

2/9/20

Gizelle Winter

Sophia Bridger

FOA: 'The Morning Show' Skit

Introduction: Sophia

'The Morning Show,' which premiered in November of 2019, is a TV show set in a morning news station. For this Further Oral Activity, we will discuss the language surrounding sexual assault and its effects on individuals and society. We will do this by enacting two skits based on The Morning Show. The premise of the series the aftermath within the news network after one of the main anchors, Mitch Kessler, is fired for multiple allegations of sexual misconduct with women (primarily subordinates) in the company. The Morning Show hires a new anchor to work alongside Mitch's ex-co host, Alex Levy. There is a stark difference between Alex and the new cohost, Bradley Jackson, in the way that they present the news. Alex has been working in the business for years and aims to please her audience while avoiding conflict. Alex had a complicated and semi-intimate relationship with Mitch, which compromises her ability to call him out completely for what he did. Bradley, however, is known for her radical behavior and wants to speak for the people. Bradley sympathizes on a deeper level than Alex with the women who have been assaulted by Mitch. One of these women, Hannah Shoenfeld, the head booker, commits suicide after her assault by Mitch Kessler becomes public. In this FOA, Zelle and I will demonstrate the subtle yet effective differences that language surrounding this topic can play by creating two theoretical interviews with Hannah prior to her suicide. We will provide one interview with Hannah by Alex, and one by Bradley, in an attempt to provide Hannah's character with a voice that she never got to use in the actual show.

Rationale #1: Gizelle

The first skit includes an interview between Alex Levy and Hannah Shoenfeld. Throughout the interview, Alex uses subtle nuances in her phrasing to insinuate that Hannah was somehow responsible for her assault. Alex also attempts to divert the conversation away from the specific actions of her ex-colleague, to whom she is extremely emotionally attached; she never mentions the culture of harassment at 'The Morning Show' station, nor the breadth and depth of silence. Through the use of demeaning names and adjectives, Alex dissuades Hannah from being honest while seeking the "truth" on a surface level. This skit should offer one perspective of how a woman such as Alex might react to the #MeToo movement.

Skit #1 (Alex and Hannah)

Sophia: Good morning, and thank you for joining us today. For the first part of this segment, I'm here with current Morning Show Head Booker, Hannah Shoenfeld, who's bravely offered to share a sorrowful account of her interactions with Mitch Kessler. Hello Hannah, thank you for your time and your courage.

Gizelle: Good morning Alex, thank you.

Sophia: First, can you explain your position to our viewers? What exactly do you do for The Morning Show?

Gizelle: Sure; I'm the Head Talent Booker, which means I'm in charge of finding speakers and stories to share on The Morning Show... I guess I never thought I'd be on here myself.

Sophia: I'm sure you didn't. And I'm so sorry for the reason that you found yourself on this side of the camera today.

Gizelle: Me too.

Sophia: So, let me ask you first: what kind of a relationship did you have with Mitch before your encounter?

Gizelle: My encounter?

Sophia: Well, yes. Your... encounter with Mitch Kessler. When he took advantage of you.

Gizelle: He was always nice to me. He was the reason I joined the cast on a trip to Vegas to cover that awful shooting awhile back, and after that trip... I was promoted to Head Booker. Mitch would tell me that he was impressed with my work and that I had great ideas. And I was flattered. I mean, the face of the Morning Show is telling you you're smart, and you're worthy. It made me feel amazing about the work I was doing.

Sophia: And when did things change for you?

Gizelle: In Vegas. I was walking around thinking about the shooting, completely in my own head, and he came up behind me and started talking to me.

Sophia: And it was when he started talking to you that you felt threatened?

Gizelle: No, I didn't feel threatened until... until I was in his hotel room.

Sophia: I see. And tell me how you ended up there.

Gizelle: We were walking back toward the hotel we were both staying at talking about the shooting. I was pretty broken up about it. It was intense, and he talked through my emotions with me, And then he started telling me how he thought I could do really well as the Head Booker of the company, or something like that, and then we talked about the shooting again, and he tried to make me feel better.

Sophia: How?

Gizelle: He told me that the one thing that makes him feel better is watching this stupid movie, so he brought me up to his room to watch it with him.

Sophia: And then what happened?

Gizelle: And then I said I had to go, it was getting late. So I stood up to leave, and he hugged me. He said I smelled good and then... he started kissing my neck. I stood there completely frozen. I couldn't do anything, he was my boss. He was the reason I was there. So, I.. I stood there and he unbuttoned my pants...

Sophia: And then he touched you, yes. I'm so sorry Hannah. Now, what were you saying during all this? Were you talking at all?

Gizelle: No, I was completely silent. I was paralyzed, I didn't know what to do.

Sophia: Did you tell him you didn't think of him in that way?

Gizelle: What? No I... I couldn't say anything.

Sophia: So... you just let him touch you?

Gizelle: No, I... I didn't *let* him, he just... **run out of words**

Sophia: Okay, it's okay honey, I understand. You didn't feel like you could say no, you were scared. When these things happen, it's almost impossible to know what to do in the moment. Hindsight is always so much clearer.

Gizelle: **Silence**

Sophia: Well, thank you so much for talking with us today, Hannah, things will only get better from here. We all wish you the best in your healing process, and we'll continue to send lots of love.

Gizelle: ... yeah...

Sophia: Thank you for tuning in, we'll see you after the break.

Rationale #2: Sophia

This next skit portrays the hypothetical interview done by Bradley Jackson. Bradley aims to look deeper into the problems within the network, and explore why Mitch was able to go on so long assaulting so many women without punishment. Why did the women feel like they couldn't tell anyone? If they did tell someone, why did it take so long to be properly addressed? Bradley sympathises with Hannah, and she wants to address the entire problem, instead of suppressing it or focusing on insignificant details. This is accomplished through subtle shifts in blame placement, through direct appeals to emotion, and through expressions of validation.

Skit #2 (Bradley and Hannah)

Gizelle: Good morning. Today I sit down with current Morning Show Head Booker, Hannah Shoenfeld, as she discusses the nature of her harassment by former employee Mitch Kessler. Hi Hannah. I know this won't be easy, but remember that I'm here with you.

Sophia: **Nods**

Gizelle: So Hannah, can you explain what you do for the network?

Sophia: Well, I'm the Head Talent Booker, which means I'm in charge of finding speakers and stories to share on The Morning Show

Gizelle: Is that how you and Mitch became acquainted? At which point did he start to make you feel uncomfortable?

Sophia: Never. I never felt uncomfortable with him. I looked up to him: he was my mentor, he looked out for me, he made me feel like my work mattered. It never crossed my mind that he saw me as anything more than a friend, than a little sister. That is until...

Gizelle: Until he assaulted you?

Sophia: It was a while back. It was right after his birthday, and I had just booked a senator for the show. I guess he was impressed that I'd been able to book a senator on such short notice, so

when the Vegas shooting happened he requested that I come along. I was just a junior booker at the time, so it was a huge opportunity. My work is everything to me... but this was by no means a joyous occasion. When we got there, shots were still being fired into the crowd... we could hear them screaming. God, it was heartbreaking. For all of us.

Gizelle: Was it in Vegas that he approached you?

Sophia: That night, I'd been walking around alone, just trying to get my bearings. I'd never... I just couldn't process everything. I ran into him in the city, and he seemed to be feeling the same way. He made me feel... he made me feel better. I know he'd been in lots of shitty situations like that before, and he knew what to say. God, he told me the funniest story about his big break, about how he had to get stitches after falling out of the anchor chair, and how I wasn't doing too bad, and I forgot everything I had seen. For a minute.

Gizelle: Would you consider this Vegas trip your big break?

Sophia: ... I don't know. I know that he did, and he seemed genuinely sorry that my first big job was so... hard. Sad? I don't know what to call it. He told me to be proud of my work, even if I felt like crap. And then he invited me to watch a movie with him, a comedy, something to take our minds off of the shooting. I should've known then, Jesus.

Gizelle: You should've known?

Sophia: That he wanted something from me, something... more than just my company. I really thought he was just trying to comfort the rookie.

Gizelle: At what point did he assault you?

Sophia: I started crying, during the movie; I just couldn't stop thinking about the screams. I got up to leave, and he came to give me a hug... but then he didn't let go. He started kissing my neck, rubbing his hands all over my body. He told me I smelled good. And I was just... frozen. I couldn't think, I couldn't talk, I couldn't move.

Gizelle: Did he say anything that resembled a request for consent?

Sophia: Well, he said that he liked me. And I said that I liked him too. God, I shouldn't have said that, why did I say that?

Gizelle: Hannah, this was not your fault. I'm here, and I'm listening to what you need to say.

Sophia: He started to take my clothes off, and he led me to the bedroom, and I was still... frozen. It's not that I didn't say no, I *couldn't* say no. I couldn't say anything, or run. He's my boss, he'd done so much to help me... I didn't want to believe that he'd done it all for the wrong reasons. I didn't want to say no and have him continue, because then I'd have to face the fact that he raped me. I didn't want it to happen, I didn't want any of it, I didn't want it to be real.

Gizelle: Is that how you'd define what happened to you?

Sophia: I don't know! I can't define it, rape or not rape, assault or not, who even knows? It just... it felt wrong. I don't know if it felt wrong to him, but it should have.

Gizelle: It was wrong, Hannah. It was wrong.

Sophia: And do you know what was the worst part? The next time I saw him, he looked me right in the eyes. He said hey, and he just... kept walking. It was nothing to him, nothing. And I was broken.

Gizelle: Did you ever feel comfortable enough to report him to his superiors?

Sophia: No, but I did it anyways. The minute he walked past me, I went up to Fred Micklen's office. I said I needed to speak with him, I was going to make sure he knew, that Mitch knew, that everybody knew. But I froze again. I just... I couldn't get the words out.

Gizelle: So you reported an incident of sexual assault to the President of UBA, and what did he do?

Sophia: He promoted me.

Gizelle: That was the deal? You got promoted for your silence? Hannah, do you have any proof of this?

Sophia: We never even said the words, I just knew. That's the way it was. Mitch was the star, he was safe, and they gave me what they thought I wanted. I'll never know if I earned it or not. Jesus, all I've done is work! I love my work, it's my life, and it's not even mine anymore! Nothing is mine anymore!

Gizelle: Hannah, you deserve justice. You've shown so much courage today; America deserves to know who's delivering their news. They deserve your honesty. Nobody should ever feel that way, in a place of business or otherwise.

Sophia: I'm sorry, I have to go.

Gizelle: Hannah— Thank you for watching, America. More than ever, these brave women need our support.

Conclusion: Gizelle

Although the #MeToo movement aims to provide a voice for women, there are many different opinions on its methods. Some women feel that the proclaimed need for unity limits their individual freedom, while others feel that the men at hand are being wrongfully persecuted. This movement sparks various reactions from all that are involved, and language plays a huge part in those actions and reactions. These skits have exemplified the ways in which words can be twisted to change meaning, and the ways in which subtle shifts in tone, blame placement and question formatting can inspire various responses. Especially with regards to an issue that is extremely personal and difficult to categorize, these language variations must be carefully considered and explored.