue.

Once openly admitted, other examples providing reasons for his defeatist attitude surface throughout the text of the play (p. 54-55, 66-67, 77). Jeffrey delivers reasons similar to those from other plays discussed in this study. He is surrounded by death and illness and it overwhelms him. He is not equipped to deal with the suffering he sees in others and the trauma he experiences as AIDS impacts every aspect of his life, even though he is healthy and free from a diagnosis of the disease.

The proposed concept of defeat in the category of the worried well has been substantiated through examples from the text in each of the four plays. However, the final concept of defeat for evaluation, defeat as a result of life, is only discovered in *Angels in America*.

Life Experiences

Although the other aspects of defeat have been a direct result of the AIDS epidemic, there are clear examples of characters that exhibit defeat as their nature in Kushner's *Angels in America*. Evidence of defeat, apparently through life experiences, is found in the characters of Harper, Louis, and Joe. To a great extent, the defeat is presented through the passive-aggressive tendencies of the characters.

When the reader is first introduced to Harper, Joe's wife, she immediately displays examples of defeat through her passive-aggressive attitude toward her husband. Harper is alone and has the following conversation with herself:

Harper: People who are lonely, people left alone, sit talking nonsense to the air, imagining... beautiful systems dying, old fixed orders spiraling apart... (p. 16)

Her monologue continues; then she states:

Harper: But everywhere things are collapsing, lies surfacing, systems of defense giving way... This is why, Joe, this is why I shouldn't be left alone.

(Little pause)

I'd like to go traveling. Leave you behind to worry. I'll send postcards with strange stamps and tantalizing messages on the back. 'Later maybe.'

'Nevermore...' (p. 16-17)

Harper's loneliness and hopelessness are clear in her statements about systems collapsing and defenses giving way. The world is a frightening place for Harper. Her fear of the world is a factor in the defeat she exhibits. Additionally, Harper illustrates her passive-aggressive nature when she shows her anger with her husband's perceived neglect.

Although he is not present for the barbs, Harper blames Joe for her unhappiness and defeat.

Another example of Harper's defeat as a result of life experiences illustrates Kushner's multi-dimensional approach:

Harper: Then they went on to a program about holes in the ozone layer. Over Antarctica. Skin burns, birds go blind, icebergs melt. The world's coming to an end. (p. 28)

As Harper describes the external events in the macrocosm of the world, it signifies the chaos of normal natural structures disintegrating. The subtext foreshadows the destruction to the microcosm of her life with Joe, who has not yet openly expressed his homosexuality. Harper's world, as she has known it, is coming to an end. Whether

expressed on the surface or as an undercurrent of things to come, her defeat is a constant part of her life.

Another character in *Angels in America* through which the concept of defeat is displayed as a result of life experiences is Louis. Although Louis has been examined earlier in this chapter as a part of the worried well, he also may be addressed as one who is defeated by life. In his own words, Louis states:

Louis: Life sucks shit. Life...just sucks shit. (p. 28)

Louis is despondent. His pessimistic attitude toward life is further revealed when his lover, Prior, comments on Louis' inherent nature:

Prior: Well, at least I have the satisfaction of knowing he's in anguish somewhere. I loved his anguish. Watching him stick his head up his asshole and eat his guts out over some relatively minor moral conundrum – it was the best show in town. (p. 61)

Prior sees Louis as one who is constantly in turmoil, even over minor events. Others observe Louis similarly. Belize pointedly informs Louis of his viewpoint in the following example:

Belize: ...It's no fun picking on you Louis; you're so guilty, it's like throwing darts at a glob of jello, there's no satisfying hits, just quivering, the darts just plop in and vanish. (p. 93)

Belize addresses Louis' constant pessimism and gloom, providing another example of Louis as one defeated by life. Louis delivers another missive of defeat as he posits:

Louis: ...there are no Gods here, no ghosts and no spirits in America, there are no angels in America, no spiritual past, no racial past, there's only the

political, and the decoys and the ploys to maneuver around the inescapable battle of politics, the shifting downwards and outwards of political power to the people...(p. 92)

Louis' belief system has eroded and he is vulnerable to defeat on every level in his life because he views life as dismal. Additionally, his statement illustrates the belief that America is not truly alive because it lacks spirituality and hope. Louis feels manipulated by life and he is lost, wandering through life with only his guilt and defeat.

The final character to be examined for his defeatist attitude because of life is Joe. Joe has repressed his true nature his entire life. The repression has created a tremendous sense of defeat where his life is concerned. When Harper asks Joe what he prays for he states:

Joe: I pray for God to crush me, break me up into little pieces and start all over again. (p. 49)

Joe's unhappiness with life is clear in his preceding statement. Generally, Joe internalizes his defeatist nature; however, significant stress can prompt him to articulate defeat, as the example above illustrates. Joe is miserable. He is living a life untrue to his essence and it has defeated him. Kushner unites Joe with Louis, who is also miserable, as the play ends. A volley of who is the most pathetic ensues as they move toward one another:

Louis:...I think if you touch me, your hand might fall off or something.

Worse things have happened to people who have touched me...

Joe: I'm a pretty terrible person, Louis.

Louis: Lou.

Joe: No, I really really am. I don't think I deserve being loved.

Louis: There? See? We already have a lot in common. (p.116-117)

Although the decision to commiserate with one another has been made, their defeat is clear in the remarks they make to one another. Kushner creates characters, situations, and dialogue encapsulating defeat on various levels. The pessimistic perception of life and the negative view of the world have generated defeat in characters in this category.

Historical Accuracy

Whereas specific examples of the three concepts of defeat have been documented, the examination in this chapter shall continue with the evaluation of historical accuracy of character portrayal in the treatment of the concept of defeat and the AIDS epidemic. The analysis of documentation from books as well as public opinion polls will be explored to determine historical accuracy. The literature under examination correlates with the applicable time frame for the plays considered in this study. The approach coincides with the established elements of evaluation and support in chapters three and four.

When examples of isolation, such as the desire to refrain from interacting with AIDS patients are employed in each of the plays, it is historically accurate. Surveys of public opinion indicate that fifty-two percent of the individuals polled would not help care for AIDS patients, seventy-one percent would not kiss someone with AIDS on the cheek, and thirty-six percent polled would not shake hands with an AIDS patient (Stipp & Kerr, 1989, p. 100). The suggestion of suicidal thoughts expressed in the plays in this study is a valid example of historical accuracy. In the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (1988), research indicates an increased number of AIDS-related suicides

occur while patients are hospitalized. The article outlines the increased risk of suicide in persons with AIDS. Patients diagnosed with AIDS were initially given an eighty-six percent mortality rate three years after diagnosis (§ 1; Boccardi, 1994, p. 144; BBC News, 1998, ¶ 1-3). The uncertainty of experimental medical treatment heightened the desire for suicide. AIDS patients were guinea pigs as the medical community attempted to discover answers about the new disease.

Additional historical accuracy is displayed when Rich discusses potential financial ruin as a result of AIDS. At the onset of the epidemic, there were no perimeters established, no gatekeepers to protect individuals diagnosed with AIDS from discrimination by insurance companies and hospitals (Rogers & Ginzberg, 1989, p. 119-120). When Saul exhibits defeat and distress attributable to the impact of AIDS, it is accurate. Research published by the *People with AIDS Coalition Newsletter* indicates there are extreme difficulties associated with coping with AIDS for those who are healthy and those who are infected (Shernoff, 1992, p. 4).

Just as historical accuracy is evident within *As Is*, the same is true of *The Normal Heart*. The physical deterioration Felix displays may be typical symptoms of AIDS (Shernoff, 1992, p. 1-5). Felix's comments concerning the claim of experimental treatments also were accurate (Shilts, 2000, p. 126-127). Previously mentioned research regarding the depiction of the worried well is demonstrated through accurate representations in *The Normal Heart*. Therefore, although dramatic liberties may enhance the scenes of the play, the medical hypotheses which drive the events are historically accurate.

Although some of the images are graphic in Kushner's *Angels in America*, he effectively utilizes the darker side of human nature to convey credible events during the AIDS crisis. Prior's melodramatic makeup scene contains heightened theatrical elements; however, the painful emotions are life-like (Shernoff, 1992, p. 1-5; Kessler, 1983, p. 33-34). The characterization of defeat evident in Harper, Louis, and Joe also represent an exaggerated form of reality. Specific examples of individuals such as the three characters mentioned may be encountered in reality at some point in life. There are people who are healthy, yet they are defeated by life experiences and the perceived problems they blame on the world around them.

Whereas Rudnick typically focuses on humorous aspects associated with AIDS as a coping strategy, he also incorporates the concept of defeat. In *Jeffrey*, he allows the gravity of AIDS to co-exist with the defense mechanisms of humor he has established. Through sarcasm, Steve expresses his defeat in the play. Just as Hoffman, Kramer, and Kushner have presented the concept of defeat with historical accuracy, Rudnick approaches his play in the same manner. The main character, Jeffrey, epitomizes the concept of defeat as illustrated through the worried well classification (Sowadsky, 1999, p. 1-3). Thoughts of despair and pessimism consume his life, although he displays no signs or symptoms of AIDS. Rudnick effectively communicates the internal chaos Jeffrey experiences as a result of living through the AIDS epidemic. Therefore, based on the current illustrations and documentation, evidence suggests the four selected plays contain elements of historical accuracy regarding the concept of defeat as depicted through characters, dialogue, and the movement of the plays.

Chapter six will conclude this work and will include an assessment of the results of the examination of the four selected plays. Of chief concern will be findings related to the concepts of defiance, denial, and defeat in an effort to ascertain the viability of the theories initially proposed in this study.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Theatre is more than just the performance of stories or tales. It is the place for human encounter, a space for authentic human existence, above all, the kind of existence that transcends itself in order to give an account of the world and itself. It is a place of living, specific inimitable conversation about society and its tragedies, about man, his love and anger and hatred. Theatre is a point at which the intellectual and spiritual life of the human community crystallizes. It is a space in which it can exercise its freedom and come to understanding. (Havel, 1994, p. 120)

Just as Lanford Wilson's remarks regarding the challenging nature of theatre began this study, Vaclav Havel's statement marks the conclusion. Havel, former president of the Czech Republic, wrote the preceding comments declaring the importance of theatre on the International Theatre Institute's World Theatre Day in 1994. His remarks emphasize the crucial role of theatre in society. The current study has examined the role of theatre in American society through the thorough investigation illustrated in the preceding chapters.

As stated in chapter one, the purpose of this study has been to analyze the character types and the concepts of defiance, denial, and defeat in four selected AIDS-related plays: *As Is*, *The Normal Heart*, *Angels in America*, and *Jeffrey*. An additional intention of this study has been to identify patterns of development in the selected drama in relation to the concepts of defiance, denial, and defeat. It has been the aim of this study to determine if the three concepts manifested in historically accurate

representations of people with AIDS as drama in this genre progressed from the initial phase of the epidemic to drama from almost a decade after the crisis became prevalent in America.

Chapter two provided a basic view of the AIDS epidemic from the theories regarding the origin of the disease and epidemic to the current demographic trends of the crisis. The same chapter also addressed AIDS and its impact on society as well as the response to AIDS from the theatre community. It attempted to provide reader-friendly information to facilitate a basic understanding of the nature of AIDS.

With a basic understanding of the nature of AIDS, the reader is better equipped to examine elements illustrated in the proposed concepts and plays selected for this study. Examining the aspects of the nature of AIDS discussed in this study also provides important information for mainstream American society. The information relayed in this chapter may assist the reader in becoming a better-informed citizen and member of the community on the issue of AIDS. The issue of AIDS is not as prevalent on the media agenda as it has been in the past. The numbers discussed in this study from the Centers for Disease Control and the United Nations reveal information the general populace may not receive watching the television, listening to the radio, or reading the newspaper since the current public interest in AIDS seems to have waned.

Chapter three has focused on the aspects of defiance as demonstrated in the four selected plays. Evidence of two significant examples of defiance emerged: defiance against the establishment and defiance through expressive acts of love and hope. Noteworthy examples were discussed and their historical accuracy validated through documentation presented in public opinion polls and books which analyzed the AIDS

epidemic. Through the concept of defiance, as explored in this study, each of the four plays selected express elements of the human condition. Mainstream America and at-risk groups portrayed in the selected dramas may relate to defiance as a concept and a common element of humanity.

Just as defiance provides a concept that illustrates the interconnectedness shared by humanity, the concept of denial, as explored in chapter four, demonstrates a similar idea. The concept of denial manifests itself in three major examples examined in this study: denial of AIDS, death, and mortality; denial of an AIDS crisis; and denial of one's homosexuality. Evidence of each of the proposed examples of the concept of denial was visible and provided credible examples of historical accuracy through documentation established in public opinion polls and books. Denial is also a concept all may relate to as it provides another commonality, which connects individuals from various backgrounds. Denial is a common part of the human condition we all share.

Similarly, chapter five displays evidence of the human condition through the concept of defeat in the four selected AIDS-related plays. Defeat is demonstrated through examples discovered in the diagnosis of AIDS, those who comprise the "worried well," and in defeat as a result of life experiences. As with the examination of defiance and denial, historical accuracy was proven through the use of public opinion polls and books. When defeat surfaces, it suppresses growth and hope. The examples in this section explore the effects of defeat on the characters as a result of the epidemic.

There were few impediments in the process of this study. However, one potential obstacle was the occasional co-existence of one concept with another in terms of character development. Specifically, denial and defeat often vacillate within characters.

One moment dialogue or movement indicated denial and the next defeat. Additionally, well developed characters occasionally portrayed one concept on the surface and another as sub-text.

Another minor potential complication occurred in the selection of concept order. The original hypothesis intended the concepts to be presented in order of ordinal occurrence from the smallest number of examples to the largest. The study, however, revealed that there were seventy-nine examples of defiance, forty-seven examples of denial, and seventy-four examples of defeat. A study could be conducted that dictates a change in the order of placement to reflect the numbers discovered. Such a change would not significantly impact the conclusions drawn in this study. It would illustrate, however, that the concept of defiance emerged as the more prevalent concept.

The concepts of defiance, denial, and defeat as demonstrated in the four plays in this study display the importance of interconnectedness through the experiences of the human condition. The conclusions drawn from the playwrights' use of defiance, denial, and defeat also illustrate the dangers of intolerance as exhibited in American society during the AIDS epidemic. Although we as a society have displayed relative tolerance for other preventable complications from individual actions such as smoking, overeating, gambling, and alcoholism, the same degree of tolerance has not been given to those who have AIDS (Perrow & Guillen, 1990, p. 58-59). The bigotry, fear, and hate demonstrated in the concepts of defiance, denial, and defeat as seen in the four selected plays cloud rational judgment and impede assistance and support of characters with AIDS in the plays studied.

Although AIDS-related drama contains fictitious elements, the negative characteristics such as bigotry, fear, and hate may be found in historically accurate accounts of the AIDS crisis. The critical nature of creating drama as a response to a world-wide epidemic bears certain responsibilities. The AIDS-related genre of drama also may be considered history plays. They reveal to future generations reactions to the AIDS epidemic. Defiance, denial, and defeat are universal concepts. The characters that embody the concepts become historically relevant as they display traits shared by humanity for centuries.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research from the current study discovered additional studies are needed which emphasize other aspects of the AIDS epidemic. The homosexual community has had success producing AIDS-related drama for mainstream America. The primary focus in commercially successful plays has been on homosexuals with AIDS. Research and drama addressing other at-risk groups, such as IV drug users and heterosexuals, would add to this body of literature.

Further research examining the role of women in this genre would also be beneficial. As PWA's live longer, research focusing on the role of the caregiver in AIDS-related drama would add to the body of literature. There are numerous heterosexual experiences with AIDS that could provide rich dramatic material. If properly addressed, these experiences could assist in dissolving the cultural and societal barriers that exist regarding the issue of AIDS.

In a different vein, a careful comparison of terminal illness in American theatre could be valuable. For example, theatre research comparing the treatment of cancer with

the treatment of AIDS might yield interesting insight into the portrayal of terminal illness on the American stage.

The current study and those proposed are daunting. The subject matter is intense. It engages and prompts contemplation of a difficult issue, the AIDS epidemic, which has faced society for over 20 years. The AIDS-related drama in the four selected plays examined in this study meet the mandates for theatre proposed by Wilson and Havel; it is provocative and challenging.

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