

The Adolescent's Voice:
How Theatre Participation Impacts High Schoolers and College Students

by

Craig Kosnik

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Johnny Saldaña, Chair
Lisa Anderson
Stephani Etheridge Woodson

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a qualitative study based on the experiences of five high schoolers and five college-aged students who grew up in Erie, Pennsylvania, and participated in theatrical productions within their schools, churches, the Erie Playhouse Youtheatre, and other community theatres. The author begins with an introduction of the theatrical scene in Erie and explains the options available to these youth during the times they performed, so the reader will have a better understanding of the background of these young people.

The author then explores the current literature dealing with youth participants in a youth theatre setting. In his research, he notes that there were few scholarly books or articles that directly dealt with youth who participate in youth theatre. Most of the books dealt with youth who are part of theatrical programs in school settings, and few researchers utilized the youth's voice as part of the process.

The author interviewed ten participants about their theatrical experiences asking them about aspects such as: positive and negative experiences, why they performed, and what they learned from doing theatre. After transcribing the interviews, the author analyzed the participants' responses for values, attitudes, and beliefs about theatre. From this analysis, the author found six themes emerged focusing on: fun, friendship, family, personal growth, commitment to productions, and negative experiences in the theatrical process. Throughout the document, the author utilized the youths' voices and kept their words and thoughts as the basis for all findings constructed and discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Erie Theatre Scene

I would like to take the reader on an exploration of the theatre scene in the times that the youth performed in Erie, Pennsylvania (a city of 102,000 people), from 1997 through today and how the theatre scene has changed in those years. By giving a thorough description of the theatre scene in Erie during that era, the reader will have a better grasp on all the opportunities open to these youth and how these opportunities may have shaped these young performers' beliefs about performance and theatre in general. Additionally, the reader will note in later chapters which opportunities the youth actually took most advantage of and their possible reasons for those decisions.

Erie is a city in northwestern Pennsylvania situated on Lake Erie close to both the Ohio and New York state borders. According to the United States Census Bureau, the 2012 racial demographics for Erie County (including Erie and its outlying areas), a county of 280,823 people, was 86.2% of the population being White, 7.4% Black/African-American, and 3.6% Hispanic/Latino. Additionally, according to the Census Bureau, other important statistics (in regards to this study) about the county are: 22.2% of the population was under 18 years of age; 50.8% of the population was female; 89.9% of the population graduated high school; 24.2% of the population had a bachelor's degree or higher; and the median household income was \$45,249.

During the time that the college students and high schoolers performed in and worked on productions in Erie, they had many different opportunities which some of them took full advantage. This does not include opportunities in neighboring towns such

as North East, Edinboro, and Cambridge Springs but focuses solely on what was available within the city limits of Erie. Going back to when the college students were doing theatre, there were three main community theatres in Erie: the Roadhouse Theatre, the Director's Circle Theater, and the Erie Playhouse. All three theatres were usually within a small radius of each other.

Scott and Kim McClelland founded the Roadhouse Theatre, a 250 seat proscenium style theatre, in 1988 and closed it in 2007. The Roadhouse mainly produced plays that were edgier and more provocative than the work produced by the other main theatres in Erie. In its latter years, to try to make ends meet, the Roadhouse started to produce more musicals and popular works. Additionally, in their last few years, they produced *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* at least once a year as an Erie cult favorite. In a November 2007 article about the theatre closing, Scott McClelland said:

I'm not casting blame, and I'm not naming names. But the bottom line is, we were no longer very popular with corporate Erie. I mean, I understand. If I was running a business, I'd want to sponsor family-oriented productions instead of adult and edgy. We're presenting a challenging and provocative product that people aren't interested in now. People don't want to be challenged and provoked. They want to feel safe. (Weiss)

Michael Weiss founded the Director's Circle Theater in 1995 and closed it in 2009. In its fourteen years, the Director's Circle lived in multiple locations in the Erie area. Generally, the spaces were small and seated 50 to 100 people. Each season, Weiss produced seven shows at the theatre and directed a few of them. The Director's Circle

produced farces and comedies with smaller casts, among forays into other kinds of work. Rarely did Weiss produce musicals in the space. Weiss perhaps says it best in an article about the theatre closing in 2009: "We made consistent efforts to encourage would-be directors and to showcase the work of new playwrights, including artists like Annie Pié, Monica Lewis, Rick Laurie, Barbara Bishop, and Matthew Martin" (Lawrence).

Currently in Erie, there are once again three main community theatres: All An Act, Dramashop, and the Erie Playhouse. Larry Lewis and David W. Mitchell founded All An Act (aka A3) in 2004, and for the first three years they produced only one show a year housed at East High School. In 2007, they permanently settled into their theatre at Columbus Square, a 130 seat proscenium style theatre and also former home to the Director's Circle Theatre. As part of their mission statement, A3 says: "the Arts should be accessible to everyone and live theatre is no exception. We endeavor to provide a venue where those who can't regularly go and see Erie Theatre can, and those who already do can go more often" (All An Act). A3 produces a variety of work including the occasional musical and, for example, their 2013-2014 season includes shows such as *And Then Were None*, *The Sensuous Senator*, *Oleanna*, and *Wait Until Dark*. A3 could be said to fill the void of the Director's Circle Theater after it closed.

Dramashop is the newest addition to the current Erie theatre scene. Founded in 2011 by artistic director Zach Flock, the group floated to various intimate locations in its first two years of being in business. As of August 2013, Dramashop has settled into its space at the Renaissance Center, a fifty seat theatre with a deep stage and also the last home of the old Director's Circle Theater. Dramashop's mission is "to provide entertaining and provocative theatrical experiences designed to challenge, educate and

engage the Erie community” which they achieve in seasons consisting of three mainstage pieces and three staged readings (Dramashop). Dramashop currently fills the niche that the Roadhouse Theatre left vacant. Examples of shows that Dramashop produces are *God of Carnage*, *Pillowman*, *Race*, *How I Learned to Drive*, and *Copenhagen*.

Besides these major community theatres, there are a number of other organizations to briefly note that are part of the Erie theatre scene. And although there have been a number of organizations that have popped up and then just as quickly floundered, I won't mention any group if it didn't survive for at least three years.

The Station Dinner Theatre, founded in 2003, is the only dinner theatre in the actual city of Erie; however, the Riverside Inn is located in nearby Cambridge Springs and there has been some rivalry between the two groups. The Station Dinner Theatre is most known for its *A Canterbury Feast*, a medieval times themed musical comedy that has been running in the Erie area for 33 years. The Station also is known for its own original musical revues.

Additionally, the Our Lady of Peace Playhouse, sponsored by Our Lady of Peace Church, has been producing shows for at least a decade to help fulfill the church's mission “by encouraging the growth of community within and beyond the parish, empowering and celebrating the use of God-given talents, serving the needs of the Church and society, fostering the art in parish life and worship” (OLP Playhouse). The OLP Playhouse produces three shows a year and mostly does large scale musicals, casting most, if not all, who audition. The OLP Playhouse produces a mix of religious and non-religious shows and has produced titles such as *Children of Eden*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *School House Rock*, and *Seussical*.

Finally, there is only one place in Erie where audience members may attend professional theatre. The Warner Theatre, commissioned to be built in 1929 by Warner Bros., is a 2,250 seat theatre that hosts lectures, local dance studios, wedding receptions, the Lake Erie Ballet's production of *The Nutcracker*, and the Broadway in Erie series. The Broadway in Erie series was founded in 1981 and is produced by NAC Entertainment, a company founded by and presided over by the Tony award-winning producer Albert Noccoolino. The Broadway in Erie series brings in tours of Broadway shows and currently has six shows in its season.

Besides these groups, there are two Catholic universities in the Erie area: Mercyhurst University and Gannon University. Mercyhurst University is a small liberal arts college that offers a few undergraduate theatre classes and has student organizations that produce both musicals and straight plays; however, the university does not have a theatre faculty and does not offer a theatre degree. Gannon University is a small liberal arts college that offers a BA in Theatre and also in Theatre/Communications with three full time theatre faculty. The theatre space is a black box and can be reconfigured to do shows in a variety of settings (proscenium, thrust, alley, arena, etc.) seating up to 200 people depending on the seating configuration. Gannon's typical season comprises three plays of various genres, one musical, one fundraiser, and other small special events depending on its season. In recent years, the university has opened up some of their auditions to the public including local youth if the production permits. In fact, in their 2012-2013 season, they cast high schoolers in Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour*.

Additionally, the university developed two programs that have become community staples: Shakespeare Summer Nights and the Fringe Festival. Developed

within the last decade, Shakespeare Summer Nights auditions are open to Gannon students and the community. One or two shows are adapted and cut down to no more than ninety minutes in length and are done in repertoire and performed outside at various downtown Erie locales. This has become a popular summer event in the Erie area. Some years, Shakespeare Summer Nights also includes a Shakespearean show that is only open to local high school students and is performed outdoors as well. Finally, in the last few years, the university has created a Fringe Festival performed in March that involves other local theatre groups as well as local high schools. The Fringe Festival provides a place for Erieites to see theatre that they might not see otherwise during the year in the area.

Having painted the general landscape of the Erie theatre scene, I now address the niche the Erie Playhouse—the primary site of this study—fills in the community. The Erie Playhouse, nearing its 100th anniversary, is a community theatre founded in 1916 by Henry B. Vincent, a former musical director at the Chataqua, and has been a continuous presence in the Erie community except for two small breaks during World Wars I and II. The Playhouse started off as a more informal theatre with smaller productions in various Erie locales and theatres in various homes until 1983 when the Playhouse opened in its current location with a production of *Annie* and has been producing large scale musicals along with plays ever since.

As of 2013, the theatre space is a proscenium seating approximately 420 audience members (before the remodel, it sat nearly 500) with a stage that has approximately fifteen fly lines for hanging drops and the ability to hang rigging as well. The theatre operates with an over one million dollar budget and has a full time staff of eleven plus part time employees and freelancers. With this space and budget, the Playhouse focuses

mainly on large scale popular musicals, hence their slogan, “Broadway is 432 miles away...the great performances are right here” (Erie Playhouse).

Currently, the Playhouse boasts a season of eight Mainstage performances, three Youtheatre performances, and many special events throughout the year. Some of the adult Mainstage shows of the 2013-2014 season include: *Carrie the Musical*, *Young Frankenstein*, *Spamalot*, and *The Great Gatsby*. Additionally, the Playhouse’s most popular production was probably last season’s production of *Les Misérables* in which they sold out the last four weekends of a six weekend run. Although the staff are professional, all actors are from the community and are strictly volunteers; however, many of the actors that grace the Playhouse boards have been trained in collegiate programs for theatre and/or music performance.

One branch of the Erie Playhouse is the Youtheatre program. Henry B. Vincent founded the children’s theatre program in 1940; however, the current structure of the program developed in the last thirty years or so. The Youtheatre mission is twofold: “to provide opportunities for students to participate in all areas of theatrical productions where they show a genuine interest and desire, learning the process of production as well as actual performance,” and “to provide educational opportunities for students who choose to participate in theatrical classes, learning introductory and advanced theatrical and singing techniques” (Erie Playhouse). Classes and most productions are open to youth ages five to eighteen.

To fill the first goal, the Youtheatre produces a season of three musicals (when the college students were doing Youtheatre, there were four musicals a year) and one or more special events. The most continuous special event has been the Summer Play

Series which has just celebrated its thirteenth year, and this is the only time during the year that youth can participate in a straight play with the Youtheatre. The Summer Play Series started by producing four shows a summer and now currently produces one show. Some past titles have included *Twelve Dancing Princesses*, *Wiley and the Hairy Man*, *The Pinballs*, and *River Rat and Cat*. To give a glimpse into the kinds of work that the Youtheatre performs with their musicals, their current 2013-2014 season comprises *Freckleface Strawberry*, Disney's *Aladdin, Jr.*, and *A Little Princess*. Additionally, youth ages 12-18 may audition for Holiday and/or Summer Showstoppers. Showstoppers is a thirty minute musical revue composed entirely of song and dance that is booked and performed all over the Erie community at places like senior centers, business functions, and local festivals. Besides performing opportunities, older teens have opportunities to run spotlights, light board or sound board, and stage manage or work stage crew for all Youtheatre shows.

To fulfill the second goal, the Youtheatre offers basic acting classes during the year which are now held in conjunction with the newly formed Triple Threat Studio. Additionally, the Youtheatre holds three one week sessions of camp each summer. During the first two weeks, campers attend classes in acting, dancing, singing, and technical theatre with additional workshops and rehearsal time for a showcase held for friends and families on that Saturday. The third week of camp is Encore Camp with campers that have either done two or more years of Youtheatre camp and/or have performed in Youtheatre shows at the Playhouse. During this week, these advanced campers work on a junior show and present it on that Saturday for friends and family.

Besides the opportunities offered by the Youtheatre, the youth of Erie stay active in other locations as well. Almost all of the local high schools produce at least two shows a year as well as many of the middle schools and, as noted earlier, teens can audition for shows with Dramashop, All An Act, Our Lady of Peace Playhouse, Gannon University, and the Erie Playhouse Mainstage if there are roles available for characters their ages. During the year, the youth have few opportunities outside of the Playhouse and their schools, but in the summer they have a bevy of options. Not only does the Playhouse offer camp and the Summer Play Series, but the Erie Catholic Diocese and Footlights offer theatrical programming as well. The Diocesan shows started the same year as the Summer Play Series, but the Diocesan always produces a large scale musical, and anyone who auditions is automatically cast. The Diocesan has done such shows in the past as *Titanic*, *Aida*, and *The Wizard of Oz*. Alex Clemente of the Erie School District and Len Ekimoff of the City of Erie's Parks and Recreation Department founded Footlights in 1975, and with Ekimoff's retirement in 1989, the program was no longer handled administratively by the City of Erie; it is currently administrated by All An Act. Footlights is a five days a week, six week program in the summer that produces a large scale musical. The program is free for any child and no child is turned away. This past summer, Footlights produced *Shrek the Musical* with approximately 130 youth.

For Erie being a smaller city, there have been and continue to be ample opportunities for youth, and adults for that matter, who want to perform in theatre. Theatrical groups come and go but the Erie scene seems to stay consistent with the types of theatre offered. There always seems to be one organization doing cutting edge and more provocative work, a group that produces many comedies and farces, and the Erie

Playhouse which primarily produces large scale musicals and popular shows from Broadway. Out of all the theatrical groups, the Playhouse is the only theatre that has been a staple of the Erie community for nearly 100 years.

Who I Am

My name is Craig Kosnik and I have been an active member of the Erie theatre community for the past sixteen years, even when I haven't lived in Pennsylvania. I grew up in Waterford, a small town outside of Erie, and went to Fort LeBoeuf High School, a fairly small rural public school, from 1994 to 1998. At FLB, they offered Theatre I, Theatre II, and Advanced Theatre which I also took, as well as an independent theatre study the year they didn't offer Advanced Theatre. When I attended FLB, there were only one or two shows a year, and for most of one year the auditorium underwent renovation.

As a youth, I only participated in one show within the community, unlike the youth I interviewed for this dissertation. When I was seventeen I was in a production of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* as one of Aslan's followers with the Erie Playhouse Youtheatre, which was one of my least favorite productions in which I have ever taken part. I found the production to have many cliques and I felt unwelcomed and unwanted. It made me consider whether I even wanted to do theatre. I bring this up because this production inadvertently affected the way that I now do theatre years later. Now primarily a director, my personal artistic philosophy builds upon ideas of respect and ensemble, so every rehearsal process or class I teach starts with ensemble building games and providing opportunities for cast members or students to connect on deeper levels. They may not end up loving each other or even liking each other, but they will

not exclude anyone or treat them with disrespect. I am curious to see how these ideas may have been present or not present in the interviews I conducted.

After graduating high school, I stayed local and earned my BA in theatre in 2002 from Gannon University. While a student at Gannon, I was a work study in the scene shop for three years plus summers, working on almost every show in some capacity—stage manager, costume, scenic, or lighting designer, light board operator, actor, or director. While at Gannon I became part of the Erie Playhouse family when I started teaching Saturday morning acting classes. From then on, whenever I lived in Erie, I taught classes, taught summer camp, ran light board or sound board, stage managed, house managed, acted, produced and directed. When I earned my MA in theatre education from Emerson College in 2005, my master’s project was a production of Elizabeth Swados’ *Red Sneaks* held in conjunction with the Erie Playhouse, and my final class for my degree was a touring production of *Mime Time II*, also done in conjunction with the Youtheatre. While at Emerson and into the present, I have traveled home every summer directing at least one show for the Youtheatre Summer Play Series. Through my work with the Playhouse, especially the Youtheatre program and Summer Play Series, I met and got to know all the participants interviewed for this dissertation.

These experiences with the Youtheatre program and also my experiences with all of the educational organizations I attended as a student have shaped what my beliefs of what youth theatre should be. Some of my personal philosophies about youth theatre include: ensembles need mutual respect and trust; I equally weight process and product; no child should be treated as a “star”; and youth theatre allows the actors to learn and discover through the theatrical experience. I am interested to learn how my beliefs are

affirmed or negated through the interviews I conducted with Youtheatre program participants.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS

Much of the current literature in the field does not reflect the youth's voice and focuses solely on theatre with young people in educational settings. With this in mind, I wanted to develop a dissertation helping investigate the gaps in the literature. I decided that the best course of action would be to complete a multiple case study of high schoolers and college students who participated in theatre during childhood through adolescence, not only in their schools but also through community programming, particularly at the Erie Playhouse Youtheatre.

This multiple case study consists of high schoolers and college sophomores, juniors, and seniors who all grew up in and around Erie, Pennsylvania, and participated in theatrical productions in a variety of locations. I chose not to interview college freshmen because I did not believe they were far enough removed from their high school experiences to comment fully on their lives as college students. I also studied participants from one geographical area to see how growing up in that area and being involved in the same programming (the Erie Playhouse Youtheatre) might have impacted the participants. I conducted in-person and phone interviews with five high schoolers and five college students for approximately one hour each.

First, I decided who I would interview for this process. I wanted to obtain perspectives from youth who were currently involved in the Youtheatre programming, and those who had graduated from that programming and were now in college, so I could later compare and contrast the statements they made. I also selected participants who had performed or crewed numerous shows through Youtheatre programming and elsewhere,

believing that they would have more insights about theatre than those who had participated in only a few shows during their lives. I knew all of the participants through theatrical productions and had directed them all at least once. I did not select my “favorites” but chose participants who had done numerous productions and would be able to reflect upon their experiences.

The high schoolers at the time of the interviews ranged in age from fifteen to seventeen, were all Caucasian, and all from middle to upper middle class families. Four were female, one was male, three went to public school, and two to a college preparatory magnet school. This demographic, for the most part, accurately reflects those who participate in theatre and Youtheatre in the community of Erie, Pennsylvania. The Youtheatre program tends to attract youth from middle and upper middle class families, mainly female and predominantly white. I would estimate that approximately 75% of the youth who do Youtheatre are female and approximately 90% are Caucasian. The one piece that may not accurately reflect the demographics of those that participate in Youtheatre is where these youth attend school. Erie has three private high schools and numerous private elementary and middle schools. It is harder to estimate, but probably half of those who do theatre with the Youtheatre attend private schools.

The five college students at the time of the interviews ranged in age from nineteen to twenty-one; four were Caucasian and one was Asian American; all were from middle to upper middle class families; three were female; all were non-theatre majors (though one did minor in theatre); and all went to colleges or universities in the Pennsylvania tri-state area. Similar to the high schoolers, this reflects the demographic of those who performed in the Youtheatre. I note that they all went to universities/colleges in the

Pennsylvania tri-state area (Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York) because many of them still came home for the summer (and other times of the year). Some still performed or directed with the Erie Playhouse or other local theatrical organizations during the summer, and this allowed me to interview three of the five participants in person during summer breaks from college.

When I interviewed both groups of participants, I asked similar questions:

- What is your most positive memory from doing theatre?
- What is your most negative memory from doing theatre?
- What do you believe you have learned from doing theatre?
- How does what you've learned by doing theatre translate into your everyday life?
- How would your life be different today if you had not done theatre?

Additionally, I asked the college students questions such as:

- If you are not a theatre major, do you still do theatre and, if not, why?
- How has your theatrical career impacted your college career?

Academically? Socially?

For a complete list of interview questions, please see Appendix C.

Before interviewing the participants, I followed Arizona State University's Research Integrity and Assurance protocol. For all minor participants, I first e-mailed their parents a parental consent form that had to be signed by one parent, and then had each minor bring the form with him or her when they were interviewed. The minors also read and signed their own consent forms on the day of the interview. Additionally, I had

all college students read and sign a consent letter. For a sample of these forms, please see Appendix B.

I conducted the interviews between July 2010 and July 2011, interviewing eight of the participants in person while working in and visiting Pennsylvania during the summers. When possible, I conducted the interviews at locations where there was little interference or causes for distraction. Six of these eight interviews were conducted at the Erie Playhouse's Rehearsal Hall, a large building in downtown Erie housing their costume building and storage areas, scenic building and storage areas, prop storage areas, and three rooms designated for rehearsal for all their productions. I conducted these interviews at the Rehearsal Hall at times when no one else was using the space. I conducted the other two interviews while working Youtheatre Camp. One was done on lunch break while sitting in the tech room, and the other was conducted after camp at a local university's student center. Aside from the interview at the student center, I conducted all other interviews one on one with no other people in the interview location. The final two interviews were conducted via telephone. By choosing distraction-free places and places where the participants felt comfortable, I believed that the participants would be more likely to open and up and think about their past theatrical experiences. Each interview lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes, and I tape recorded and transcribed all ten interviews. Before coding, I changed all of the participants' names for confidentiality purposes.

As stated earlier, I already knew all of the participants before interviewing them. I will address how that may have affected any of the participant's responses. Reflecting on the college-aged participants interviewed, I directed two of them only once and

directed the other three multiple times. The two I directed only once I knew well through the Youtheatre program by working with them in technical positions (most commonly the participant running spotlights as I ran light board) and also as they volunteered/worked at Youtheatre camp. Knowing these participants fairly well, I already had an established bond with each of them, and I believe that relationship made each participant relax during the interview and made them willing to discuss openly their views on theatre and also at times reminisce with me about a shared memory. With the college-aged participants, I doubt that our previous interactions could have had a negative impact on the interviews or skewed the results. Additionally, none of them had anything to gain by providing false information or trying to flatter me because I am no longer in a position where I would likely direct them because I direct shows exclusively with those less than eighteen years of age.

Reflecting on the high school participants, all of them at the time of the interview had been directed by me three times or less each. For the most part, I did not know these participants as long or as well as the college-aged participants. Two of the five had worked/volunteered at Youtheatre camp for a number of years, so I did know them slightly better. Even though I did not know these participants as well, I still had a good rapport with each of them which I believe made them comfortable during the interview and willing to reflect honestly on the questions posed to them. One participant, Louise, even remarked when asked what her least favorite role was: “Probably when I was the Red Queen in *Dorothy Meets Alice* that you directed, just cause I didn’t connect with the part really well, and I don’t really like plays as much.” Even though she was worried that I might take offense to what she said, she still answered the question honestly. Though

each of them were still at an age where I could have cast them in the Summer Play Series productions I directed, I don't believe that was a factor that influenced their responses. Out of the five, only one of them ever auditioned for me again, and I directed her three times after the interview occurred. Finally, even though all of the interviews, both high school and college, were serious in subject matter most of them had a more light-hearted demeanor with laughter and smiles.

After transcribing the participants' interviews, I coded them for themes, values, attitudes, and beliefs. According to DeSantis and Ugarriza, a theme is "an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (qtd. in Saldaña, 139). This way, I saw what themes reoccurred in the multiple interviews, why those themes reoccurred, and what they possibly meant. In *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, Johnny Saldaña defines values, attitudes, and beliefs. A value is "the importance we attribute to oneself, another person, thing, or idea" (89). An attitude is "the way we think and feel about oneself, another person, thing, or idea" (89). Finally, a belief is "part of a system that includes our values and attitudes, plus our personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world" (89-90). By coding for values, attitudes, and beliefs, I stayed grounded in the words of the high schoolers and college students—voices that have often been neglected in educational theatre research. By listening to what they believe is important, I used those ideas at the forefront of my dissertation. Finally, by coding in the ways described, I saw what larger themes stem from these

attitudes, values, and beliefs, and how these ideas translate to adolescent performers in general.

Through coding and viewing the data, it was important that I kept the adolescent's voice at the forefront of the research. To accomplish this, I use direct quotes from the participants as much as possible to make sure that all coded ideas are rooted firmly in what the participants said and not in what I had hoped or wished they said. It is important that this is not another document that explores the topic solely from an adult's perspective.

However, in the following chapter I will explore the current books and articles that professional adults in the theatre for youth field have written on the subject of youth performers in formalized theatrical settings and report on the conclusions they reached about why youth perform and what benefits they receive by this performing. Additionally, I will state the six major research questions that I explore in this dissertation and the reasoning for exploring these questions. Finally, I will explain the value and significance of this study and how this dissertation could be useful for theatre educators and youth theatre directors and how this document can be a useful tool for theatre for youth advocacy.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background—Textbooks in Theatre Education

The topic of adolescent performers is not a recent one in the field of Theatre for Youth. In the United States alone, one can trace writings about adolescent performers back to the late 1700s to the writings of Charles Stearns and read regulations he created for school exhibitions and the proper guidelines for male and female performers. In the early 1900s, Constance D’Arcy Mackay wrote about youth performing in community pageants and how she perceived they benefitted from participating in those pageants. She also provided guidelines as to how and what youth should perform in the community. In the 1930s and 1940s, there was a boom of books about “creative dramatics,” and many practitioners such as Winifred Ward wrote about the place of drama in the education system and what they believed youth took from such activities. However, there has not been a similar boom in the field of more formalized theatre with adolescent performers, other than perhaps the plethora of so called “how to” books (e.g., producing and directing the school play, learning acting through drama games, improvisational activities, how to stage an improv show). Certain textbook writers such as Viola Spolin have outlined more specifically why formal theatre may be beneficial for youth.

While looking for current literature on the subject of youth performers in formalized youth theatre settings, I found that there were not many books on this subject, and many of these texts dealt with youth performers in an educational setting. The books most relevant to the topic at hand fell into two categories: theoretical works and practical works. The theoretical books dealt with reasoning why schools should have drama

programs, what youth gain by participating in such, and hypothetical possibilities for ways that theatre programs could and should be run in the school system. The practical books ranged from how to manuals and theatrical exercises for youth to comprehensive guides for running a successful theatre program in a high school setting. Even in the practical texts, the authors focused more on educational settings than community programming.

Out of the books that theoretically explore youth as performers, two books seemed most relevant to this study: *Signs of Change: New Directions in Secondary Education* by Joan Lazarus, and *Imagining to Learn: Inquiry, Ethics, and Integration through Drama* by Jeffrey D. Wilhelm and Brian Edmiston. In 2004's *Signs of Change*, Lazarus sounds her bugle for a call-to-arms of creating better education practices and, more specifically, theatre education practices. Within this assessment of what theatre education should be, Lazarus posits three characteristics of best practices in theatre education including: learner centered classroom and production work, socially responsible practice, and comprehensive theatre education.

In a learner-centered classroom, “the student’s place at the center of that learning process is acknowledged, valued, and nurtured” with “dialogue, collaboration, risk-taking, and experimentation [as] hallmarks of this practice” (9). Lazarus elucidates about socially responsible practice as “material studied and produced [that] is relevant to students and their communities and is developmentally appropriate” (9). Theatre is a place for any student no matter what his or her background may be. Finally, Lazarus describes comprehensive theatre education as “instruction [that] is holistic, authentic, and allows students to learn and practice collaboratively in the roles of actor, director,

playwright, designer, technician, critic, researcher, and audience,” and theatre education “takes place across arts disciplines, in other subjects, and in the school and the community” (9).

Lazarus relies on her experiences as a “high school theatre teacher, theatre artist, professional development coordinator of theatre teachers, and university theatre teacher” (8) to craft this book. About the first third of the text focuses on learner-centered practice where she poses that theatre education should consist of “learning together, students and teachers pose, consider ideas from multiple perspectives, investigate topics, and reflect on discoveries” (20). It is interesting to note that this section is based mostly on Lazarus’ own reflections and research; however, she does utilize theatre teachers’ voices from around the country in journal-like passages, but for an approach that she describes not having the teacher as the sole expert that students only learn from and not with, it is surprising that there are no student voices included in this section. It would be interesting to see how those supposedly at the center of learner-centered education would react to these ideas since they are the ones that are supposed to be co-investigating topics and co-reflecting on discoveries with the teacher.

In Wilhelm and Edmiston’s 1998 text *Imagining to Learn*, Wilhelm writes: “we believe that every teacher, at every grade level, in every subject area, no matter his or her background, needs to make drama a part of the teaching repertoire. Drama is a fundamentally humane way of engaging with and exploring the world. This is what our book is about” (xix). Similar to Lazarus’ *Signs of Change*, this book is mostly a call-to-arms that drama exercises should be used in the classroom (as illustrated in the above quote). Some of Wilhelm’s reasoning is that drama: assists students’ performance; can

help set curriculum for socially relevant projects; makes learning visible; and helps support reading and the exploration of new values (xxii). Trixie, a participant in one of the dramas, corroborates these assertions: “At first (when we started the design project with hypermedia) I thought ‘Oh No’ what is this stuff? [...] We’re learning everything, and it’s all together at the same time so you don’t even notice...and it’s fun too!” (85).

Wilhelm and Edmiston focus solely on the use of drama (the process) in the classroom versus using theatre (the product). The book is a collection of examples of how process drama and other dramatic exercises have proven useful in the classroom. Both authors have worked with high school aged students, yet all the examples in the book focus on work done with seventh graders. The researchers utilize the youths’ voices throughout the book, starting each chapter with an observation from a participant about the drama that is described in the following chapter, and also by using statements that the students said during the drama exercises.

Many of the recent practical books on formal theatre with adolescents are no more than training manuals or collections of exercises. These newer sources seldom explore this topic through a critical or theoretical lens, and usually just give “tips” on everything from blocking a show to figuring out who can make the costumes. These kinds of books include texts like Elizabeth Swados’ *At Play: Teaching Teenagers Theatre* and *The 7 Simple Truths of Acting for the Teen Actor* by Larry Silverberg. The Swados text is mostly a collection of exercises that a teacher or a youth director could use in the classroom or the rehearsal process, and chapters are titled under subjects such as: Voice, Characters, Improvisation, Space, and Time. Swados does not view this topic through a theoretical lens, but does relate her personal life experiences in an introduction to the

book and gives her view on what theatre is, not just for youth but for everyone: “For me, theatre is not just entertainment. Theatre is discovery and adventure. It’s challenging what’s acceptable while you create new stories. It’s celebrating what’s clear and true” (xxxiv). This is the closest she gets to explaining why she works in the way she does. Silverberg’s book is structured so that every chapter explores a “useful” truth that the teenage actor should ponder. Some of the truths include: “Truth 3—The Words Are the Tip of the Iceberg,” “Truth 4—Your Acting Is Alive or It Is Dead,” and “Truth 6—Acting Is an Act of Commitment” (v). Silverberg uses his personal experiences and observations of other actors to help teenagers become better performers.

In *Secondary Stages: Revitalizing High School Theatre*, Jeff Bennett writes honestly and genuinely about how to develop, create, and run a successful and well-thought out high school theatre program; however, the author only briefly touches on why students participate in theatre and what they achieve through performing. In his introduction, Bennett creates a bulleted list as to what student performers may take away from the theatrical production. Within this list, Bennett includes: “the ability to draw vivid emotion from the printed page and arouse instant empathy in an audience”; “the growth in self possession that comes from standing confidently before your peers, parents, and teachers”; “the gain in judgment and insight that comes from inhabiting the skin of another human being”; and “the heightened sense of community, of sharing in a meaningful act of cooperation” (xiii-xiv). These are some important insights and also good advocacy for why students should do theatre. However, Bennett relies solely on his vast experience and observations of high schoolers and not on the words of the young

performers themselves. Shouldn't we include the high schooler's voice in the literature if we truly want to know what might make a strong high school theatre program?

Bennett makes one other important observation in his introduction: "Theatre *is* fun, and our prejudices dictate that anything fun can't be worth much. In fact, when any subject is taught with inspiration, the result is an experience that's fun for the learner" (xiv). While conducting my interviews, all the participants commented that they did theatre because it was fun or that they received enjoyment by performing. Is this a reason that the youth's voice is often not included in the literature? If youth talk about theatre being "fun," does that make the theatrical process/production less important in society's eye? Furthermore, what does the word "fun" actually mean and how does it fit into this theatrical landscape? I believe that coming to an understanding of fun and realizing its importance to the theatre will be one of the keys to understanding the youth's voice and why they perform.

Another recent book on theatrical production with high schoolers is *Temporary Stages: Departing from Tradition in High School Theatre Education* by Jo Beth Gonzalez. In her book, she outlines what she calls a Critically Conscious Production-Oriented Classroom (CCPOC). A CCPOC, according to Gonzalez, has five governing principles: presents original live theatre to an audience; students are central to the "artistic evolution" of the production; a democracy is in place; understanding about theatre, self, and humanity emerges from and prompts continued student inquiry; and action for social justice as a primary goal (15-16). Although I find this an important book for any high school theatre educator, Gonzalez only uses the youths' voices periodically throughout and never do these voices explain why they do theatre or what they learn from

the experience. The book is an interesting commentary on democracy, artistry, and power/authority struggles in a high school theatre program and advocates for the inclusion of the youth voice; however, even with this advocacy for the use of the student's voice there is still very little of that voice present.

Aside from these contemporary books, there was one recent dissertation relevant to the subject of this document with some similarities to this study. In his 2005 dissertation, "A Phenomenology of Youth Circus Training at Fern Street Circus," Doyle Ott conducted a series of interviews with adolescent youth circus performers living in a communal setting. After transcribing the interviews of the participants, Ott explains: "I equalized the weight I would give the data by stripping the responses first of my own voice, and then of the participants names, leaving a body of data consisting of statements made by the participants as a group" (19). Ott did this in part to stay grounded in the words of the participants and to look for themes based on what they said and not on what he may have believed himself. Ott noted that some of the observations made by the youth performers were: "youth circus training means developing and strengthening friendships" (104); "youth circus training means exploring family relationships and expanding the meaning and scope of 'family'" (107); "youth circus training also means developing identity by experiencing a sense of belonging" (119); "taking part in youth circus training means assessing and taking risks and confronting fear" (131). These and other themes Ott notes are similar to what many of the youth theatre participants said during the interviews I conducted. In many ways, Ott's dissertation is similar to this study, but he focuses solely on youth circus performers and not on youth theatre performers.

Aside from these books and dissertation, there was also a model report funded by the Wallace Foundation, created by Lorraine Gutiérrez and Michael S. Spencer about the Mosaic Youth Theatre in Detroit, Michigan. This report relates more closely to my study than any of the texts mentioned so far. Founded in 1992 by Rick Sperling, the Mosaic Youth Theatre was created because there was a need for “advanced-level theatre and music training at a time when budget cuts had led to the elimination of most school-based arts programs” (2). The Mosaic Youth Ensemble is now composed of the Mosaic Acting Company, the Mosaic Singers, and the Mosaic Technical Crew. The Ensemble has toured the United States and the world.

To achieve this success, Mosaic has certain expectations for its participants such as: rigorous rehearsal and self-review process, tackling advanced level material, and a focus on exemplary conduct and accountability (4). These expectations are fostered in safe spaces of total acceptance. Finally, Mosaic takes pride in empowering its participants. Empowerment is fostered in such ways as: participants are involved in every element of production, participants are given leadership roles and responsibilities autonomous from adults, and participants serve as goodwill ambassadors locally and internationally (5).

Sperling noted in his work that the “program was having an impact on its young artists that went far beyond artistic pursuits” (2), that most Ensemble members were going to college (up to 95%), and that skills learned at Mosaic were transferring to other parts of their lives. These observations contributed to Sterling wanting to create a report on his program to share with others wishing to do this type of work. To create this report, Gutiérrez and Spencer, researchers from the University of Michigan, were hired to assess

Mosaic’s programming. Their “evaluation methods included a literature review, statistical analyses, self-administered surveys, an on-line survey, and focus groups” (39). By conducting this type of research, the authors were able to use direct quotes from alumni and current participants of Mosaic to help support the claims made in the report. Gutiérrez and Spencer found that the Mosaic programming impacted participants in “academic achievement, artistic ability, professional development, leadership skills, and community development and participation” (40). Some of the highlights from their findings were: “Mosaic has developed leadership by increasing individual self-awareness, encouraging them to work toward goals, and by making them accountable to the larger organization”; “Mosaic encourages them to take responsibility for themselves and the group, to work hard despite setbacks, and to manage their time”; and “Not only do they learn critical skills, but they also learn to take risks, receive constructive criticism, and how to work to improve their craft” (40). The findings about Mosaic resemble some of my findings; however, Mosaic’s multi-year programming is larger in scope, so there were findings that were specific to their group.

Background—Scholarly Articles in Youth Theatre

There have been a select number of articles written about adolescent performers in recent years, with some utilizing the participant’s voice as part of their analyses; however, none are exactly like the study I conducted. Many do not use the youth participant’s voice as part of the study; many only focus on youth participants in a school setting; many focus only on the educative value of theatre and what the participants learned in the program; and some, more or less, push their own agenda for why youth should participate in drama/theatre. With that said, these articles, more so than the books

noted, are more closely aligned to my study. In the following section, the articles are organized and ordered into four categories: articles not using youth voice that focus primarily on theatre within a school setting; articles using youth voice that focus primarily on theatre within a school setting; articles that do not utilize youth voice that focus primarily on theatre within a community setting; and articles using youth voice in a youth theatre or a community setting.

There are two articles worth noting exploring youth performers in educational settings that did not utilize the student's voice in the analysis of the study. In a 1996 article in *Teaching Theatre* entitled "Theatre Builds Leadership Skills," Kent Seidel explores how theatre education can "teach students numerous leadership and communication skills including: group management, self-motivation, self-confidence, time management, accepting and acting on criticism, confidence to communicate with others in a variety of situations, acceptance of unexpected occurrences, and tolerance for others' differences" (17). The second article from 2009 appears in *Research in Drama Education: "Acting Together: Ensemble as a Democratic Process in Art and Life"* by Jonothan Neelands. Neelands observes two high schools and their drama/theatre programs, one in Nottinghamshire and the other in Leicester, and explores how the "ensemble approach provides young people with a model of democratic living" (173). Both articles explore teen performers in school settings but focus on aspects outside of the teen's own articulated experience. Neither of these works explores the questions I ask in my study, but focus more on what a theatre program should do for its students and what students should receive from the program.

Seidel, in “Theatre Builds Leadership Skills,” studied Jefferson High School’s theatre program situated in an 1,800 student high school in a large midwestern city with a population of 1.8 million. The theatre program has one full-time theatre instructor and one part-time instructor and plenty of parent involvement. Seidel wanted to examine: “does this theatre, at least in this particular high school, teach certain leadership and communication skills that are valuable to students in general?” and “how does educational theatre foster this sort of learning?” (16-17). Seidel found that the theatre program taught these skills by having students work in eclectic groups on complex tasks to build community (such as set building, striking the show, the teacher giving the students the opportunities to own the program, etc.); having the students assess themselves and others in the creative process (such as peers giving notes at rehearsal, informal critique sessions, etc.); and that “vision is an effective way to guide a group of workers” (17). By focusing on leadership skills, Seidel does not focus on *why* students participate in theatre programming or what they perceive they get from this programming.

Neelands in “Acting Together” explores how two schools have used an ensemble as a democratic process approach, and he advocates that this system should be used throughout England and elsewhere as the primary means of theatre education. Neelands is distraught that, in the last decade in English schools, theatre education “has tended to shift the emphasis in drama education towards foregrounding the pro-technical acquisition and measurement of ‘subject knowledge’ and ‘products’ in drama and backgrounding the pro-social objectives and integrative and experiential epistemology of the process drama tradition” (179). He wants the English system to focus on ensemble as

a democratic approach because the theatre “has a role to play in giving a voice to the excluded; in giving a voice to the minority; in demanding the right to speak publicly; in criticizing without fear; and in questioning the borders of freedom” (180).

In one of the schools Neelands observed, he noticed Muslim and Hindu girls studying *King Lear*, and he notes this as a way that drama brought together youth from conflicting cultures to try and understand the work together and, in so doing, the youth formed a community. It is not a focus per se on the technical and performative elements of the production, but a focus on the social and political ideas brought up through studying the play and studying as a group. Neelands’ study is almost a personal piece explaining—no, demanding—that the English school system must adopt ensemble as a democratic approach, and does not focus on the students and what *they* would like to get from their own theatre education. Neelands acts as the expert, which he is, and strongly believes in his own experience and opinions in this piece.

In my searches, I found four articles that explored youth performers in an educational setting that utilize the youth participants’ voices in some way in their research. In Reed W. Larson and Jane R. Brown’s “Emotional Development in Adolescence: What Can Be Learned From a High School Theater Program?” the authors followed the three month rehearsal process of a production of *Les Misérables* to see how the youth participants learned about and dealt with their emotions in a theatrical setting. In Debra McLauchlan’s “Keeping the Kids in School: What the Drama Class Tells Us,” the author studied three different Year IV classes with high school seniors in three different Ontario schools to see whether theatre programs help adolescents stay in school. In “A Qualitative Exploration of Adolescents’ Commitment to Athletics and the Arts,”

the multiple authors explore how extracurricular activities may provide developmental benefits for adolescents that engage in these activities. Finally, in “The Skin of Their Teeth: A Case Study of a High School Production,” Kathleen Gershman follows a high school production of Thornton Wilder’s *The Skin of Our Teeth* from auditions through final performance.

In “Emotional Development in Adolescence: What Can be Learned From a High School Theater Program,” Larson and Brown’s goal was to “develop theoretical concepts about processes of adolescent emotional development and how settings can facilitate these processes” (1084). The authors chose a high school drama program as a site because it consisted of a goal-directed activity, the activity is done with peers, and there is an organized setting with experienced adults. The authors believed that these were all factors contributing to the emotional health and development of adolescents. In their study, the authors chose a high school from a small midwestern city mounting a production of *Les Misérables* over a three month rehearsal process, including 110 of the 840 students from the school. To obtain their data, the pair interviewed ten cast members, based on the director’s and producer’s suggestions, once every two weeks and then two years after the production. The pair also obtained data through interviews with the youth’s parents, the director and producer, and through participant observations.

Through their research, Larson and Brown noticed three categories: “gaining abstract emotional knowledge,” “learning to manage negative emotions,” and “learning to manage positive emotions” (1091). The students gained abstract emotional knowledge through some of the following ways: by participating in the rehearsal process they could understand other personalities better and why they displayed the emotions they displayed;

by developing a character, some reported understanding emotions better; and others also reported that they had a better understanding of what caused certain emotions. The students learned how to manage negative emotions in such ways as: trying not to allow their negative emotions to induce negative emotions in others; understanding that people's outside lives can contribute to negative emotions they might express at rehearsals; and learning strategies to keep their own emotions in check, such as recognizing what angers them and calming themselves down. Finally, the students gained insight into how to manage positive emotions such as: using positive emotion to enhance their own work and the work of others—i.e., a positive attitude can spread just as easily as a negative one; not allowing one's self to express "diva-like" attitudes by being too proud or happy with one's work; and using comedy to lighten the mood or ease tensions. Larson and Brown kept the youths' voices at the forefront and explored similar topics to me, such as the positive and negative aspects of theatre and how the youth performers dealt with them; however, this study's sole focus was on how the students' emotions developed over the rehearsal process due to their participation in the production.

In "Keeping the Kids in School: What the Drama Class Tells Us," Debra McLauchlan conducted a study in three Ontario schools that offered the Year IV drama class, the highest level of drama in Canadian schools that focuses primarily on the production of one or more scripts. McLaughlan gave each student in the three classes a 30 minute questionnaire and then interviewed four randomly selected students from each class for about twenty minutes. McLauchlan had three aims in her study: "to document student attitudes about motivation, retention, and success in senior drama courses"; "to

reveal student beliefs about the value of drama education”; and “to compare findings across schools and genders” (138).

Some of the themes that emerged through the interviews included: “students valued drama’s differences from other high school courses” (143) including such things as the physical nature of the course, community building and a space where students’ opinions are valued; “the teacher was a cornerstone of students’ positive experience in drama” (144); and “students valued drama class very highly, although its perceived benefits were largely unrelated to curriculum content” (150), like the building of social networks and friendships, personal growth and a better understanding of self-identity, seeing the class as an emotional haven, and a place to cultivate their creative and expressive potential. McLauchlan does not reach many conclusions in her article, but through her analysis of what the students said in their questionnaires and interviews, she does claim that the enjoyment of drama class made some students more likely to attend school on a day-to-day basis. McLauchlan grounds most of her observations in the students’ words and quotes students throughout her article.

In “A Qualitative Exploration of Adolescents’ Commitment to Athletics and the Arts,” Fredricks, Alfeld-Liro, Hruda, Eccles, Patrick, and Ryan’s aim “was to delineate the relevant factors and processes that influence adolescents’ commitment to extracurricular activities” (71). To reach this end, the authors conducted paid interviews with youth participants and their parents. The authors chose from previously completed surveys only those students who were the “most highly involved in an activity” (73). The authors interviewed participants from sixty different activities such as marching band, dance, theatrical productions, and sports. In these interviews, the authors asked similar

questions I posed in my interviews such as: “the adolescent’s history and accomplishment in the activity”; “the impact of the activity on other aspects of life”; “the role of significant others, such as family members, coaches or teachers, and peers on his/her involvement”; and “hopes and plans for involvement in the future” (74).

Perhaps not surprisingly, while conducting these interviews the authors discovered that “enjoyment was the most common reason why adolescents reported participating in an activity” and that “being good at it and having the opportunity to see friends” (77) were important reasons for youth participation. These are similar reasons that emerged from interviews I conducted with the participants from the Youtheatre. The authors also noted that adolescents reported it was important to “participate in an activity where they felt an adequate level of challenge” (82); the youth were less shy and had better people skills; the youth “learned lessons and values, including the importance of discipline, getting along with others and working as a team, responsibility and the importance of deadlines, dealing with disappointments, and the value of hard work and perseverance” (84). The students also reported times of stress because of emotional turmoil and having little time to do other things (such as a job, homework, spend time with their families, etc.) because of their chosen activity. Once again, these findings are found in many of the interviews I conducted.

After the authors reported these findings, the main questions they reached revolved around the participation in the actual activity such as: should all youth be given the opportunity to participate in any activity and whether students should have intense participation in one activity or branch out to a variety of activities in which they devote less time to each? I believe that, even though this study found similar results as my

interviews, it is not as useful as other research in the field because it explores all kinds of extracurricular activities, and there is no way to know whether those who participated in lacrosse had the same responses as those who participated in theatrical productions, and how responses about different activities guided the findings of the report.

In “The Skin of Their Teeth,” Gershman follows the seven week rehearsal process of Thornton Wilder’s *The Skin of Our Teeth* in a small high school in a northern Great Plains state. Gershman does not outline her process for analyzing and observing the rehearsal process in the article, but from an educated guess, I believe Gershman observed the audition process, set construction days worked by the cast, many (if not all) rehearsals, performances, and strike. It also seems that Gershman interviewed some of the cast members, either formally or informally, because she used direct quotes from the actors in which they talk about how they felt about different aspects concerning the production such as: set design, costuming, and working with other actors. However, these interviews do not seem to be a large part of Gershman’s process.

Gershman spends approximately three-fourths of the article giving a detailed account of the day-to-day business of what happened during the rehearsal process and how the youth actors responded. In the last fourth of the article, Gershman reflects on the process and also what might be learned by those who participate in that process.

Gershman quotes Alfred North Whitehead’s *The Aims of Education*, in that education should “aim at producing men of culture and expert knowledge in some specific direction” (12), and further explains how theatre can achieve this. Gershman quotes Mr. C, the high school director of the production, on how he perceives theatre works toward the goal of creating “expert knowledge in some specific direction.” He says:

“Basically...what educational theatre is for, is to encourage and promote the students to be a theatre audience. Because they have been involved in it, they can be the critics of the theatre. [After performing] you can see what is good theatre, you can evaluate it” (13). This is just one example of how students might benefit from working in a theatrical production.

The two main articles involving youth in community settings that did not include the youth participants’ voices as part of the study revolved around “marginalized” groups. On the Community Arts Network website, David Krasnow’s original 1993 article is reproduced. “TeenStreet” explores the Chicago Free Street Theater’s teen group, TeenStreet, and the goal of its programming. The group helps get teens off Chicago’s streets, provides cathartic release for participants, and provides a haven of safety for the participants. Similarly, in her 2008 article from the Community Arts Network, “Putting Culture to Work: Three N.Y.C. Youth Theatres,” Heather Stickeler investigates three organizations that each have some sort of defining criteria for who may join. These two articles are similar to my study in that they explore youth participants in community programming, why the youth participate in these programs, and what they get from them. However, these two studies differ in that they explore groups that only work with specific populations and do not perform traditional theatrical works. Additionally, Krasnow and Stickeler act more as observers and do not directly engage the youth or use their voices to illustrate their findings.

TeenStreet is a gang prevention and jobs program that employs actors from inner-city areas of Chicago. This particular article focuses on one production the group performed for audiences in the Chicago area called “Standing Out in a Drive-by World,”

a piece devised by the teens “marrying plaintive tales of life in the ghetto and an avant-garde formal structure, the company avoids a numbing recounting of urban atrocities by turning them into art” (Krasnow). Ron Bieganski, TeenStreet’s director, doesn’t like the terms “community theatre” or “teen theatre” because he finds that these kinds of theatres are too often known for creating mediocre work and he “wants to see ‘theater—brilliant theater’” (Krasnow), and TeenStreet is a place for young performers to craft and hone their skills. In one effort to meet this goal, the performers are paid between \$4.25 and \$5.00 and can be docked wages for absences and not working with their groups.

Bieganski has turned this into a job for the participants. Krasnow produces little summary or analysis of what is mainly a report on the program. He does offer this, however: “For many, it is the first time discipline, teamwork and commitment have been demanded from them. The socialization, creativity, improvisatory abilities and, ultimately, job skills fostered by TeenStreet make it clear that arts training for inner-city youth is not just a luxury expenditure of civic dollars. Employability factors as strongly in the program's goals as rave reviews” (Krasnow).

In Stickeler’s article, she observes and studies three groups from the New York area that are “community-based youth theaters [...] using playmaking and performance to position young people as key cultural agents with the power to shape and revitalize their communities” (Stickeler). One of her main goals is to examine how community is created within youth based groups. Stickeler studied three organizations that operate on a community-based and not a community theatre model, meaning that the community-based model “situates the work as created and performed by youth, who either identify with the communities that these three ensembles represent or *come* to identify with them

by virtue of participating in a playmaking process that positions them as part of those communities” (Stickeler). I believe that a similar definition could be argued for the way that participants who work with the Erie Playhouse’s Youtheatre program would describe themselves. In many of the interviews I conducted, the participants described the theatre as a family, and a family is a community. The Youtheatre program, however, allows anyone 5-18 years old to participate in its programming; Stickeler’s observed groups have a more narrow focus about who may participate.

The three groups Stickeler observed are: viBeStages for NYC teen girls, allowing them “to construct and celebrate a new meaning of girlhood today, and to create a sense of empowerment for other girls, as well as older generations”; Ifetayo Youth Ensemble, exclusively for African-American youth to explore their African cultural heritage; and Find Your Light, for youth that have experience committing acts of violence or receiving acts of violence. She finds these groups “enabled [the participants] not only to participate actively in a broader community-building process, but also actively transform the ensemble experience itself, ensuring it remained responsive to the community’s changing identities, purposes, interests and needs as well as their own” (Stickeler). Stickeler was more interested in how the participants became part of a community and, by becoming part of the community, how they helped shape the community they formed. Unlike my study, she is less concerned with why the young people participated and what they personally experienced by being part of that community.

After scouring through the articles related to youth performers, there was only one that I concluded focused on utilizing the youth’s voice and also focused on the specific programming of youth theatres. That article is Jenny Hughes and Karen Wilson’s

“Playing a Part: The Impact of Youth Theatre on Young People’s Personal and Social Development.” Additionally, in this section I include Dana Edell’s article, “Say It How It Is: Urban Teenage Girls Challenge and Perpetuate Stereotypes Through Writing and Performing Theatre” even though it is not a traditional youth theatre setting; however, Edell does utilize the youth’s voice throughout her analysis. In her article, Edell studies the impact of the group viBe Theater Experience, the same as in Stickeler’s article discussed in the previous section.

In Hughes and Wilson’s “Playing a Part,” the authors created a study in which they contacted more than 300 youth participants in youth theatre and reviewed more than 700 youth theatres across England. Even though the researchers conducted interviews and utilized youth participants’ voices, that was only one tool utilized while conducting their research, and interviewing was not the primary focus of their study. The duo also utilized peer researchers with whom they met three times, facilitated a research workshop with youth participants with over 250 youths from 21 youth theatres, created different questionnaires for participants and youth theatre practitioners, and interviewed 23 youth participants and 26 youth theatre practitioners. Of note, in England, the youth participants were aged 12-30 years old, whereas in the United States, most youth theatres cap their youth programming at 18 or 20 years old, with adults occasionally playing adult roles in some productions. The pair undertook this extensive research to explore the impact of youth theatre on young people’s personal and social development, similar to my study as well. They did this partially because they noted that “youth theatre has attracted little interest from the research world and there is a scarcity of publicly available literature” (61).

Hughes and Wilson analyzed the statements made during the interviews to find out how youth theatre impacted the participants' personal and social development and reached four main conclusions. First, Hughes and Wilson posit, "youth theatre helps young people develop a range of personal skills and resources" (63) such as the ability to work on your own initiative; take part in a work-like, disciplined and committed process; risk take; and use it as an opportunity to explore and express thoughts and feelings. Additionally, the authors posit that "youth theatre provides an informal and supportive context for personal and social development" (64). Next, the authors state that "taking place in youth theatre encourages young people to participate more fully in their communities" (65). Finally, they claim that youth theatre allows the participants to "play many parts" and that there is an "importance of performance and the creative process" (66). By performing many parts, youth actors can develop the confidence and skills to perform in a variety of settings.

Through these and other observations made from the questionnaires and workshops, Hughes and Wilson reached broader conclusions. One of the more important ones is that "attending youth theatre can be an important protective factor for young people experiencing social exclusion/growing up in contexts of high risk" so that the participants do not become "permanently marginalized in the current social climate" (68). Additionally, they conclude that youth participants can find new ways of empathy and living in different situations because "youth theatre can offer a context, outside of normal routines, for young people to explore uncharted social territories or individual possibilities and experiment with different ways of playing a part in social processes"

(69). This article, based on the authors' conclusions, readily becomes a document for youth theatre advocacy.

In Edell's "Say It How It Is," she explores the work done by "urban teenage girls of color" in a program, viBe Theater Experience, that she helped create a decade earlier and was also executive director from 2002 to 2012. Edell explains her purpose in creating the group: "I have been fighting to create spaces where girls can craft their stories—'speak it,' as Maddie [a participant in the program] says—and construct theatre performances that might help their communities better understand their desires, struggles, and experiences" (52). In this study, Edell interviewed over 25 girls in the program, "analyzing the various ways in which they communicated their stories to me, to each other, and then to their theatre audiences" (52). Edell wanted to investigate how the girls in this program challenged and perpetuated stereotypes of violence and sexuality in the performances they created. She did this by conducting interviews (of different types), observations, self-reflection, and text analysis. For the article, Edell focused on three participants in the program.

Edell, being so close to the programming, was afraid that she would only see the benefits and positive outcomes of the programming; however, she has "witnessed and understood too many instances when unchecked creative processes have led girls to perpetuate dangerous stereotypes that inadvertently serve to oppress them" (60). She has witnessed girls in the program create more dramatic stories with bigger emotions in order to impress audience members and conform to what these audience members believe that girls from the "ghetto" should act like and what they should have experienced (e.g., rape, assault, abuse, etc.). Edell also creates a good metaphor with "Miss Empowered" and

“misempowered.” The viBe Theater Experience can be viewed through both lenses. On the one hand, the concept of “Miss Empowered” is the “girl who speaks her mind with a confident, loud voice and articulates majestically how her voice and actions will make the world a better place” (60). On the other hand, “misempowered” could mean:

I see a young woman who still hears the echoes of applause and cheers from her performance but then washes off her stage make-up after the show and hates the familiar face she sees reflected back at her in the mirror. I imagine the girls who take the tools they learned through theatre programs and use them instead to perpetuate dangerous stereotypes. (60)

Any group like viBe Theater Experience has the potential to become either or both. Edell closes her article with three suggestions to create honest stories that do not support stereotypes: 1. the use of fictionalized or semifictionalized characters to tell the stories instead of the unmasked real child; 2. the engagement of the girl telling the story in a critical dialogue about why she is telling the story and what she hopes the audience will get from her telling it; 3. the use of preview performances with invited audiences to allow the girl to get used to telling her story and discussing it.

After looking through these sources, I found two gaps present in the literature: 1) There is not enough (or, in some cases, any) representation of the actual youth’s voice; 2) Very little of the literature explores youth in traditional theatrical environments. Most of these articles and/or books look at the world of adolescent formal theatre through the eyes of an adult, and often through an educative or socially conscious lens—i.e., what is the adolescent *learning* from being involved in the theatre? These observations of what the

students are experiencing from performing is based on what the adult researcher has seen, and often not on what the adolescents involved have to say. In some cases, the researcher has not even interviewed the participants to learn what they believe they have gained from their experiences. The two main exceptions to this are Ott's dissertation and the article on youth theatre in England by Hughes and Wilson. Ott interviews the performers at the Fern Street Circus; however, his dissertation does not focus on traditional theatre—it focuses on circus performers. Hughes and Wilson interviewed participants as part of their study, but it was with English youth theatres with participants up to 30 years old.

Statement of Purpose

Since there is scant literature in the field involving the adolescent performer's voice, especially in a formalized theatrical setting, my dissertation will address this gap. Even though I am focusing on theatre in a formalized setting, I am not negating classes and productions that the youth participated in at their middle and high schools; however, that is not the focus of this document. I interviewed high schoolers to learn why they do theatre; what they believe the impact of participating in theatre has been on their lives; what they believe they have learned; and how they have grown by doing theatre. I also interviewed college students to learn how they believe theatre has impacted their lives, and how it has possibly made them grow and succeed in college and the "real world."

It is important to note that I am examining the *impact* that performing in theatre has had on these participants' lives, and am not trying to claim that performing in theatre has *changed* their lives. This is an important to note because if I was trying to claim that theatre had changed their lives, based on the general definition of the word, I would have to prove that theatre in fact made them become different people or become someone else.

Instead, I am trying to show that, by participating in theatre, performing has instead had an impact on their lives—meaning, by performing, the theatre has made a direct *effect* on their lives. I show how performance shaped and guided the performers’ lives as they continued on their developmental journeys and how the performers also used theatre to shape and guide their own lives, but I am not trying to show that theatre has made them into a completely different and/or “better” persons.

With these thoughts in mind, my primary research questions are:

1. Why do some adolescents participate in theatre?
2. What do adolescents and college students learn from participating in theatre?
3. How does/did performing in theatre translate into other aspects of the adolescents’ and college students’ lives?
4. How do adolescents deal with the negative attributes of theatre (rejection, cliques, casting issues)? Do the negative attributes have a negative impact on their lives?
5. How do adolescents deal with the positive attributes of theatre (getting cast, making friends, receiving praise and applause)? Do the positive attributes have a positive impact on their lives?
6. How are the experiences of the high schoolers similar to the college students? Different?

By focusing on these primary research questions, I kept the participants’ voices at the forefront of this dissertation. I give their voices credence and legitimacy in a field that is supposed to be for them, about them, and with them. I position youth as advocates

for themselves, and ultimately others, for why youth theatre is important and how it impacted their lives and helped shape the people they are today. Their voices will no longer be the flowers that are choked and killed by the weeds of authoritative adult voices explaining the importance of youth theatre for participants, but their voices will now be the flowers that stand alone and bask in their own importance and authority.

Even though the youth's voice will be at the forefront of this document, I do not want to totally negate any authority or insights the professional theatre for youth field has offered. By analyzing the words and ideas of the youth participants, I will see how closely the adolescents' views align with what has already been written about them by adult researchers to show us if we have been on the right track all along. Additionally, by analyzing the participants' words, I will be able to highlight what other paths adult researchers may want to explore and have been only touched upon or entirely neglected at this point in time. Just as others want to "put the Christ back in Christmas," I want to put the youth back in youth theatre.

Value and Significance

The value of this document is threefold. First, as previously stated, this document advocates why theatre is an important instrument in the development of young people's lives. Second, this dissertation provides a reference for teachers of the performing arts in school systems. Finally, this dissertation provides a useful tool for youth theatre directors and practitioners.

This dissertation is a useful instrument for theatre for youth advocacy in the school and in the community. One of the main ideas explored is: what have the participants learned from doing theatre and how has that affected their lives? In

conducting these interviews, most of the participants focused on the positive aspects of theatre and how that has impacted them. Most of them comment on aspects of theatre they find negative; however, for the most part, the participants do not seem overly affected by the negative aspects and have more to say about the positive and how that has helped them in their everyday lives in both interpersonal relationships and in coming to a better of understanding of self. Some participants also discuss that, by participating in theatre, it has helped them academically. By using these participants' words, no longer will adults be the only ones advocating for the importance of arts—the adolescents will advocate as well.

Next, this dissertation is a useful instrument for theatre educators in the school system. Many, if not all of the participants, not only discussed their experiences in community theatre but also their experiences, or lack thereof, in their high school theatre programs. Some of the topics the participants raised regarding their high school programs included: casting policies and procedures, show/season selection, directing styles, interactions between under and upperclassmen, professionalism, production values, and college preparation. By viewing these participants' thoughts, theatre educators can reflect on their own theatrical program at their school and if they are meeting the needs of the students and school community. Additionally, by seeing what some of these students express, it may also encourage educators to have open and frank conversations with their own students, and learn how their students view the theatrical programming and whether it is achieving what the educator hopes it will achieve.

Finally, this dissertation is a useful tool for youth theatre directors and practitioners. The productions worked on by the participants in this study were primarily

performed through the Erie Playhouse Youtheatre, a community theatre program focusing on youth productions. During these interviews, the participants reflected on both positive and negative memories while partaking in this programming. By reading about these participants' attitudes, values, and beliefs, youth theatre directors and programmers can reflect on the opportunities they afford their own participants, and whether their programming serves participants in the ways they hope. Additionally, by noting what seems to work well in the Youtheatre programming and what doesn't, youth theatre directors and programmers can consider elements to include (or not include) in their own programming to further serve their constituencies. By reading and reflecting on these youths' perspectives, practitioners can make their own programming even stronger.

In the following chapter, I explore the attitudes, values, and beliefs of my participants, based on what they told me during interviews, by qualitatively analyzing what the participants said. These findings are explored through the six research questions I posed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS—IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I interviewed ten participants from college and high school. Louise, Tiffany, Jessica, Rita, and Jim were the high school participants; and Monica, Rose, Helen, Roger, and Arnold were the college-aged participants. In the following, using their words as much as possible, I explore their answers to my six main research questions, and offer some thoughts on how these findings could be useful to theatre educators and youth directors.

Why do some adolescents participate in theatre?

In my interviews with the participants, they were all directly asked, “Why do you do theatre?” For the college students, I rephrased it as, “Why do you/did you do theatre?” because some of the college participants had not participated in any theatrical performances since graduating from high school. In response to this question, some participants had little to say and did not go into any depth in their responses, whereas some participants spoke at length about why they did/do theatre. Additionally, some participants referenced why they participated in theatre during other parts of the interview in response to other questions, so I included those responses in this section.

While analyzing why the participants performed in theatre, there were eight reasons that surfaced with three reasons mentioned by over half of the participants, two mentioned by one third of the participants, and three that only one or two participants referenced. The four main reasons the participants mentioned as to why they participated in theatre were: that it was *fun*, or that they *loved it* (8 responses); that *their friends did it*, or that they *made friends* by participating in it (8 responses); it allowed them to *explore*

characters different from themselves and *different parts of the human experience* (6 responses); and they performed in theatre because it was like a *family*, or their biological family was involved in the theatrical process (6 responses). Approximately one third of the participants shared the following reason: performing in theatre *helped them grow personally* (4 responses). Finally, a few participants stated the following reasons: they started auditioning/performing because of shows that they attended as audience members (2 responses); they enjoyed the professionalism of the community theatre versus their school theatre program (1 response); and they had “spotlight fever” and craved the attention they received from the audience (1 response).

Fun

Perhaps not surprisingly, eight of the ten participants said they participated in theatre because it was “*fun*.” Even though these eight participants mentioned that they did theatre because it was fun or that they loved doing it, this was an attitude that no participant explored in depth during the interviews. They would say, “I just love it,” “it’s something I enjoy doing,” “it’s fun,” and “it was cool.” More often than not, “it was fun” was followed up with a statement about being around friends or about the actual act of performing, so the participants saw some connection between those ideas. In many instances, it was a phrase that they tacked on at the end of a statement before I asked them the next question—it was an easy way for them to end a series of thoughts. They thought it was important enough to mention but not important enough to thoroughly explore. Perhaps they didn’t go into much detail because they didn’t think that the idea of fun was important enough to talk about in depth, or that the idea of fun was not important enough to explore in an interview that would be used for academic purposes.

Perhaps they didn't have adequate words to describe what the idea of fun really meant to them or why it is important to them that they have fun during the process.

Even though the participants did not explore this idea thoroughly, I still think it is important that we, as educators or youth theatre workers, take a moment to reflect on the implications of the idea of fun. If theatre wasn't fun, most of the participants would not have kept auditioning and performing in shows, especially with some of the negative aspects they experienced during the theatrical process, which I will address later. So, if theatre being fun is important to these participants, what is our responsibility as educators and directors, to make sure that our classes and rehearsal processes *are* fun? I believe that there does not have to be a dichotomy between the ideas of fun and education/the artistic process. We may want our students/actors to learn something from the process, but we can also make sure that they have fun along the way, to continue pursuing this creative outlet as they mature and become members of society. I believe that fun makes them more willing to learn and explore, but I also believe that we cannot become a slave to the idea of fun and recognize that some of the learning/artistic process may require work that will not always be fun. It might also be important to remember during stressful times of the rehearsal process and tech week that many of these young people are here for fun, and we need to find a way to temporarily lighten the mood or ease the stress of the situation. This idea of fun cannot be a throwaway concept in youth theatre.

Friendship

The importance of *friendship* was mentioned by eight of the ten participants, often connected with the idea of fun. Of the eight, half were high school participants and half were college aged participants. Many talked briefly about friends in theatre, while a few

went more in depth. The two aspects of friendship touched upon were: 1. making friends through theatre; 2. friends encouraging the participant to audition.

Eight participants stated they made friends by being in theatre. Rita, Jessica, Jim, Tiffany, and Roger only briefly mentioned that they made friends, or that the majority of their friends were made through theatre, while Monica, Helen, and Rose elaborated a bit more. Monica believes that “theatre kids are a little bit different than other kids. They’re a little bit more outgoing, and a little crazier, and I’ve always been drawn to those kinds of people, and most of my friends at college I met through the First Year Players, and all my best friends from high school, like I actually don’t have any friends outside of theatre.”

Helen shared a similar sentiment to Monica, in that she has very few friends outside of the theatre:

I had more friends at the Erie Playhouse, like the Playhouse family. I was closer with them than I was with my high school friends, like I mean, I’m still friends with a close-knit group of girls. There’s like five of us that hang out all the time, but like I really was closer with the Playhouse people which is crazy because they come from everywhere, but you only see them then, and I’m like a homebody and a family person. I’d rather just stay at home than hang out with friends anyway, so it was okay that they lived far away, and you couldn’t hang out with them, but I think socially it’s a fun group of people, and like, I still talk to people I did shows when I was like eight. Thank you, Facebook.

Rose met most of her friends while doing theatre, and this was the first reason she mentioned when she talked about why she did theatre. She explains:

One, because I met lots of new friends and stuff. It was kinda hard for me when I was younger to go up [to people] and make new friends that way, so I was always quiet in my classes, and people would be like, “Oh, yeah, Rose’s here too. I forgot; she’s so quiet (trails off in a quiet voice)” but I did it cause in the first play, I met new people and I was like, “well, this is great,” and then my second show which was *Children of Eden*, I met tons of people and I met tons of friends, and I was like, “wow, this is amazing,” and I guess you’re just stuck with them all the time, so you’re kind of made to hang out with them, but it was really nice.

Like Rose, some of the participants sought out new friends as they started doing shows in the theatre, and for others like Monica and Helen, they found people with similar interests and of similar personality types that they were able to make most, if not all, of their friendships.

Fun and friendship were tied as the major reasons these youths participated in theatre, so it is important that educators and directors acknowledge this idea so they can reap the benefits of having casts who already like each other and who care about one another; however, this does not negate that a cast of youth performers that do not know each other cannot become friends/an ensemble and create a good production. That is evidenced by the participants who spoke about making some or all of friends through performing in the theatre because they were not friends previously with these people.

As far as friends encouraging them to audition, three of the participants mentioned that. Rose was the only college student who said her friends “definitely made me want to audition.” This way she could see them more. In her case, it wasn’t active encouragement, it was simply an encouragement because she believed they were positive people and she wanted to make her theatrical experience more positive.

As far as the high schoolers, both Tiffany and Rita spoke of specific friends that encouraged them to audition—one indirectly and the other directly. Tiffany speaks of Jessica, another girl I interviewed. Tiffany held Jessica up in high esteem: “Jessica, which is my first theatre friend, she was the one that I really looked up to when it came to coming out of your comfort zone and being yourself, and having her there by my side all of these years, we have learned so much from each other.” Tiffany went on to explain why she admired Jessica: “She had no fear. She knew what she wanted, she was determined to get it, and through all the way, she has never been a selfish person. She’s always helped others in helping herself.” So after being friends with Jessica and seeing her onstage, Tiffany knew that she “really wanted to be involved.”

Finally, Rita talks about who has been her inspiration in theatre and made her want to audition. She has a very positive attitude about her good male friend: “he was pretty much the first person that told me actually how fun the Playhouse is, and how great theatre is, and everything like that, and so he was pretty much the number one inspiration for auditioning for a show.” From inactive to active encouragement, these three had friends that they looked to as role models and who encouraged them to get involved in theatre. It is quite possible that without these encouraging friendships, these three may

never have auditioned, or may have stopped auditioning because they didn't feel like they belonged.

Exploring Characters and the Human Experience

Six of the ten participants talked about how having the ability to *explore characters* outside of who they are, and having the opportunity to *explore different human experiences*, were why they liked participating in theatre. These six participants were split equally between the high school and college interviewees. Of the high school participants, Rita simply stated her attitude of getting to “be a whole different person” and to perform in front of everyone is really fun. Tiffany explains that, even in kindergarten, she was fascinated when she saw *Heidi* at the Playhouse and “the way they could take one person and morph them into someone else completely onstage, that fascinated me.” This fascination spilled over into her own acting career. She explains: “I feel it's a great way to express not only yourself but to pretend to express someone else, get out of your comfort zone.” Later on in the interview, Tiffany explained that she connects less with normal roles and really likes unconventional roles that push her outside of her comfort zone, such as when she played Ruler Rockalina, one of her favorite roles in *Q*³. She explains: “She was a crazy alien rock queen that was obsessed with getting a time warper and being in control, and she was easily irritated, and just with that kind of crazy personality, it's very easy to play with it and morph it into what you feel was right.”

Louise, another high school student, explained her attitude toward getting to explore characters unlike herself: “I love being able to portray something that I'm not, even though I'm not really a fan of the ingénue, oh-so innocent part. I get cast as those

sometimes, but I really prefer being like a lot more loud and obnoxious than I am. It's just something different." She further explains: "I like being funny. I like being the comedienne. I like being just really crazy. You don't really have that much freedom with like the innocent young ingénue, unless she's like scatterbrained or something." For Louise and Tiffany, they both prefer acting in unconventional, crazy, and funny roles, and would prefer not to play "normal" or ingénue roles. Perhaps students are so used to having to act normal every day at school and in most of society, that some of them crave the chance to break societal norms and release their inhibitions as they play characters hell-bent on destroying the world, or just want to be a funny girl, which is still not as accepted in society as the pretty, quiet, and boring ingénue. These roles can act as an escape from the norm and provide a sense of empowerment to the performers.

For the college students, when asked why they participated in theatre, the ability to take on the characteristics of someone else was the main reason why Arnold participated. He explains the value of this:

No matter what kind of day you're having, you can always go onstage and you're someone completely different. You can, not like hide, but you can get away from all the problems maybe you have in your personal life, but also just in general. It also gives you a chance to look into other people's lives, how they live their lives, and how these fantasy worlds, where it's not a strict play, where it's like a historical event or something, where it's like a fairy tale, so you just get away and it's fun.

Arnold has found a way to have a momentary escape from his everyday life by finding comfort in someone else's shoes.

Monica simply said that she "likes being someone different," and that she is good for theatre because "I'm kind of like the most insane person alive, and I can just do like crazy things, and I'm not really worried about it, and I kind of think that to be in theatre, you kind of have to go to the next level a little bit." Monica, unlike Louise and Tiffany, doesn't necessarily want to be a crazy or unconventional character, she just has a natural amount of "crazy" to bring to the process, which she later explains how a director can pull that "crazy" back and shape it into what is needed for the role. She is already bucking the social norms in her real life, so it is easier for her to bring it to a role.

Finally, Roger, the last of the college aged students to touch on this subject, believes that theatre "can be so visceral in terms of putting forth human emotion which, when you get right down to it, I think that's what art, in general, always attempts to emulate." This leads to a better understanding of the human experience: "you see this in all of the famous playwrights. Theatre has a way of telling to the past, the future, the present, [...] that this is what the human experience is. This is what it was, this is who we were, and these are our voices being heard. This is kind of philosophical and weird of me, but that's how I see it, and I want to be part of that." Roger has a slightly different take than the others. By performing in theatre, not only is he taking on another character's views and personality, by being part of the production he is getting a chance to experience the human condition based on what the playwright wrote and the other characters represent. Roger is expanding his view outside of the one character he is presenting.

Family

Six of the ten participants explained how the theatre was related to their *family lives*. Three of the five participants referred to their actual biological families, and four of the participants briefly touched on how the theatre is a family. Monica explained to me that as a little girl she, her mother, and her aunt would see shows together, and she would often come home singing the catchy songs from the shows. This made her aunt and mother try and get her into theatre. It took her approximately seven auditions, and when she made her first show, *Peter Rabbit and Friends*, she became the first person in her family to act onstage. After appearing onstage, her brother was in a few shows before becoming more interested in sports, and her mother appeared with her in the musical *Footloose*. This led Monica to reflect on why she loves performing:

Being from Erie, you see so many people who have done theatre forever and their kids do it at the Erie Playhouse, and I grew up in that. Me and my mom did one show together and I loved it, and I would love to do shows with my kids and I would love to, you know, always be a part of that. It's just I don't know where I'll be and what kind of community outreach they have in that area, but I definitely can't see my life without theatre in it at all.

Monica claims that being in *Footloose* with her mom and her friends was one of the best theatrical experiences of her life.

Likewise, Tiffany and Roger commented on the impact of having siblings perform. Tiffany, like Monica, was the first person to perform onstage, and she even explained in her interview that her father initially wasn't very supportive, but she kept

auditioning and performing anyway. Through her involvement at the Playhouse, her younger brother started to do shows, and she started to look up to him as well. She explains the value of seeing her brother perform: “I never had faith in my brother when it came to theatre. [...] But the first time I watched him walk onstage and say his lines, it just astounded me that I could look up to my little brother so much in him doing that.”

Roger wasn't the first person in his family to perform. Both of his parents performed throughout high school and college, but stopped as they had children and pursued their careers. Roger's older sister also started performing at the Playhouse before he started auditioning for shows. Roger explains: “I had never gone to the Erie Playhouse and seen a production until the first production my sister was in. Before I really saw my sister onstage, I was like, ‘I can do that, cool.’ I never really had an interest in it, until I realized it was something that I could be a part of. It just kind of seemed foreign, and fun, but foreign.” Seeing his sister onstage encouraged Roger to audition and he and his sister were in *Heidi* together. Through Roger and his sister's involvement at the Playhouse, his parents started getting involved in theatre again through the Playhouse's Mainstage programming, and Roger has been in shows with his sister and with his parents.

Jessica briefly touched on the fact that the theatre is like a family. When responding to why she does theatre, she said: “Well I started just because, but I stuck with it because it's like another family.” She may not have had a clear reason for starting to audition, but the feeling of how a cast becomes like a family made her want to continue doing shows. Roger also briefly mentioned the theatre family: “Because of my sister and me, my parents got much more involved in the Erie Playhouse and have since

become part of the family.” Roger doesn’t explain further what he means by the Playhouse being a family, but still uses the term with ease and familiarity. Additionally, Helen, when talking about her friends at the Playhouse, refers to the Playhouse as the “Playhouse family” but does not go further in depth. Arnold in his interview also mentioned his “theatre family.”

In a school system, parents don’t normally perform with their children (though siblings may perform together), but it is still important to note how this aspect of community theatre life could translate to the school setting. As Roger and Jessica reminded us, the production cast and crew become a family. Families are functional and dysfunctional, and the theatre family is no different. A good teacher/director needs to recognize this familial unit and learn how to cultivate the positive attributes of being a family (love, cooperation, compassion, etc.) along with navigating the negative aspects of being a family (jealousy, fighting, misunderstandings, etc.).

Personal Growth

Four of the ten participants explained that they do theatre because of the *personal growth* attached to it. Of these four participants, only one was of high school age. Three of the four did theatre for more intrapersonal reasons, whereas one of the four did it for more personal artistic growth.

Jim was the only high school student to explain that he participated in theatre for personal growth and, in fact, this was basically the only reason he gave for performing. He believes: “It’s made such an impact on me and it’s really helped me to develop as a person and to learn about myself and to learn about others and to make great friends and to keep them, and it’s just always been a part of me and I really think that it’s something

that I'm going to want to continue doing for the rest of my life because I think that I'll continue growing and continue learning as I continue doing it."

Roger eloquently explains his belief of how he has grown by doing theatre:

It has formed some of the strongest relationships I've ever had, and it has been extremely integral in my growth as a person, due to conversations that I've had backstage during theatrical productions. I have formulated my opinions on religion, politics, sex, romantic relationships, platonic relationships, how to deal with negative aspects of life. I would argue that my views on things like homosexuality and the ethics of it are formed in a large part due to the theatre because, I mean, it is a stereotype, but kind of an accurate stereotype, that a lot of homosexual male people tend to do theatre and that's where I first met people of that persuasion, first encountered that idea, in a very young stage of my life, which I feel was positive that I first encountered those themes. That's getting off topic but...It has made me who I am and that is not an understatement or an overstatement. It has made me literally who I am, and it is something I love to do, and I can't think of any reason why I can't continue to grow within this art.

Rose, also a college student, tacked on at the end of one her statements that she did it because "I thought it was good for me." It helped her overcome some of her shyness and quiet nature.

Helen was the only participant that talked about performing in theatre to become better artistically. In her interview, Helen explained how, as a young child, she loved seeing anything with singing in it, and how her love of music encouraged her to take up dance and then musical theatre because she could sing, dance, and act in those performances (she has now graduated college with her music education degree). Even though Helen loves musicals, she also auditioned for plays, which she doesn't enjoy as much. Nevertheless, she explains the value of why performing in plays was important to her:

I don't have the acting chops, so I think I did plays to try to build some kind of an acting repertoire for myself because I wasn't sure what I was doing, you know, in life or whatever, and I still, even at college, I still would rather do a musical than a straight show, but I think it just a different experience, a different opportunity, and different directors, [...] I like working with new people and I like their experiences, especially after directing, after being on that end, then you're like, "Well, that's how they do that. That's really cool. I can take that from them."

Through performing in plays, she was able to focus more on her acting than her singing or dancing abilities, and she was able to take those experiences with her when she directed *Q³* and *Jungle Book*.

Even though only four participants talked about personal growth as a reason they performed in theatre, all participants talked about personal growth in some manner when they were asked what they had learned by doing theatre. Three of these four participants

were in college; only Jim was in high school, but he was going into his senior year and was the only senior interviewed for this study. Perhaps being older, this allowed each of these participants to be more reflective in why they performed and led them past the immediate responses of theatre being fun and a place to make friends. This is important for educators and directors to remember that they are responsible and influential in the behavior patterns of young people, and they need to be good role models for both personal *and* artistic values.

Other Reasons

Briefly, I want to explore the three reasons for doing theatre that only a few of the participants mentioned during the interviews. Two of the participants spoke about how *seeing a show* impacted their daily lives and how that impact caused their families to try to encourage them to get involved in the theatre. After seeing a production of *Les Misérables* at the age of three, Monica would remember “always singing ‘Castle on a Cloud’ even when I was little, like my Aunt Tracy taught me the lyrics to ‘Castle on a Cloud’ and I would always sing it, so they were definitely like, ‘she needs to be in theatre,’ when I was like really young ‘cause I loved singing and performing for people.”

Helen also vividly recalls an early time as an audience member:

The first show I saw was *The Snow Queen*, and I remember that entire show. I was like six, and I remember that entire show.

I still have the program and everything for it, but it was like the coolest experience ever and it was a Youtheatre show at the Playhouse, and I remembered her because she came down the aisle and I was on the aisle seat and she yelled at me with her magic

wand or something or other, and it was like the coolest thing, and all the kids around me were crying and I was just mesmerized by how cool this Snow Queen was, so then we got *The Snow Queen* book, and we were on a *Snow Queen* kick for awhile (laughs).

Helen also talks about seeing *Sesame Street Live* and watching Disney movies and how she would know all the songs from them which finally made her family remark, “You know, we need to start getting her into something.” I believe that the takeaway from these two examples is that those creating theatre for young people, and all people, need to create compelling theatrical experiences. These two women as youngsters were so captivated by what they saw that they mimicked it around their families, and this was what motivated their families to get them into theatre.

Additionally, Rita commented on the *professionalism* of the Erie Playhouse versus the non-professionalism of her school. Rita valued professionalism: “they [her school] don’t take as much time with it and they don’t perfect everything as much, so it’s a little bit different like that, so it’s not as professional, and all the quality of the shows are better at the Playhouse because we spend more time and money into it.” Even though schools will always have a smaller budget than the Erie Playhouse and theatres like it, that doesn’t mean that schools cannot operate in a professional manner. Rita’s English teacher was the one that taught the theatre class and directed the shows. Too many schools do not have a person with theatrical experience or theatre degrees running their programs, and many of them are not well-organized and frustrating for the students that participate in them. Schools need to be encouraged to hire qualified people as theatre teachers who can run a rehearsal process in an organized and professional manner.

Finally, Helen commented on what she called “*spotlight fever*”: “So, theatre was like my niche, and it was cool ‘cause then you see everybody afterwards and they’re so proud of you, and they’re like, ‘Oh my gosh, that was great, I didn’t know you could do that,’ and you’re like, ‘Yes, I can. Let me show you more,’ and then I got spotlight fever, where I just love being onstage.” Helen goes on to say:

I like to be the center of attention, which sounds really bad, but it’s true, so I think theatre gives you that, and people have to watch you which is awesome, but they have to watch you and they have to clap for you, but I mean, I guess they don’t have to, but they do (laughs) and they do clap for you, and it’s like the most gratifying experience.

I was actually quite surprised that Helen was the only one to comment on this experience. I had similar feelings through high school and college; however, Helen was the only participant that talked excitedly about what it is like to get applause and be the center of attention. I believe theatre educators should be aware that these feelings exist in some of their students, and they have a responsibility to make sure their students don’t become “divas” and understand the multiple reasons for participating in theatre.

What do adolescents and college students learn from participating in theatre?

In my interviews with the participants, all were directly asked, “What have you learned by doing theatre?” Some participants had very little to say and did not go into any depth, whereas others spoke in great detail about what they learned by doing theatre. In some cases, I asked follow up questions to help participants reflect on their theatre experiences and to explore the reasoning about how theatre led them to these conclusions

about themselves. In other cases I asked some participants, if they didn't state it in their initial response, if the theatre led them to learn anything about themselves. What the participants learned by participating in theatre fell into four categories: *self/personal* (10 responses), *organizational* (3 responses), *artistic* (3 responses), and *social* (3 responses).

Self-Awareness

Participants overwhelmingly spoke about how they believed the theatre helped shape their views of self and come to a better sense of *self-awareness*. This was the only category that every participant mentioned. Additionally, participants spoke more freely and in depth on how the theatre had affected them personally, unlike organizational, artistic, or social learnings. These discoveries about themselves fell into the following three subcategories: coming to a better sense of self (10 responses); becoming less shy, becoming more outgoing, and opening up more (4 responses); and having better self-esteem/confidence (3 responses).

All ten participants commented briefly or in depth on how the theatre allowed them to become more comfortable with themselves and/or allowed them a better understanding of who they are. I will not go into detail for each of the ten participants but will select a few from both high school and college to show how they reached a better understanding of self. Louise and Jim were two high schoolers that spoke in depth on how the theatre shaped them in this respect.

Louise said the theatre made her realize how she wants to portray herself in the real world. She reached this conclusion based on portraying other characters and viewing how she was or wanted to be different than those she portrayed onstage. When asked how she wants to portray herself, Louise believes:

I want to portray myself as a smart, intelligent person that knows how to have fun, and isn't mean to everyone, and isn't two-faced and doesn't talk about people, like portraying myself as a good person 'cause if you know how to go onstage and act as a bad person and knowing the difference between acting as a good and a bad person, you'll be able to act more like that good person, if you choose to do so.

Louise recognizes that a person could take away negative attributes of characters that they represent onstage, but she chooses to take away positive characteristics and includes those in her own daily life.

Jim, like Louise, also spoke of how the theatre has shaped his personhood:

I've learned a lot about myself by doing theatre, and I think that a huge reason why it happens is people get very into the characters they play onstage and very into the script and the score that they sing and say onstage, and I think that sometimes if you have the right show and you have the message of the show, you kind of think a lot of the times like "oh, boy, well I kind of do the same things sometimes," and I think that happens to me a lot when I'm doing a show. I'll look at a character and be like "oh, geez, I do that a lot. I should probably fix that maybe sometime soon (laughs)."

Even though Jim saw theatre as a learning tool to correct bad behaviors, he was not able to give specific examples from his own life when he was asked a follow up question on

how a show had done that for him. Even though he couldn't think of any specific examples, Jim still admitted, "I've become a better person through my experiences" and that he no longer participated in the negative kinds of conversations he used to have when he was younger and first started doing shows.

Two of the college students, Arnold and Roger, spoke eloquently about how the theatre helped shape their being and who they have become as they have gone through college and life. While in college, Arnold appeared in a new work directed by a fellow student in which he had to undress onstage and appear naked. Arnold believes that was one of his theatrical experiences that allowed him to become more comfortable with himself:

I was like, 'why, not? It's art,' and it's not like it's being pornographic at all or anything, so I was comfortable with it and it made me more comfortable with myself. The school saw me naked, so I was like 'I don't really have much else to hide.' It was very eye opening, and I don't think many people can say that they've been naked in front of people.

Earlier in the interview, Arnold told me he went to a small college where a student knows almost everybody else, or has at least heard of that person. It must have been hard for him to make the decision to be naked in front of lots of people he knew on such a small campus, but the theatre and this experience in particular allowed him to be vulnerable enough to literally shed all the layers and lay himself bare for all to view. This is the experience that allowed him to feel comfortable in his own skin and share that honest, genuine person with the world.

Additionally, Roger spoke about how theatre allowed him to meet others and how meeting this variety of people helped him shape his own world views. In the previous section about why the participants performed, Roger was the participant who mentioned how his theatrical experiences allowed him to meet new people of all ages and that hearing their views at a young age helped shape his own developing views. He talked about this even more when he explained what he had learned by doing theatre. He believes that “I’ve essentially formulated who I am and my world view as a person where I am now,” which he learned through formulating relationships in the theatre. He explains some of his world view:

Well, whatever stereotypes might persist about the theatre, the fact of the matter is that people of all walks of life do it. I’ve met Republicans, Libertarians, Liberals, Democrats, Socialists all through the theatre. And through listening to all of them, I was able to, whereas you know, otherwise I might’ve just been hearing one or two political viewpoints especially in Erie, and that actually goes for religion too, we’re predominantly a Catholic city. Through hearing the opinions of these people from all other walks of life, I’m able to bounce ideas off of the others and figure out what exactly makes sense to me. As it stands now, I am a cultural and predominantly religious Episcopalian in that I agree with almost everything the church does. I have some issues with the more core proponents of the faith, but I’m reconciling with those, and I am a social liberal and a financial liberal I guess as well. Everyone

in my family has kind of changed. My sister, probably in no small part due to the theatre and interactions, is a Socialist.

For Arnold and Roger, through their interactions with cast members, taking on different kinds of roles, and tackling challenges that were initially uncomfortable, they were able to learn about themselves and feel more comfortable in their skin and with their views.

Nearly half of the participants mentioned they had become *less shy*, able to open up more, and become more outgoing. Rose was the only college-aged participant to comment on this idea. Rose says that, not only did it help her with her confidence and self-esteem, she believes she would be a different person if she hadn't participated in theatre: "If I had gone without theatre forever and never gotten to experience that, I'd still be that really, really shy girl that didn't just even try and talk to people." In other parts of the interview, Rose spoke often about how quiet she was before she started performing, and that it was by going to rehearsal and performing that she started to feel close enough and safe enough with people that she started to open up more and become less self-conscious. Even though she admits that it can still be an issue with people she doesn't know, she is better equipped to handle the situation than when she was younger.

Of the high school aged participants, Jessica, Rita, and Tiffany all commented how they became less shy and more outgoing by participating in theatre. Jessica spoke briefly about theatre opening her up. She briefly recounts an experience with fellow participant Tiffany: "My theatre family has helped me open up, and really learn how to express myself, like I swam across the lake with Tiffany (laughs). I got in trouble for that one." Even though opening up can generally be viewed as positive, it may still have consequences. Tiffany briefly comments on how theatre helped make her less shy: "I

wouldn't say I was introverted, but I kept to myself until I started doing theatre, and now my embarrassment level has gone off the roof. I can do anything now and I am perfectly okay with it.”

Rita values the interactions she has had in the theatre:

I feel like I've opened up a lot more. When I was in middle school I was painfully shy, like ahhhhgh (Rita laughs and puts her hands over her face and goes “bleahhhhhh”). Once I met people from the Playhouse I opened up a little bit more, and then once I started actually doing shows, I feel so much more comfortable with myself and less self-conscious.

She explains that this happened by going to rehearsals, playing acting games, and participating in acting exercises that involved the body, especially during her time working on *Mime Time 2010*. All three of these participants found a safe haven in theatre where they could experiment with new things and have a chance to connect with others that allowed them to come out of their shells. Some of them may still be shy at times, while others allowed the theatre to create an explosion within them that allowed a more outgoing personality to burst onto the scene.

Three of the ten participants said participating in theatre boosted their *self-esteem* and helped their *confidence* levels. Rose was the only college student to talk about this.

Rose speculates why her mother had her audition:

My confidence is kinda bad and so I think that she kept pushing me to do it because I was so quiet and shy, and she wanted to help me break out a little. I'm better now, but I mean I still

once in a while will revert back to being really quiet and shy, but the theatre I think definitely, without that, I don't know where I would be right now, like definitely helped me with my self-esteem and confidence.

When she gets nervous, she will pretend that she is acting and that will make her calmer.

Louise and Jessica were the two high school participants that discussed how theatre gave them better self-esteem. Louise explains: "I've learned a lot about my self-esteem where I've gained a lot of it 'cause I have been given leadership roles. I have been given lead roles in a show. I'm in a special performing group for the Playhouse, just like that kind of stuff. You're like, 'well, maybe I'm not terrible.'" Jessica explained she gained confidence by performing some of her biggest roles in *Mulan, Jr.*, *Twelve Dancing Princesses*, and *The Dragon of Nitt*. She realizes that not everyone is able to perform these roles in front of an audience. For example, she describes how getting a lead role in *Mulan, Jr.* helped her:

With *Mulan*, I had never gotten a lead role before, and I wasn't sure if I was capable of it, and when I got it, I realized that somebody had faith in me, that this director cast me [...]. I can memorize lines. I remember that I had 99 lines in that show and I memorized every single one of them, and I also learned that you have to stay with that role because there's fourteen shows and you just can't go on autopilot, and that's kind of with like life, I mean you just can't go through life. You'll miss the roses or whatever that phrase is (laughs).

For these three participants, performing roles (some of them lead roles) for the public gave them confidence in their own lives because someone gave them the chance to shine and believed in their abilities. This is important for artists and educators to remember because every time we cast any youth in a role, we are partially responsible for helping him or her succeed and feel comfortable in front of people. When they feel comfortable in front of an audience and confident that they know the show and their character, it becomes natural that some of this confidence will transfer into real world applications.

Organizational Skills

Three of the ten participants, two of them college age, spoke of *organizational skills* they learned through participating in theatre. For this document, organizational skills would include those that are beneficial to larger organizations, businesses, and any place of employment. The skills they mentioned fell into two subcategories: *communication* and *leadership* skills.

For Monica, theatre honed her communication skills: “I really think that helps because if you can be exposed to a whole audience of people critiquing you, watching you, then it is pretty easy to be one-on-one with somebody, so I definitely think my social skills and my speaking skills have been really improved because of theatre.” Louise and Helen reflected on growth in their leadership skills. Louise values her experiences in lead roles, as choreographer and dance captain, and how these kinds of opportunities allowed her to take on leadership positions: “It’s what I really like to do.” Helen spoke briefly on how theatre prepared her for leadership roles and her own ambition: “When I said I’m president of organizations, I mean president. I don’t mean I worked my way up, I mean I like to be in charge.” She admits that through theatre she learned her strengths

and weaknesses, and by coming to this knowledge she has followed her own ambition to become president of many organizations and she can be the “center of attention.”

Artistic Growth

Only three of the participants, all high schoolers, talked about how participating in theatre has helped them grow *artistically*, and none of them spoke in much depth on how theatre helped them achieve this growth. Louise talked about becoming a better “techie”: “I’ve learned a lot about technical stuff, like how to build things, how to tear things down, how to run a sound board which is really, really hard, how to run a light board which is also really, really hard, how to run a spotlight, how to pull drops. I can now whip drops faster than like the biggest guy on stage crew across that stage.” Louise also briefly commented on how playing in an orchestra pit was different from playing in a band or school orchestra. Surprisingly, Louise does not speak of her performing abilities, yet she performed more often than she teched or played in the pit.

Rita, through rehearsals and note sessions, became a better actress and singer: “I feel like I’ve gotten better at my skills doing theatre. I’m awful at dancing, but that’s ‘cause I haven’t done it that much, but I feel like I’ve grown as an actress. I think I have. I hope I have. I’ve gotten better at singing because of my voice lessons and everything, so I’ve improved in that by all the experience.” Even though Rita says she has grown as an actress, by interpreting her statements it is hard to tell if she truly believes it herself. It may have been that, at the time of the interview, Rita had only performed in a handful of productions and still doubted she could be good. Her self-confidence in acting was still fairly low. She had learned things like “how to get into character,” “stage presence,” and “not turning your back to the audience.” By these examples, Rita is still a young actress,

and her responses would likely be different today as she continued to perform regularly and continued to grow. So, her accounts of what she had learned with all the disclaimers attached may not have been only that Rita was unsure of herself, it may have also been due to the fact that she was still learning and didn't have the proper theatrical vocabulary to accurately discuss her growth.

Finally, Jim also reflected upon his growth as an artist. He, unlike the others, spoke longer about his growth but, for the most part, did not give concrete examples of how he had grown. For example, Jim relates: "I've learned so much about technical techniques of acting, of dancing, of singing, and also of technical and administrative aspects." This is excerpted from a longer response; however, Jim mostly keeps repeating notions about "technique" but never really goes into much detail about what that means, except to say, "I've been learning through my experiences in theatre and how to take technique but not lose your natural self and your natural ways of doing things." He, like Rita, perhaps does not have the proper vocabulary yet to explain exactly what he means by "technique" and how that has made him a better performer. Later in the interview, Jim spoke about the people most influential in his theatre career to that point and what he learned from them. He talks once again about "technique," but also discusses the value of the contributions of his high school theatre teacher to allow him to explore the business side of theatre (which I include here as artistic growth). Jim explains: "[My teacher] acknowledges quickly that business is something that I enjoy in the theatre. He's given me a lot of opportunities to run the box office, to design this website, to do those kinds of things, train kids when I'm leaving here, and he's also responsible for

getting this internship for me at the Warner because he's friends with [another person], so I have to give him credit for that.”

I was surprised that only three of the participants spoke about their growth as theatrical artists and, of those who did, only talked about it briefly and/or focused more on other theatrical elements like stage crew, running control boards, and running the business end. The focus was not on the idea of performing, and all three of them at that point in their lives had performed more in theatre than any of the other tasks that they mentioned. So why was this the case? I think there are a few possible reasons.

First, the participants may have believed that their growth as actors was a given and too obvious to discuss, so they didn't mention it during their interviews. Perhaps they assumed if they continued to perform they would get better with experience. Second, maybe they didn't realize that they had grown as performers (or perhaps they hadn't grown as performers since they first started), and therefore they didn't mention it. Third, as I mentioned earlier, perhaps the participants did not yet have the words to describe how they had grown as performers, and they couldn't grasp the right words to explain how they had grown. They became bogged down in words like “technique” and “character development” to truly explain what those things meant to them. Fourth, the participants may not have thought that artistic growth as a performer was important. Was this why none of the college-aged performers mentioned this when asked what they had learned by doing theatre? At the time of the interviews, most of the college-aged participants were not actively pursuing theatrical interests. Since they did not perform as often, maybe the importance of performing had left their thought patterns and so they did not speak about learning how to be a better performer. Finally, was the question (What

have you learned by doing theatre?) asked in such a way that the participants thought they had to answer with more practical or personal aspects learned? Whatever the reasoning, artists and educators need to focus more on the art of theatre and making sure casts and students have a better grasp of how they are growing artistically, and that they can reflect upon it in an intelligent way with a proper theatrical vocabulary.

Social Aspects

Only three of the participants, all college-aged, talked about the *social aspects* of theatre and how they learned through the medium to get along easier/better with people socially. Of the three, only two spoke about this topic in some depth. Monica briefly mentioned, “I’ve learned how to get along with people.”

Arnold initially said, “I think doing theatre helps you be more of a sociable person” and stopped his thought there. I asked him a few follow up questions to help him reflect on what that means and how theatre, specifically, helped him achieve this. He explained:

You have to work with someone so you’re sort of forced to get to know someone, and if you’re in a role that needs to interact with another person and you don’t know them, then you get to know them through the character and everything. You have to break away at the barrier that you have up against a new person, you know, like you don’t want them to get to know you, or you have to break that away in order to find a connection, to make it believable for the audience.

I then asked him how theatre makes this happen compared to other possible activities that one might participate in during high school or college. He mentioned how theatre was different than yearbook, which he was a part of, and how it appeared different than sporting teams: “I had my theatre family. I had the people to go to, whether they would be my age or even adults that I looked up to and everything, so I think for sports, you only have that group that’s around your age and your coach. You don’t have the variety, I guess.” Arnold, as a youth, participated in both Youtheatre productions (shows that had youth ages 5-18 years old) and Mainstage productions, which could include children as well as adults of any age. This mingling of different generations in community theatre allowed Arnold an experience, unlike school activities including school productions, to meet new people and hear their differing perspectives, and therefore have the opportunities to learn how to work with a variety of people, not only his peers.

Roger also spoke about how he believes theatre influenced his interactions with fellow human beings. Roger mentioned how, as an actor, one needs to be able to see the world from a different perspective and go completely outside of your own experiences. By taking on different roles, such as the Phantom in *The Phantom of the Opera*, he was able to live experiences that were different from his childhood of a “very privileged atmosphere and a very positive atmosphere.” Even though he had never experienced what the Phantom experienced, he still drew from emotions that he experienced in his own life. Roger further explains how these acting experiences of trying to relate to his character helped in his real life relationships:

I think that’s what acting truly teaches a person is empathy
because they learn how to channel these emotions in a way

that you can understand them and put yourself there even though you've never quite been there. As a result, in interpersonal relationships, I've always been one of those people, who people kind of come to in times of need, and I think, I've never really minded that position, and I think that it's actually helped me in that role in a lot of ways because I think actors have an ability when someone comes to them with a problem, to understand that problem because I can put myself there. I can understand exactly how you were feeling, there's obviously going to be a disconnect at some point, like if, I have friends who have been sexually abused, and when I discuss that with them, obviously I can't imagine the level of distress that that puts them in; however, I can understand that distress is there and what it entails and how one can go about healing at least from my perspective, and I guess the point I'm getting at is that it has given me a lot more deep and more critical and more true understanding of human emotion, and how that truly defines more I believe than anything else what a human being is.

Empathy is what Roger learned from being an actor, and he could implement that effectively in his everyday life. Educators should take note and remind themselves that students visit other viewpoints while taking on the roles of different characters, and that they can use these viewpoints to better understand those in the cast or class that surround them. These young actors can also take these new thoughts with them as citizens in a

larger society. Theatre *is* crafting young people's minds and we help shepherd that growth.

How does/did performing in theatre translate into other aspects of the adolescents' and college students' lives?

During the interviews I asked all the participants: "How has what you learned through theatre translate into your everyday life?" or "How has what you learned through theatre translate into your college experience?" Of all the questions I asked the participants, this was the question that they responded to the least. In fact, one of the high school participants, Tiffany, only said that she will "spontaneously break into song," "act very dramatic towards everyday things," and "it kinda makes life more enjoyable overall." The other nine participants' responses fell into the same four categories of what they learned through participating in theatre: *organizational* (8 responses), *social* (6 responses), *self* (5 responses), and *artistic* (1 response). In this section, I will devote at least one paragraph each for the first three categories; however, only one participant spoke briefly about how theatre translated into her artistic life, so I will note that here. Louise, a high schooler, has become a better musician by playing in the pit orchestra during theatrical productions, and she has been the only one playing the flute, unlike in her school band where she can check to make sure she is playing the right notes based on hearing the other person(s) next to her. She has to be responsible for carrying the musical part correctly on her own.

Organizational

When asked how what they had learned through theatre translated into their everyday lives, the most responses (seven) dealt with *organizational* aspects. From these

seven participants, three spoke about time management, three about college/job prep, one about memorization, and one about creating better presentations.

Three of the college-aged participants spoke about time management—two positively, one negatively and positively. Helen briefly commented: “I think because of crazy rehearsals and stuff, it helped me balance my time.” Rose similarly commented: “going to the rehearsals and going to the shows and things like that, I think it made me more responsible and more organized in my life.” On the other hand, Monica spoke negatively about her time management skills and how she didn’t get as much done during tech week: “Academically, I think it has helped me or hurt me ‘cause obviously during tech week, when rehearsals get really serious, you don’t really have time to study as much as you should, but then at the same time, I’m the kind of person that has a lot going on, that’s when I do the most.” This brings up an interesting point for educators. Even though it is not directly in our purview, should we help students learn how to manage their time better, especially when they have other classes and tests to prepare for? I believe the answer is yes. This may mean that during tech week, directors conduct shorter rehearsals, allow students to work on homework in down time, and make sure that the students are not at school until 11:00 p.m. every night. The production is important, but not at the expense of the students’ academics and general welfare.

Finally, three of the participants, without direct prompting, talked about how theatre has helped them plan for college or their future careers. Louise, at the time of the interview, wanted to be a psychologist (she is currently in school for Studio Art), and she explained that participating in theatre prepared her for her major in college: “if I have clients have them try to act something out or maybe suggest, ‘oh, you should try theatre’

and maybe that will help you with whatever mental problems you're going through [...] and it's a place for them to fit in, where they might not fit in at school or something.”

Jim talked about how his theatre teacher in high school helped him find two internships—one with the Erie Playhouse and the other with the Warner Theater. These two internships allowed him to gain experience in the business side of theatre that he is currently pursuing at college.

Rose mentioned how theatre has helped her in pursuing a career in animation:

I remember, in my beginning animation classes, they were like, we recommend you go into acting classes, and I was like “What?! I thought I just left that? I thought that I had to give that up. What?” And so, it was really great, when they were like, you are actually the characters, so you're not just drawing, you're just not making things move on a piece of paper. You're giving that thing life. You're making it a part of you, so you got to make it relatable, and you have to give it emotion, and you need to make it think. Like, why are they wearing this? Why are they walking this way? Why are they moving this way? So acting, theatre in general, I think it really helps.

Regardless of whether these students pursue a theatre-related career or not, their theatre experiences could help make them more successful in the career paths they've chosen.

Social

Six of the participants reflected on the *social* aspects of theatre when they were asked how what they had learned translated into their everyday lives. Of these six, four

were college-aged and two were high schoolers. These six spoke about how theatre has allowed them to better understand others and how it has made it easier to talk to others and make friends easier. Jessica, a high schooler, believes: “It translates because the people you are portraying onstage, they’re usually based off of real people or they’re kind of like somebody in the world, [...] It allows you to see somebody else’s life, and maybe how it has relation to yours.” Roger believed that his theatre experiences might help him become a better RA at his college because he would be better able to relate to the dorm residents:

Having an understanding of how people feel and emotion is very important in the college experience because if high school is one of the most formative parts of a person’s life, college is where it’s solidified. I think that as a result people feel a lot of emotion, and a lot of emotion that they might not necessarily know how to deal with, and I think it’s helpful both for myself when I am in that situation with other people to have an understanding of this, so I can remove myself enough to be like, logically this is good next step, but personally enough where I’m like I completely understand this and why you would think this or that.

Three college students and one high schooler mentioned how theatre made it easier to talk to people and make friends. Louise values the social skills she has learned through theatre: “I’ve learned a lot of people skills, like I feel like I can make friends really easy. I can get along with all sorts of different types of people because people that do theatre are from all walks of life, whether from the really poor side of town to the

really, really rich side of town. You get this great mixture of people and personalities and you learn how to deal with them and interact with them.”

Arnold, Helen, and Monica briefly spoke about how they believe theatre has helped them in their everyday social lives. Arnold said: “I don’t know if it’s helped me academically at all but socially definitely. [...] It definitely helps with meeting friends and meeting new people and even if you don’t know them, as soon as you meet them, you know, like being able to talk to them and just try and find something in common in-between you.” Helen commented: “I have no problem talking to anybody, no matter what level they’re at, so I think that’s helped too. I can be the same person with everybody because I know who I am.” Monica commented: “it has given me a really good group of friends. I love my group of friends and I would never want other friends.”

Self-Awareness

When asked what they had learned through participating in theatre, all ten participants responded in some manner about how it brought them better *self-awareness*. When asked how theatre translated into their everyday lives, only five of the ten responded in regards to self-awareness. Louise talked about the value of not getting embarrassed as easily because of her experiences onstage: “You can’t have inhibitions. [...] I mean I’ve worn a duck suit onstage. I had a hat like a cake on my head. You just can’t worry about looking stupid anymore, and I think that has helped a lot with life too, like just not worrying about how cool you look.” Jim commented: “the big thing that I’ve learned is to just be yourself and to be natural when you’re onstage, and I love being able to say that in my life, I feel like I am as natural and real as I possibly can because I

feel like a lot of people are very fake in our society.” Both feel more comfortable with themselves and how they fit in society.

Arnold remarked briefly that he believed his theatre experiences made him “more of an open person, like more open minded.” Rose briefly mentioned that exercises learned during *Mime Time I* helped her relax after a stressful day: “I was trying to loosen up, and I don’t know, I think I was having a stressful day or something. I was like, ‘okay, let’s just relax,’ and so I was like, ‘what did we do that one time [...]’” Roger offered: “Well, I’m a good liar now” (even though he only tells “little white lies”) and he can accept rejection better.

How do adolescents deal with the negative attributes of theatre?

While interviewing the participants, almost all of them were asked: “What was your most negative memory of doing a show?” and “How would you describe the most negative theatrical experience that you could be a part of?” Additionally, some were asked what they believed were negative aspects of theatre and how they deal with them; what their least favorite roles and productions were; and “Is there anything that you’ve seen in theatre that you’ve done that you wish you could change? Why or why not?” This final question was confusing for many of the participants and sometimes needed clarifying statements from me to help them respond. Perhaps due to this confusion, there was a wide range of responses from the participants. I expected them to focus on negative aspects they had witnessed and discuss how they would like to change them; however, that was rarely the case. For example, some talked about the wish to revisit a performance that they had done and be able to do it again with the experience they now

had. When asked about auditioning, many of the participants talked about negative feelings and how they dealt with them.

In the following section, I offer brief snapshots of each individual's reactions to the negative aspects of theatre instead of grouping them by theme as I did for the previous questions. This is a more logical approach and will be easier to follow since I did not ask all the participants the same question, and there was sometimes confusion to the questions asked. Also, there is less overlap in the responses and each participant seemed to respond more personally, making their experiences unique. After the snapshots, I will draw a few conclusions based on the participants' experiences.

High Schoolers

Tiffany commented the least on the negative aspects of theatre and her feelings about them. She talked about nerves and auditioning: "That is where you really feel the most competitive with people because it is before anything is cast. It's when you're all trying out for the same thing, and you need to stay positive and confident through all of that." When asked how she stays positive throughout all this, she responded that she will perform mock auditions for people whom she knows "will tell me if I'm bad and how I can better it." Tiffany finds competition in theatre one of the most negative aspects because "that over-competitiveness can really diminish some great friendships that could have potentially have been there," but she deals with this by "constantly looking in the mirror and telling myself that I need to be myself and the best that I can be, and that's all I can really be expected to do."

Jessica found that auditioning, bias, "drama", and what her role is, can be some of the negative aspects of theatre. Similarly to Tiffany and others, Jessica finds auditioning

a bit of a negative experience, more “nerve-wracking” than stressful. She explained that after getting cast in many roles, she got a little cocky and she “didn’t care about my audition” and started not getting cast. When she was little she would cry to deal with her feelings, but now “I don’t really get that upset anymore, especially if I know that there was a reason that I didn’t make it.” This last sentiment also goes along with the next item that Jessica views negatively: bias. She explains: “I don’t like the bias—there’s not a lot of bias, but when there is, it gets you a little angry.” Directors might want to ponder how we combat our own personal biases, how we show that a cast list isn’t biased, and that the best people were actually cast.

Jessica, like many participants, disliked the “drama” between cast members that could be connected to the rehearsal process and/or backstage antics. She believes:

Sometimes, like I said there’s a lot of “drama” backstage and some people just like to start it, especially when you’re a teenager and hormones are high and stuff, and with that you just kind of have to stay out of it. And if they’re your friends just try and calm them down so that they don’t get anybody else roused up, and then there’s also the people that don’t want to be there, and that’s kind of more negative, but again you just have to deal with that too, and try to encourage them [...] you can’t let anything get you down with it ‘cause the audience doesn’t need to know any of that’s happening.

Jessica, along with others, spoke of how they try to help alleviate this drama and to act as a positive force instead of a negative one. They want the show to go as well as it can.

Additionally, Jessica likes to be active when she is in a show and not just sit around doing very little. Two of her least favorite shows were *The Music Man* and *Into the Woods, Jr.* because of that. I think this is important to note because some theatrical groups cast as many youth as possible for various reasons: to promote their program, sell tickets, and give many young people a chance. However, this can be a drawback for some youth if they are simply sitting on the side of the stage watching and occasionally singing, like in Jessica's *Into the Woods, Jr.* experience.

Rita brought up three main aspects that she struggles with: the process of auditioning, "drama" with the cast and backstage, and stress related to the theatrical process. She finds auditions "terrifying"; however, she is generally not upset when she isn't cast because "I kind of deserve it because I wait until the last minute to get my audition song, and then I don't know it very well, and then I go into the audition and fail." Rita, even though she might be sad about not making a show, is also able to realize that, at least sometimes, it is partially her fault she is not cast because she hasn't taken the amount of time necessary to fully prepare and show her capabilities.

Additionally, Rita noticed "drama" among cast members during the rehearsal process and backstage that included: cast members forming cliques, relationship drama, and young children not paying attention or misbehaving. She explains: "We're theatre kids, we're dramatic, it's not gonna change (laughs)," and she also commented, "Yeah, I love it!—like some of it, as long as it doesn't get ridiculous, like this is too ridiculous now, why are you even making such a big deal of this, but it makes life interesting, that's for sure (laughs)." Even though backstage drama can be stressful and irritating, Rita also

addresses that she secretly enjoys it and that it draws her to the theatre as well. This is probably true for other youth actors as well.

Finally, Rita talked about the different aspects of theatre that stress her out. These included rehearsals, especially if there were a lot of young children and the director and/or choreographer yelled a lot; “if you don’t know your lines exactly and you feel like you should”; and not reviewing the work in a timely manner. In one show, the choreographer choreographed a number and didn’t review it for an entire month for various reasons. Rita explains: “Ok, so we all left there and none of us knew the dance after she taught it to us because it was, I don’t know, it just was really fast, like it wasn’t that hard, but it was really fast, and so we all left, not knowing it, and we came back a month later, none of us knew it, and she totally yelled at us. It was ridiculous.” After that the choreographer wouldn’t answer questions and gave the cast her notes and let them sort it out for themselves.

Louise only brought up two negative aspects of doing theatre: auditioning and “drama.” She spoke briefly about the former but spoke quite in depth about the latter. As far as auditioning, Louise explained that she is more nervous during auditions now than when she was younger, and she is generally fine if she is not cast, as long as she believes that those who were cast deserved the roles. Louise refers to one of the same shows that Jessica recalled which had 110 cast members. Lots of “drama” and cliques were formed:

No one got along. Not that the director yelling at us really bothers me, but we got yelled at every day for just stupid, stupid little things that people did that were just really, really unnecessary,

like someone took a picture of someone sleeping in the dressing room, and the person that was sleeping that got their picture taken of them flipped out and there was just big “drama”. We couldn’t have cell phones anywhere and couldn’t have cameras anywhere. There were just a lot of issues [...]

She noted that this wasn’t the only show in which there were problems with cast unity, and she didn’t note how she deals with it, other than cry when she thought a camera she had taken to the show had been stolen. Directors and educators need to be aware of “drama” issues within their casts and classes and have strategies planned to help combat these situations.

Jim commented on three aspects of theatre that can be viewed negatively: time spent/tediousness, poor production values, and “drama.” Jim spent less time on the negative aspects than many of the other high schoolers, and when he was asked what his least favorite role and show were, he said he didn’t have one because “I really think that no matter, even if I do have a negative experience in a show, I really believe after the fact, that every show has taught me something different.” Jim spoke about how the rehearsal process can be “Long. Grueling. Obnoxious—no, but it’s necessary,” and the time spent on the whole process. Additionally, Jim shared how his most negative experience would include “everyone’s nightmare when you put on a show that you lose sleep over, that everything just goes wrong and everything falls apart.” Finally, Jim, like others, spent the most time speaking about “drama” in the cast—seniority issues in high school that no other high schooler mentioned: “A lot of people who have been through high school for four years and they don’t get parts and they’re seniors, and they think,

now it's their time and they deserve something, but they're really not up to par, but then when they don't get parts and they're seniors, they [...] really made it a very negative experience because they didn't get parts." Jim also spoke about similar problems with casts that the other high schoolers mentioned.

College Students

Generally, the college students spoke less about the negative aspects of theatre. This is probably due to the fact that, for the most part, the college students were asked less questions about this area than the high schoolers. Roger briefly spoke about how lack of commitment of cast members was the major negative characteristic that bothers him when working on a production. He values when everyone can show up to rehearsal and give it their all. He recalled a production he was working on at the time of the interview that wasn't the case: "It's a situation where no one is really helping each other out all that much. It's very disjointed. People like [actor] who are missing almost all the rehearsals, and he still does a good job because he's [actor]. It's also because I feel like I'm not giving it my all, and I could give it my all, but I'm just lethargic to do so." This project was a musical revue, and Roger admitted that he didn't generally care for these kinds of shows, and it was hard for him to commit during the rehearsals but had fun performing in them once they opened.

Arnold spoke little about the negative aspects of theatre and only focused briefly on two points: director's emotions and frustration with self. His most negative memory was in a production of *The Sound of Music*; the director "got really frustrated and he's yelling at us like always," but even though directors would yell, Arnold shared that it was

never bad enough that he considered not performing. Arnold believed this about being frustrated with himself:

No, I think, just negative like being frustrated, and letting yourself convince yourself that you can't do something, that you can't get into it, and one example was during *Red Sneaks*, when [actor's name] and I had that scatting battle [a fight fought using scat syllables], and you were pushing and pushing me, and I just got frustrated that I couldn't do it, so then, we were frustrated with each other and as soon as I calmed down and just went with it, you know, I was fine, and obviously, it wasn't perfect at first, but, nothing will be, so I think the most negative thing is holding myself back.

Even though Arnold recognized this as a negative aspect, he also put a positive spin on it by just letting go and trying something new; he was able to grow.

Monica spoke briefly about not liking to have her time wasted during rehearsals and spoke more in depth about the casting of a show in high school. When asked what her most negative theatrical experience would be, she responded: "I'm not the kind of person that likes having my time wasted. I hate, hate it when I go to a rehearsal that is unproductive, and I hate when it is stressful 'cause I feel like, for me, doing shows is the thing I do to relieve the stress and where I go to be home, to be with my friends." Even though she spoke briefly about this, she went into much more detail on casting policies. She spoke about the same show as Jim when he addressed seniors and their unhappiness on not being cast.

Monica had a different view on the topic:

My most negative memory was my senior year of high school, and basically my whole senior year of high school was really bad with the theatre program because our director was against the senior class, and he didn't cast any of us, especially the girls. He never gave us any supporting roles or lead roles. He always gave the parts to, you know, underclassmen, and we were doing *King and I*, and he gave every role, like any soloist or anything to underclassmen, and we were devastated because *The King and I*, it's not like a show where you can have fun being in the chorus. If you're not one of the main people, you're standing in a line with your hands pressed together and you're a wife, and you don't have a whole lot to do, and we were all really upset about it, and I'm not the kind of person that takes things easily, or doesn't stand up for myself, so I was really blatant about how unhappy I was, and I challenged him, and he basically tried to kick me out of like 90% of the show.

Monica repeated multiple times in the last statement that the director didn't "give" any of the seniors roles in their final year of high school. She never spoke about whether they "earned" these roles, which was one of the points Jim, from the same high school, made about the situation. Dealing with seniority issues in a school setting can be one of the stickiest situations for a director; however, it is his or her responsibility to do what is best for the production and cast those who are most appropriate/best for the roles available.

To appease some of these upperclassmen, directors might find other opportunities for these students, such as leadership roles in the production, so that they feel their time and experience are valued.

Rose, similar to other participants, spoke about how she found auditions nerve-inducing and how she disliked backstage “drama.” She went to her first audition based on her mother’s request, even though she secretly wanted to go as well. But for that audition and others, she admitted that she was often nervous with that nervousness accompanying her into her first rehearsal for her first show. Rose spoke more at length about how her most negative memories from shows were due to the fact that people were messing around backstage, as in the productions of *Treasure Island* and *Velveteen Rabbit* she was in. She recalled: “In *Velveteen Rabbit*, there was a crazy little kid who needed Ritalin. [...] He obviously couldn’t do the show anymore, cause he wasn’t being very nice and he was like pushing people and being a little weird, like a crazy little animal, and then he left, and so the sister had to leave too, but I was like ‘that’s too bad for the sister, but man, I’m glad that boy’s gone’.”

Finally, Helen, out of all the participants, perhaps had the most to say about her negative experiences in theatre, and these focused on her overall experience when she directed a production of *Jungle Book* in which she went into great depth in our interview. This extended quote summarizes her experience and her attitude toward it:

You can only do so much with a scene when you’re missing your three main people, and then because those three main people are never there, they never know their lines, and they don’t know their lines come dress rehearsal, you know, final

dress rehearsal, and I hate yelling. I despise yelling. I will not yell, find any other way to get people's attention or to get it into their heads that they have to do something, except yell, and I had yelled more than I've yelled ever that tech week, and I felt awful for the kids, and then you have parents watching and the kids that aren't doing anything wrong, and I sent out an e-mail like everyday where I was like, 'just to let you know, I'm very sorry for yelling at the entire cast, when you know who you are and you're not doing anything wrong,' but I felt like I had to apologize, and I had to acknowledge everything that I was doing, and it was just, it was bad, and then when you have parents there of the kids who keep missing rehearsals, who are talking to you, saying, 'why are you yelling so much at my child,' and it was bad (laughs).

These experiences caused Helen to not want to direct the next summer, but it is likely that she will direct again in the future.

In summary, the top two negative aspects of theatre addressed by the participants were nervousness during auditions and the issues among the cast and backstage during the performances. As part of the original research question, I asked whether these negative aspects had a negative impact on their lives. Based on the participants' responses, I would propose that these experiences may have had a momentary negative impact (e.g., crying, feeling frustrated, getting angry); however, this said, none of the participants spoke about any long term effects on their lives based on their negative

experiences in theatre. The closest to this would be Helen's experiences with *Jungle Book* and not wanting to direct the next summer and needing to take a break.

What do adolescents identify as positive attributes of theatre?

All participants were asked, "What is your most positive memory from doing a show?" and "What would your ideal theatrical experience be like?" All of the high schoolers were asked what their favorite role(s) and favorite show(s) were and why they chose those over other productions in which they acted. Every participant spoke about positive aspects of theatre during their interviews, especially to "What is one moment from your theatrical experiences that you'll never forget and why?" Some of the responses to this question may initially have had a negative connotation; however, in retrospect, the participants looked back on these moments fondly or with a sense of humor. This section is structured the same way as the last with ten snapshots of the participants and a brief summary.

High Schoolers

Tiffany spoke of two main positive aspects of theatre: helping with her depression and the actual performances. When asked about her most positive memory from doing a show, she explained that she was diagnosed with depression at age twelve and "that was when I really threw myself into theatre because that was my main outlet, and even through that, I was able to work through the negative emotions and make really great, supportive friends." Instead of focusing on the negative aspects of her life, theatre became an outlet where she could find happiness, friends, and positive experiences. One of the shows that helped do this was *Around the World in Eighty Days*. She explained that it "was a large cast show" and "it was a big family." She also has a positive attitude

about the actual performances: “I feel the shows are constant high for me. You get lots of Starbucks; you hang out with your friends all the time; it’s my little piece of heaven, and it’s the most rewarding part of theatre.” In both helping with her depression and loving the performances, the role of friendship is very important to her.

Jessica spoke about cast unity and the rehearsal process as two positive aspects of her theatrical experiences. Like Tiffany and *Around the World in Eighty Days*, Jessica had good things to say about the cast as well: “I remember for *Around the World in Eighty Days*, there was just no ‘drama’ in that show at all, like, it wasn’t a good show, but everyone in the cast just loved each other and this one girl, like there was I think seventy people in the cast, and she made a card for every single one of them, telling them something good about them and what she likes, and that was just really nice.” This idea of a cast that is nice to each other and where there is no drama ties into what her ideal theatrical experience would be: “The people that really fit and deserve the roles, and they do a very good job with that, and if everyone was nice backstage, no divas, no people complaining, and having fun off the stage to have fun on the stage, just a fun show too with a good script.” A cast that gets along was mentioned multiple times by different participants. Jessica also finds that a good rehearsal experience created by an experienced director can be very positive. Similar to what Monica later says, Jessica values the rehearsal process as a time to bond with cast members and her friends: “rehearsals are so much fun and some people don’t remember the show at all, but they remember the rehearsals, and that’s the time when you have to bond with who you are going to be acting with onstage. You can have an actual relationship onstage. They’re

just a lot of fun.” She also believes this is how one does the most growing in the theatrical process.

Rita spoke about two positive aspects of theatre: getting a part and cast unity. Similar to Rose, one of the college students, Rita was excited when she was cast in *The Frog Prince* because she had an actual part and lines. She had been in the chorus of a musical before but this was her first play. She liked having lines but also had fun during rehearsals and found it to be a good learning experience. Rita also commented positively on how she loved being in *Babes in Toyland* because of the way the cast got along: “I think it was because of the cast, like the cast was just really awesome. I don’t know why, there was just no ‘drama’ in the cast, and nobody talking about each other. There was none of that and it was awesome, and so the cast made it really fun to be in.”

Louise spoke about three aspects of theatre that had a positive impact on her: spending time with/making friends, cast unity, and high-level dancing. Similar to Arnold, Louise’s most positive memory of doing shows revolved around her friends: “Just making soooo many friends. I’ve met so many great people, and I have so many people to look up to.” Similar to other participants, Louise found it important when a cast got along well and thoroughly enjoyed her experiences in shows where this happened. This was also part of her ideal theatrical experience. Unlike anyone else, Louise finds shows that have higher level dancing to be more fun and positive, and her ideal experience would include: “Well, it would be a big dance show, like I would have a good part, maybe not the leading role, but maybe someone that gets to dance a lot and have a song or something.” Louise was one of the few participants who spoke about artistic challenges as part of the positive experiences they had in theatre.

Jim spoke in a positive light about three aspects from his theatrical experiences: praise from adults, the actual performances, and performing a lead with lots of dancing. Jim talked about his role of Jojo in *Seussical* and how the praise he received from the man that played the Cat in the Hat was very touching and inspiring. Jim heard him on a local radio program: “And he was talking about the show, and he brought up me, and he’s like, ‘oh, this kid is just so great and he’s phenomenal to work with and it’s amazing that such a young kid can be that natural onstage and everything,’ and I was just touched by that.” Jim looked up to the man and this made it even more special for him.

Like Tiffany and Helen, Jim enjoyed performing in the actual productions. He explains: “That’s the best part of the process in my opinion because the work’s already put in it. [...] You are so comfortable with your part that you don’t have to be concerned about it anymore, that you can have fun during the opening of the show and have fun with the people you’re with because everyone’s so comfortable with where the show is that you don’t need to be stressed out anymore.” Finally, like Louise, he enjoys a show where he can dance, like the male lead that taps a lot in *42nd Street* at his high school.

College Students

Roger had many interesting thoughts to share and/or expand on; however, as far as strictly positive aspects of his theatrical journey, he only spoke about it when asked “What is your most positive memory from doing a show?” Both memories were about the casts and how they stepped it up to make good productions. *Over the Tavern* was a Mainstage production at the Playhouse, and “that was a play where everyone was exactly where they needed to be at every time, and it was the most smooth production I’ve ever been through.” The other production he spoke of was *The Phantom of the Opera* that his

high school produced in which he played the Phantom. Even though people weren't always where they needed to be, "everyone really brought their A game."

Arnold, perhaps, had the least to say about his positive experiences in the theatre. When asked what his most positive memory was from doing a show, Arnold didn't choose a specific one but said: "I would probably have to say, just like, the friends that I gained doing shows [...] and I think, the most positive thing that I got out of it was being able to be comfortable with myself as a person and understanding others easier."

Monica commented on three aspects: the rehearsal process, leadership opportunities, and her experiences in *Footloose*. She values the rehearsal process because it's

the best time ever and that's the time you really get close to people, and you really learn who people really are. [...]
During rehearsals is when you have the time to have fun and be with friends, and definitely the rehearsal period is kind of the time that I love most when the show is fun because you just get to have a blast every day.

She also credits two positive leadership experiences she was given by one of the directors at the Playhouse who has also been one of the most influential persons in her theatre career. This director gave her a chance to be an assistant choreographer on one production which was great for her "because I got to learn what goes into it," and he also gave her a chance to be dance captain for a show "which helped me learn how to teach people."

Finally, Monica responded that her most positive memory was when she worked on *Footloose* with her friends and her mother. It was the last show she did with many young people she had grown up with through the Youtheatre program, and they got a chance to hang out “24/7.” Her experience on *Footloose* was also one of the experiences that Monica would never forget. She talked about the feelings she had on opening night: “At the end, the very end, like this is our encore, we just stood there and everybody stood up, and it was a full house and they just clapped for like, probably like two minutes, and we were just standing there like, ‘oh my gosh’.” Recognition for a job well done is an important part of the process and one that makes the participants feel better about themselves.

Rose spoke about the show *Velveteen Rabbit* twice in a positive light. This was the first show that she had a character name—Mugsy: “When I found out that I had a name in *Velveteen Rabbit*, I was over the moon ‘cause I was like, ‘Oh, my gosh I have an actual [name]. Oh my gosh, I’m not just chorus. I have a name. Amazing’.” This was also her most positive memory about performing in a show:

I was saying something, like maybe saying “heavy,” like
“heavy” (she says in spacey voice) because I was kind of spacey.
I just remember I was onstage and the spotlight was in my
eyes, but I was saying my little spiel and these people just
kept laughing so hard, and this one guy in kind of the front
was laughing really hard. I guess, that just made me feel really
great. That’s probably one of my favorite memories ‘cause
I was like, “Wow, this is awesome that they love me.” I was

feeding off the crowd and it just made me perform better I think.

Just having a name and getting some laughs from the audience made her feel good about herself, and made her want to perform better and continue doing theatre. As directors, we can help young actors feel good about themselves by making sure that their roles are important to the production and they are given opportunities to shine.

Rose spoke positively about her first director (me) when she was asked who had been most influential in her theatre career. She at first felt “weird” answering the question that way because I was the interviewer, but she went on to say why her experiences with me, especially being the first one, were so influential on her theatre career: “You just made it really positive for me, and made me want to keep doing it I guess, ‘cause you know I was like, ‘wow, Craig’s, he’s’ well (laughs) at the time, in my head ‘he’s the nicest director I ever had’ even though you were like the first one I ever had. You just made it really fun. [...] Without that being my first play, I don’t know if I would have gone and done more.” Directors, especially those who work with youth, are constantly shaping the way that their actors view the theatre and their experiences, and directors have a responsibility to ensure that these students have a sense of fun and positivity so that they will hopefully come back, keep auditioning and be a part of theatre in general, whether it be as a performer or an audience member. Those who have negative experiences will be less inclined to continue and be a part of theatre in any way.

Helen spoke about many positive moments in her theatrical experiences including: opening night, having a lead, having leadership roles, and an exceptional moment performing a musical theatre song. She loves opening night because to her it means “performing,” and she loves “when you’re the first one, *Anne of Green Gables*, I

was the first one people saw, so you're sitting there behind a curtain waiting for the curtain to open, and I think it's just the most magical experience ever." Next, one of her most positive moments was when she was Annie in *Annie* in a school production because it was the first show she was in and she had the lead. It was also positive because "after that, I never got a lead again, like for a long time."

Like Monica, some of Helen's most positive experiences came from productions where she had leadership positions. Monica had a director (the same one as Louise) at the Playhouse who was influential on her theatrical career. Helen believed that I had a similar influence on hers. Helen spoke positively about being able to choreograph numbers and to assistant direct for me; however, she found *Q³*, a show that I wrote and a show that she directed at eighteen years old, to be one of her most positive theatrical experiences. She believes

it was a good, positive experience for me personally because I kind of got to build myself, and I had to prove myself a couple of times to parents, to be like, I can do this. I promise I am responsible enough to trust your kids with me for the day and it will be fine, and to really kind of take charge with everything, and I guess I didn't know how much was going to be involved with directing.

Finally, Helen's experience that she will never forget happened at college and is what I would like to call an "aha moment," or a moment when everything just made sense to her. She was in a musical theatre class where most of the students were not that interested in the topic, and everyone had to sing a musical theatre song that they had

never heard before which was chosen by the professor. The professor chose the song “Perfect” from the musical *Edges*. After “tearing apart” her initial performance, the professor had Helen over the next hour of class analyze the song based on the text without any knowledge of the whole piece. At the end of the hour she performed again. This is how she felt:

I just cried through the song and meanwhile the whole time he’s videotaping the class and doesn’t tell you that he’s videotaping class, so at the end, he shows you the final take of when you finally perform your song, and I think it was the best I ever performed anything ever and to take every word apart in a piece and to dictate it and to say, you know, I don’t have to do movement with this work if I just stand there and I just, you know, find this inner power energy that it was just awesome, and it was one song, and the song’s over in like three minutes, and the last time I performed it, when I’m standing there bawling my eyes out and crying and singing this piece and then at the end of the song, the recorded track that you’re singing from is done, and everybody’s just sitting there and they’re crying and they can’t clap because they’re just like, it was amazing.

Helen’s positive experiences happened both in class and in performance.

Summary

Each participant had a variety of responses in regards to what they felt were positive experiences in theatre. Among the most popular positive experiences were: the

actual act of performing in productions, being among friends, landing lead roles or roles with names and/or lines, and being part of a cast with a sense of unity/ensemble. What impact does this have on educators/directors? The participants mostly enjoyed when they were cast in lead roles or in named roles with dialogue; whereas under negative experiences, more than one participant spoke of a dislike for shows where they were “just” in the chorus or had very little to do. How do we keep students/actors feeling positive about their work and connected to the production if they have small roles? Some productions require choruses or small parts, so actors will be cast in these roles, and directors expect them to be as committed to these roles as those who have the leads. To keep them committed, actors have to feel that their time isn’t wasted, that their role matters, and that the director notices and values them.

The other aspect that arose in numerous parts of the interviews is cast unity. Almost every participant spoke of a time when there was “drama” in the cast, young people being mean to each other, the director yelling for various reasons, and people not committed to the show. A few spoke about casts that were delightful to work in which there were no problems. In fact, some of the participants spoke about how their ideal experiences would include a cast that liked each other and got along. If directors could consistently create an atmosphere where there is little “drama” (even though there are big personalities), young actors may be less likely to turn away from participating in the theatre.

Finally, as part of the initial research question I wondered if these positive experiences made a positive *impact* on their lives. In the previous section, the negative aspects didn’t seem to have lasting negative impacts, but the positive experiences seem to

have had positive impacts. The participants spoke about how these experiences helped shape who they are today: being comfortable with selves, finding long-lasting friends, gaining leadership skills, and having more self-confidence.

How are the experiences of the high schoolers similar to the college students?

Different?

I originally included this as a primary research question because I believed that there would be quite a few differences in responses between the high schoolers and college-aged participants; however, that is not the case. Throughout this chapter, I have noted what responses are from high schoolers and which ones were from college participants. In almost all cases, the participants from both groups had similar responses; however, most of the college students went further in depth than some of the high schoolers. This may be the case because four of the high schoolers were interviewed in the summer after their freshman year, and only one was going into his senior year.

Summative Themes

Based on the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the participants, I constructed six major themes from their responses:

- Theme 1: Students and actors are more likely to continue in theatrical endeavors if they have fun during the process.
- Theme 2: Friendship encompasses all aspects of theatre including: things learned, things translated to everyday life, and both positive and negative experiences.
- Theme 3: The theatrical experience allows for and nurtures personal growth and understanding.

- Theme 4: Leadership roles in a production (e.g., choreographer, dance captain, director) and being cast in a lead or speaking roles create more commitment from the participants than having little or no responsibility and being cast in the chorus or in non-speaking roles.
- Theme 5: Cast unity, or the forming of familial relationships, creates positive experiences for those involved and makes the participants want to continue on their theatrical journeys.
- Theme 6: Backstage drama, misbehaving/non-committed cast members, and cast cliques bring negativity to the entire production and make some participants less inclined to want to participate in theatrical activities.

These themes will be further explored in Chapter 5—Discussion and Closure.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CLOSURE

In Chapter 4, based on the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the participants, I constructed six major themes from their responses:

- Theme 1: Students and actors are more likely to continue in theatrical endeavors if they have fun during the process.
- Theme 2: Friendship encompasses all aspects of theatre including: things learned, things translated to everyday life, and both positive and negative experiences.
- Theme 3: The theatrical experience allows for and nurtures personal growth and understanding.
- Theme 4: Leadership roles in a production (e.g., choreographer, dance captain, director) and being cast in a lead or speaking roles create more commitment from the participants than having little or no responsibility and being cast in the chorus or in non-speaking roles.
- Theme 5: Cast unity, or the forming of familial relationships, creates positive experiences for those involved and makes the participants want to continue on their theatrical journeys.
- Theme 6: Backstage drama, misbehaving/non-committed cast members, and cast cliques bring negativity to the entire production and make some participants less inclined to want to participate in theatrical activities.

Each theme is explored further in this chapter.

Theme 1: Fun

While researching Chapter 3 The Literature Review, only two of the resources commented on the idea of fun and each only briefly. In the article “A Qualitative Exploration of Adolescents’ Commitment to Athletics and the Arts,” the authors noted during their interviews with adolescents that “enjoyment was the most common reason why adolescents reported participating in an activity” (77). However, the authors do not explore the concept of fun on its own but break down fun into “being good at [the activity]” and as an “opportunity to see friends” (77). In McLauchlan’s “Keeping the Kids in School: What the Drama Class Tells Us,” she found from questionnaires given to Year IV drama students that 18.5% of students perceived drama (as compared to other classes) was “fun & course motivation to learn” (142).

Each of the articles uses the idea of *fun* as a footnote and does not explore the concept in any depth. As in the article on athletics and the arts, the participants in my study often connected the idea of fun with friendship; however, I believe that the concept of fun is important enough to be discussed on its own. Fun/loving theatre was tied with making friends/spending time with friends as the number one reason the youth participated in theatre. Because the participants had fun, they continued to audition for shows and participate in theatrical productions throughout high school and, in some cases, college.

With a concept integral to many people’s experiences in the theatre, why do few researchers write about the phenomenon of fun? I believe fun is often overlooked because in our society activities generally viewed as fun do not seem to carry as much importance or weight as activities considered “educational,” “artistic,” or “multicultural,”

even though theatre often fits these criteria as well. Additionally, based on the literature available, academic journals or publishing houses are less likely to publish articles and books when the idea of fun is central to the writer's arguments. Finally, fun is swept aside on a daily basis as theatre companies and educational theatre programs apply for money and/or grants. Those in theatre for youth know that to receive money from funding organizations, writing about how their program is "fun" will not bring in grant money. Their program has to *work* with special populations, tie into curricular standards, or do something that will prepare the participants to be better members of society. I agree that these are important aspects of what theatre can and should do; however, participants should also have fun while performing in these programs because it will likely *strengthen their commitment to and engagement with the program*.

So is fun an important aspect of a youth's participation in theatre? Absolutely. First and foremost, the youth's enjoyment of the activity is one of the main reasons that they continue to audition and perform. If they are not having fun, they may audition less or even eventually stop doing theatre altogether. Additionally, some of these participants may be bullied at school, have a bad home life, not succeed at other extracurricular activities, or not be athletically inclined. Afterschool or community theatre programs may be one of the few places where these youth feel comfortable enough to be themselves and to have fun. This activity may be the only time they have fun during a normal day.

So what does this mean for those of us who work with youth in a theatrical setting? It is part of our responsibility to make sure participants have fun in all aspects of the theatre experience from auditions through strike, as difficult as that may be at times.

However, even when there is a sense of fun, hard work and artistic growth must still be accomplished. Creating an atmosphere of fun may be as simple as playing a theatre game at the beginning of rehearsal, after break, or at the end; cracking a silly joke during a particularly long and boring note session; or stopping a dance rehearsal where the actors are struggling with the moves and leading a peppy chant or cheer to get their energy renewed. Fun and growth should be partnered together because fun can help foster a youth's engagement in the theatrical process.

Theme 2: Friendship

Four sources discussed the idea of friendship in the theatrical process but, once again, these sources did not go in depth on the subject. Three of the articles spent a paragraph or less on friendship. In "A Qualitative Exploration of Adolescents' Commitment to Athletics and the Arts," the authors included the making of friends as a sub-category of fun: "it helped them to find a peer group that shared common values and interests" (80). In McLauchlan's "Keeping the Kids in School: What the Drama Class Tells Us," the author combines the idea of "building social networks" with "interpersonal skills" (151). In Hughes and Wilson's "Playing a Part: The Impact of Youth Theatre on Young People's Personal and Social Development," the authors state: "some young people emphasize the importance of having a group of friends away from their regular peer group at school or on the street" (65). Finally, Doyle Ott in "A Phenomenology of Youth Circus Training at Fern Street Circus," explores more in depth how friendship is an element of interpersonal growth. Similar to my study, Ott found: "Some mention friendship as an enjoyable *benefit of* circus training, while others indicated that friendship

is the major *reason for* participating in circus training” (104). As in my study, he also found that this feeling of friendship translated into the performers’ everyday lives.

Making friends/spending time with friends correlated with having fun/loving it as the primary reason youth participated in theatre. Similar to the idea of fun, the idea of friendship has been overlooked for the same reasons: not educational, not important, does not bring in the grant money and/or other funding, etc.. Many of the articles do note the idea of friendship, but they do not explore the idea on its own. They mention it almost as a footnote or combine it with other ideas like social growth, or viewing it is an interpersonal skill. Just like “fun,” I believe that friendship, something that encompassed many aspects of my participants’ lives, should be explored further for its own merits.

Even though the idea of youth making friends may not bring in grant money, it is an aspect that influences most people’s (including youth and adult) lives. Few people choose to separate themselves completely from others, and those that do often do this for religious reasons or because they may suffer from mental disorders. Society runs on human interaction—from public transportation to the classroom to the fast-food restaurant to the home. The ability to get along with others can help a person navigate through his/her life and even perhaps become successful. Learning to get along with others is one skill gained by learning how to make friends, and theatre is just one place where many youth can do this.

How does the theatre allow youth to make friends? Part of it, as Monica told us earlier, is that participants in theatre spend “24/7” together. While this is an overstatement, those creating a production do spend a lot of time together: rehearsals, tech week, performances, and often helping find, make, or borrow costumes, props, and

set pieces. Where spending this much time together could be negative for some people, I believe that it is generally positive in the theatre for one main reason—everyone wants to be there (assuming it's a positive experience) and is working toward the same goal. By being around people with similar interests who may be friendly, youth are more likely to want to spend time with these people at rehearsal, leading into spending time together outside of rehearsal, and finally becoming friends. These friendships often last beyond the production at hand because the people may like each other enough to continue hanging out or, most likely, they may see the same people at the next auditions and be in another show with them. Also, as Helen said, "Thanks Facebook!" She still kept in touch with people that she did shows with eight years ago.

Even though friendship can be viewed mostly as a positive experience, there are ways it can become negative during the theatrical process—cliques can form, participants feel left out, and/or gossip spreads. Even though these things happen, that doesn't mean the participants will blindly side with their friends. Rita spoke about a negative experience in a musical she was in where a clique that included her best friend gossiped and said negative things about other cast members: "she was friends with all those people, so I had to kind of veer away from her which was hard because she was my friend there, but I met a lot of other people, and I knew some people there, so I tried to hang out with them some more." She may not have actively tried to change her friend's behavior but she also did not actively support the behavior either.

As stated in Chapter 4, making friends in the theatre has translated into some of the participants' everyday lives. By being able to loosen up and relax in the theatrical experience, some of the participants explained they were able to make friends more easily

in other areas of their lives. By being able to make friends, these participants are more likely to enjoy their lives and be happy, and I would argue that making friends in theatre will allow these participants to be happier later in their lives as well.

But what does the phenomenon of friendship mean to those who work with youth? I don't believe that it is necessarily our responsibility to help the participants become friends in the process; however, I believe it is important that we foster a safe environment where everyone is treated with respect and kindness where friendships *could* blossom. If a director can foster this experience (speaking from personal experience with shows I've directed), the participants will have more fun, the production will often be better, and the participants audition for other shows. However, if the director shows favoritism (such as treating the lead characters as stars and not valuing the ensemble) or cannot stop cliques from forming, the participants will likely have less fun, the production value will suffer, and those in the chorus may not wish to audition again.

Theme 3: Personal Growth

One theme both participants and researchers agreed on was: theatre helps nurture personal growth. Personal growth included but was not limited to: better understanding of self and emotions, more self-confidence and self-esteem, and becoming less shy. Four articles and one dissertation commented on aspects of personal growth in youth participants. Larson and Brown's "Emotional Development in Adolescence: What Can Be Learned from a High School Theater Program" explored how students are their own "agents in their emotional development" (1096). McLauchlan found that "drama class promotes personal growth and enhances general life skills" and "students who self-identified as shy claimed that drama helped them become more outgoing" (148).

Similarly, in “A Qualitative Exploration of Adolescents’ Commitment to Athletics and the Arts,” the authors noted: “This emerging identity as a participant in a particular activity helped to shape the individual’s perceptions of the context and their motivation for participating in it,” which further led to some students identifying as “an athlete, a musician, or an artist” (87). Additionally, Hughes and Wilson claimed “young people report that taking part in youth theatre develops their sense of self-identity” and the “whole activity of youth theatre is focused on providing young people with the skills and resources to develop their initiative, confidence, ability to express themselves and take risks” (68). Finally, Ott concluded the largest portion of his findings about youth circus participants fell under the umbrella of intrapersonal intelligence and that “*youth circus training means developing one’s personal inner life, self-awareness, and identity in an activity rich with opportunity for self-exploration*” (114, emphasis in original).

Formation of identity is fundamental to all humans. In my study, all ten participants discussed how participating in theatre led them to a better understanding of self, who they want to be and, conversely, who they do not want to be. This understanding of self and shaping of identity occurred in multiple ways: portraying characters onstage and noting how those characters were similar to and/or different from themselves; the ability to take chances and risks; and meeting different kinds of people with varying viewpoints. Youths had agency to form opinions of themselves on their own terms by using the resources surrounding them and could choose to be who they wanted to be.

The idea that theatre helps shape youths’ identities *should* be important to adults who work with youth. Identity comprises the totality of who we are, and it is a great

responsibility to help guide this blossoming self-awareness. Adults can act as role models showing that it is all right to be yourself; striving to create non-judgmental atmospheres in their classrooms and rehearsal processes; allowing students to make discoveries about themselves and their characters; encouraging students to try their hardest and praise them when they deserve it; and watching for students adopting negative characteristics of characters that they are portraying.

Theme 4: Participant Commitment

Seidel's "Theatre Builds Leadership Skills" focuses on how theatre can help the participants develop leadership skills but does not discuss how students, given leadership opportunities, will often be more committed to a production. Perhaps not surprisingly, the participants in my study found that leadership roles in a production (e.g., choreographer, dance captain, director) and being cast in lead or speaking roles created more commitment from them than having little or no responsibility and being cast in the chorus or non-speaking roles.

Commitment of actors to the production can be an issue in community youth theatres and the school program. Giving students opportunities to perform lead roles or take on leadership production roles allow them to feel more committed to the production; however, that doesn't mean that every participant can or should be given these opportunities. Some actors wonder why they are never cast in leading roles. There are multiple reasons why: they audition poorly; they do not have the necessary talent; they struggle with singing, dancing, and/or acting; they are not "right" for the roles available in the productions; they do not put in the time or effort to craft their characters; and they are not able to handle the extra lines or stress associated with having a lead. Even though

every actor is not prepared to take on a leading role, the same actors should not be cast in lead roles in every production. When the same people are cast in large roles repeatedly, it may appear that the director is biased and showing favoritism which may cause other cast members to feel negatively about the production. A director needs to be careful when casting a show and make sure that he or she *bases the cast list off of the auditions* and doesn't cast an actor in a lead role solely based on the fact that he or she has performed well in lead roles before. This will possibly allow more youth to experience lead roles and to feel more connected to a production, and once they've had one lead role, they may try harder at auditions to earn a lead role again.

Whenever possible, I believe that youth should be allowed and encouraged to take on leadership roles that they can handle in a production. Participants in this study felt more committed to and a sense of pride in shows when they were a dance captain; however, that doesn't mean that every young person should be given this opportunity. The youths who took on this position had years of production and dance experience and were comfortable with learning all the dances and teaching them to others. Even if a youth has interest in the position, that does not mean that he or she should automatically be given the opportunity, especially if he or she will not be set up to succeed. If the youth has performed in several shows and has limited dance experience, he or she might feel overwhelmed with the responsibilities; be incapable of performing the functions of the position; and end up feeling more alienated from the production than committed to it. The same reasoning would apply to youth interested in being choreographers, assistant directors, or directors.

Finally, these positions should only be awarded to youth that have years of experience, a passion for the theatre, and a sense of responsibility. They need the experience to understand the ins and outs of the theatrical process; a sense of passion because the road is long and not all of it will be pleasant; and a sense of responsibility because they are in charge of others and responsible for their welfare. If the right youth are selected it can be a worthwhile experience for them and all involved.

Theme 5: Cast Unity and Familial Relationships

The concept of *ensemble* is the foundation of my experience in the theatrical process, whether I am directing or teaching. This foundation existed since I first worked with the college-aged students from this study and has been honed and shaped over the following years up until now. Since this is my foundation to the theatrical experience, I crafted a definition that I use with classes I teach and productions I direct:

An ensemble is a group of individuals, using their individual strengths and working together cooperatively and responsibly, for the betterment of a group, wherein the group becomes just as important as the individual. Our ensemble's goal is to respect one another and use our strengths to create the best theatrical work we can make.

I note this because I worked with all ten participants at least once, and I believe this philosophy has impacted most of them in some way; hence, many of the participants reflected on issues of cast unity (being an ensemble/not being an ensemble) and how the members of the Erie Playhouse are like a family.

Participants spoke about the idea of family under reasons why they participate in theatre; about positive cast unity/forming an ensemble under positive aspects of participating in theatre; and cliques/unsuccessful ensembles under the negative aspects of participating in theatre. Many of the participants' ideal theatrical experiences included a cast that got along and worked well together.

As far as the sources I researched, only two of them commented on the idea of family. McLauchlan notes: "Students repeatedly identified classmates a 'family' or emotional oasis" (144). Ott explores the idea in more depth in his dissertation. Similar to the participants in my study, the circus trainees trained with both biological and *created* family members, and there are both positive and negative implications through this metaphor of the cast as family. Ott found: "*The rich web of interpersonal relationships produces an experience of extended or metaphorical family that leads many who participate in circus training to describe Fern Street circus as a family*" (114, emphasis in original).

As with fun and friendship, the same reasons apply for why this topic is not given much importance or exploration in the theatre for youth field. Many of the reasons that the idea of family/ensemble is important are similar to the themes of fun and friendship—e.g., it makes them want to continue to participate, gives them a place to belong, and makes them happy. From personal experience, I have worked with many youths that do not have "traditional" families (they live with other relatives instead of their parents, live with only one parent, live in blended families, etc.), and/or have families that do not truly understand/support their love of performance and the theatre. This created theatrical family can help replace or supplement what these participants do not receive from their

biological families. For many of these youth, the theatre family accepts them, whereas they *may not* feel truly accepted at home.

Personally (because of my own philosophy), I believe that the creation of an ensemble/family is the most important thing that a director/educator can achieve during the theatrical process. In every class I teach or production I direct, I spend the first week or two playing ensemble games and exercises with the cast to help them bond with me and each other. Throughout the process, I lead these exercises occasionally to reinforce these notions with the cast. When I have achieved creating an ensemble with a cast, I believe that everything else falls into place—less resentment about casting choices (because everyone feels important); cast members help each other out; there is less gossip and cliques; problems that arise can be dealt with in a quick and respectful manner; and everyone is focused on one goal—the creation of a good production. When this ensemble creation is successful, cast members have a positive experience, often feel better about themselves, and want to continue on their theatrical journey.

Theme 6: Negative Attributes

The only source that discussed the negative impact theatre can have on students was Larson and Brown's "Emotional Development in Adolescence: What Can Be Learned from a High School Theater Program." The article focused on how students managed negative emotions that stemmed from anger and stress connected to the production. It was surprising to me that these sources rarely commented on negative aspects that surround theatre because these aspects will always be found to some degree in any theatrical process. Perhaps these authors found their participants did not comment on the negative attributes, or perhaps those researchers who interviewed youth did not ask

questions dealing with negative attributes or that elicited those responses. I believe part of the reason these authors do not comment on the negative aspects of theatre is that they may believe by commenting on these attributes, it may take focus away from the positive attributes of theatre, and the authors do not want to show the theatrical process in a negative light. It's possible that if there are too many studies showcasing the negative attributes of theatre, it could discredit the profession and the good things that participants take away from the art form. It is also possible that the researchers do not come from a theatrical background and do not understand all of the possibilities that exist for negative experiences in the theatre. However, it is still important to explore these negative attributes to determine ways they may be combated or lessened.

Unlike Larson and Brown's article, most of the participants in my study did not discuss getting angry during the theatrical process—the closest was Monica's experience of her senior year in high school and the production of *The King and I*; however, some did talk about being frustrated or stressed out during the experience. The participants in my study mostly experienced negativity based on backstage "drama," actors that were non-committed or misbehaved, and cast cliques that formed during the process. Since these were the attributes most discussed by the participants, the question arises: how can educators/directors combat or prevent these situations?

I don't believe that backstage drama or the formation of cliques can be totally eliminated from the theatrical process. There will always be actors who do not like each other; actors who have conflicting personalities; actors who are "divas," and actors who are jealous of roles other actors earned. Additionally, some cast members may know each other from school, other productions, or other activities like dancing at dance

studios. Even though prior friendships may exist, that does not mean these groups cannot incorporate new people into them or that cliques must form. Similar to what I discussed earlier, I believe most of these problems can be prevented by the director leading the cast in exercises or games fostering collaboration, cooperation, and feelings of cast unity. Many of these exercises are fun for the participants, so if they are already having a good time they will be more likely to establish pleasant relationships with fellow cast members. Much backstage drama stems from cliques and cast members who treat others poorly, so when these cliques can be prevented from being formed (as I explored above) there should naturally be less “drama” during a production. However, even in the best situations, drama still occurs backstage—whether from cliques, boredom (too much time offstage), or actors not being mature enough to be responsible for their own actions.

When this drama occurs, it is not always effectively dealt with. In many youth productions at the Erie Playhouse, older teenagers are stage managers backstage, and their peers or younger children do not always listen to them or respect their authority—sometimes causing even more problems. Sometimes having an adult backstage as well can curtail drama from happening. Additionally, directors will sometimes make general announcements about misbehavior to the whole cast in hopes of stopping the drama from occurring; however, I’ve noticed this approach is rarely successful. Those causing the problems either choose to ignore the instruction, or they believe that the announcement is about other cast members. Sometimes cast members not causing trouble get upset because they are being disciplined for what others are doing and they don’t have behaviors they need to modify. It might be more effective if the director confronts the offending cast members directly and discusses with them the problem at hand.

Finally, participants were frustrated by other actors not committed to the process or who misbehaved backstage. When the participants discussed actors' misbehavior, this was almost always connected to very young children in the cast (approximately 5-8 years old). The Erie Playhouse produces three Youtheatre musicals during a season, and some of these musicals are open to actors ages 5-18 years old. It is not unusual for a larger scale musical (like *Aladdin, Jr.*) to have 100 cast members or more with up to 50% of them under the age of ten. When the participants spoke about misbehavior and cliques, these ideas were usually connected to productions with larger casts. One way to eliminate this misbehavior would be to cast older actors; however, for various reasons, that will not likely happen with most youth theatres.

So what can be done to keep these youths occupied and kept from misbehaving? These are a few suggestions: responsible younger youth can help with scene changes and managing props; they can color pages, play board games, do homework, and/or other quiet activities can be supplied to these youth to keep them engaged while they are not onstage; and responsible adults can stay backstage who are specifically assigned to keep younger actors quiet and well-behaved. Doing one or two of these suggestions may make the theatrical experience a pleasant one for all involved.

Summary

Theatre is a powerful artistic process. I highlighted the power of this process by focusing on the words and ideas of the participants interviewed. By analyzing their words, I formulated six themes about theatre created with youth. I was then able to see what researchers/scholars in the field have focused on and what the youth focused on. The youth in their responses focused primarily on the idea of having fun during the

theatrical process, seeing and making friends, and the idea of having another family with the theatre. They also spoke in depth about some of the attributes of theatre they found to be negative: “drama,” cliques, and uninvolved/trouble-making cast members; and how leadership roles and larger parts made them feel more committed to the production. The one theme that both scholars and the youth explored was the idea of self-growth and understanding.

This document is about the impact of theatre on youth’s lives, and each participant was asked: “How would your life be different today if you hadn’t done theatre?” I believe the best summary for this document is using the participants’ words explaining what they would be like today if they hadn’t performed in theatre. Below is an excerpt from each participant (see Appendix F for each participant’s full response).

The High Schoolers

Tiffany: [...] My brother would have never gotten involved and god only knows what other kinds of things he would have picked up if he hadn’t done theatre. Through doing theatre, I have also inspired my older sister to even push further in being herself and she has let me know that she loves that, and I think that me being in theatre has brought me closer to my friends and even to my mother and my father that they see me doing what I love and doing it well.

Jessica: I wouldn’t have most of the friends that I have now. I’d probably actually be a bit of a snot, I’m not going to lie. [...] I might not even be at the same high school. I’d have different friends ‘cause I chose [school name] because of their advanced theatre, among other things, and that was one of the things that I was thinking of.

Rita: Theatre has been the best experience of my life. I have no idea where I would be without it— probably where I was two years ago and compared to, well, I thought that was fine, but, umm, doing art and writing and all that, but, umm, now that I have this, I mean, why would I want to go back to all of that without it (laughs).

Louise: I think if I didn't do theatre, I would be one of those female jock types. I'd be playing all kinds of sports and stuff 'cause I need to be busy all the time, and I feel like my life wouldn't be as positive [...] I don't feel like I would be as happy as I am now, and I wouldn't know all these awesome people that I do, and I wouldn't have all these great people to look up to like I do, so just stuff like that, like I wouldn't have the same kind of life experiences at all.

Jim: It would be so different. I probably, I would be a lot more boring. [...] I just think it's so weird how I just randomly got into this, and I mean, I never sang, danced, acted in my life before I auditioned for that first show and when I did, it just was this epiphany of epiphanies and I was just like this is perfect for me. I love every minute of it, and I can't imagine if that wouldn't have happened, so I think it is odd how those things just kind of randomly happen, and they end up changing your life.

The College-Aged Students

Roger: [...] I feel if I hadn't done theatre, I would have been more committed to sports and ultimately the conclusion that I've come to is that I probably would have been cut, and I apologize for this, but probably would be a little more of a douche bag than I am, which I could still very well be, but I feel like I would have been more of one because I wouldn't have developed that understanding of human emotion which has soooo affected who I am in the sense that I kind of see it in everything, or try to anyway,

and no, I don't think that I would have been able to gain that through just doing sports [...].

Arnold: I think that it would be definitely different, I mean, I don't even know what my life would be like if I didn't do theatre, just 'cause that's like, like I said, that was my childhood, so I can't even imagine, like I don't think I would've gotten into any sports or anything either. Umm, so, I don't even know if I would have gotten into singing, so I have no clue what my life would have been like, if I didn't do theatre.

Monica: I don't know that any part of my life would be the same. I wouldn't have the same friends. I wouldn't—I picked [college name] because of the First Year Players 'cause I wanted to be part of this group, so I probably wouldn't be at the same university. I would have probably gone to a different high school because I was so into like [teacher] and being in the theatre department and like I just can't even see any part of my life that would have been the same had I not done theatre.

Rose: [...] it was like one of the best experiences I had. I'm really glad that I had—if I didn't have it, I'd be really bummed and really sad that I missed out on so much fun and so many friendships, and I guess I learned a lot [...].

Helen: I'd be like 500 pounds, and like read a book every day because what else would I have? I'd work at Hallmark, and I'd like take a book to read. [...] I think my whole life would be different because I didn't have that—weird, who would I be? [...] I probably would be a librarian because I like the library, and I would have more time to read, and read, like chomp out two books a day. I'd also be like one of those internet people who would make my own world because I don't do anything else [...].

Suggestions for Further Research

Finally, like any good study conducted, this dissertation raises questions and offers other avenues for further study. What seems almost non-existent in the current literature is the effects of F^3 —*Fun, Friendship, and “Family”*—on youth participants. I have labeled these three areas as F^3 in honor of how I work with cast members during tech week and in green room meetings before performances. During tech week, I focus on what the cast needs to work on to make a phenomenal performance and then create an abbreviation or acronym from the first letters of each word (e.g., Projection, Character, Fun equals PCF). Once I have determined the words by myself or with the cast, before each tech rehearsal or performance the cast and crew will chant these words. The chant starts at a whisper with the body in a crouch. As the body rises up, the voice grows in volume until the chant is cheered at full volume. This chant has proven effective in getting the cast members both focused and psyched up to perform to the best of their abilities while concentrating on the meaning of the words chanted and what they have to do to achieve mastery over these concepts.

In the same vein, perhaps if we chant F^3 loudly enough, someone will take the time to conduct a study based on the ideas of Fun, Friendship, and “Family,” and how these concepts impact the youth that participate in theatre. This will show scholars and practitioners in the field (and also those that grant funding to programs) that these are not throwaway concepts. They have a direct impact on youth’s enjoyment and continuation in the theatrical experience.

Fun: There are many layers to this concept and many areas during the theatrical process where the participants experience this feeling. How can fun shape the artistic learning and growth of the young actor?

Friendship: How are friendships created during the theatrical process? How do friendships have a positive effect on the theatrical process? What happens when friendships end during the theatrical process? How does the formation of cliques affect the theatrical process?

Family: What effect does performing with biological family have on participants? How does a cast become a “family?” What are the positive and negative effects of “family” on the theatrical process? These are just a few of the questions that could be further explored in future studies.

Closure

Myself as artist and researcher

After conducting this study, I reflected on how it affected me as an artist and a researcher. I categorize myself primarily as a youth theatre director followed closely as a theatre educator (of all ages), and as I have matured I feel quite comfortable in these roles. However, there is always room for growth in any profession, and by conducting this study I found new ways to grow. Perhaps, most importantly, as an artist I want to recommit to the notion of “fun.” As a young theatre practitioner, I focused more on the theatrical process and on the participants having a good time; however, as I’ve matured and became a professional in the field, I became more obsessed with having a good production and that the youth became good actors. I still would like to direct good productions and help young people become better actors; however, I want to make sure

the youth participants are having a good time. If I can assure that the young actors are having fun, I will likely see them continue to participate and audition. I actively started doing this again with the production I am currently directing, especially since there are a lot of younger actors (under the age of 12) in it. There have been long blocking rehearsals and I noticed that some of the actors have been bored or frustrated, so I have found ways to lighten the mood and get them to laugh while still accomplishing the primary goals of the rehearsal.

The second thing I take from this study as an artist is finding ways to show casting is unbiased. This is much harder to do than reincorporating fun into the process. Many of the participants complained of unfair casting processes (and in some cases I believe that they were right) and feeling less committed to a production if they felt that the casting was biased. Additionally, in my professional/personal life, I have heard the same complaints about how shows were cast. There is no easy solution to the problem.

Yet, one possible solution may be making the auditions as public as possible—meaning all actors watch everyone’s monologues and cold readings; however, this is not usually a practical way of running an audition. Additionally, if I hold callbacks, I would never callback those that I wouldn’t cast, and those actors wouldn’t be able to see how the called back actors performed during auditions to see why they deserved the roles. Additionally, in the school system, I started having a second faculty member attend auditions. I chose another performing arts teacher whom the students respected. When doing this, I found that my thoughts on casting (as far as lead, secondary, and smaller roles) almost always aligned with the other faculty member. And if they didn’t I would consider his or her opinion and reflect on whether I was holding prejudiced opinions

about some of my students because of their past behavior or how they previously performed. By having this second faculty member attend auditions, rarely did I hear any complaints from the students once I posted the cast list.

Finally, by conducting this study I have been greatly affected as a researcher. Before conducting this study, I strongly believed that I would never conduct research or write a scholarly paper ever again, and that this would be my last hurrah as an academic; however, this is no longer the case. After finding and exploring the six themes and discovering what gaps still exist in the literature, I would like to be one of the researchers to investigate these missing pieces. More specifically, I would like to conduct another study where I can explore the effect of F³ on youth theatre participants since these factors were ones that had a great impact on their theatrical careers and made them want to continue in the theatrical process. Perhaps there is a book ready to be written about this subject.

For the Field

It was relatively easy to reflect on how this study affected me as a researcher and an artist; however, it is more difficult to reflect on what the field should take away from this one study and how this study adds to the existing literature. There are three main takeaways for the field. First, there *must be a time and place for youth to have fun in the theatrical process*. Second, there *must be a sense of ensemble or unity during productions*. Third, *youth must be active agents in the theatrical process*.

I explored the idea of fun throughout the entire dissertation and I believe it is one of the most important concepts to take away from what the youth participants said. The youth did not participate in theatre because it was educational, multicultural, or artistic—

they did it because it was fun. Too often adults get caught up in “what are they learning?” and do not consider why they themselves initially got started in the theatre. Most adults would probably say they enjoyed theatre and made friends through the process. As educators and directors, we have a responsibility to make sure there is a place for all students who want to participate, that those involved are challenged artistically and are learning; but we also have a responsibility to create a pleasant and enjoyable atmosphere to create the work. When students are relaxed and happy, they are more willing to take artistic risks. If they are stressed out and/or unhappy, they will shut down and walk through the process. The students need to find joy in creating characters or the production will be stale. Educators must find ways to make educational and artistic endeavors enjoyable to engage the students.

One of the primary complaints from the participants was a lack of cast unity during productions. Youth theatre directors must move past the star system and develop ensemble based productions and class work. Too many students feel as if they are superfluous and that if they are not the lead role that their work is unimportant. Generally, we are not preparing our students for careers on Broadway that operates on that kind of system. If our students continue on the theatrical path, they will likely find careers in schools and universities, regional and community theatres, and in museums or other recreational programs where this is generally not the operating standard. I believe that theatre should be a place where everyone should feel welcome and respected.

Finally, youth participants must be active agents in the theatrical process, especially if they are going to continue to perform or be a part of theatre as an adult. In my opinion, the theatre for youth field focuses too much on youth as audience members

and what benefits they receive from watching a show. Being an audience member is generally not an active experience. Youth audience members are often coached on appropriate audience etiquette, encouraged to sit in their seats and be quiet, and applaud at the appropriate places. Occasionally, the audience might be asked to clap to save a fairy's life, asked which way the wolf went, or asked how the character might get out of whatever predicament he or she might be stuck in. Often, this interaction is superfluous to the action of the show, and the show will continue regardless of whatever the audience does or does not do. I will acknowledge that currently there are more theatre artists attempting to create engaging and interactive productions for audience members—especially those for the very young.

It is important that youth attend theatrical productions, but I believe it is more important that youth are given opportunities to *participate* in the theatrical process. This might mean having more theatre programs in schools, creating more community programs, and having national conferences for youth theatre practitioners to network, learn, and grow. Only a few of the participants spoke about being engaged as an audience member (and that was before they started doing theatre)—they were most committed to and interested in work where they had an active role. They were even more engaged when they had larger roles and were able to tackle production roles that carried responsibility with them. Youth need to be *actively involved* to appreciate and love the theatre.

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APPENDIX A

OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND ASSURANCE APPROVAL LETTER

To: Johnny Saldana
GHALL

From: Mark Roosa, Chair
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 09/24/2009

Committee Action: Expedited Approval

Approval Date: 09/24/2009

Review Type: Expedited F7

IRB Protocol #: 0909004368

Study Title: The Adolescent's Voice: How Theatre Impacts High Schoolers and College Students

Expiration Date: 09/23/2010

The above-referenced protocol was approved following expedited review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without approval by the Institutional Review Board.

Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

APPENDIX B

PARENT AND PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND ASSENT FORMS

Parental Letter of Permission

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Johnny Saldana in the School of Theatre and Film at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand first hand why adolescents participate in theatre and what these adolescents perceive that they might gain from this participation.

I am inviting your child's participation, which will involve a 45 to 60 minute interview, with perhaps one smaller follow-up interview. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your child's actual name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of your child's participation is a greater understanding of how their participation in theatre has been beneficial in other areas of their lives and a fuller understanding of why they do participate in the extracurricular activity. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your child's participation.

Responses will be kept confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your child's actual name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, please call me at (814) 823-1370.

Sincerely,

Craig Kosnik

I _____ (Parent's Name) give consent for my child _____
(Child's Name) to participate in the above study.

Signature

Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact the ASU Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Adolescent Consent Form

My name is Craig Kosnik and I am a graduate student at Arizona State University.

I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more about why adolescents choose to participate in theatre and if they perceive there are any benefits from participating in it. Your parent(s) have given you permission to participate in this study.

If you agree, you will be asked to partake in a 45 to 60 minute interview and perhaps a shorter follow up interview. You will be asked about subjects like: your theatrical experience, any theatrical instruction you have had, the audition process, and why you do theatre. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable, and you may stop the interview at any time.

You do not have to be in this study. No one will be mad at you if you decide not to do this study. Even if you start the study, you can stop later if you want. You may ask questions about the study at any time.

If you decide to be in the study I will not tell anyone else how you respond or act as part of the study. Even if your parents or teachers ask, I will not tell them about what you say or do in the study.

Giving me a verbal “okay” means that you understand this form, have had it read to you, and that you are willing to be in this study.

Subject's Name _____

Date of verbal approval _____

College Student Consent Letter

Dear College Student:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Johnny Saldana in the School of Theatre and Film at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand first hand why adolescents participate in theatre and what these adolescents perceive that they might gain from said participation. In conjunction with interviewing adolescents, I am also conducting interviews with college students to see if they believe that their adolescent participation in theatre has had any impact on their lives as college students.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve a 45 to 60 minute interview, with perhaps one smaller follow-up interview. During the interview I will be asking you about such things as: your past theatrical experience, your past theatrical training, memories of shows that you may have worked on, people you found influential in your theatrical endeavors, and how you might perceive your theatrical experience has impacted your college career. If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them. You may also stop the interview at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Responses will be kept confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your participation in this study, please call me at (814) 823-1370.

By verbally agreeing, you are giving your consent to participate in the above study.

Subject's Name _____

Date of verbal approval _____

APPENDIX C

HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

High School Interview Questions

- How long have you been doing theatre?
- Do you or have you taken performance based classes in the school or community? If so, what types and for how many years? Be as specific as possible.
- Where have you/do you do theatre? Be as specific as possible.
- When was your first audition? Were you cast?
- What is your family's involvement with theatre?
- What do you remember about your first audition?
- Whose choice was it to go your first audition?
- Why do you do theatre?
- What is your most positive memory from doing a show? Why?
- What is your most negative memory from doing a show? Why?
- How do you deal with the negative aspects of theatre (i.e. not getting cast)?
- What has been your favorite role? Show? Why?
- What has been your least favorite role? Show? Why?
- Do you believe that you have learned anything by doing theatre? If so, what?
- What have you learned about *yourself* by doing theatre? How did you come to these realizations?
- Do the things you have learned translate into everyday life? If so, how?
- Do you plan on pursuing a career in theatre? Why or why not?
- Who has been most influential in your theatre career? Why?
- What is one moment from your theatrical experience that you will never forget? Why?
- Is there anything that you see in the theatre you do/have done that you wish you could change? Why or why not?
- If a young child was considering auditioning for a show and getting involved in theatre, what would you say to them? Why?

College Students Interview Questions

- What is your current major? Year?
- If you are not a theatre major, do you still do theatre? If so, in what capacity?
- If you no longer do theatre, why not? Do you think that you will ever do theatre again in the future?
- Have you ever taken performance based classes? Types? Level? Years?
- What is/was your family's involvement in theatre?
- When did you start doing theatre?
- When was your first audition? Were you cast?
- What do you remember about your first audition?
- Whose choice was it to go your first audition?
- Where have you done theatre?
- Why do/did you do theatre?
- What is your most positive memory from doing a show? Why?
- What is your most negative memory from doing a show? Why?
- Do you believe that you have learned anything by doing theatre? If so, what?
- What have you learned about *yourself* by doing theatre? How did you come to these realizations?
- Who has been/was most influential in your theatre career? Why?
- What is one moment from your theatrical experience that you will never forget? Why?
- Is there anything that you see in the theatre you do/have done that you wish you could change? Why or why not?
- If a young child was considering auditioning for a show and getting involved in theatre, what would you say to them? Why?
- How has what you learned from doing theatre translate into your college life? Academically? Socially?
- How would your life be different today if you hadn't done theatre?

APPENDIX D

HELEN'S INTERVIEW

Craig Kosnik: Where do you go to school?

Helen: [Name of college] in [city].

CK: What's your current major and what year are you going into?

H: I am a music education major, voice focus with a theatre minor, and I'm going to be a junior in the fall.

CK: Since you're not technically a theatre major, do you still do theatre, and if so, in what capacity?

H: I am technically on paper a theatre minor, but with the intensive study of my music education major, I haven't been able to take as many theatre classes as I would like to and I probably won't finish my minor in my four years. That being said though, I have done more theatre outside, like just doing shows and auditioning and whatnot, more than taking theatre classes, and I've gotten new experiences at [college] actually that I didn't have before.

CK: So what kinds of things have you done since you graduated high school, theatre-wise?

H: I was props master for one of our plays down at [college], and I had the opportunity to take an advanced musical theatre course with [a man] who's been on Broadway or whatnot or whatever, and we did *A Little Night Music* with him, and I was in that show, and then I am also costume designing a show in the fall when I get back.

CK: Have you done anything in the summer related to the theatre?

H: Oh, yes. Well, when I come back in the summer I am working with the Erie Playhouse, in coordination, we do an Erie Playhouse kids camp that I have been working as assistant musical director for the past two years. Also, last year, last summer I directed *The Jungle Book* which was a cast of twenty-three kids, I believe they were ages seven to sixteen, or something like that at the time, and then this summer I'm working with Craig, you, and I am musical director, I guess is the title and choreographing a number for your show which is in the same Youtheatre program as last summer.

CK: What were your experiences like working as assistant musical director at camp? What things did you do?

H: Well, last year from this year is two different directors who I was working with, and I think it depended on the director because last year I led warm-ups for fifteen minutes, you know, for each class period and I was able to teach a song each week to the kids individually on my own, and then being a voice major, and the guy I was working with

was an instrumental major, so I was able to kind of help their voices along, but this year, this girl who I was working with was also a voice major, and she took charge, and I didn't do much at all, if anything (laughs).

CK: And working on *Jungle Book* and this summer series, how did these opportunities come about for you?

H: Well (laughs), it's through the Playhouse but technically I was given the opportunity, I believe by the good word of Craig Kosnik, telling the Playhouse to let me do this because I have assisted under him so many times, like I've assisted directed him, or I've choreographed for him, or I've done other things, and I expressed an interest in directing. I was given the opportunity a couple of years ago. He wrote a show, and he said, "hey, you know, I don't want to direct it, I'd like someone else to, and I trust you with this," and I was like, "oh my goodness, crazy opportunity," so I took that, and I directed it, and then from there I directed again last summer, *The Jungle Book*, and this summer my schedule was just too busy and we only did one show as opposed to the two we've done back-to-back the other years, so I wasn't able to direct, but I'm still working with him and I appreciated that (laughs).

CK: Well, you are doing theatre, but how do you see theatre involved in your future, if in any fashion?

H: Well, my music ed degree will be K-12 band, choral, and orchestra, which means I can go anywhere, but I really want to teach elementary music because I like kids. I get along better with them in that setting. I work better with that, and that's a pretty demanding job from what I've heard or what I've experienced in my practicum, so I think my only theatre will be if they do a concert, a spring concert and it has little dialogues in it, you know what I mean? I think that will be my only real directing and if, who knows where I'll end up living, but if there's a community theatre there, like the Erie Playhouse has, you know, and I have an opportunity to audition for shows, I think, I'm not going to be able to direct a show, or like choreograph a show, unless it's at the high school level, and if I work in a high school then that would be ample opportunity to do it, but if not they'd probably already have somebody situated, you know, within my district, if I were to say, "hey, can I choreograph," unless they have someone already, so I don't know, it'll probably be more music-based once I graduate.

CK: Now, this is going back, before college, or we can even include college too, but have you ever taken performance based classes, and is so what kinds, levels, amount of years? This can include dance, music, theatre.

H: I took two months of voice lessons before college with a woman who then moved away which was the only reason I stopped, and then I auditioned at the college, and they

said, “you need voice lessons,” and I said, “oh, I totally agree (laughs).” I took a ton of instrumental lessons, and I believe I took one, the Playhouse offered music classes like a while ago, and I took one of those when I was like ten, but I don’t remember anything about it. I’ve danced for, I think, I took fourteen years of lessons cause I started when I was three, and I am still taking dance classes, and I am teaching dance classes too, but I think those are the only, but then in college I started taking some Intro to Acting, you know your Acting 101, Advanced Musical Theatre, Technical Theatre Design, stuff like that.

CK: Dance. What kind of dance and how many years of each, if you remember?

H: (laughs) Tap I took all fourteen years because I like to tap dance even though it’s a dying art (laughs). I took like two years of modern and hip-hop which is just funny.

CK: Were they taught together?

H: No.

CK: Oh I thought you meant modern and hip-hop together.

H: No, I had switched studios and at the new studio I decided, you know, that I was going to take up modern and I was going to take up hip-hop cause I never competed through dancing because I was too busy doing everything else, so I just took them for fun. Then the rest of the years, I took ballet and jazz, I think consecutively, just to have the technical ballet training.

CK: What dance classes have you taken at college?

H: We have like a dance theatre program where it’s student run and we teach each other, so I teach a tap class. Last semester, it was every Monday, but whatever it is, for an hour, and then I took from my friend, I took Pointe classes cause I never had danced on Pointe before, and I thought that would be cool, and then we do like yoga and modern classes, and we teach each other, and then at the end of the year, we perform. We audition each other for our dance numbers, we choreograph a dance number, and then we perform in a big theatre recital kind of a thing for the campus.

CK: What about in high school? Did your high school offer any dance, acting, or music classes? If so, what kind of classes did you take at your school?

H: (laughs) My high school offered nothing. I was in choir and I was in band, concert band, and marching band, and then when you’re in tenth grade, you’re allowed to audition for the vocal ensemble which is, some say the elite group of singers when it’s really not, it’s just kind of the people who want to audition for it, and I took a piano class,

but the choral director who taught the piano class was my private piano teacher for seven years, so that was kind of futile, but my high school just didn't offer classes.

CK: So you took piano for seven years, did you take any other instruments?

H: I played flute for eight years. I took lessons and then piano, and I stopped taking lessons and kind of self-taught. The only like real lessons before college I've taken yeah.

CK: Can you tell me about your experiences with instruments at college?

H: Okay (laughs), well for a music ed degree we have to take a pedagogy course for each instrument. Some pedagogy classes last for two semesters long, so, so far I have taken a semester of brass pedagogy which is every brass instrument, woodwind pedagogy, string pedagogy, piano ped, and vocal ped, and I still have second half of woodwind, second half of string, second half of piano, and all of my voice pedagogy diction courses where you learn how to sing in French, German, Italian, and all of that fun stuff.

CK: I want to go back to high school. So you were in the concert band and marching band, what did you do in those bands?

H: In concert band, I played the flute, and in marching band, I was on drumline, and I was on drumline in college, and then I also played like in the pit where it's like a standing vibraphone, the mallet instruments there when I didn't feel like marching my senior year.

CK: Okay, and you talked a little bit about teaching, what have you taught?

H: The college I'm at, we play (?) in the classroom, your second semester you're there, so my second semester of freshman year, I was in a special education classroom for a week, and at the end of the week 'cause I'm technically a music major, but you have to be in special education for the degree, I taught two days to all of the students who came, who she saw throughout the day, I taught them music classes, so we did like, we sang like "Old MacDonald" and we played with drums and stuff like that, and then I was in a high school band setting for a week, and I conducted a piece at the end of the week, but I didn't teach much there, and then this last semester, I was in an elementary class for three weeks, and the last week I taught the entire week. I taught her curriculum though, and then the final day of that week I was allowed to teach my own curriculum. I teach private voice lessons. I have two voice students when I am at school, and in the summer, I don't have any right now, and then also at school, I have an independent conducting student, who I teach how to conduct cause he felt like that would be fun, and my prof gave me higher marks so I was allowed to teach him. I also have a flute student and a piano student at school, so I have five students.

CK: Now we're jumping to a different section, more about your theatre experience before college. What is or was your family's involvement in theatre?

H: Hmm.

CK: If anything?

H: Nothing. My dad was in a couple shows at the Erie Playhouse, but that was only after I had been in them 'cause my parents have been involved like selling concessions, or whatever when I'm in shows, so they get to know everybody, and then for one of the shows that my dad did, they just needed guys, so they just put like a e-mail out like, "we need guys to sit in"—what, like a jury box?

CK: Yeah.

H: For *Inherit the Wind* or something, so he did just that, but the only theatre experience I've been exposed to is what I put forth on my own, and like they totally support me, they just have no interest to do it themselves.

CK: I know you have a sister, has she done anything with the theatre?

H: (small laugh) Yes, we (large laugh) were in one show together, *The Wizard of Oz*. She was a Munchkin, and there were like one hundred little Munchkins, and she hated every minute of it, but I think, I just think that it was a bad experience, but because of that, she's never wanted to act again, and that's fine because she doesn't like to do things that I have done. She kind of likes to be her own person, an individual.

CK: Has she crewed anything?

H: I was getting there. She prefers in life to kind of be behind the scenes, and not to be shown, whereas I like to be onstage and everybody knows my name. When I directed *Q³* and then I directed *The Jungle Book*, she was backstage for *Q³* and decided she wanted a title, so she was stage manager for *The Jungle Book*, but I mean, she's just behind the scenes but still has fun.

CK: Your parents, do they usher, or do anything else in the theatre?

H: My mom is an usher for the Erie Playhouse, so she does that like once a month, or whatever. They have like their usher team, and they go out to dinner, and I don't know (laughs) but whenever I am in a show, they are more than willing to usher and they'll do concessions and they'll do all that, or when I was out in shows at my high school, they would do, like "oh, I'll help you make candy grams, or I'll help you sell flowers" or you know whatever.

CK: Before you started performing in shows, did your parents take you to see shows? Do you have any recollection of seeing shows?

H: The first show I saw was *The Snow Queen*, and I remember that entire show. I was like six, and I remember that entire show. I still have the program and everything for it, but it was like the coolest experience ever and it was a Youtheatre show at the Playhouse, and I remembered her because she came down the aisle and I was on the aisle seat and she yelled at me with her magic wand or something or other, and it was like the coolest thing, and all the kids around me were crying and I was just mesmerized by how cool this Snow Queen was, so then we got *The Snow Queen* book, and we were on a *Snow Queen* kick for awhile (laughs). We got the movie and whatever, but then we decided, my mom would take me to see *The Nutcracker*, like the ballet that the Lake Erie Ballet, the performance that they do every year because I was into the dance, and I was like, “I don’t want to dance, where’s the singing,” and so then we saw *Sesame Street Live* and they were singing, and that was cool (laughs) and I was just one of those kids though that you would watch a Disney movie and I would know all the songs after the first time watching it, so she was like, “you know, we need to start getting her into something,” and then when I was in third grade, the only reason that I got into theatre was because the high school, in my school district, sent out a thing that said, “we’re doing *The Sound of Music*, and we need kids,” so I was like, “oh that would be cool,” so I auditioned for *The Sound of Music*. I didn’t get it, which is fine, but I mean, I was heartbroken, but it’s okay now (laughs), and then I didn’t audition for anything else cause we didn’t even think about the Playhouse, and then in fourth grade they did it again for *Annie*, and I was chosen to play *Annie* through the audition process, so from there, I went to the Playhouse, and did twenty some shows or whatever I did throughout elementary and high school.

CK: So you were in fourth grade then when you started doing actual shows?

H: Yep.

CK: Okay, you mentioned a little bit about your first audition. You said you weren’t cast. What do you remember, if anything, about this first audition for *The Sound of Music*?

H: Umm, I know I was too short because they had already cast the high schoolers who were playing each part, so they had lined us all up onstage before we even sang—it was like the Disney audition all over again, and I was too short, and they were like goodbye, and I didn’t even sing, but that’s all I remember.

CK: Okay. Was *Annie* your next audition?

H: Yes.

CK: Do you remember anything else about *Annie*?

H: It was a whole year later, and I know cause I really wanted to do it that I had stayed after school and my mom came in and we sat with like the elementary piano, like the music teacher, you know, and she sang, we killed “Tomorrow” and sang it so many times, and then I remember being in there, it was like in fourth grade, so I slept at 9 o’clock, and we there until like midnight that night because there was so many kids auditioning for everything, and they just kept eliminating and eliminating and I was always in from the beginning, I was always in the Annie line. There was like an Annie line and a Molly line ‘cause (?), and I was in the Annie line from the beginning, and then we there until like midnight, we went home and I was down to like the last five, and then he called me, the director called me at like 12:30, and said, “you’re wearing the wig,” and I was like “woooooo!” My mom let me sleep in the next day and go to school late, (laughs) and that’s what I remember from that.

CK: Going along with this, whose choice to go on your first audition? Was it yours?

H: It was mine, yeah cause well, like when the director had e-mailed the music teacher for the elementary school and she was telling us all about it, I was like, “oh that’s so cool,” and me and a couple of friends, you know, went out to do it, and it was actually my really good friend, who was really good friends with at the time, got the part I wanted, and I didn’t, but that’s okay. (laughs) We don’t talk anymore, so there’s that.

CK: Was it because of that role?

H: No, I mean I don’t know, it might’ve been. Bitter. (laughs)

CK: Okay, where have you done theatre?

H: Where have I done theatre? Well, at my high school, [name of school], at the Erie Playhouse, Northeast Community Players, I did a couple of shows, well, I assisted, I guess a couple of times, I think I was only in one—no, I was in two, and then [college] now, [name of college].

CK: What kind of stuff do you do at [college]?

H: Well, [college’s name]’s set up in a very odd way that we do one musical every other year, and we do an opera on the opposing years, and then we do three straight shows, and four straight shows on the opera years.

CK: You mean plays?

H: Plays, yeah, straight plays, sorry. I’ve never done a straight play before, not a college level straight play, you know what I mean? I’ve done the fun, like out at Northeast we

did *Scraps! The Ragtime Girl of Oz* or something, and it's just like silly, but I've never done like a real, like *Rabbit Hole*. We did *Rabbit Hole* and that was just crazy, you know, and we did *Misanthrope*, stuff like that, but I've done, I'm sorry to say, I've done a lot of opera down at [college] too which is a theatre experience in itself cause it's not through [college theatre program], it's through the Music Department program, and I was in the last, we put together like opera scenes 'cause it wasn't a full year opera year, so we did like a bunch of love scenes about brides who want to be brides and yadda yadda yadda, so I choreographed it because I was supposed to sing, and then they found a girl who wanted to sing, really wanted to sing, and I said, "that's fine, I'll just choreograph," cause I really didn't feel like singing opera (laughs) even though I'm trained. I don't really like singing opera, so I choreographed it, and then she said, "oh, wouldn't it be funny if you were, dance around onstage, like in a little Cupid outfit, and shot paper planes off of a bow at people to make them fall in love while they're singing their opera song and blah blah blah," and I was like, "oh, hahaha, that's funny, you're kidding, sure, of course I'd do that, hahaha." Well, came tech week and boom I was Cupid and dancing around onstage, climbing ladders, and shooting arrows at people, so that was a fun theatre experience.

CK: At your high school, because you were talking about plays, did your high school not do any plays?

H: Nope. We did one musical in the spring every year. That was it.

CK: We were also talking about where you did theatre? Did you do shows at any churches, your church, or anything?

H: Oh, good point. Not at my church 'cause we never did that.

CK: They didn't even do the Stations of the Cross?

H: Yeah, we've never done that. I did do *Children of Eden* the musical out at Our Lady of Peace which is like forty-five minutes away. Must have been my senior year, the summer before my senior year, it went into fall. We were supposed to perform at Cathedral Prep, one of the high schools in Erie, and it ended up that we just performed it out at OLP.

CK: Did you ever do any of the youth camps, like Youtheatre, Footlights, the Diocesan shows?

H: The only one out of those three that I have done is the Youtheatre camps. I think I did the required two years of regular camp where you just put on a concert at the end of the week or whatever with everything you've done, and when I was able to the third year, whether it was from camp or shows, I don't know, I would have to look at the timeline. I

did *Babes in Arms*, and I for some reason, even though it was my first year of Encore Camp, like the elite camp, I got a lead, and I hated it because I was never in the classes with my friends, if you go with friends, you know, to be with your age group, and I was never with them because I had to be, you know, cause all the older kids were in the same class, so I would go to their class, and it was like, it was just sad, and I don't remember it, and I stopped doing camp because I was stressed out. I was like eleven, and I was stressed out because I couldn't learn lines in a week, like I didn't know how to learn lines in a week. I didn't know how to learn dances in a week. I didn't know how to learn songs in a week. It was just crazy, and somehow the show went on, but that's all I remember, and I stopped doing camp, and I never knew about Footlights until like last year. Didn't do Diocesan shows.

CK: Did you ever audition for any of those?

H: No, I like competition, and the Diocesan shows, everybody gets in, and you picks parts from there, but everybody gets in, and I feel like if I prepare because I prepare weeks in advance for an audition, no matter what kind of an audition it is, whether it's a dance, vocal, or a monologue, or whatever, and I don't like that from all that prep, you're in anyway, and from that they pick, so I've never done one of those shows.

CK: A broad question, why do you or did you do theatre?

H: That is really broad.

CK: Yes, there's probably more than one reason, but tell me all the reasons that come to mind.

H: I guess, I always liked music, like music was kind of my thing, so when it was like, let's audition for a show, and let's sing, let's dance, it was like, "oh, I can dance, I can sing," you know, I can actually do this, 'cause my dad always wanted me to be athletic, and I don't have athletic abilities at all, so that wasn't going to happen, so theatre was like my niche, and it was cool cause then you see everybody afterwards and they're so proud of you, and they're like, "oh my gosh, that was great, I didn't know you could do that," and you're like, "yes, I can. Let me show you more," you know, and then I got like spotlight fever, where you're, I just love being onstage, but now I prefer, I love to perform, I really do, but I really prefer to be on the opposite end right now at least where I am at. I don't know if it's like my teaching experiences that like where I want to be a teacher and I want to watch and I want to mold people into what they can be, so I feel like I want to be on the opposite end which is why [college]'s given me the opportunities, you know, or like when I directed here. I've done props, and you're picking out the patterns that you want the kids to do for their costumes, or you know, I'll be sewing

costumes in the fall, and stuff like that. I really enjoy being behind the scenes, I don't know. I think that's where I am right now.

CK: Okay. Well you said a lot about that you liked music, and from knowing you, I know that you have done a lot of plays too, why did you audition for plays as well because as we both know, plays and musicals are completely different.

H: Extremely, yeah.

CK: What drew you to the plays?

H: Well, I prefer musicals over plays at any level, like whether it's professional or whatever, but I prefer to see musicals, or I prefer to be in a musical, but I think plays are more, they just give you a different opportunity 'cause in a musical, if you can't act, within five minutes you're singing and dancing, so it doesn't really matter, like it doesn't, they say be a triple threat, like be a singer, dancer, actor, whatever, and I consider myself a singer first, then a dancer, and then an actor because I've done more musicals than plays. I don't have the acting chops, so I think, I did plays to try to build upon that wherever it is, to try to build some kind of an acting repertoire for myself because I wasn't sure what I was doing, you know, in life or whatever, and like, I still even at college, I still would rather do a musical than a straight show, but I think it's just a different experience, a different opportunity, and different directors, you know, like you have more directors come out to do a straight show, then you do, like the musical is always the same person, and I like working with new people and I like their experiences, especially after directing, after being on that end, then you're like, "well, that's how they do that, that's really cool, I can take that from them," or I don't know.

CK: Continue along with the whys. Are there any social whys? Were there any social reasons you did theatre?

H: I didn't have a lot of friends in high school (laughs).

CK: That wasn't what I was saying, but you can go there.

H: I'm going there. I had more friends at the Erie Playhouse, like the Playhouse family. I was closer with them, than I was with my high school friends, like I mean, I'm still friends with a close-knit group of girls. There's like five of us that hang out all the time, but like I really was closer with the Playhouse people which is crazy because they come from everywhere, but you only see them then, and I'm like a homebody and a family person, I'd rather just stay at home, than hang out with friends anyway, so it was okay that they lived far away, and you couldn't hang out with them, but I think socially it's a fun group of people, and like, I still talk to people I did shows when I was like eight, you

know, like thank you Facebook (laughs), and I don't know. It's just yeah, I think it's a social thing too.

CK: Before I move on, are there any other whys that are jumping in your mind?

H: I like to be the center of attention which sounds really bad but it's true, so I think theatre gives you that and people have to watch you which is like awesome, but they have to watch you, and they have to clap for you, but I mean, I guess they don't have to, but they do (laughs) and they do clap for you, and it's like the most gratifying experience, I think.

CK: There's nothing better than getting applause at the end of a show. There really isn't.

H: It's true.

CK: Even I feel like on the other end as a director, even getting applause then, them applauding your show, there is nothing better than that.

H: Right.

CK: What is your most positive memory from doing a show and why? Or it could be a couple.

H: I think the whole *Annie* experience was positive because it was like the first show that I ever did, and I was the lead.

CK: And who directed that? I am just curious.

H: [Man's name], yeah, 'cause he was still at [name of high school] at that time, and then [woman's name] choreographed—there was a lot of train steps (laughs). So I think that was just a positive experience, but I think it was also, it was positive because after that, I never got a lead again, like for a long time, so I think it kind of, it was good to be like yeah, I can do it, but then it was like once you got to the Erie Playhouse there's a heck of a lot more competition, so then you really need to step up your game, you know what I mean? I think it was positive in that helped me kind of build myself, like you know, I thought about, "well, what if I took piano lessons, and then I'll be able to read this music," you know what I mean, and then I would be able to pick more songs to audition, or what if I (?).

CK: You have one or two more if there's anything else that jumps up to you as a really great experience.

H: Directing *Q*³ was a good experience. *Jungle Book* was not.

CK: We can even talk a little bit about that too if you want, but—

H: Okay, well directing *Q³* was fun. Well *Jungle Book* and *Q³* were both twenty-three kids. I don't know why I liked that number. Actually, it's my least favorite number in the whole world, but so that's ironic, (laughs), but it was actually most of the same kids, but it was just like a new group and *Jungle Book* cast was horrendous to work with, anyway, so *Q³* was positive because I was—well, I was eighteen...

CK: Yeah, I think so.

H: Yeah, so it was a good, positive experience for me personally because I kind of got to build myself and I had to prove myself a couple of times to parents, to be like I am, I can do this, like I promise I am responsible enough to trust your kids with me for the day and it will be fine, and then you know to really kind of take charge with everything, and I guess I didn't know how much was going to be involved with directing, like you know all the behind the scenes, all the paperwork, and you know, always e-mailing people, and typing this up, and typing that up, and it was just like, but it was a good experience because it helped me, you know, I stayed organized, and I think it just helped with this is the real world, you know, this is what you're going to be doing, and so it was good. *Jungle Book* was bad.

CK: Do you want to say what was bad?

H: Sure, let's talk about *The Jungle Book*. When we first got *The Jungle Book* like when we decided on *The Jungle Book*, I loved the script 'cause it was so cool because Rudyard's sitting with his book and he's writing the book of *The Jungle Book*, and it would phase over to *The Jungle Book*, and it was the neatest script ever, and then, I don't know if it was a strange batch of kids auditioning, but I like to give people a chance, which kills me in the long run because then I get some very interesting characters to work with, and even more interesting than that are their parents, and I had a lot of parental issues in *Jungle Book* like just not necessarily bad things even, I only had two kids drop out because of their parents, and one kid is now probably attempting to be on Broadway and he's not going to make it but that's okay—abs boy.

CK: Oh.

H: Should I tell that story?

CK: Sure you can.

H: I have this little boy, and this is his first audition ever, and he wants to be Mowgli, and will only be Mowgli which is why he dropped out of the show because he's not old enough to be Mowgli, and whatever, he's like six, and he's like, "Jack be nimble, Jack be

quick, Jack jumped over my candlestick, Look at my abs,” and he lifts up his shirt and has abs and it was the funniest, most hilarious thing ever, so I asked him, “so do you have another monologue,” trying to get him to actually say something, and it was pretty much like, it was some other nursery rhyme, and then it was like—

CK: It was “Humpty Dumpty” maybe?

H: It was “Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Look at my abs,” and I was like, oh my gosh, and that was awful, and his parents are like, “well, you know, we’re going to move to New York City,” and I was like, “goodbye,” and that was my phone call with them, so poor kid, but I don’t know, it was just a weird kind of group of kids, and then I had never had the experience where they just didn’t show up to rehearsal, you know, and it was like three people, you know what I mean, it was just the same people or like five minutes before rehearsal and they would call me and they were sick quote, unquote, you know, and I don’t know if they were really sick or not, but it was just like, you’re missing another rehearsal, and then five minutes before rehearsal, I can’t cancel it if I’m missing three people. I don’t know they’re not coming and it was just like, then it was awful because, I don’t think the kids had as good as an experience, you know, cause we played games for two hours, or an hour and a half because you can’t, you can only do so much with a scene when you’re missing your three main people, and then because those three main people are never there, they never know their lines, and they don’t know their lines come dress rehearsal, you know, final dress rehearsal, and I hate yelling, I despise yelling, I will not yell, find any other way to get people’s attention or to get it into their heads that they have to do something, except yell, and I had yelled more than I’ve yelled ever that tech week, and I felt awful for the kids, and then you have parents watching and like the kids that aren’t doing anything wrong, and you know, I mean, I sent out an e-mail like everyday where I was like, “just to let you know, I’m very sorry for yelling at the entire cast, when you know who you are and you’re not doing anything wrong,” but I felt like I had to apologize, and I had to acknowledge everything that I was doing, and it was just, it was bad, and then when you have parents there of the kids who keep missing rehearsals, who are like talking to you, saying you know, “why are you yelling so much at my child,” and it’s just like, it was bad (laughs).

CK: Well, then this is sort of going with this next question, and maybe this isn’t your most, but what is your most negative memory from doing a show and why?

H: I think that. I really do because like, I have negative memories from auditioning for shows and not getting the parts I wanted, but then like even if I was in the chorus, sometimes the chorus does more in a show anyway, you get to dance more, you know and you get to still hang out with the same friends, and you know, so like, I feel like those are just learning experiences, not negative, but I think *Jungle Book* was an all-in-all

negative experience, and that's why I'm not directing this year. I just needed a break (laughs).

CK: Do you believe that you have learned anything by doing theatre, and if so, what?

H: I think, I've not necessarily become a better person, but I've become a better me because I know where I'm going or what I'm doing, and like, I think theatre it helps me. I'm not afraid to speak out, to say anything, or like, I don't know, I'm president of like ten organizations at [college] which is awful but that's okay. Just because I know, like and I'm organized enough from directing or like, I can voice my opinion well, or I know how to like write, and I know how, you know, to project my voice, or whatever. I've never had trouble with a speech class or anything like that, but I think theatre, it's a special kind of a person who does theatre, and I think I just get along really well with those people, and I like those kind of people, but what I think I've taken from it is just like, that's who I am now. It's just kind of like in my DNA, part of what I do, like my dream vacation would be to go to New York and see shows for a week, you know what I mean. It's just kind of what I do now. I don't know, I just think I've become more aware of myself and my strengths and my weaknesses and I think it, being on a stage, performing and everybody watching you, you know your strengths, and that's what you get your applause for, but you're very aware of your weaknesses, and I think that was a hard thing for me to do, but it was really good.

CK: Going along with this, how do you think theatre did this opposed to volleyball, or yearbook, or some other extra-curricular activity? What do you think theatre did specifically to help do this?

H: When I said I'm president of organizations, I mean president. I don't mean I worked my way up, I mean I like to be in charge. I like to be, I do. I like to be the center and I like to be in charge, so it was like in theatre, it's somewhat of a team, but even if you're in the chorus, and even if there is a hundred people dancing in a chorus line, and you're the only one smiling, you're the one, and you know it, that everybody's watching, so it's like, volleyball, no you're a team, you know, I mean, you're a team and you do team funness, but like, no, I mean, even though when I direct I say, "oh, let's play team-building games," it's really like, no, you know how to make yourself stand out in a good way, at least I know the good ways. Some people know bad ways, but (laughs) so I know how to make myself stand out, and I know how to do that, and that's why I think, yeah. That's a really bad way to end a sentence (laughs).

CK: Okay. That's fine. I think you already covered this, unless you have anything else you want to say, but what have you learned about yourself by doing theatre, and how did

you come to these realizations? You said you learned “me.” What does that mean? How would you describe Helen?

H: (laughs)

CK: I’m sort of joking, but not really.

H: I know.

CK: How would you describe yourself and how has that helped by being in theatre?

H: I would describe myself as kind of, why I’m always smiling, I think (laughs), and I like to be happy because I know that’s what people want to see (?), but then it’s just become, like onstage, people want to see you smile, and then I was like, “well, that’s fun,” so that just sort of became me, you know what I mean, or like if you’re more spunky or active or running around for this practice or that practice or that practice, like I’m still running around. I’m always going to this practice or that practice, like and I think I like being active, I like doing things. I like, I’m a happy person. I’m a very organized person, which is, I think theatre helps you, even if you’re in shows, I don’t know.

CK: Who has been or was most influential in your theatrical career? Why?

H: Umm, it’s gonna sound bad that I’m saying you, like on your interview.

CK: It’s fine, if it’s—

H: But it’s true. Craig Kosnik is the most influential person in my theatre life. So (laughs), but seriously, it’s because like when, I don’t know, there was a streak for awhile where I wasn’t, I don’t know if it was age or height or whatever, but I was auditioning and auditioning for shows at the Playhouse and I just wasn’t, there was like a two year period where I just wasn’t in shows, but then you were doing like, that’s when the Summer Play Series started up, cause you were doing a summer play, and I was like, “well, I’ve never done a play before, why not, let’s try out for this one and get booted off.” And then like, I got a part, and it was like, “well that’s cool,” and like, your experiences, you as a director personally is different from any other director that I’ve experienced. I don’t know if it’s because the most straight plays I’ve done are with you, you know what I mean, and I’ve done musicals and that takes a different kind of director, and that’s fine, but it’s like, you know, let’s be a team or let’s, we can play these games, or we can build upon your character, so then I was like okay, and Craig did it the next summer and the next summer, and I was like, you know, “Craig gave me a good part, let’s see if Craig will give me another good part,” and honestly, you’ve given me the best

parts, like the best roles that I've had at least until [college] 'cause at [college] I got, you know, some pretty nice roles.

CK: Or you earned.

H: Or I've earned. Earned, whatever, so I *earned* these roles with Mr. Kosnik and (laughs) I don't know, it's just that, and then it was like, I had expressed, you know, he knew I danced, so like five years ago or something, you were like, "hey, I'm doing this show out at Northeast, do you think you could choreograph a number for it?" and it was like, "yes" and then I was like, "I would love to teach," and then that brings in my teacher, like the teacher part of myself, so it was like, "yeah, I would love to teach a dance," you know, and then you were like, "hey, what if you assistant direct me," you know, cause I had expressed interest in that and we just, I think, through that then is how I was assisting you, and then I directed your show that you wrote which was amazing, kind of didn't hit me until after I directed it that I directed the show you wrote while you watched me direct your show, like that's incredible, like because I wrote a show for my high school like a Christmas play, you know, whatever, and it's just like, I could never allow anyone else touch it, of course that would be like me, being commanding and in charge and in powerfulness. But that was just like, that didn't hit me until afterwards that I directed the show that you wrote and I was like, "I can do it," you know, so I directed again. For the show you wrote, you did look over my shoulder and I totally understand that and I'm cool with that, but then it was like, I'm going to do it next year, and he's not going to look over my shoulder, and I'm going to do it, you know what I mean, and it was like, "wow, I can do this," and it was, but I wouldn't have done it cause who else would I have assisted? Do you know what I mean? Looking back, it's like, people at the Playhouse have assistant directors, but they copied papers, do you know what I mean. It's like, it was just a different experience, so it was like sweet. Again, a bad way to end a sentence.

CK: This could be positive too, but what is one moment from your theatrical experience that you will never forget and why?

H: That's a tough one.

CK: Once again, it could be one or two.

H: Yes, now this is at [college], is that okay?

CK: Yeah, yeah.

HJ: I was in, I took an Advanced Topics in Musical Theatre course with [man's name], and he, I mean there were like twelve of us in the course, but there was like only five of us who wanted to really be there 'cause you have theatre majors, but like my friend

[name] for instance, she wants to be props design for the rest of her life, so she could care less to be in a musical theatre class, but she has to take it for her major, so there's only five of us who honestly really care. So we each, he picked a song for us, a song that we had to swear that we had never heard of before, you know, he pulled it out of nowhere, and for like the five of us, we all played piano. We weren't all music majors or whatever, but we all played, so we would play it. He would give it to us, the class is an hour long, he would give us the song, ten minutes to play through it and memorize it, and then we would perform it, as if it were a mock audition, and he would just say go. So you performed it, and he tore me apart on this song. It was "Perfect" from the musical *Edges* which I don't know if you ever—well, exactly, I never heard of it, which is the point, and then he tore me apart, so then for the rest of that hour, each of us were given a class period, so for the rest of that hour, you were spent analyzing the song, and what you thought it meant without knowing anything about the musical, or he would tell you subtle hints, and it's more of a powerful song than I ever experienced, and I just like, cried through the song and it was, meanwhile the whole time he's videotaping the class and doesn't tell you that he's videotaping class, so at the end, he shows you the final take of when you finally perform your song, and I think it was the best I ever performed anything ever and it was just like, to take every word apart in a piece and to dictate it and to say, you know, I don't have to do movement with this work if I just stand there and I just, you know, find this inner power energy that like, it was just awesome, and it was like one song, and the song's over in like three minutes, and you know, when you're, the last time I performed it, when I'm standing there bawling my eyes out and crying and singing this piece and then like, at the end of the song, the recorded track that you're singing from is done, and everybody's just sitting there and they're crying, and they can't clap because they're just like, it was amazing. It was just like amazing that from him working crazy diligent and I wanted to kill him, like for an hour and just being able to do this after an hour was like such a self, I don't know, you really, I really dove into myself and found these things—

CK: Awareness.

H: Yeah, self-awareness, like found these things that I didn't know about and was like able to put forth this much emotion and this much energy and like it was crazy. It was awesome. There's a video of it on Facebook—not *the* video, but check it out.

CK: Okay. Is there anything you see in theatre you do or have done that you wish you could change, why or why not?

H: Especially now that I've directed, there was sometimes where directors will just scream, and I just want to change. But I think, I don't know, I'd like to go back and change like my auditions for the things that I just was in the chorus, where like after

you've seen, your mom sees the show and goes, "wow, you could've done better as the lead," or whatever, you know what I mean, and you're like, "well, what did I do wrong," but I don't know if it's something that I would've changed, or if it was simply that I wasn't tall enough, my hair wasn't the right color, you know what I mean, something like that, but I think I would like to go back and watch myself audition for like every show, and be like, "you're doing that wrong, why are you doing that," you know. I don't know, I think that is the only thing that I would change 'cause it was a good experience, like being in the chorus is a great experience. It's just I'd like to know why, what I did wrong. That's what I'm always looking for, is like, tell me what's going on, tell me what's wrong, I don't know.

CK: If a young child was considering auditioning for a show, what would you tell them?
Why

H: (laughs) I think that depends on the child. If abs boy asked me, "can I audition for a show?" I would've said, "yes, you can audition for a show." He said, "okay, I'm going to say a monologue that I can show my abs." I would say, "no, he's going to say this monologue." Do you know what I mean? I don't know. I think it depends on the child.

CK: Let's say, it's a child that they seem excited, and they seem like they're old enough to handle the commitment of being in a show.

H: Okay, well then, heck yes, but that could be the teacher in me too though 'cause I would be like can I mentor you through your audition process. Can I mold you?

CK: In that creepy way you just said it?

H: In that creepy way, yes with the eyes and everything, of course it wasn't video recorded. But no, I think, I don't know, I think it's just a good experience, and like my sister, she did one show and didn't like it and that's fine. She just won't do it again, but I think, and I know a lot of people who've done one show when they're young, and go back to it in college, do you know what I mean, where it's just kind of like, I think it's something to have, a new experience that you can try, if you're not athletic, you know what I mean, I don't know, it's just something, something different, and I think everybody should try it once, twice, three times.

CK: Can you describe your ideal the theatrical experience?

H: Hmmm (with a little laugh)

CK: You can be in any role, what would be your ideal theatrical experience?

H: My ideal experience because there's always those musicals, well for me it's musicals, there's always a musical where there's someday I will play that part, you know, and you get the vocal book and analyze the score, and if there's ever an audition for the show, I will be this part. But honestly, the way I work, like as myself, as Hannah, I want to do a one person show. I want to direct it, I want to perform it, I want to star in it, I want to design my costume, I want to sew my costume, I want to do my props, you know what I mean? Like ideally that would be my perfect show. In real life, will that happen? No way and I don't want it to happen in real life because it would be crazy stressful and my hair would be grey, then that wouldn't work for what the show's about, but I can't have grey hair (laughs). I would want to do a one person show because I don't want to work with anybody because I want to show people that I can do it, I don't know.

CK: Okay. On the opposite side of this, what do you think would be the most negative theatrical experience, like the worst possible theatre experience?

H: *Jungle Book* reunited (laughs). *Jungle Book II* with the same cast and the same people, or just like, I think cause when I was doing *A Little Night Music* with [man], I was struggling with my character because I wanted there to be like more to the character or less to the character at this part, or whatever, and there was just some days, where he just, he wouldn't listen, and I think that in itself is just negative when the actor wants to communicate with the director and it's "help me here, or what do you think of this, or you know, where am I going," and he just won't communicate back. I think that's just negative in itself, so I think if it was an entire run like that, and it was only like a couple of days with [man], and then I sat down with him, and I was like, "listen, we're going to talk through this. We're going to go through my script. We're going to take two hours, and we're going to go through everything." But if I hadn't taken charge of the situation, that would be an extremely negative experience, do you know what I mean, like it, I think there needs to, one with no communication would be awful.

CK: I am going to give you a couple of words and I am just going to have you talk about them. Audition.

H: Hmmm! Um, I prepare for auditions like three weeks in advance, and I am still never ready, personally, so I get myself really worked up, and I get jittery at auditions, and I feel like I am a bad auditioner, and I can't break out of that mold, but also, on the opposite side, is when I am directing I am watching people audition, I hate that because (laughs) I'm like, I'm never, I'm so expressionful, that's not a word, on my face (laughs). I am full of expression on my face, and I just can't hide things well at all. Auditions are just bad news bears for me, like no matter where I am, unless it's with people I've worked with before, like when we're auditioning for our dances at school or whatever, like, if I've worked with her before, I can be like, "[Name], point your toe, what are you

doing?” you know what I mean, and just yell right at her in an audition and she’ll do it, which is like, “thank you. I know you can do it. I know you can,” I don’t know. If it’s new people, I hate it.

CK: Okay. Rehearsal process.

H: (laughs) Rehearsal process, rehearsal process for me is always too long. Rehearsals are always too long. If I’m directing, I talk too fast, and I never know how to fill a rehearsal. If I’m in a rehearsal, I get distracted, like ADD almost, and I’m like, “oh, I have to do this when I get back to my dorm, or I have to work on this paper, I have to do that,” and I kind of lose myself. I have trouble staying in the rehearsal, like I have trouble focusing at a rehearsal, in a rehearsal.

CK: Opening.

H: There’s nothing better than opening night. Opening to me means performing, so I’m going like for the performer and I love when you’re the first one, *Anne of Green Gables*, I was the first one people saw, so you’re sitting there behind a curtain waiting for the curtain to open, and I think it’s just the most magical experience ever, ah and the lights, ah and it’s great.

CK: Closing.

H: Depends on the show cause some shows you’re like, “thank goodness, it’s done,” but I still think it’s a bittersweet experience because there’s good things and bad things, and I think with each closing, I know at least personally, I meditate before and after each closing, and you’re kind of just like, “okay, this is what I did through this run.” Was it good? Was it bad? You know, what was good, what was bad? Who knows? A bittersweet thing.

CK: Two questions left. How has what you’ve learned in the theatre translated into your college life? Socially, academically, anywhere?

H: I think because of crazy rehearsals and stuff, it helped me balance my time, like you know, you have to go to this rehearsal, or you have to stay after an hour because you’re in a dance routine, you know what I mean, so it like helps me balance my time, or I’m always bringing homework to rehearsals, or I don’t know, something like that, and I think socially, I’m a social butterfly. I’m not afraid to meet people, and I don’t know if that’s because I’m onstage and I enjoy talking to, and I’ll talk to anybody, like I think it helps socially and academically too because I have no fears of talking to my prof as opposed to the student next to me, you know what I mean? I feel like, I mean I know people are at a higher level or something, but I have no problem talking to anybody, no matter what

level they're at or whatever, so I think that's helped too. I can be the same person with everybody because I know who I am or like what, I don't know.

CK: How would your life be different today if you hadn't done theatre?

H: (laughs) I'd be like 500 pounds, and like read a book every day because what else would I have? I'd work at Hallmark, and I'd like take a book to read. I don't know what I'd do cause so much of my life is based on theatre like a couple of summers ago when I was sixteen I went to Europe as a student ambassador, and the people who wrote my recommendation letters were theatre people, you know what I mean, or like the only reason that I was willing to go was because I was confident, and you know sure, and I was like, "yeah, oh my gosh, this would be fun," and I was like willing to go. I think my whole life would be different because I didn't have that—weird, who would I be? Maybe I would have black hair and have a gothic kind of look.

CK: Tell me—we talked about who Helen is, who would Helen be if she hadn't done theatre?

H: Fat. I would be because dancing is the only thing that I do, dancing and yoga is the only thing that I do to keep in shape, so I'd be fat, like 500 pounds fat. I probably would be a librarian because I like the library, and I would have more time to read, and read, like chomp out two books a day. I'd also be like one of those internet people who would make my own world because I don't do anything else. Everything I do somehow has evolved from theatre, you know, if it's dancing, I still think that's evolved or I think, singing, you know, is involved, and I think, I loved music, yeah, but like, music has helped me through things because of musicals, you know what I mean, like cause yeah, I played piano, but it's still not, not enough, you know what I mean, or like, still even when I audition for college I use musical theatre songs. It's what I do. That's the kind of music I listen to, like man, I'd be gothic I think, and making my own world on the computer, and I'd sit at the computer all day, in my own like digital world, and be like 500 pounds, and read a book as I'm on my computer.

CK: What a lovely way to almost conclude (she laughs)...Last thoughts? Anything that you want to tell me? Anything that we didn't cover? Any last thoughts?

H: I'm really happy that I did theatre because I don't want to be that digital person (laughs). I don't know. I guess, I guess one day I'm going to have to go through, like everybody I've met along the process, and thank people for what they've done, and that's something that I have been thinking about is like, you know, I have to kind of like thank people cause I wouldn't be where I am today without people. I don't know, I feel like there is like simple ways where I can thank you, you especially though. I don't know if this will help you, this probably won't help you at all—you were like can you write this

music for me, and I was like, “heck yeah, I can write this music for you.” If somebody else had asked, I’d be like, “what am I getting paid to write the music?” Do you know what I mean? I just think it’s like, you’ve helped me, so I’m helping you, and I think that’s just something that I want to continue, you know, if I can help a student with this, they can be able to give this back to me.

APPENDIX E
ROGER'S INTERVIEW

Craig Kosnik: Where are you going to college?

Roger: I got to college at [name of college] in [state].

CK: What year will you be going into?

R: I will be entering into my sophomore year.

CK: What is your major?

R: I intend to double major. I have not declared yet. But I intend to double major in anthropology and religious studies.

CK: Real quickly, why did you decide to choose those two majors?

R: Well, I was brought up in a very religious family. My dad is an Episcopal minister and religion has always been something that has greatly interested me and how it seems to be an essential part of the human experience, since every culture has developed one for various reasons that all could be argued but it wasn't just my own faith that interested me. I wanted to know it all, and I wanted to know why it was important to the human experience and when you start thinking in that way, you start getting into anthropology, so I feel the two areas of study coexist very well, and they're just areas of study that I love. It's one of those things where I decide to learn what I love instead of formulating a career path, which I kind of have anyway, but I will probably intend to teach with those, maybe getting a university job if I can manage it, so yeah.

CK: So, since you are not pursuing theatre as a career, do you still do theatre?

R: Yes, every opportunity I can get. Ever since I started doing theatre when I was eight, it just has been a—I'm hesitant to call it a hobby because it means more to me than that, but it has been a passion of mine, just not one I wish to pursue in a career format.

CK: Are you currently working on anything?

R: Uh, yeah, yeah, I am in a revue at my local community theatre where I first started performing which is based around the television show *Glee* and I am in all male production of *Othello*. Additionally, I am in an all male cappella group at [college] which I guess counts, and I am also working with a few of my friends to start a classical theatre troupe at [college].

CK: I'm curious, why classical theatre?

R: Well, originally it was a Shakespeare troupe, but then I decided I really didn't want us to be limited to just Shakespeare. I mean if we wanted to do some traditional Irish plays which are generally very cheery because the Irish are cheery people. Sorry, that—

CK: That's fine. I'm taking that was sarcasm though?

R: Yes, but classical plays in, I mean, I'm still learning, so I'm not the biggest theatre expert, but classical theatre to me kind of extends all the way up to Arthur Miller, so I don't know, yeah! It will probably through the years end up just becoming another theatre company without much of a theme, but that's how it's starting.

CK: Okay. Have you ever taken performance based classes and this can start from the youngest age through college now. If so, what types and how many years?

R: Yeah, I have been doing that ever since I started performing. A little while after I started performing, I tried out this theatre workshop camp that my community theatre did. I hated it and never came back until I started working it, many years later. After that, I worked at something called SPAW—I didn't work there, I attended there as a camper and it stood for Summer Performing Arts Workshop, and it was run by a family friend of mine, and I went and attended that for probably three, four, five years. Additionally, I, in high school I did many theatrical productions, and what we did there was, one of our shows that we do there every year is also a class, and yeah, we would learn about the show, learn about doing the show, learn about other things associated with theatre—

CK: So, do you have to be in the class to be in the show?

R: Not necessarily, but it's preferred that way. I was in the class and in the show all but one year, in which case I was just in the show, but not in the class. Also, I attended the Governor School for the Arts for theatre, not exactly that. They cut the funding. Mr. Rendell cut the funding for Pennsylvania's Governor School, and they kind of came up with a replacement for it later that summer, and all those who were accepted went to that and that was very educational. That's where, it was probably because of that, that I first decided I didn't want to pursue any sort of theatre, acting as a career, and that's not because I had a bad experience. I had a fantastic experience. It's just, there they taught us as much about the actual craft of acting and movement and body language, they also taught us as much about the business in terms of show business, and what to expect, and it just seemed very cutthroat to me, and I have always found theatre works best in a very welcoming environment that I don't feel, I mean, I don't know cause I have never been a professional actor, but it seems to me that professional theatre is not always conducive to that welcoming setting.

CK: Did you also do the Shakespeare camp at Gannon?

R: Yes, I did. I did do ShakeXperience, and on top of that, I have also taken courses in college. So yeah, I've done a lot. I did that Shakespeare camp for its first two years, and that was very educational as well. I became very comfortable speaking in early modern English in that way which I hadn't before, so I consider that to be a big benefit.

CK: Besides this, have you taken any voice lessons, dance lessons, or musical instruments, or anything like that?

R: No dance classes, but I did take guitar lessons, and I have since then been teaching myself to various means of success, the ukulele and the banjo. Additionally, I have taken voice lessons.

CK: How long did you take voice lessons?

R: Well, I've been taking them all put together probably five or six years, but I've been taking them from different teachers therein. I've stopped since last year, but I intend to sign up for voice lessons at my college.

CK: What is or was your family's involvement in theatre? Did they also do theatre before you started?

R: My mother played Zeidel in *Fiddler on the Roof* in her high school production. My father played Tommy is the lead character in *Brigadoon*, right?

CK: Sure. I don't know at the moment.

R: I think it's Tommy. He played Tommy in *Brigadoon* at his college and he was also in *Camelot*. They've been doing theatre, I believe since around those times, my mother in high school, my father in maybe late high school and in college and throughout all that they have also been singing. When they had to focus more on their jobs, they never really searched for outlets of community theatres or whatnot, so they stopped for a long time until my sister started doing the theatre which got me into theatre which got my parents into theatre again, and so that's how that worked. Because of my sister and I, my parents got much more involved in the Erie Playhouse and have since become part of the family. That said, I feel, in terms of youth doing theatre, theatre has been a much bigger part of my sister's life and my life than it was my parents. I don't think my parents considered theatre a big part of their lives until around, you know, recently.

CK: Did you attend theatre as an audience member before you started doing it?

R: I did, but only when my parents would take a trip to Toronto or New York. I had never gone to the Erie Playhouse and seen a production until the first production my sister was in. Before I really saw my sister onstage, I was like, "I can do that, cool." I

never really had an interest in it, until I realized it was something that I could be a part of. It just kind of seemed foreign, and fun, but foreign.

CK: Do you remember when your first audition was and if you were cast?

R: Yes. I was one of those lucky bastards who was cast in the first thing they auditioned for, which was a production of *Heidi*, which I don't know, I mean, I don't know who wrote it or anything. I'm not sure how widely known a production it is.

CK: Well, *Heidi* is pretty famous. I don't know who wrote it, but—

R: The story, yeah. But I was eight years old at the time. It was back in this old, old rehearsal hall that the Erie Playhouse had and have since gone through two others. I remember my first audition and the song as well.

CK: What did you sing?

R: I sang "Consider Yourself" from *Oliver* the musical.

CK: And what were you cast as?

R: I was cast as a townsperson kid thing, a chorus member basically, but I got like a solo in one of the chorus songs which was really cool, and I also waved to someone I knew in the audience before I knew that was something that you're not supposed to do.

CK: You started talking a little bit about it. What do you remember about your first audition?

R: I remember if anything, not taking it immensely seriously. In fact, I think that was a lot of my early theatre career through probably the first five or six things I did. I didn't take it incredibly seriously, and I think to a certain extent, there's room for not taking things seriously, but you know, that's arguable. My mom told me I should audition with [sister] for *Heidi* and I thought, "hey, that's a great idea," that's something I'm kind of interested in, and so she picked a song for me, and I tried it, I was on-key, enough, and I went in and sang it, and tried to act as damn cute as I could, which back when I was eight, I was adorable, and [director's name] took a shine to me.

CK: So your sister did audition with you as well?

R: Yes. My sister and I have actually done theatre together a great deal.

CK: Was she cast in that show?

R: She was.

CK: You sort of answered another question. Whose choice was it to audition? Your mom sort of threw it out there.

R: Well, both my mother and my father voiced the suggestion, and that's all I really needed I think. That's how I remember it anyway. I wasn't doing anything else.

CK: So where have you done theatre?

R: I've done theatre, by and large, most theatre I've done has been in my community theatre, the Erie Playhouse. I've done theatre in my high school.

CK: Which was?

R: Which was [school name] in Erie, Pennsylvania, the only IB school in northwestern Pennsylvania, okay, umm, I have done theatre, well let's see, I've done theatre in Lincoln Park, which is where the quote-unquote Governor School happened. That's also in Pennsylvania. I did theatre at [college], and yeah, I guess besides those places, everywhere else I've done theatre has been in Erie at various places. I mean, I've done things for my church. Oh, oh, oh, oh I also, one big thing that I've done which was a great experience. Erie, Pennsylvania was twinned with a city in Ireland, Dungarven, and when that happened, the Erie Playhouse brought over a production of a play that they felt was uniquely American, and also happens to be my favorite play of all time, *The Fantastiks*. Now I did spotlights when the Erie Playhouse originally did their run and one of the people couldn't make it to play their part, so I was able to play their part instead, so I did do theatre in Dungarven, Ireland, and that was a fantastic experience for various reasons.

CK: That was a "fantastic" experience.

R: Oh, buh-dum-tish.

CK: And what role did you end up filling in for?

R: The Mute which is a really, really fun role.

CK: Going along with this, can you talk about your theatrical experience? Have you been in plays, musicals, been on crew, etc.? Can you give me a rough estimate/sketch of your background?

R: Well, okay, umm, this is something that I didn't really learn until I went to college and realized that this is very unique, but the Erie theatre community is very unique in that it's almost completely dominated by musicals, and I hadn't realized that musicals aren't necessarily the norm, at least not in an academic setting. My college does one mainstage

musical every four years. That said, I've done predominantly musicals. I have done straight plays as well.

[Brief interruption by a man coming to fix the water fountain...]

CK: You were talking about your experience, and you said you've done musicals, straight plays, and that's where we stopped.

R: This is complex, but when I'm doing a musical and a straight play, I've heard a lot of people argue about how odd of a transition it is, and it's never been really that odd of a transition for me, I mean, I think it's all acting when you get down to it. One just tends to have more places where words aren't good enough and music needs to help, and others don't because, we could get into that in a large way, but apart from being onstage, I've also worked on stage crew, I have worked lights and spotlights, and I've never really worked in terms of sound and microphones and whatnot. I have built sets before, and I have also taken down sets. I've directed in very small, small ways. What else?

CK: Would you consider you have more performance experience or behind the scenes experience?

R: More performance experience by far. I'm cool working behind the scenes, but I'm not as experienced with it.

CK: Do you have a rough estimate of the amount of shows you've been in?

R: Between, uh, close to fifty, if not more, I would say.

CK: That encompasses the Playhouse, school, Shakespeare, and all these different things?

R: Yes.

CK: Why do you and did you do theatre?

R: Uh, that's a big question.

CK: It sure is.

R: (laughs) Ummm, (pause) theatre to me (pause), I mean, it's so many things. It's an art form. It's a way to meet people. It can be an emotional outlet. Some of my best friends I've ever met been through theatre, in fact, most of them. And it's something I enjoy doing. It is something I feel I am good at doing, and that's an incentive to continue doing it. But more than that, and this is going to be hard to put into words, but for me theatre represents an art form that no other art form can really emulate which is, I mean, you could say the same thing about literature or what have you, but what theatre, it can be so

visceral, and in a way that, I feel you kind of have that detached except for very specific situations in terms of literature, film, or other forms of performance, but theatre, including live dance I suppose, can be so visceral in terms of putting forth human emotion, which when you get right down to it, I think that's what art, in general, always attempts to emulate. I don't know, it's for me, you see this in Shakespeare, you see this in all of the famous playwrights, theatre has a way of telling to the past, the future, the present, well not the past I guess but whatever, that this is what the human experience is, this is what is was, this is who we were, and like, these are our voices being heard, and I mean, I'm sorry, this is kind of philosophical and weird of me, but ack, like that's how I see it, and I want to be part of that. In a way, it's almost like, and this is breaking it down into a point where I feel it's a little more selfish than I really view it, but it's a way of for me to in some small way, kind of escape oblivion in a way and leave some kind of legacy apart from my progeny. Now, apart from like the whole philosophical nature in terms of how I feel about it, it has formed some of the strongest relationships I've ever had, and it has been extremely integral in my growth as a person, due to conversations that I've had backstage during theatrical productions. I have formulated my opinions on religion, politics, sex, romantic relationships, platonic relationships, how to deal with negative aspects of life, how to view, I would argue that my views on things like homosexuality and the ethics of it are formed in a large part due to the theatre because I mean, it is a stereotype, but kind of an accurate stereotype, that a lot of homosexual male people tend to do the theatre and that's where I first met people of that persuasion, first encountered that idea, in a very young stage of my life, which I feel was positive that I first encountered those themes, that's getting off topic but...

CK: That's fine.

R: (laughs) It has made me who I am and that is not an understatement or an overstatement. It has made me literally who I am, and it is something I love to do, and I can't think of any reason why I can't continue to grow within this art.

CK: What is your most positive memory from doing a show and why?

R: I can't pick just one, but whenever someone says—

CK: It can be one or two, but just try and narrow it down as much as possible.

R: Yeah, when people ask me this question, there's one I always come back to, and that's a play that was done at the Erie Playhouse, a straight play, by a man named, directed by a man named [director's name] and the play was *Over the Tavern* which was about a Polish family living in like 1950s Buffalo, Catholic Polish, and it encountered Catholicism, the kind of ridiculousness of it within the Polish community, and Erie being a very Polish city, it was kind of a hit, a sleeper hit, and we actually sold out a lot. In the show, I

played a character named [character's name] which was, the fact that there was a character named [character's name, same as Roger's name] who was my age at the time was probably the primary reason why I auditioned and I wouldn't argue that has ever been my best performance, but that was a very unique situation for me in that, that was a play where everyone was exactly where they needed to be at every time, and it was the most smooth production I've ever been through. In every production I've ever been in there has always been a few people who don't know their lines when they should or some people who can't quite dance at the moment they're needed. In that, everyone was where they needed to be at every point, it was like, it wasn't this way, but it was almost like it was on autopilot 'cause it was just so natural. The other one that I would pick, for completely selfish reasons, is when my high school put on the first production in northwestern Pennsylvania of *The Phantom of the Opera*, and I was lucky enough to have the part of the Phantom, and that was one of the most, like I would argue that was one of my best performances, and it was one of the most visceral, I'm using that word again, the most visceral theatre experiences I've ever had because I had to sort of get to a point where that's kind of dark, and because of the nature of that, in that we were doing something big, a high school was doing something big that had never really been done before in the setting, everyone really brought their A game, and it wasn't a situation where everyone needed to be. God knows that wasn't the case, but everyone really brought their all to it, and it was an extremely positive experience for me. Other people might tell you otherwise, I don't know, but that was something for which I am still extremely proud.

CK: You said visceral a couple of times. In your own words, what does that mean to you? And why is that important?

R: When I think of the word visceral, and to tell you the truth, I could not give you like—

CK: You don't need to give me the definition. What does it mean to you?

R: Yes, and I couldn't give you a Webster's definition and I don't know it, but when I think of the word visceral I think of cutting, like slicing, and to me visceral is terms of a performance that I can really connect this to is Natalie Portman in *Black Swan*. I thought her performance, and I've seen other people do this as well, but she comes to mind, I think their performance is so natural and so real in a way that it cuts to the audience in a way if even if they haven't been in a situation like that, they're brought to that level, in a way that's kind of awful, but you know, by the end getting back to the Greek, well getting to the Greeks like catharsis, so I guess that's what it means to me, when someone can so properly play a role in a way that cuts to the core of that role of that human emotion to which everyone can relate, and thus the audience comes away more worldly, I suppose for knowing it, and the way I put it kind of sounds negative but I don't think it is.

CK: I don't think it was. You just said negative. What is your most negative memory from doing a show and why?

R: I've never been in a production that I hated. I've been in productions that like, during the time, I'm like, "oh God, I really wish I didn't have this other thing to do." Most of the time, my negative feelings from a production come from when I'm doing revues which are weird because I love doing them when I'm actually doing them, but everything leading up to that point, I'm like, "this doesn't even have a plot to drive it. Why are we doing it?" Yeah, I've got mixed feelings about those, unless it's for a benefit or something like my high school used to do. Additionally, one of my favorite productions, one of my favorite musicals rather of all time is *Fiddler on the Roof* and I was lucky enough to be in my community theatre's production of that. It was cursed. I think we did a good job, but there were problems nightly and out of it came a very, very big scandal that still kind of rocks the Erie Playhouse. Yeah, I think you know what I'm talking about.

CK: Yeah.

R: And I was never a part of that scandal. I didn't know it was happening until after, well close to the end of the run, but it kind of freaked me out. It shook me in a weird way. Apart from that, I can't think of anything too negative. There have been the occasional musicals where I kind of just don't care that much. When my high school did a production of *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, I think it's a cute musical, but I don't have an extremely high opinion of it, and I just didn't care all that much about it. More so than that, I would say, *Babes in Arms* which I really, it's just a vehicle for Lorenz and Hart. What irritates me is when I'm in a musical, I guess that doesn't have a plot, a very...

CK: It sounds just like you're talking about musicals—

R: Yeah, I've done vastly more musicals than straight plays.

CK: Okay.

R: So that's why those are all the things I'm bringing out, but yeah. Mostly it's when I don't care about the production that I guess I could call it negative apart from that one cursed production of *Fiddler on the Roof*.

CK: Do you believe you have learned anything from doing theatre, and if so, what?

R: Uh, I mean, I mentioned some of this earlier, like I've essentially formulated who I am and my world view as a person where I am now. I learned about sexuality both in, you know, my sexuality as currently a heterosexual, and you know, those of my peers who are

homosexual, bisexual, transgender, queer, or what have you. I've learned about all of that through forming relationships in the theatre. It has broadened my world view in a political scheme and a religious scheme. Apart from just that, umm, like formulating my opinions as a person, and this will be tough to—

CK: Before you even go there, you said political and religious. Can you go a little further with that, if you don't mind? What do you mean exactly?

R: Well, whatever stereotypes might persist about the theatre. The fact of the matter is that people of all walks of life do it. I've met Republicans, Libertarians, Liberals, Democrats, Socialists all through the theatre, and through listening to all of them, I was able to, whereas you know, otherwise I might've just been hearing one or two political viewpoints especially in Erie, and that actually goes for religion too, we're predominantly a Catholic city. Through hearing the opinions of these people from all other walks of life, I'm able to bounce ideas off of the others and figure out what exactly makes sense to me. As it stands now, I am a cultural and predominantly religious Episcopalian in that I agree with almost everything the church does. I have some issues with the more core proponents of the faith, but I'm reconciling with those, and I am a social liberal and actually, what's the word, money (laughs), financial liberal I guess as well. Everyone in my family has kind of changed. My sister, probably in no small part due to the theatre and interactions, is a socialist.

CK: So is it mostly through the people you've met and not the subject material then?

R: Not really the subject material. I can see how that could be the case in different situations but as significant as I feel musicals can be, the fact of the matter is most of them are not putting forth political ideology. Very few do. They put forth emotional ideology, I think, but political not as much. So yeah, it's mostly been through the interactions with people that I've done musicals and productions with.

CK: So you talked about political and religious, and I think you started to go somewhere else about something you've learned but I cut you off though.

R: Yeah. I'm not the most educated person in the theatre yet so what I'm saying might be incorrect according to Aristotle, but Aristotle can go kiss someone's ass, I don't know. I don't really agree with him (laughs), but theatre in a lot of ways has given me a different perspective on emotion in general because I should start by saying, I consider myself to be much more of an actor than a singer or a dancer and I've felt through my experiences through acting, when one acts, they just tap into human emotion that's already there, but might not necessarily be applied in a certain situation. How I guess I could describe this is, when I felt this the most I played the part of the Phantom. When I played the Phantom, I had never been in a situation where my face was mutilated and I

was brought up in an environment of hatred and (?) like the Phantom. I was brought up in a very privileged atmosphere and a very positive atmosphere; however, though I had never been in those situations before, the emotions that are felt are still the same emotions that I felt at points in my life, just a different magnitude and in different facets, and I think that, when I get right down to it, it's empathy. I think that's what acting truly teaches a person is empathy because they learn how to channel these emotions in a way that you can understand them and put yourself there even though you've never quite been there. As a result, in interpersonal relationships, I've always been one of those people, who people kind of come to in times of need, and I think, I've never really minded that position, and I think that it's actually helped me in that role in a lot of ways because I think actors have an ability to when someone comes to them with a problem, to understand that problem because I can put myself there. I can understand exactly how you were feeling, there's obviously going to be a disconnect at some point, like if, I have friends who have been sexually abused, and when I discuss that with them, obviously I can't imagine the level of distress that that puts them in; however, I can understand that distress is there and what it entails and how one can go about healing at least from my perspective, I don't know, and I guess the point I'm getting at is that it has given me a lot more deep and more critical and more true and more understanding of human emotion and how that truly defines more I believe than anything else what a human being is. That probably sounds very moony-eyed and whatnot, but that's just how I am.

CK: I don't think you need to be concerned with any—

R: I know. That's just also how I speak in conversation. Lots of disclaimers.

CK: Who has been most influential in your theatre career and why? It could be one or two people. It could be family, directors, a teacher.

R: Uh, I'm hesitant to say my parents because while they always encourage me to continue doing the theatre, a lot of that has been my own decision. In some way, you have actually very much affected my growth as an actor anyway because you once told me that like "70 percent of acting is reacting," and while that is arguable, it is something that I never really considered before, that acting is more than just saying lines and that kind of started me off on this growth of an actor I feel. I think in a big way, two people named [two people] have been very influential in my growth in the theatre. I've been in a lot of productions directed by [woman's name] and only one or two directed by [man's name]; however, I've been in productions with [the man], I've interacted with [the man]. [The man] is a very, he likes the metaphysical, and he likes to discuss the metaphysical, and those are situations in which I, some of the first situations in which I've discussed that with someone other than my father. In terms of growth, it's a tough thing to say, [the woman] has shaped me in a lot of ways of how to be both an ensemble member and

someone who has a lead role which I think is very important. Additionally, I would say that my high school theatre director [man's name] helped me out in a lot of ways in that he kind of taught me how to roll with any situation, and I'm not sure how I can explain that.

CK: I think you did.

R: Yeah, I suppose. Okay, I don't know. I don't know if that's adequate.

CK: That's fine.

R: Those are people—it's a tough thing for me to measure because I don't think that there any one, or two, or three people who have—they're it, but those are some people who have been extremely important.

CK: What is one moment from your theatrical experience that you will never forget and why?

R: Part of me saying this one is because I am sort of sick of talking about the profound for a little bit, but there's this, one of my favorite moments in theatre, I could probably actually name two, but this is the one—

CK: You can go with both if you like.

R: Okay. I'll say the other. That one is less entertaining, but this one, umm, my high school was putting on a production of *Peter Pan* in which I played Captain Hook, and there's a moment, throughout the entire thing I'm trying to be as animated as I can, whipping around my arms, and at one point my hook flies offstage. This is in one of the final scenes where there on a pirate ship.

CK: Is this a performance or rehearsal?

R: This is a performance, and the audience lets out a little chuckle cause they see the hook fly offstage, and as an actor's supposed to do, I didn't even notice it, I continued on with the production as is normal. Now there comes a point where the kids in it, I don't even remember their names, but the kids, the British children come onstage from offstage onto the pirate ship. Now they end up about right behind me, and I didn't know, but one of the boys picked up my hook, and it had behind their back, and there is a moment that I put my hands behind my back and bowed my head because I'm supposed to be faking a solemn moment, and he leans over, slips my hook back in, and the way that it's staged right after the solemn moment, I hold my fist up, and when I held my fist up, the hook is back, and the audience just applauds and maybe it's the applause that makes me remember it, but I just, oh God, out of all, and that's not even a catastrophe that could

happen, but of all like little mishaps than can happen onstage, that's one of the most seamless like mending of one that I ever experienced, and ultimately, I shouldn't even think of it that way because regardless of how it ended up, it took the audience out of the play, but even still, I think that's a fun thing. The other one was when I was in a production of *The Wizard of Oz* at my grade school in my eighth grade year.

CK: What were you in that?

R: I was the Cowardly Lion which I am not a big fan of that musical, but that's one of the most fun that I've ever had, one of the most favorite roles that I've ever done, and there's a moment where the Scarecrow, the Tinman, and the Lion are without Dorothy because she got kidnapped, and what is supposed to happen is I'm supposed to come onstage holding Toto with the Tinman and the Scarecrow will be onstage and like, "Toto has her scent. She can show us the way." However, no one brought me Toto and the Scarecrow and the Tinman were two people younger than me who had never done a performance before, so they couldn't think on their feet, and after we said the few lines before what was related to of how we'll find Dorothy, after those lines they were blank. They couldn't think of a single thing to say, so I made up about a minute and a half of dialogue, going like, "Didn't you see Toto a little while back? Let's think for a minute. If we saw Toto and managed to get Toto, and he has her scent, we could find Dorothy," and it was like, and I basically ended it with, "Come on guys," and they're looking at me, and I'm like, "Come ON guys," and I don't know, that was, I don't think the audience actually noticed it, but it was kind of, it's a moment that I am very proud of in terms of thinking on my feet.

CK: Is there anything that you've seen in the theatre that you've done that you wish you could change? Why or why not?

R: I would do over several productions that I've been a part of, particularly ones in which I had a large role, umm, just because I have a recording of almost every one, and in every situation, I've grown a lot as an actor, and I see things that I do that I wish I hadn't, so in that sense I wish I could redo them and just put on a better performance. I've been in productions of shows where there are directorial choices that I, presumptuous as it is, I feel like I could have done better, so in those situations, I suppose yes, but my mentality for a lot of it is a musical or a play is a musical or a play and because I plan on continuing to do theatre for all of my life, there's a good chance that I'll be doing whatever this is again, so there's always a chance that I can improve, and come back to a role and make it better, so it's never been something that's bothered me like a whole lot because I feel like I'll, I never, one of my dream roles is to play El Guillo in *The Fantastiks*, and I was much too young to have that chance when I was actually able to be in *The Fantastiks*, and also the actor who originated the role at the Playhouse for that production was able to do it. It

didn't bother me because at some point in my life, I'm pretty convinced that I'll have another chance to audition for El Guillo in *The Fantastiks*, so I don't know. I guess that's it, that I feel like I'll always have another shot.

CK If a young child was considering auditioning and getting involved in the theatre, what would you say to them? Why?

R: I would tell them that there is no harm in going for it. I can only think of one or two very extreme situations where there would be. If you don't like it, you don't like it, you can drop out, but I would encourage, I would tell them that I encourage you to do at least one full production and put everything you can into it to make sure you have a good time because theatre can be negative for some people, but I think a lot of it is what you put in it, so yeah, I would tell them to, I would encourage them to go for it because you have nothing to lose and give your all into it, and if you still find that you don't like it, you don't have to do it anymore, but you can always come back to it later, so yeah, that's my mentality, go for it, why not?

CK: How has what you've learned in theatre translated into your college life? This can be academically, socially. Or doesn't it?

R: Well, I'm a good liar, now. (We both laugh) That's one thing (laughs).

CK: And how does that translate into your college life?

R: Well, it doesn't all that much. I mean everyone tells little white lies and I'm good at those now, but like I said, and this is especially helpful in college where I intend to become an RA somewhere in the future or CA as they call them at my college, but that's irrelevant, having an understanding of how people feel and just emotion I feel is very important in the college experience because if high school is one of the most formative parts of a person's life, college is where it's solidified, I think, and probably even still very formative, and I think that as a result people feel a lot of emotion, and a lot of emotion that they might not necessarily know how to deal with, and I think it's helpful both for myself when I am in that situation and other people to have an understanding of this, so I can remove myself enough to be like, logically this is good next step, but personally enough where I'm like I completely understand this and why you would think, you know, this or that (does lip flutter). It has taught me how to more gracefully and you're never going to completely gracefully accept rejection but, yeah, accept rejection, which I've experienced more in college than I have anywhere else, and I'm lucky for that in a sense because that means I haven't experienced a great deal of rejection in my theatre career, but in college when I don't get into a play, I'm very disappointed, but I go, "okay, when's the next one," which I think theatre has taught me how to do. Accepting rejection, understanding emotion, lying, what else? It has taught how to apply myself in

a way. I am better at what I am hesitant to call memorization so much as learning because I can put it in the sense of like, if there's information, I can put it in the sense of like a philosophical conversation almost in the way that I could dialogue. Apart from that it's a tough thing to quantify. I don't know, it probably has like sneaky little tendrils in all aspects of my life in some way, but those are the things that are brought to mind.

CK: I am going to give you a word and I just want you to talk about it. Auditioning.

R: Nerves. The fact that nerves can be a good thing. The fact that fear is almost always a good thing provided that you don't let it rule you because fear can provide you to do some of your best work because the stakes are high. I hear people who talk about how auditions are never that big a deal for them, and I am always tempted to go, "you're lying," even though they probably aren't. But for me, I've never been quite able to get over an auditioning, an audition scenario, like not in the sense that they petrify me but I've never been able to go into an audition and be like, I've been able to go in and be confident but I've never been able to go in and be like, "I know how this is going to pan out. I'm not nervous at all." No, I've always, very, very nervous, probably more so than I am on opening night or something; however, I have been of the opinion for a long time that fear is good, and it provides you the ability to do your best, so yeah. Auditioning, I think of nerves and I think of fear, but I think of that positively.

CK: The rehearsal process.

R: Work. That's just what it is. It's a lot of work. It can be a lot of heartbreak. It can be a lot of fun, and when you get down to it, that's the meat of a theatre person's theatre experience is rehearsal, so in that sense, it should encompass all of the things that one feels when doing theatre, so I think there's a lot of pride associated with it. There's a lot of heartbreak, a lot of fun, a lot of sadness, a lot of joy, a lot of friendship (does a lip flutter).

CK: Okay. Opening Night.

R: Fear again (laughs). Fear again, but a more excited fear because everything you've been working for is building up to this, and if you don't give it your all, it could be a bad performance, but even if you don't give it your all and give an adequate performance, you have the next nights and the nights after that. Also, audience. I think of the audience and like yeah.

CK: Closing performance.

R: Relief. I've always said that I am never sad to see a show go. I'm always ready for a production to end. I can only think of one or two situations where that hasn't been the case, so almost in every case, it's me going, "I can have something of a life again. I love

this, I love doing this, but its time has passed.” I think that in a big way is another reason why I wouldn’t want to pursue theatre as a career because if I did succeed, I very potentially could be doing the same production for years at a time which I would hate.

CK: If you could describe your most ideal theatrical experience, what would it be?

R: One where a cast truly comes together in a very close, a very personal way. That seems very broad, but the situation where that has happened for me in the biggest way was when I was in a production of *Godspell* at my high school. *Godspell* I think as a musical, I, just as a theatrical piece in general, I’ve always seen it as having this weird way of bringing a cast together. It really does. Everyone in that production became very close. There was little to no “drama,” none really. The one person that had the ability to incite “drama” didn’t end up being in the production for various reasons, but another person that had the ability to do so in the past never did cause everyone just became very close and very understanding of each other and it was extremely interpersonal with people helping each other out to get to the point where we needed to be and it was one of the best productions that I think our high school’s ever put on. Another example of this would be what I mentioned earlier with *Over the Tavern*. That cast became very close as well. We no longer are sadly, with the exception of myself and a guy named [teen’s name] who are still very close, but for that production it was this weird insular bubble where we were just very on each other’s terms. Yeah, so like that.

CK: If you were to describe the most negative theatrical experience, what would that look like?

R: Uhhhhhh, kind of like the revue I’m in now in the sense that—I’m enjoying it, and it’s over soon, so I’ll be fine, but it’s a situation where no one is really helping each other out all that much, it’s very disjointed. People like, and don’t mention this, but people like [actor’s name] who are missing all, almost all the rehearsals, and he still does a good job because he’s [actor’s name] and he can dance but, I don’t know. It’s also because I feel like I’m not giving it my all, and I could give it my all, but I’m just lethargic to do so. So yeah, something that is the opposite of what I said earlier, just disjointed, no one’s really helping each other out, people like each other but it’s, no one’s really putting a lot into it.

CK: Final question. How would your life be different today if you hadn’t done theatre?

R: I thought about this a lot. What I can deduce is, when I started doing theatre, largely it was an alternative to do doing sports, which I wasn’t adverse to, but I just kind of did theatre first, and I tried to have the two coexist for awhile, and at that point I wasn’t determined enough in either way to do that. I didn’t consider theatre to be like a passion of mine until I was probably twelve or thirteen, probably even fourteen, at which point I decided that theatre was something that I was going to devote myself to. Before then, it

was just kind of a fun thing I did, a fun thing that I did that I preferred to swimming or soccer or cross country which are the three sports that I tried. I feel if I hadn't done theatre, I would have been more committed to sports and ultimately the conclusion that I've come to is that I probably would have been cut, and I apologize for this, but probably would be a little more of a douche bag than I am, which I could still very well be, but I feel like I would have been more of one because I wouldn't of developed that understanding of human emotion I don't think which has soooo affected who I am in the sense that I kind of see it in everything, or try to anyway, and no, I don't think that I would have been able to gain that through just doing sports which is definitely what would have not happened if I hadn't done theatre. So I am thankful for that in that sense.

CK: Any last thoughts?

R: Not really. I don't think so. I think I've said all I wanted to say. To have a nice ending note, I think it's something that is in every single aspect of my life shaped who I am, and I wouldn't have it any other way. It is the most personal, I feel, of art forms. It is the most applicable to other art forms I feel, just in the sense, if you're an actor, you can be a film actor. If you're a dancer, you can just dance and act. You can be a playwright and write literature if you want or all different things that require different abilities and aptitudes, but all of them have some kind of relation to the theatre I think. Like, I feel like it's where all of the different forms of art had an orgy and had a baby and then theatre happened. That's how I feel, even though some came before the theatre, some came after, but, I don't know, and that is something that has affected me completely, especially in the emotional aspect. I view everything in that light now for better or for worse, but for better or worse it is because of theatre that I do that

APPENDIX F

WHERE WOULD THEY BE TODAY WITHOUT THEATRE?

All participants were asked at the end of their interviews: “How would your life be different today if you hadn’t done theatre?” Many of the participants used these responses to summarize the impact that the theatre had on their lives. The responses are organized below by high school and college participants.

High Schoolers

Tiffany: Well, umm, I did swimming for eight years and then I dropped it for theatre, so I probably would have pursued that. That would have had its pros, but I think the pros of theatre outweigh that. My brother would have never gotten involved and god only knows what other kinds of things he would have picked up if he hadn’t done theatre. Through doing theatre, I have also inspired my older sister to even push further in being herself and she has let me know that she loves that, and I think that me being in theatre has brought me closer to my friends and even to my mother and my father that they see me doing what I love and doing it well.

Jessica: Um, I probably—I wouldn’t have most of the friends that I have now. I’d probably actually be a bit of a snot, I’m not going to lie. I might be doing soccer. I’d be doing a lot more soccer because I do like that and I’m okay, but I don’t know how well that would be going over that I am in high school and they can actually cut you from the team, but I probably would still be doing, I might still be doing dance because I kept with dance so that it would help me with my theatre. I don’t know if I’d even be there. Um, I’m not sure. I might not even be at the same high school. I’d have different friends ‘cause I chose [school name] because of their advanced theatre, among other things, and that was one of the things that I was thinking of.

Rita: Theatre has been the best experience of my life. I have no idea where I would be without it— probably where I was two years ago and compared to, well, I thought that was fine, but, umm, doing art and writing and all that, but, umm, now that I have this, I mean, why would I want to go back to all of that without it (laughs).

Louise: I think if I didn’t do theatre, I would be one of those female jock types. I’d be playing all kinds of sports and stuff ‘cause I need to be busy all the time, and I feel like my life wouldn’t be as positive and I wouldn’t have as much stuff going for me as I do right now because of theatre ‘cause I’m really not that good at sports, so if I was playing all these sports, and I wasn’t good at them, I’d feel negative about myself with all of these people that were better than me at it, you know. I don’t feel like I would be as happy as I am now, and I wouldn’t know all these awesome people that I do, and I wouldn’t have all these great people to look up to like I do, so just stuff like that, like I wouldn’t have the same kind of life experiences at all.

Jim: It would be so different. I probably, I would be a lot more boring. I might actually play a sport, now, which I can't really. I might still play baseball which I can't really picture cause I'm not the best athlete which is why this works out so well, but I honestly can't even, I just think it's so weird how I just randomly got into this, and I mean, I never sang, danced, acted in my life before I auditioned for that first show and when I did, it just was this epiphany of epiphanies and I was just like this is perfect for me. I love every minute of it, and I can't imagine if that wouldn't have happened, so I think it is odd how those things just kind of randomly happen, and they end up changing your life.

College Students

Roger: I thought about this a lot. What I can deduce is, when I started doing theatre, largely it was an alternative to do doing sports, which I wasn't adverse to, but I just kind of did theatre first, and I tried to have the two coexist for awhile, and at that point I wasn't determined enough in either way to do that. I didn't consider theatre to be like a passion of mine until I was probably twelve or thirteen, probably even fourteen, at which point I decided that theatre was something that I was going to devote myself to. Before then, it was just kind of a fun thing I did, a fun thing that I did that I preferred to swimming or soccer or cross country which are the three sports that I tried. I feel if I hadn't done theatre, I would have been more committed to sports and ultimately the conclusion that I've come to is that I probably would have been cut, and I apologize for this, but probably would be a little more of a douche bag than I am, which I could still very well be, but I feel like I would have been more of one because I wouldn't of developed that understanding of human emotion I don't think which has soooo affected who I am in the sense that I kind of see it in everything, or try to anyway, and no, I don't think that I would have been able to gain that through just doing sports which is definitely what would have not happened if I hadn't done theatre. So I am thankful for that in that sense.

Arnold: Ummm, no, I think that it would be definitely different, I mean, I don't even know what my life would be like if I didn't do theatre, umm, just 'cause that's like, like I said, that was my childhood, so I can't even imagine, like I don't think I would've gotten into any sports or anything either. Umm, so, I don't even know if I would have gotten into singing, so I have no clue what my life would have been like, if I didn't do theatre.

Monica: I don't know that any part of my life would be the same. I wouldn't have the same friends. I wouldn't—I picked [college name] because of the First Year Players 'cause I wanted to be part of this group, so I probably wouldn't be at the same university. I would have probably gone to a different high school because I was so into like [teacher] and being in the theatre department and like I just can't even see any part of my life that would have been the same had I not done theatre.

Rose: Really don't have anything, other than it was like one of the best experiences I had. I'm really glad that I had—if I didn't have it, I'd be really bummed and really sad that I missed out on so much fun and so many friendships, and I guess I learned a lot, some

things too, like for staging and things like that ‘cause that helps me in animation too. We have to know staging so that helped too (laughs). And learning the subtleties in people, we have to do that for animation too.

Helen: I’d be like 500 pounds, and like read a book every day because what else would I have? I’d work at Hallmark, and I’d like take a book to read. I don’t know what I’d do cause so much of my life is based on theatre like a couple of summers ago when I was sixteen I went to Europe as a student ambassador, and the people who wrote my recommendation letters were theatre people, you know what I mean, or like the only reason that I was willing to go was because I was confident, and you know sure, and I was like, “yeah, oh my gosh, this would be fun,” and I was like willing to go. I think my whole life would be different because I didn’t have that—weird, who would I be? Maybe I would have black hair and have a gothic kind of look. (Interviewer: Tell me—we talked about who Helen is, who would Helen be if she hadn’t done theatre?)

Fat: I would be because dancing is the only thing that I do, dancing and yoga is the only thing that I do to keep in shape, so I’d be fat, like 500 pounds fat. I probably would be a librarian because I like the library, and I would have more time to read, and read, like chomp out two books a day. I’d also be like one of those internet people who would make my own world because I don’t do anything else. Everything I do somehow has evolved from theatre, you know, if it’s dancing, I still think that’s evolved or I think, singing, you know, is involved, and I think, I loved music, yeah, but like, music has helped me through things because of musicals, you know what I mean, like cause yeah, I played piano, but it’s still not, not enough, you know what I mean, or like, still even when I audition for college I use musical theatre songs. It’s what I do. That’s the kind of music I listen to, like man, I’d be gothic I think, and making my own world on the computer, and I’d sit at the computer all day, in my own like digital world, and be like 500 pounds, and read a book as I’m on my computer.

