

Constructing the Youth in Commercial Musical Theatre:

An Intersectional Case Study

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers how adolescent identity is constructed and represented in commercial musical theatre for youth (e.g. Broadway and Disney Theatrical Group) by examining two commercial productions with adolescents in lead roles—*Spring Awakening* and Disney’s *High School Musical*. My theoretical framework is intersectionality which creates a foundation for my research within the field of childhood studies, gender studies, and performance studies to illuminate current US American trends in youth oriented art and research. My framework extends into a case study methodology exploring the world of childhood and youth sexuality through a close read of the popular Broadway musical adaptation, *Spring Awakening*. In addition, a second investigation chronicles the world of Disney’s *High School Musical* through my own intersectional tool, the Disney Industrial Complex.

I claim that adolescence, as a constructed identity, exists as a multi-faceted intersectional category composed of multiple and conflicting intersections such as gender, race, sex, ethnicity, and so on. These intersections develop over the course of the period known as “adolescence” and “youth.” The goal of this dissertation is to serve as a reference for other theatre educators and their work with young people creating art.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my wife, Kelly.
Thank you for your loving support during this incredible journey.

With sincere thanks to Mom & Dad
for always suggesting to do what you love and what brings you great joy.

Inspired by all the young people with which I have had the pleasure of creating
art.

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PREFACE

“Life Upon the Wicked Stage” — Reconciling the Teacher and the Artist

As a young boy, I ventured onto the stage in two distinct musical performances. The first was dressed as an elephant swaying in the background to some jungle-themed song, and the second was as a hair-slicked kindergarten student lip-synching to a *Grease* medley. Several years later, I remember seeing my first live musical—a high school production of the classic US American musical, *Oklahoma!* Musical theatre is a life-long love and one I share with my students. The teacher, the scholar, and the artist in me are inseparable in the same way that song, dance, and the power of story are inseparable from the musical as an art form—an academic triple threat I embrace whole-heartedly.

The basis for this project has been percolating for some time. Graduate school proved to be the means to bring this idea to fruition. I have always been curious about how youth identities are constructed in and how youth identify with commercial musical theatre—something I often think about while watching a theatrical event or directing a musical production. Are youth characters constructed with actual age-appropriate actors in mind? Do these created identities contain a level of realism and is that realism acknowledged by actual youths? Do youth actually enjoy performing in musicals? Do youth see themselves in these primarily adult creations? I am fascinated absolutely by young people and their quest to know—to know themselves, the world around them, and to know those adults who interact with them. What do these

representations of youth mean, I wonder? My desire to analyze the work created and marketed for youth also sparked my research with how youth represent themselves, specifically on YouTube through theatrical recreations.

This dissertation explores different facets of my intrigue with youth representations. Here, I navigate through youth texts, plays, performances, self-creations, and youth focus groups as a means to understand youth characters as well as how actual youth come to understand these materials through lived experiences.

I want to fuel further work by educators with young people through pathways of engaged discovery and wonder. As this project is finite, so, too, are my sites of exploration. This work charts the appearance of the term “adolescent” and the subsequent research around this “new” identity category, pausing to stop and explore two specific contemporary theatrical sites—the Broadway musical production of *Spring Awakening* and Disney’s direct-to-TV musical phenomenon *High School Musical*, considering the role of social networking in the construction of identities (YouTube), and asking actual musical theatre students how they feel about the characters they see portrayed and have had the opportunity to portray on stage. The culmination of this document is uncovering glimmers of *what it means to be a youth in musical theatre* and how that knowledge applies to real life.

Chapter one sets up my intersectionality theoretical framework creating a foundation for my research within the field of childhood studies, gender studies, and performance studies to illuminate current US American trends in youth

oriented art and research. Chapter two extends my framework through case study methodology delving into the worlds of childhood and youth sexuality through a close read of the popular Broadway musical adaptation, *Spring Awakening*. Chapters three and four present a two-pronged extended case study investigation into the world of Disney's *High School Musical* through my own intersectional tool, the Disney Industrial Complex. Finally, the conclusion posits next steps and the potential applications.

Enjoy the work. Challenge the work. Consider the work. My personal and academic goal has never been to stand in as the pre-eminent voice on youth identity or youth identity construction in musical theatre, but rather *a* voice of an arts educator who has spent his entire professional career working with and exploring theatre with young people. Through my work, I have come to understand that youth identity is both a biological state and a social construction, with both sides mediated by actual lived experience.

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, & KEY TERMS

Set-Up

This study explores how youth identity is constructed and represented in commercial musical theatre for youth (e.g. Broadway and Disney Theatrical Group) by examining two commercial productions with youth in lead roles. This research considers the ways in which youth identity representations exist for youth consumption. My theoretical frame pulls from childhood studies, performance studies, and women and gender studies to both historicize and contemporize the discussion around youth identity construction. I claim that youth/adolescence exists as an intersectional category composed of multiple and potentially conflicting identity groupings such as biological sex, socio-economics, and sexuality through cultural performance. These intersections gain changing levels of importance over the course of adolescence and provide indication of whether or not commercial musical theatre productions represent youths' actual lived experiences. These intersections highlight a challenging dichotomy as youth lived experience is in a constant state of change throughout the period known as adolescence, just as the intersectional categories themselves change while a young person grows and matures. I further ground this intersectional conversation through the methodological framework of the case study—a close textual analysis of two contemporary commercial musical theatre productions.

Primary Research Question

- How is adolescence constructed in commercial musical theatre?

Secondary Research Questions

- How has adolescence been defined and constructed in childhood studies and developmental psychology?
- How do adolescents consume and circulate materials created and/or marketed toward them within a theatrical realm through social media (e.g. YouTube)?

Assumptions

- I understand “adolescence” to be both a biological and psycho-social developmental stage of human maturation.
- I also understand “adolescence” is a socially constructed cultural understanding performed onto and into the bodies of youth.
- Primarily, adults create all commercial entertainment for children/adolescents.
- As a field, childhood studies investigates childhood as a contested utopian state that reinforces heteronormative expectations.

Intersectionality and Youth Research

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness. It was the season of light, it was the season of darkness. It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair....

~Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

Following the French Revolution, France entered a period of “adolescence” and Victorian novelist Charles Dickens captures the essence of this tumultuous time in the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Although Dickens was not writing about the development of a young person during a transitional stage (or any stage), the storyline manages to capture the duality that is adolescence with one hand holding onto childhood while the other reaches into adulthood. A Western-centric adult-child binary emphasizes polarity of this stage of life. I posit a more nuanced approach recognizing and exploring the intersectionality of “adolescence” while using research on human development, biology, childhood studies, and gender studies. For the purposes of this study, I gravitate to a more encompassing term—youth—to refer to this transitional phase of a person’s life to capture the revolving and unstable spans possible during this particular phase. I evoke the term “adolescence” to present a historical timeline of the development of the term and its subsequent fields of inquiry (adolescent development, psychology). However, I rely on the term “youth” to encapsulate the entire age range from young child to undergraduate student as my sites of exploration address that entire age-range (five years old to twenty-five years old).

I employ the understanding of intersectionality as established by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in her article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics” (1989). Crenshaw claims that we cannot fully consider the roles of women in society without taking into account how class and race interact. For example, African-American women must choose between being considered African-American or women in the several law cases cited by Crenshaw. Crenshaw argues that we cannot remove the African-Americaness or “womanness” from this categorical analysis, therefore we must take into consideration how the category of “woman” intersects with and is experienced simultaneously by categories of race (African-American), class (low, middle, upper), and sexuality (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning). In the same way, youth can be understood as an intersectional category. For example, charting the development of a youth from an upper class, Caucasian, suburban household cannot be universalized to a poverty-stricken, Native-American youth from a rural home. Also, a key intersectional category missing from much contemporary research in performance and childhood studies concerns youths’ own voices. In other words, research that takes into account a youth’s agency. I use “intersectionality” to understand the complex space and processes of adolescence beyond common biological or developmental psychological constructions.

Crenshaw’s intersectional strategy suggests that for social identities to be studied, educators must consider how identity interacts with other social

constructions (such as race, sexuality, and gender) as well as more traditional educational platforms such as intellectual growth, ethical decision-making, and cultural awareness. I use intersectionality to explore how static-seeming identity structures—race, sexuality, phases of biological development, etc.—influence and affect each other as they interact. And by studying these intersections, I hope to create a more complex understanding of youth. Further, human development (physical and psychological) does not occur in a segmented manner; rather development occurs in tandem with physical, biological, emotional, and intellectual expansions shaped through individual agency. I believe that both lived (i.e., embodied) and constructed (i.e., performed) forms of identity interact with and mutually construct one another. I hope to open up the conversations surrounding theatrical constructions of youth as both a transitional and intersectional developmental phase by presenting a methodological case study around two youth-centric musical productions.

Youth Power & Hegemony

Power, as a construct, has been explored by numerous theorists, but I depend heavily on the writings of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault. In developing the concept of hegemony, Gramsci argues that ruling classes in capitalist societies maintain control partly through coercion. He notes that “[h]egemony is concerned with the production and reproduction of forms of consciousness, as a form of domination which is imposed through a mixture of persuasion and coercion” (qtd. in Griffin 6). I understand youth as a period of

“persuasion and coercion” emanating from both internal spaces (struggle for identity) as well as external forces (parents, adults, civic spaces, laws, schools, etc.). In fact, each individual youth attempts to move away from childhood and into adulthood, but is not embraced in either category. This struggle to simultaneously resist and conform to hegemonic power structures is emphasized in neither/nor category of youth. I further extend Gramsci’s concept of power through the writings of Foucault.

Michel Foucault explores the construction and operation of power structurally and historically. Foucault’s concept of a “regime of truth” (Vadeboncoeur 3), helpfully articulates how cultures come to know and understand youth as a fixed “natural” category. In other words, cultures understand the biological processes of human maturation through a web of belief structures that create “naturalized” concepts governing youth. For example, US culture emphasizes and understands youth/adolescence as a period of stress and change—*sturm und drang*. However, Margaret Mead’s early work in Samoa showed how this stressful transition period is not universal, but cultural. Power operates internally and externally to enforce rigid naturalized codes. In terms of constructs of youth, power can be seen externally (through the control by the parent or the school), internally (the self-reflective gaze that the youth places upon him/herself), and peer to peer. This system repeats in the classroom as the administrator watches the teacher who in turn watches the student, who in turn is being watched by the parent, all the while recognizing these multiple levels of power construction. In this manner, power practices cyclically reinforce

hegemonic structures targeted to youths. In terms of binary structures, adolescence is defined by what it is not. For example, an adolescent is neither a child nor an adult. Therefore, an entirely new category is created to contain this in-between state. These terms: “hegemony” and “regimes of truth,” highlight the importance of considering youth agency and youth voice as an integral and necessary component of my intersectional analysis.

To better understand this missing “voice,” I spent a year teaching and directing at a performing arts high school. My musical theatre class agreed to complete a survey and I held two different focus groups as an attempt to capture some of this information. I have integrated the youths’ observations throughout this dissertation as their comments unknowingly reify, contradict, or suggest alternate memes present in the two case studies—*Spring Awakening* and *High School Musical*. I had the pleasure of watching my students grow as an ensemble and as a distinct group of individuals over the course of one academic year mapping their progression through auditions, panel performances, and three main stage productions. I share their words and their experiences as a means of questioning and deepening my understandings of actual youth lived experiences while integrating their responses as a frame for the methodological case studies.

The Historical Construction of “Adolescence”

Numerous scholars consider Jean Jacques Rousseau and G. Stanley Hall fundamental to modern US understandings of adolescents. Their work grounds much of the educational and developmental psychological scholarship on

adolescence, and by extension youth. According to Louise Kaplan in *Adolescence: The Farewell to Childhood*, Rousseau's *Émile* "invented" the adolescent phase of life (61). Kaplan notes that "[b]y studying man as a creature who develops, Rousseau was proclaiming the centrality of history for understanding the species, society, [and] the individual" (63). *Émile* breaks the life of an individual man into five stages from birth to late adolescence, with a prescription for the educational methods appropriate for each stage. Book I focuses on infancy (birth to age two), Book II on the child (ages two to twelve), Book III on boyhood (age twelve to puberty), Book IV on adolescence (ages fifteen to twenty) and Book V on *Émile*'s courtship of Sophie and their subsequent marriage (ages twenty to twenty-four). Book V focuses on the education of Sophie and places the responsibility of control over men's sexuality with women. Sexuality plays a major role in defining and understanding youth in Rousseau's model. Kaplan asserts that the "relations between sexual passion and virtue rest on Rousseau's distinction between love of oneself (*amour de moi*) and self-love (*amour-propre*). Love of oneself exists in nature, whereas self-love is a societal construct where the individual is inclined to have a greater esteem for himself than anyone else" (68). According to Rousseau, this self-love "inspires in all men the harm they do to one another" while "the sexual passions of adolescence propel him beyond love of himself to love of mankind" (Kaplan 68-69). Rousseau "discovered for the modern world the distinctive human plight that arises when a child assumes the sexual and moral responsibilities of adulthood" (Kaplan 51). I contend that this "distinctive human plight" is the biological

timeframe of youth. Acknowledging one's sexuality swiftly challenges the youth to consider his/her role in the adult hegemonic world. This sexual acknowledgment does not necessarily come with the knowledge of both biological changes or the youth's own bodily and emotional realizations of how s/he views self in the context of the world. Rousseau's and Kaplan's example demonstrates how key sexuality awareness is in the life of a youth's understanding of self. These writings comment on a world not focused on the hypersexualization of youth as the current 21st century.

G. Stanley Hall, the first Ph.D. in psychology in the US and founder of developmental psychology as a field of study, wrote a two-volume treatise on adolescence entitled: *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*. In this work, Hall introduced to the US American public the notion that the adolescent period was one of storm and stress, or the popular German term, *Sturm und Drang*. According to Christine Griffin in *Representations of Youth: The Study of Youth and Adolescence in Britain and America*, Hall's work "synthesized a range of themes, assumptions, and arguments in the late nineteenth-century western ideologies around education, sexuality, family life, and employment" (11-12). It was Hall who first invited Freud to the United States and introduced US Americans to psychoanalysis. In particular, Hall viewed adolescence as the "last great wave" of human growth and noted that this "wave" was unstable (Kaplan 69). This instability speaks to both the argument that this "wave" is characterized

by *Sturm und Drang* coupled with the inherit flexibility as the youth her/himself is determining the trajectory of this final “wave.”

In *Teenager: The Creation of Youth Culture*, Jon Savage claims that “the image of adolescence that has dominated Western consciousness ever since the eighteenth century embodies revolution, social and moral idealism, romanticism, naturalness, nobility, savagery, passion: in sum, ‘fiery youth’” (52). Hall highlights the same sexual-moral tensions that had been described by Rousseau a hundred and fifty years earlier over the course of his five years of research prior to publishing his two-volume treatise on adolescence. Hall reflected his thoughts about youth in such statements as “the ‘teens’ are emotionally unstable” and “we here see the instability and fluctuation now so characteristic” with the youth (74, 75). From these quotes and his extended writings, Hall considered turmoil to be an unavoidable fact of life for the youth. Hall also notes that puberty marks the start of the condition of adolescence: “the dawn of adolescence is marked by a special consciousness of sex” (qtd. in Savage 71). Puberty becomes the most common biological demarcation for adolescence, particularly since youth sexuality is viewed as dangerous and, by extension, so then are youths. However, biology cannot be the only influencer as each point of intersection is also impacting the awareness of sex.

As Jennifer Vadeboncoeur asserts in *Re/Constructing ‘The Adolescent’*: “puberty is a fact; everything surrounding that fact is fiction” (ix). For me, there

is a solid body of work presented by the scholars surveyed that puberty¹ is biological in nature and, although these scholars debate at what age these transitions occur, there is agreement that puberty generally marks the shift from childhood into the transitional stage of adolescence. In some cases (e.g., the work of G. Stanley Hall and his later advocates), the exact opposite would seem to occur when the youth is more confined and asked to “control” his or her behavior because sexuality (and active sexuality) in youth is perceived as dangerous and as aberrant behavior. Sexuality only becomes acceptable and even promoted once the youth reaches the socially-accepted age for sexual activity which is a fixed point in time. Nancy Lesko, like Vadeboncoeur, posits a social construction of “youth” in her book, *Act Your Age!: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*, claiming that “[a]dolescence became a social space in which to talk about the characteristics of people in modernity, to worry about the possibilities of these social changes, and to establish policies and programs that would help create the modern social order and citizenry” (5-6). She posits that there are two dominant views of youth: “the biological view and the sociohistorical view” (7). Biology touches on the physical fact of human maturation. Sociohistorical involves the manner in which a society in a particular time and a particular place construct the meaning and behavioral patterns of a life stage. Theorists working within childhood studies and postmodern educational pedagogies have demonstrated

¹ Puberty tends to be defined as “the stage of adolescence in which an individual becomes physiologically capable of sexual reproduction” (www.thefreedictionary.com). Generally, it is accepted that this occurs at age 12 for girls and at age 14 for boys, but it could occur sooner. However, this definition rests entirely in the biological and does not acknowledge the nuance of the term. For example, the challenge with both “puberty” and “adolescence” is the term itself implies an emotional state and actually lived state that cannot be captured through a scientific definition alone.

radical changes in the ways cultures have understood children over time and place. Lesko, as a childhood studies historian, creates four “confident characterizations” structuring the way advanced Western cultures understand “youth” in the 21st century: youth “come of age into adulthood; they are controlled by raging hormones; they are peer-orientated; and they are represented by age” (2). The success of Hall’s *Adolescence* in US America created the field of developmental psychology and defined young people as emotionally chaotic and hypersexual. In terms of my work, this sedimentation of beliefs highlights the necessity to examine the experiences of young people through their daily lives versus fixed understandings resting in the pages of encyclopedias or plays.

Youth: Race & Culture

A portion of contemporary research about childhood and youth is raceless². That is, the research assumes that this period of “development” is universal. Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Sexual Politics* recounts a personal story noting that “I learned that, in some situations, gender, age, social class, and education do not matter if you are Black” (2). Through this statement, Collins emphasizes race and culture as key intersections. The invisibility of race as a key intersection in youth research is problematic. Much like Collins, I too, treat “race, class, gender, and sexuality as intersecting versus competing frameworks” (10).

Another key to my approach comes from Linda Martín Alcoff’s *Visible Identities*,

² I recognize that the term “race” is widely contested. However, for the purpose of this study, I present this argument to note that the wide selection of scholastic work examines the youth journey without race or ethnicity and this is precisely the challenge which underscores the importance of intersectionality as a tool to exploring youth culture.

where she notes that race operates through “visual markers on the body” (6). Visual markers of race and culture cannot be ignored. In a like manner, an individual’s age is also always present visually. Alcoff claims: “the visible is a sign, moreover, and thus invites interpretation to discern what is behind it, beyond it, or what it signifies” (7). Just like one’s gender, race is a visible sign that requires in-depth analysis rather than sweeping generalizations about a particular race or developmental phase of life, and this sign is both constructed by the individual and by society. Alcoff asserts: “there is often a significant disparity between the way in which identity is characterized by the critics of identity politics and the way in which identities are generally lived or experienced” (12). For Hill Collins and Alcoff there is a difference between the physical presence of race and the way in which race is understood by the individual. Therefore, youth must contend with perceived and internalized race as another visible marker on the body (like gender) where his/her understanding may conflict with societies’ expectations of a particular race.

Race, as an intersectional category, challenges conceptions of universal children (popularized by Jean Piaget) and further emphasizes race (as well as gender, age, and sexuality) as lived intersecting experiences affecting the development of real youth. The racial contexts operating in youth are key to understanding youth holistically. Interestingly, the students that I interviewed never mentioned ethnicity as a driver in their identity construction, and I believe that is somehow related to the fact that theatre asks an individual to take on a character and to develop a character which is not (necessarily) reflective of the

actual performer. Certainly, this is freeing in the sense that I (as the performer) am able to leave my daily self behind and become this other self that does not carry with it the same constraints or challenges that I could in everyday non-theatrical life. Also, the lack of acknowledged ethnicity could be contributed to a predominance of Caucasian middle-class students who do not necessarily “see” their ethnicity because they are in the majority as determined by access to goods and services (considering Peggy McIntosh’s concept of the “invisible backpack”³) coupled with the de-raced roles the students played that year in a production of *Seussical, the Musical* (where fictional animals, not people, drive the storyline). Race was certainly present in the classroom because it is inscribed on the students’ bodies and is read by others.

Youth Agency

In order to fully grasp youth agency, I posit a complex understanding of childhood and the child as both analytic and biological categories. I present an understanding of the child (and youth) as outlined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC). The website, *Youth and the United Nations*, notes:

The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines ‘youth,’ as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. [...] All United

³ I only present McIntosh’s concept as a means of postulating why race was muted in the focus groups and over the school year. McIntosh’s short essay, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack,” does not address youth racial culture specifically. Rather the essay emphasizes that racial privileges are not distributed equally or shared by individuals of every race. The thrust of my argument is not about inequalities, but rather race as an additional intersection.

Nations statistics on youth are based on this definition, as illustrated by the annual yearbooks of statistics published by the United Nations system on demography, education, employment and health. By that definition, therefore, children are those persons under the age of 14. It is, however, worth noting that Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines ‘children’ as persons up to the age of 18. This was intentional, as it was hoped that the Convention would provide protection and rights to as large an age-group as possible and because there was no similar United Nations Convention on the Rights of Youth. Many countries also draw a line on youth at the age at which a person is given equal treatment under the law – often referred to as the ‘age of majority’. This age is often 18 in many countries, and once a person passes this age, they are considered to be an adult.

However, the operational definition and nuances of the term ‘youth’ often vary from country to country, depending on the specific socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political factors.

Within the category of ‘youth’, it is also important to distinguish between teenagers (13-19) and young adults (20-24), since the sociological, psychological and health problems they face may differ. (www.un.org/youth)

Although this definition places great emphasis on age as the distinguishing category, it acknowledges that other external factors may contribute to a more

complex understanding of youth and children. In addition, this definition reinforces previously introduced timelines which carry youth into one's early twenties. Ultimately, this definition also posits the need to "protect" (and perhaps control) this category of person.

In fact, the Convention on the Rights of Children notes that "childhood is entitled to special care and assistance" (Pufall 12). Peter B. Pufall and Richard P. Unsworth comment in their edited collection, *Rethinking Childhood*, that "children are humans who because of their developmental status require special protection" (12). All but two UN nations ratified the Convention on the Rights of Children within two years noting, "children are human beings with rights and dignity" (12). This language indicates that a child is a "developing" being and due to this "developing status" requires special protection as well as being afforded the same rights as all other developing beings. The desire to provide a child with "special protection" reinforces hegemonic power structures of the adult world where the agency of the child is emptied out. Since the child lacks agency, he or she is not classed directly as an individual and is without an immediate social category. Rather, the child inherits the categories of his/her parents, family unit, tribe, etc. As Allison James, in her article "Understanding Childhood from an Interdisciplinary Perspective: Problems and Potentials," notes:

to see children as social actors is core to childhood studies. From that perspective, one sees children both as individuals who participate in the social world and as members of a social category defined by particular social, historical, and ideological processes.

It is also acknowledging the temporality and the processes of change that define the being and becoming of a child. (Lambert 36)

Childhood is a lived experience. Through this understanding, children—and by extension youth—are social actors who participate in not only the moment to moment life and contexts of their lives, but they also actively make meaning of those lived experiences. Youth development turns on internal—individual, and external—cultural factors. I agree with James and acknowledge a mutually constitutive process of the individual crafting a sense of self and negotiating that self in the larger world. I also recognize how created selves interact with familial, national, and global contexts.

James's assertions also are reflected in Carolyn Kay Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*. Steedman notes that "[c]lass and gender, and their articulations, are the bits and pieces from which psychological selfhood is made" through her examination of nineteenth-century working-class childhoods (7). Steedman advances the arguments surrounding agency in children by asserting that "[c]hildren do not possess a social analysis of what is happening to them, or around them, so the landscape [similar to Alcoff's "horizon"] and the pictures it presents have to remain a background, taking on meaning later, from different circumstances" (28). The meaning-making process is accentuated during youth as they become aware of their social circumstances. Another challenge in exploring the role of youth agency is that educated adults are the ones theorizing and writing about youth—a period long removed from

their own personal experience. Moreover, the adults “constructing” the concept of youth are functioning within the binary between child and adult where the child has no agency. Here, I draw from Alcoff and Steadman considering the concept of horizon and landscape. Agency implies the ability to act and to act in different situational ways over the course of a lifetime. The challenge for youth is the conflicting desire to act and to have these actions controlled by adults. Therefore, agency is both an internal desire to act, coupled with the actual execution of the action as it aligns with (or challenges) the adult-driven societal norms.

Ultimately, the apparent lack of agency in youth is not a lack of agency at all. In fact, lack of agency is actually adult-mandated and controlled agency as determined by the adult. Thus, the youth is only “free” to act once the perceived action has been taught, approved, or previously viewed by the adult determining both the scope and extent of an individual youth’s agency. Agency provides a perfect example as to why implementing multimodal forms of research assist in mapping the intersectional life of young people.

Youth: Gender & Sexuality

As noted earlier, G. Stanley Hall marks puberty as the start of the condition of adolescence: “the dawn of adolescence is marked by a special consciousness of sex” (qtd. in Savage 71). In 1905 Sigmund Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* opened up psychology as an entry point for scholars. In this text, Freud puts forth the idea of an infantile sexuality and, as a result, adolescence and puberty were no longer viewed individually; rather

adolescence was seen as a “period of final transformation, a transition and bridge between the diffuse infantile and genitally centered adult sexuality” (Freud, A. 30).

Sigmund Freud’s work was further developed through the research of German-American developmental psychologist, Erik Erikson. Erikson studied the development of people over the course of their entire lives (which he divided into eight stages). Erikson’s books, *Childhood and Society* (1950) and *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968), acknowledge that the environment in which a child lives was essential to providing growth, self-adjustment, self-awareness, and a source of one’s identity construction. As a Neo-Freudian psychologist, Erikson proposed that the primary task of “youth” is to develop an identity. Erikson claims that in order to complete this process, individuals need a personal conflict during this period. Experiencing this conflict is crucial to mature development which, of course, further characterizes youth as a period of *sturm und drang*. Literally, youth is constructed in the West as a period of storm and stress revolving on the fulcrum of puberty’s sexual development. In contemporary psycho-social development fields, youth must come to understand themselves as well as how the physical manifestation of sexual maturation is read and performed in contemporary society.

The work of R.W. Connell, Barrie Thorne, and Judith Butler—contemporary theorists—foregrounds the notion that the “masculine” and the “feminine” are not innate and predetermined by biological sex organs. Rather, gender is a socially constructed “act” performed and maintained over the course

of one's life through repetition and reinforcement. Connell's book, *Gender*, attempts to map the "revolution" of gender by exploring gender research, gender difference(s), the dimensions of gender, gender in personal life and world society, and gender theory. Connell notes that "[b]eing a man or a woman, then, is not a fixed state. It is becoming, a condition actively under construction" (4). Much like age, race, or ability, gender is lived. Connell contends that the "great majority of us combine masculine and feminine characteristics, in varying blends, rather than being all one or all the other" (5). Connell's work is important to a nuanced intersectional understanding of young people—youth try on gender behaviors as they mature and grow and, therefore, live across a gender spectrum as their lives develop. As young people's external circumstances change so do their positions along the gender spectrum.

Butler, Thorne, and Connell explore the roles society plays in creating and enforcing gender. In *Gender Play*, Thorne writes: "They [American children] are not passively 'socialized' into a sex role. They are, of course, learning things from the adult world around them: lessons about available identities, lessons about performance, and—regrettably—lessons about hatred" (Connell 15). These theorists emphasize that gender is first learned and then practiced or repeated. Butler's *Gender Trouble* notes that "gender is performative, bringing identities into existence through action, rather than expressive of some preexisting reality" and gender is a "stylized repetitions of acts through time" (130, 158-59). Gender, therefore, is a product not only of biological determinants, but also a construct

within a particular culture or society and the performance of gender appears visibly on the body for others to interpret, assess, and judge.

Turning again to *Black Sexual Politics*, Hill Collins claims that contemporary family value structures about sexuality are still rooted in colonial discourse of the 1600s, arguing that “(1) all sexual practices should occur only within the confines of heterosexual marriage; (2) the fundamental purpose of sexuality is procreation; and (3) children should be protected from all sexual information with the exception of abstinence as the preferred form of birth control before marriage” (37). Her remarks again raise the question of child protection and this time from the “evils” of sexuality. Hill Collins also explores the role of sex education in US America by asserting that a “sexually repressive culture strives to render human sexuality invisible” (38).

The “performance of gender” is key to understanding how gender identity develops in young people. Connell posits that “bodies have agency and bodies are socially constructed” and that “bodies are transformed in social embodiment” (47, 50). Boys and girls embody gender differently, while also different boys and girls embody gender differently. And all must contend with the influences from their immediate society—in other words, power and status directly relate to more or less “successful” performances of gender identities. Connell claims that “[g]ender relations are always being constituted in everyday life. If we don’t bring it into being, gender does not exist” (54). That is, through physical and mental performance in accordance with societal norms, gender is “birthed” and primarily exists as a binary—a binary reinforced over time in clear and punishable

ways (e.g., as explored by Foucault). As Connell asserts: “the greatest human invention of all is other human beings. We not only create social relations, we teach new generations to operate in, and build on, the social relations already existing” (68-69). It is through this instructive measure that youths inscribe their appropriate gender roles and work to reinforce those roles even if they feel the need to counteract these teachings. Primarily because “gender patterns develop in personal life as a series of encounters with the constraints and possibilities of the existing gender order” which makes it difficult to explore one’s gender options if there is a pre-existing expectation (82). Gender, therefore, is intricately connected to youth development and cannot be separated from that experience. I argue, then, that it is impossible to remove gender as an intersectional component of youth, and gender must be reflected in research attempting to “define” and “explain” youth categories.

In addition, Connell claims that “teenagers try out one strategy after another” (82). This desire to “try out” gender performances reinforces gender as a social construct. Clearly, “in adolescence [there is] a conflict between loyalty to a same-gender ‘peer group’ of friends, and cross-gender attachment to a boyfriend or a girlfriend” (Connell 82). This conflict arises because of the pre-existing societal norms that define what gender is and how a biological “boy” and a biological “girl” are to live and interact through the prescriptive demands of heteronormative society. Connell contends that “[o]ne of the key competencies children learn is to know what are the prevailing masculinities and femininities in the adult world” (84). Then, not only are their prevailing trends acknowledged,

they are learned, practiced, reinforced, and then passed down to new generations to maintain the heteronormative dominant culture in US American life.

Debates over the origins, social execution, and appropriateness of gender and sexual performances continue. Therefore, to understand youths as completely as possible, we cannot depend only on one line of investigation without considering interconnecting lines of research. Overall, relying on memes that claim youth solely as a turbulent period of biological development is problematic because it places sexual development within the biological. As a result, research that does not consider cultural factors or the role of a youth's agency performing and re-performing sexuality completely ignores gender's intersectional relationships with both biological maturation and the youth's relationship to his or her sexual identity/ies.

Conclusions on Intersectional Youth Research

French novelist Alphonse Karr commented in 1849 that “the more things change, the more they remain the same” which seems to capture the essence of the theories on youth. Youth is not determined solely by chronological age nor by biological and physiological factors. Rather, youth's functionality is as a transitional process involving an “interaction of interpersonal and intrapersonal behavior in a real and physical world” (Lambert 24). Contemporary research can and should examine youth development in this intersectional light—how do youth mature into adulthood read through multiple factors that cannot be separated? Through the remainder of this document, I consider the following intersections in

an adolescent's life: gender, sexuality, and race. My examination of youth will by nature be partial, of course. I trace the construction and history of the term adolescence/youth, while mapping youth as it functions as a non-additive intersectional category of analysis through race, agency, gender, and sexuality. With intersectionality as my theoretical ground, methodically I focus on case studies of two key youth-centric and youth-driven popular cultural phenomena of the early 21st century—Broadway's sexually explicit *Spring Awakening* and Disney's hermetically cleaned *High School Musical*. Both properties place youth in key roles in opposition to the adult world that the youth so desperately want to inherit. Their induction, however, will come with the reification of adult norms and mores aligning themselves with the hegemony which extends the world they want to disrupt. This desire to thwart but accept the adult world is captured indelibly through the conversations with my musical theatre students as they search for the wording that is self-empowering and defining, but which remains complimentary to the adult world which awaits their developing selves.

CHAPTER 2

“ALL THAT’S [NOT] KNOWN”: YOUTH SEXUAL EDUCATION THROUGH *SPRING AWAKENING*

“Shocking.” “Obscene.” “Pornographic.” “Horrific.” These words appear both in critical analyses and reviews of Frank Wedekind’s frequently banned and striking work, *Spring’s Awakening* (1901). Wedekind wrote about his personal experiences. Twenty years after writing *Spring’s Awakening*, Wedekind reflected: “I began writing without any plan, intending to write what gave me pleasure. The plan came into being after the third [masturbation] scene and consisted of my own experiences or those of my schoolfellows. Almost every scene [in the play] corresponds to an actual incident” (Bentley xxi). Although Wedekind dramatized scenes from life, *Spring’s Awakening* was widely banned during Wedekind’s generation and met with social contempt. Why? One reason is that Wedekind discusses, writes about, and stages issues and life experiences that even today are met with whispers and deception. As critic and scholar Eric Bentley notes: “*Spring’s Awakening* has been one of the most censored of all plays” (xiii). Wedekind’s work is powerful and speaks beyond the generation in which it was produced. Not only are the issues presented in the play of concern to today’s youth as well as the youth during Wedekind’s time, they still are issues of social interest considered taboo. The play’s controversial themes focus on the sexual awakening and concurrent identity construction of the youths in the play. In *The Social Significance of the Modern Drama*, published in 1914, Emma Goldman comments: “[s]o close is Wedekind to the soul of the child that he

succeeds in unveiling before our eyes, with a most gripping touch, its joys and sorrows, its hopes and despairs, its struggles and tragedies” (118). Goldman continues, “Wedekind has been accused of exaggerating his types, but any one familiar with child life knows that every word in ‘The Awakening of Spring’ is vividly true” (2). Wedekind’s ability to realistically capture the themes and topics surrounding youth sexual angst led to the creation of a new adaptation of his play.

Currently, Wedekind’s socially conscious voice echoes across the country in numerous productions of the original, *Spring’s Awakening*, at professional, university, and community theatres. One acclaimed adaptation is the Tony-Award winning Broadway musical, *Spring Awakening* (the musical opened on December 10, 2006 and closed on January 18, 2009). It is through the examination of this modern adaptation that I explore how *Spring Awakening* depicts the self-realization of youth sexuality in concrete ways. Specifically, I will explore the emergence of youth sexuality in the play in opposition to the controlling and puritanical adult world in which the youth live. Ultimately the development of sexuality in *Spring Awakening* is used as a mode of provoking thought and raising questions not merely to shock the viewers, for as Wedekind noted sex is “the legitimate pursuit of [all] teenagers” (Bentley xxvii). This pursuit, however, is as an exploration of sex and self and not as a means to an end. In 1976, French theorist and historian, Michel Foucault published the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* exploring the role of sexuality beyond the procreative. Foucault’s expansive historical work posits that the “transformation of sex into discourse” was “governed by the endeavor to expel from reality the forms of

sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction: to say no to unproductive activities, to banish casual pleasures, to reduce or exclude practices whose object was not procreation” (892). Foucault’s driving point is that sexuality, in and of itself, is not perverse, but the attempts to control sexuality (youth and adult) ultimately branded unauthorized practices as perverse and aberrant. Through Foucault’s theory of a non-traditional (non-procreative) sexuality, the sexual awakening of youths in *Spring Awakening* can be more adeptly understood.

For the purposes of this chapter, I explore three topics related to youth sexual awakening in light of the youth protection from this knowledge by an adult figure. First, I will examine the development of youthful sexual awareness through the characters of Wendla, Moritz, and Melchior. Secondly, I discuss how shame is associated with either gaining knowledge about sex and intimacy (i.e. Moritz and Melchior) or results in the lack of that acquired knowledge (i.e. Wendla). The conversation around shame evokes Foucault’s thinking about deviance. That is when “normal” sexuality (procreative) becomes classified as deviant (for pleasure or non-procreative purposes), the individual feels shame as a result of his/her actions. Finally, I consider both of the previous topics in light of the presence and awakening of homosexuality through the characters of Ernst and Hänschen. In order to examine each of these topics, I first consider Wedekind’s original text, *Spring’s Awakening* (referred to as the original), and then compare the development of those same themes in the modern musical adaptation, *Spring Awakening* (referred to as the musical), as a means of explicating the fundamental

angst of youth—sex. I rely on the writings of Michel Foucault, R.W. Connell, and Judith Butler to posit how the construction of gender and sexual identity develops in youths through the lens of *Spring Awakening*. Ultimately, I postulate the detrimental effects of not empowering today's youth population with the knowledge necessary to understand and interpret their own bodies by outlining the taboo themes of adolescent sexual awareness, childhood shame, and homosexuality.

Becoming & Doing Gender

I want to provide a working definition and understanding of how I view gender in terms of the construction and exploration of the term in this chapter as multiple concepts and understandings exist. R.W. Connell's *Gender: A Short Introduction* does not include a specific chapter on youth sexual development and understandings of gender identity; rather the text explores children and youths as tangential elements in most chapters. Connell attempts to map the "revolution" of gender by exploring gender research, gender difference(s), dimensions of gender, gender in personal life and world society, and gender theory. Connell notes that "[b]eing a man or a woman, then, is not a fixed state. It is becoming, a condition actively under construction" (4). This idea of "becoming" plays a crucial role in the lives of the youths in *Spring Awakening*. Connell's idea of "becoming" is directly connected to Judith Butler's concept of "doing" which I discuss later in more detail. Connell contends that the "great majority of us combine masculine and feminine characteristics, in varying blends, rather than being all one or all the

other” (5). This combination can be seen in the characters of both the play and the musical as they work to discover who they are. They do not immediately subscribe to one side or the other and as they grow and mature, they take on characteristics of both genders even if one is preferred. However, the challenge in defining gender is that through defining the term an oppositional binary can be created where gender is understood as either one thing (male) or something else (female). This binary does not acknowledge the gray area in the middle.

Connell’s *Gender* continues to explore the role that society and parents play in learning gender roles. One example Connell provides is from Barrie Thorne’s *Gender Play*. Thorne comments on “American children’s agency in learning gender” noting “they are not passively ‘socialized’ into a sex role. They are, of course, learning things from the adult world around them: lessons about available identities, lessons about performance, and—regrettably—lessons about hatred” (*Gender* 15). Unfortunately, the youth of *Spring Awakening* are distant from the adult world and therefore, the roles they learn are misunderstandings of what they see represented by their parents. The idea that gender is first learned and then practiced or repeated is a common thread. In both cases, Connell and Thorne agree, to some extent, that “gender identity does not determine sexual practice” (22). How sexual practice develops as a result of a child or youth acquiring and rehearsing his or her specific gender role becomes an integral part of this analysis. For it is through this dualism (the acquisition of a sex at birth and the development of a gender role throughout youth) that a gender identity is created. Connell notes that “a common sense compromise would suggest that

gender difference arise from both biology and social norms” (35). Gender, therefore, is a product not only of uncontrollable biological determinants, but also a construct within a particular culture or society; the performance of gender appears visually on the body for others to interpret, assess, and judge. However, Connell does claim that “teenagers try out one strategy after another” (82). This desire to “try out” gender demonstrates that gender is, indeed, a social construct and fluid and not something that is inherited at birth. For, “in adolescence [there is] a conflict between loyalty to a same-gender ‘peer group’ of friends, and cross-gender attachment to a boyfriend or a girlfriend” (Connell 82). This conflict arises because of the pre-existing societal norms that define what gender (and sex) is and how a biological boy and a biological girl are expected to live up to that construct. It is with Connell’s frame of gender development within the theoretical framework of intersectionality that I enter into an exploration of the two different play texts as a methodological case study (the original and the musical) around the construction and performance of youth identity.

Awakening Youth Sexuality

One of the major themes of both the original play and the musical adaptation is sexuality or, more specifically, the awakening and realization of one’s own sexuality. In the original play, all of the characters present this theme, but one of the most vivid is the transformation of young Moritz. Moritz has recently experienced what his best friend Melchior describes as the “stirrings of manhood” (Wedekind 10). These “stirrings” [erections and ejaculations or wet

dreams] have caused Moritz great distress as he has been unable to focus on his schoolwork or anything else for that matter. He seeks Melchior's advice and asks him to explain everything about this new feeling to him. Melchior responds: "I'll tell you [Moritz] everything.—I got it [my knowledge of sex] partly from books, partly from pictures, partly from observing nature. You'll be surprised: it made an atheist of me in time" (Wedekind 12). Although Melchior's revelation has led him to atheism, another reoccurring theme in Melchior's journey, he is able to process his body's physical and biological transformations and live with them. Moritz begs Melchior: "[w]rite down what you know. Make it as brief and clear as you can" (Wedekind 13). Melchior complies with Moritz's request and learns that this new revelation has caused more "stirrings" in Moritz than ever before:

MELCHIOR: —To see the frantic way everyone always fastens on to the subject, you'd think the world revolved around penis and vagina.

MORITZ: To be quite frank, Melchior, since I read your essay, I feel that it does...I was most affected by what you wrote about girls. I can't get rid of the impression it made. (Wedekind 31)

Moritz's newly acquired knowledge does not relax him as he hoped it would. Rather, his understanding of his own sexuality intermingled with knowledge about the sexuality of a female has given Moritz more sleepless nights and will continue to take away from his potential academic success. *Spring Awakening* lyricist Steven Sater comments that "[s]ubtitled 'A Children's Tragedy,' Wedekind's play is full of the unheard, anguished cries of young people"

(“Awake and Sing” 28). It is these “unheard cries” that are then musicalized in the modern adaptation. As Sater notes, “[i]t struck me that pop music—rock music—is the exact place that adolescents for the last few generations have found release from, and expression of, that same mute pain” (“Awake and Sing” 28). Unfortunately, Moritz, in the original play and the musical adaptation, is unable to find release for his anguish and, ultimately, suffers academically and personally.

Another way sexuality is explored is through the female characters, specifically Wendla. Wendla begs her mother to explain where children really come from as she is now fourteen years old and no longer believes in the stork. She claims: “Here I have a sister two years married. I myself am an aunt three times over. And I haven’t the slightest idea how it all comes about...How does it happen?...You can’t seriously expect me to believe in the stork—at fourteen” (Wedekind 34). After encouraging her mother to explain where babies come from and hiding her own head under her mother’s apron to soften the news, Mrs. Bergmann responds: “—To have a child—one must love the man—one is married to—love him as only a husband can be loved. One must love him so much, one must love him, Wendla, as your age are incapable of loving...Now you know” (Wedekind 36). Why is the truth so difficult to explain? As Emma Goldman notes, “boys and girls must grow up in ignorance of their sex functions, they must be sacrificed on the altar of stupidity and convention which taboo the enlightenment of the child in questions of such elemental importance to health and well-being” (1). Mrs. Bergmann refuses to tell her daughter the truth, hoping that this answer will satisfy her intellectual and, pending, physical curiosity.

However, what Mrs. Bergman fails to realize is that her daughter is also sensually interested in knowing the answer to her question. She, just like Moritz and Melchior, is beginning to experience “stirrings” and knows that there is more to the answer than what her mother is telling her. The culmination of her “stirrings” comes from her casual relationship with Melchior.

The theme of sexuality is fully realized in the culminating scene between Wendla and Melchior. This scene demonstrates the harsh realities of suppressed unbridled passion as Wendla asks Melchior to beat her. In their first meeting, Wendla longs to understand what it is like to be beaten, so that she can sympathize with her friend Martha who is constantly being beaten and sexually abused by her own father. Wendla asks Melchior to beat her: “[w]ouldn’t you like to hit me with it [a switch] once?” (Wedekind 25). He is genuinely shocked by the request: “[w]hat’s got into you, Wendla?...I won’t hit you” (Wedekind 25). However, she is persistent, and he finally hits her with a thin switch through her clothing. She feels nothing and asks him to hit her on the legs. Melchior is suddenly and without warning filled with intensity as she taunts him, so he beats her senseless:

WENDLA: You’re just stroking me! — You’re stroking me!

MELCHIOR: Just wait, you little witch, I’ll beat the hell out of you!

(He throws the branch away and pommels her with his fists till she breaks out in fearful yelling. Not in the least deterred, he lets fly at her in rage, while his tears run down his cheeks. Suddenly he

springs upright, clasps his temples with both hands, and plunges
 into the woods sobbing pitifully and from the depths of his soul.)
 (Wedekind 26)

Both of the characters are filled with emotion and internal misunderstood passion. Wendla wanted to understand the life of her friend, and Melchior was struck by Wendla's forceful demands to be beaten. Both explode in anger and passion since they do not yet understand how to interpret and integrate their sexual feelings into their actual lives. This scenario will repeat itself only a few days later in the hayloft.

On their second meeting, Melchior recalling their earlier interaction is immediately repulsed by Wendla's appearance: "Keep away! — Keep away from me!" (Wedekind 39). Fearing that he will not be able to control his current emotions, and filled with shame and disgust because he has previously beaten her, he wishes to avoid her completely. Wendla is aware of her power over Melchior and moves into him. As she closes in on him, her mother's lecture rings in her head as she tells Melchior: "Don't kiss me, Melchior! — Don't kiss me!...People love each other — if they kiss - - - - don't" (Wedekind 39-40). However, the established relationship has pushed its limits and Melchior pushes himself onto Wendla. He exclaims: "There is no such thing as love! That's a fact. — It's all just selfishness and self-seeking. — I love you as little as you love me —" (Wedekind 40). The scene ends in ecstasy as both reach a climax on some level as their passion is drawn from the darkest of forbidden places. The climatic ending of this scene is grounded by Goldman's claim that "[t]he Awakening of

Spring' has done much to dispel the mist enveloping the paramount issue of sex in the education of the child" (4). The fact that Wendla was not educated on this issue leads her to believe that she is not engaging in an inappropriate act for she does not "love" Melchior. *New York Times* resident theatre critic Charles Isherwood reinforces Goldman's comment by asserting that *Spring Awakening* underscores "the importance of sex education for minors" ("Rock 'n' Roll" 2). It is through the sexual awakening of Wendla that the audience could realize the lasting effect of not empowering one's own adolescent with the tools to understand his or her own body. Mrs. Bergmann withholds crucial information regarding the development of her daughter and as a result she directly aids in her daughter's death by sending her to a doctor who administers a hasty and deadly abortion.

Considering Foucault, it is precisely because youth sexual awakening is not procreative (even if it ends that way in the case of Wendla) that the adults of the play cannot comprehend its centrality and relevance to their children. For example, the adults prevent (or they perceive it is prevented) sexual awakening by focusing Moritz and Melchior on schoolwork and refuse to acknowledge its development entirely with Wendla. Foucault posits that there is an "indifference regarding the sexuality of children" (893). In *Spring Awakening*, this level of indifference is present from the first "stirring" and intimate question posed by daughter to mother. However, indifference quickly becomes extreme action once the youth's sexuality is awakened and acted out. Moreover, Foucault's "indifference" can be equated with Goldman's statement regarding the non-

education of the child in terms of his or her own sexuality. In another text, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* published in 1969, Foucault explores communities of knowledge. Specifically, he explores how literary discourses create rules and conventions that regulate what authors say and know. In the case of *Spring Awakening* (both the original play and the musical) the awareness of one's sexuality is a community of knowledge restricted, regulated, and controlled by the adult or parent. In the case of sexual knowledge, the individuals who need to know (the adults) do and those who do not (the adolescents) do not.

Foucault continues by suggesting that “[w]e must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination” (91). The youth of *Spring Awakening* question pre-conceived notions and the knowledge traditions of their respective society. Their bodies yearn for many types of knowledge. On the one hand, they want to know the basic logistics of reproduction and sex; on the other hand, they are searching for answers to the natural changes occurring with their bodies that they are currently not equipped to interpret or manage. Young people strive to create meaning around these biological facts. Foucault asks “what was being said in what was said?” (91). This statement is the key to understanding the role of the parent in *Spring Awakening*. Yes, Mrs. Bergmann provides her daughter with an answer, but it is an answer that does not contain the truth, but rather a contrived response that will hopefully set her daughter's mind and developing body at rest. However, this is not the case, for “words are as deliberately absent as things themselves” (Foucault *Knowledge* 96). Silence is as powerful as the constructed

community of knowledge which reinforces social falsities. In this case, the falsity surrounds youth sexual education and the perceived fact that youths do not need to know about sex nor are they perceived as sexual beings.

Youth, Sex, & Rock ‘n’ Roll

In the Broadway musical production many of Wedekind’s original scenes have remained with the addition of music and dance. Sexuality is explored and developed through the music. All of the character’s interior dialogue or “stirrings” are presented through song. That is, the other characters on stage freeze and the characters singing directly address the audience and use a hand held microphone as opposed to a more discrete one, thereby breaking the established theatrical convention and fourth wall. Sater comments: “I always felt our show should begin with this determined young woman asking her mother how babies are born, only to be rebuffed, coddled with bourgeois evasion” (xii). Following Wendla’s conversation with her mother about her sister’s children and where children come from, Wendla and the girls sing the opening song, “Mama Who Bore Me.” The first time this song is sung it is only by Wendla as she wonders: “Mama who bore me, / Mama who gave me / No way to handle things, / Who made me so sad” (Sater 15). This song echoes the same sentiments that Wendla felt during her question and answer session with her mother, and she is still not provided with the truth. As Sater notes: “[t]he seeds of the entire ‘children’s tragedy’ are sown by this one willful act of silence—a parent failing to talk honestly to her child about sex” (“Awake and Sing” 31). A reprise of this

song is sung a second time almost immediately by all the girls, and the same lyric is repeated. Through the use of repetition, the lyric develops the theme that this feeling and sentiment is felt by all the girls. They desire to know the truth about life and love. The major lyric of the song demonstrates how the girls view their lack of preparedness for the world coupled with their yearning to understand their own and ever-changing stirring bodies.

Later, all the youth discuss their “stirrings” in the song, “My Junk.” This song acknowledges the character’s internal feelings and the fact that they do not know how to process these feelings or completely understand what they mean. Wendla sings: “In the midst of this nothing, / This mess of a life, / Still there is this one thing to see you [Melchior] go by” (Sater 29). As the other young people join in, they also share Wendla’s feelings and expose the plight of the “stirrings” of youth: “We’ve all got our junk, and my junk is you” (Sater 29). It is during this song that Wedekind’s famed scene three (the masturbation scene) takes place. Physically, it occurs in the middle of the stage in the middle of the song. The presentation is energetic and quite explicit to match the beat and tempo of the music. As Georg completes the act of masturbation, a group of girls dance in a circle around him celebrating their own level of sexual self-awareness. Ultimately, all of these sentiments about “stirrings” result in one phrase sung by all: “but what can I do?” (Sater 32). The youth are lost. They recognize these new feelings, but they do not have any way of deciphering their meaning or a way of understanding how these feelings fit into their lives and have, therefore,

become emotionally ambivalent. They are left to figure it out for themselves, just as Mrs. Bergman has left Wendla to figure it out on her own.

The most powerful moment of sexual awareness comes in the hayloft scene between Melchior and Wendla. Both Wendla and Melchior process the interaction through a dual monologue song entitled, “The Word of Your Body.” The Broadway adaptation changes this scene and the result is more powerful than the original play. The use of music to make a major point abundantly clear to an audience is incredibly poignant. While singing together, but in separate mental states, Melchior and Wendla ask: “haven’t you heard the word of your body?” (Sater 39). They are aware of something, something that they cannot explain, but are desperately trying to interpret. They slowly give into their emotions and realize that opening themselves up to this new and uncharted experience will have immediate and long-lasting results. They sing: “Oh, I’m gonna be wounded, / Oh, I’m gonna be your wound, / Oh, I’m gonna bruise you, / Oh, I’m gonna be my bruise. / Haven’t you heard my wanting?” (Sater 40). This phrase is repeated twice in this song and sung at the same time by both characters. The use of repetition underscores the concept that the youth are aware of the continual presence of internal struggles within their bodies. However, they learn that since no adult will fill in the sexual gaps for them, they must listen to their own bodies and respond accordingly. Ultimately, this response may or may not have parental approval.

The sexual exchange between Melchior and Wendla shifts from the date-rape of the original play to consensual love-making in the Broadway adaptation.

In an interview, Steven Sater explains: “[w]e [Michael Mayer, Duncan Shiek, and Steven Sater] wanted to see him make love to her. More: we wanted to show how this young man (who jests at his friend’s puberty wounds) first uncovers ineluctable sexual feelings; how he begins to own his sexual identity; how he helps Wendla awaken to hers” (“Awake and Sing” 30). Sater later reconfirms this artistic goal in an interview with Susan Birkenhead when he comments that “it shouldn’t be about rape but rather a much more complicated and consensual lovemaking” (Birkenhead 39). Although this reconfiguration appears to remove Wendla’s agency in discovering her own sexuality, both Melchior and Wendla have outside aids. Melchior learns about his sexuality through books (written by adults) which he then shares with Moritz, and Wendla discovers her sexuality through Melchior. Nonetheless, the decision to shift Wedekind’s date-rape to love-making is a powerful one. For not only do Melchior and Wendla not truly understand their feelings but, by creating a scene that evokes love-making, they learn to accept their “stirrings” and recognize that their actions are natural and appropriate. This acknowledgement develops while still maintaining the innocence of youthful inexperience as demonstrated by their lack of knowledge about intimacy’s potential end result—parenthood. In terms of the sexual act that is not procreative, Foucault comments that “pleasure and power reinforced one another” (898). The scene between Melchior and Wendla would indicate that both teenagers experience the dual feelings of pleasure and power—the pleasure of the sexual act itself; the power of realizing their sexuality and owning it in a new and unexpected way.

The realization that the youths see themselves and their respective lover(s) as the mode of their demise demonstrates their overall lack of knowledge on the topic. They have been abandoned by their parents and other authoritative figures when it comes to the most intimate of needs. *New York Times* theatre critic Charles Isherwood comments:

‘Spring Awakening’ makes sex strange again, no mean feat in our mechanically prurient age, in which celebrity sex videos are traded on the Internet like baseball cards [...] ‘Spring Awakening’ lingers almost painfully on those passages in youth when the discovery of sex temporarily disorders everything: relationships to family, friends and the piano teacher; the feel of your body; even the fabric of the world itself, which suddenly seems to shimmer before you like a mirage, alive with danger and promise. (“Sex and Rock” 1-2)

The major theme of this song returns later in the show when it is used to describe the feelings of Ernst and Hänschen in the development of homosexuality as they sing the same song to each other by accepting their “stirrings.” The parallel construction of these scenes exploring differing sexualities helps to illuminate the struggles of youth sexuality. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault writes:

Educators and doctors combated children’s onanism [self-gratification] like an epidemic that needed to be eradicated. What this actually entailed throughout this whole secular campaign that mobilized the adult world around the sex of children, was using

these tenuous pleasures as a prop, constituting them as secrets (that is, forcing them into hiding so as to make possible their discovery), tracing them back to their source, tracking them from their origins to their effects, searching out everything that might cause them or simply enable them to exist. (895)

Mrs. Bergmann, as the parent and primary educator, seeks out the assistance of the medical profession to help “heal” her daughter from her “affliction.” This desire to have outside assistance moves the parent from a role of youth sexual “indifference” to a more destructive role where the realization of the youth’s sexual self ends in personal punishment and sexual shame. Furthermore, the sexuality of children came “under scrutiny” (Foucault’s term) simply because it was not part of a procreative act—it was an aberrant sexuality; one that existed as part of experimentation and the realization of the functions of one’s body (Foucault 893).

Shame & Youth Sex

Another prevalent theme, shame is, in the play, connected to one’s sexuality as understood through Foucault’s concept of pleasure and power where shame becomes an offspring of youth sexuality. Early on in one of the many conversations between Moritz and Melchior, Moritz asks, “if the sense of shame is simply a product of a person’s upbringing?” (Wedekind 8). Melchior does not provide a clear answer as he did with the “stirrings.” Moritz realizes that he is a disappointment to his parents and his teachers—all of the authoritative figures in

the play. He claims, “[m]y parents could have had a hundred better children than me. Yet, here I am, I don’t know how I got here…” (Wedekind 11). This sense of confusion and aimlessness pervades Moritz as a character, and the only firm decision he makes is to take his own life to avoid being a shame to his parents and his school (coupled with the fact that he simply cannot control his “stirrings”). Moritz’s decision to commit suicide is foreshadowed. He understands that only 60 students will be promoted to the next class and there are currently 61 students enrolled. Moritz breaks into the faculty room, looks up his records, and learns that he has received his promotion. Upon sharing this news with his friends he tells them, “[i]f I didn’t get my promotion I was going to shoot myself!” (Wedekind 21). Later in the play, the audience will learn that he meant every word as the promotion is rigged by the faculty and Moritz is not promoted, because they deem him unworthy. Moritz’s unsettling realization that life could have been spared had he been taught about the changes he was experiencing reflects the complete abandonment of youth by adults.

In addition to academic and familial shame there is the omnipresence of sexual shame. In the original play, Melchior is upset with himself that he not only beat Wendla, but that he date-raped her as well: “[w]hatever I do about it now, it remains rape” (Wedekind 68). He must reconcile with himself about his actions and then later to Wendla. However, after returning from the reformatory, where he was sent by his parents because of his written explanation of sex to Moritz, he learns that Wendla was not only pregnant, but that she died by an overdose of abortion pills to cure her “illness” administered by her mother (Wedekind 81).

The precision with which Wedekind assesses the youth of play is unparalleled. Theatre critic Gina Bellafante notes that “[w]ithout didacticism, it [‘Spring Awakening’] becomes advocacy theater. ‘Spring Awakening’ is as much a musical about the importance of choice as ‘The Crucible’ was a call for the necessity of unfettered expression” (1). Through Melchior’s actions or choices, he achieves a level of both social awareness and personal self-actualization just as Wendla and Mrs. Bergmann are forced to reconcile the choices they have made—both beginning with silence. Mrs. Bergmann refuses to discuss sex with her daughter and Wendla does not confess her intimacy with Melchior to her mother. As a result, silence serves as the catalyst for their personal loss. Mrs. Bergmann loses a daughter and Wendla loses her lover, her child, and her life.

The Broadway musical adaptation maintains and develops the essence of the original scenes. The event carrying the most impact dissects the letter Moritz writes to Fanny Gabor (Melchior’s mother) asking for help before he decides to kill himself as a result of not being promoted. The song: “And Then There Were None” explores this theme. As Mrs. Gabor reads her letter to Moritz he interjects with sung lyrics that not only explain his response to her letter, but to his feelings about his current life state. He sings: “You wanted more, sorry it won’t change / Been there before / You want a life that’s too absurd / You start to ask, can’t hear a word, / You’re gonna crash and burn, / Right, tell me more” (Sater 52-53). Later he comments, “They’re [my parents] not my home, not anymore, / You try to run, no where to hide” (Sater 53-54). In addition, Moritz repeats the phrase “Who knows?” multiple times throughout the song helping to display his

complete and utter loss of himself and the authoritative figures who have abandoned him.

In the Broadway production Melchior does not view his sexual interaction with Wendla as rape. Presenting the sexual exchange in a romantic fashion, Wendla actually helps to guide him during the overall process by placing his hand on her newly exposed bare breast and welcoming the exchange. This current adaptation attributes the sexual exchange between Melchior and Wendla more to love and attraction than to impassioned rape. Prior to the sexual act, Melchior sings “Touch Me” where he considers: “Touch me—just like that. / And that—O, yeah—now; that’s heaven. / Now, that I like.” (Sater 35). This song sets the stage for a real sexual interaction with a woman. Sater, commenting on the changes from the original text to the musical, admits: “[t]he truth is, we had already, irrevocable, set Melchior on this [sexual] path when we gave him the song: ‘Touch Me’. There, he articulates his sense of ‘the female’ yearning for pleasure, singing as if in some hypothetical woman’s voice [...] [s]heltered in a hayloft in a rainstorm with an actual woman—Wendla—and confronted with the possibility of giving her that pleasure, Melchior cannot restrain himself” (x). Relying on the awakening of adolescent “stirrings” the same can be said about Wendla’s willingness to explore her own body as well with a partner.

Following the love-making, the song “I Believe” is sung by Melchior who posits: “I believe all will be forgiven / There is love in Heaven / All will be forgiven” (Sater 59). This is an interesting response given that Melchior is a professed atheist. However, it certainly harkens back to the general loss of self

that all of the youths have encountered. Following “I Believe,” the cast sings: “The Guilty Ones” where the overriding lyric, “Now our bodies are the guilty ones / Who can say what dreams are? / Who can say what we are?” explores that their upbringing has forced them to look for a scapegoat (Sater 65). Seeking solace in their religion, they still question not only what they have done, but why they have done it. The full cast singing this song would also indicate that other young people have entertained the desires of their “stirrings” and have come to the same self-realization as Moritz, Melchior, and Wendla. In fact Sater’s lyrics reinforce Goldman’s idea that the play attacks “the ignorance surrounding the sex life of the child and its resultant tragedies” (1). Ultimately, the exchange between Melchior and Wendla whether it is a date-rape (original) or love-making (musical) results in tragedy because of parental ignorance. This is a passion that is both visible in the heterosexual relationships of the play as well as in the one dominant homosexual relationship between Ernst and Hänschen.

In discussing the above scene, Steven Sater quotes the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein: “What we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence” (“Awake and Sing” 29). The silence in this case appears as an interior monologue song for the entire ensemble. *New York Times* theatre critic, Charles Isherwood comments:

‘Spring Awakening’ depicts and discusses adolescent sexuality in a variety of guises, including (possible) rape, masturbation and homosexuality. It explores the confusion and desperation that ensue when the onrushing tide of hormones meets the ignorance of

children raised by parents too embarrassed or prudish to discuss what those new urges signify. (“Rock ‘n’ Roll” 2)

The musical adaptation develops its own form of youth sexuality and explores it through song while “the book and lyrics, remains faithful to the play’s awareness that the discovery of sex can carry in its heady wake both salvation and destruction, particularly when it is coupled with ignorance” (Isherwood “Sex and Rock” 3). The outward presentation of heterosexual pairings in the first act and through the beginning of the second act, make the presentation of a homosexual pairing possible, for the two pairings exist in opposition to one another. The audience has accepted the trials and tribulations of Melchior and Wendla, and now those same trials are mirrored in the relationship between Ernst and Hänschen. The acceptance and viability of Ernst and Hänschen as a couple references Connell’s assertion that gender is fluid and youth specifically explore both sides while determining their own gender (and sexual) identity.

As a way of reinforcing the sentiments of the youths as presented in the musical number, “The Guilty Ones,” Foucault’s comment that “parents and teachers were alerted, and left with the suspicion that all children were guilty” of some form of non-procreative sexuality, reinforces a reason parents avoid telling their children the truth and why youth are filled with a sense of shame and guilt (895). The youths themselves realize this “guilt” and pass it along to their bodies as their bodies committed the prohibited act. A further extension places the guilt, in fact, on the parents for their unwillingness to confront their children’s questions with direct honesty. Thus guilt takes another form through the homosexual

pairing of Ernst and Hänschen. Textually, the homosexual scene comes near the end of the play, and on Broadway the staged scene itself is bookended by the actual sexual act. As Eric Bentley notes:

Sex in this is presented obliquely and sometimes symbolically, as in the long stage direction at the outset and the talk of grapes swinging ‘from my mouth to yours.’ It seems that orgasm was reached just before the scene opens and will be reached again just after it closes, now that the boys’ strength ‘...is renewed again’ and they ‘start over.’ (Wedekind 74)

Aside from the physical sexuality that would have been required, the textual evidence develops the relationship between Ernst and Hänschen. Ernst propounds, “I love you, Hänschen, as I have never loved a living soul...” (Wedekind 75). Although, Hänschen does not openly return the verbal sentiment of “love,” he does understand the social implications of their actions, but reflects that “[w]hen we think back in thirty years to an evening like this maybe it will seem indescribably beautiful...[w]hen we think back in thirty years, we’ll make a joke of it” (Wedekind 74-75). Emma Goldman notes: “it is conceded even by conservation elements that the conspiracy of silence has been a fatal mistake (125). Goldman’s quote helps to unpack the core of youth. Parents need to be openly honest and welcome their children’s own identity for silence will only bring hurt and destruction to the family. This statement also raises the question regarding the definition and understanding of sex and gender orientation.

The question regarding the origins of gender and sexuality brings me back to the work of Judith Butler and her assertion that gender is a “stylized repetitions of acts through time” (158-59). This repetition could be words, acts, or gestures. Defining gender as a series of performative acts begins to address cultural constraints, but the point remains that regardless of culture, race, age, etc., gender is performed and is performed under all of those other circumstances. This is why adult unwillingness to speak to their children truthfully does not stop the development of youth sexuality as the youth are playing it out in their own circles and in their own lives without adult intervention. More importantly, to agree with Butler is to acknowledge that gender is a performance and, therefore, the performance may change over time, develop in a non-linear fashion, or simply not match what is processed visually. Butler acknowledges this mode of construction or as she calls it “doing” (Connell calls it “becoming”) in her book, *Undoing Gender*. Butler notes that “[i]f gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical” (1). Although, I would contend that the “doing” and the “knowing” are connected and the youth of *Spring Awakening* are doing while unconsciously constructing at the same time, the action still remains organic and not mechanical. This organic construction is where the role of performance and the performative nature of gender and sexuality enter the conversation. To do something is to perform it. Therefore, to be or do male or female, heterosexual or homosexual, is to perform those terms and to either reify their construction or deconstruct an accepted meaning. Moreover, it is through

the continual performance of these roles that the meaning and normalized performance of those roles are questioned, explored, and expanded into a modern context and understanding not only of performance, but of gender and sexuality specifically.

It is through performing these gender roles during youth that the binary of male (Melchior or Mortiz) and female (Wendla) is challenged and a third gender or an in-between state is constructed. This viewpoint of the third gender introduces an interesting argument regarding the construction of gender and sexuality. Butler claims that “[g]ender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized” (42). This “deconstruction” occurs through the construction of another gender and approach to understanding the construction of gender. Butler notes: “the alternative to the binary system of gender [male or female] is a multiplication of genders” (43). The concept of a multiplication of genders is not only interesting in light of this dissertation, but highlights the constructive and performative nature of gender itself. As Butler asserts: “I want to reiterate that displacing the binary model for thinking about relationality will also help us appreciate the triangulating echoes in heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual desire, and complicate our understanding of the relations between sexuality and gender” (151). It is the awareness of something outside of the norm that challenges and potentially frightens a parent from answering key questions of youth self-discovery and gender assignment.

Youth & Homosexuality

In another extension of gender construction, theorist and scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) examines the role of “gay and lesbian representation in literature” (912). In terms of defining the role of gender, Sedgwick comments:

[g]ender, then, is the far more elaborated, more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviors – of male and female persons – in a cultural system for which ‘male/female’ functions as a primary and perhaps model binarism affecting the structure and meaning of many, many other binarisms whose apparent connection to chromosomal sex will often be exiguous or nonexistent. (915)

Spring Awakening (both in the original and in the musical) explores this binary by presenting the heterosexual (read normative) pairing of Wendla and Melchior and the homosexual (read abnormal) pairing of Ernst and Hänschen. Sedgwick’s argument (coupled with Butler’s) presents a feminist reading of both the original play and the musical. Sedgwick notes: “the charting of a space between something called ‘sex’ and something called ‘gender’ has been one of the most influential and successful undertakings of feminist thought” (915). This binary and opposition is presented through the character construction of both the original play as well as the Broadway production. The sex and gender of the youths is created in opposition to one another. The relationship between Ernst and Hänschen only exists because its binary, the relationship between Wendla and

Melchior, also exists and vice versa. It is through the relationship of Ernst and Hänschen that “sexual object-choice” is developed (919). It is also through their relationship that the “question of knowledge and secrecy” regarding sexual orientation becomes visible (912). The homosexual couple is out, in love, and physically displaying their “stirrings” on stage in the same manner and through the same dialogue and songs that Melchior and Wendla consummated their relationship because, to return to Foucault, “the homosexual was now a species” (912).

This scene remains essentially the same in the Broadway production. The dialogue is similar and the interactions and characterizations match the original play. The song used in this scene is the same one that Wendla and Melchior sing prior to their sexual experience. So, it is clear that the new artistic team was looking for a way to bridge the gap between heterosexual love and homosexual love and equalized the two as an awakening. It is done beautifully as the lyrics display in “The Word of Your Body.” Hänschen asks Ernst to “[t]ravel the world within my lips, / fondle the pearl of your distant dreams... / haven’t you heard the word of your body?” (Sater 77). Then both boys sing the previous refrain introduced by Wendla and Melchior: “O, I’m gonna be wounded, / O, I’m gonna be your wound, / O, I’m gonna bruise you, / O, you’re gonna be my bruise” (Sater 78). After both boys sing the refrain, the entire cast sings it, thereby emphasizing that all the youths have been struck by these “stirrings” and may or may not have acted upon the impulses. Again, Isherwood captures the essence of the new adaptation: “the characters’ confusions are ultimately not sexual but existential

too [...] [The] angst-riddled teenagers are growing into a new awareness of ‘the bitch of living’ itself. And the beauty of living too” (“Sex and Rock” 2-3).

According to Bellafante, the Broadway production “engage[s] with sexual politics in a way rarely seen on the mainstream stage” (1). Ultimately, it is the acceptance and realization that sexuality is a normal and natural part of the development of a youth that prevents scenarios like those discussed above from occurring in real life. However, the contemporary presence of an unwillingness to embrace this awakening results in youths who do not understand their bodies, are shamed by their “stirrings,” and unable to embrace feelings that are not traditional.

“The Guilty Ones”: Conclusion

Michael Mayer, the Broadway stage director, said that “we [the artistic team] didn’t set out to ‘revolutionize the musical theatre,’ nor with the express intention of doing something different. Rather, we had a story we wanted to tell, and a way we all felt we wanted to tell it” (Sater “Awake and Sing” 76).

Isherwood furthers Sater’s remarks by claiming that viewing *Spring Awakening* reveals “[a] straight shot of eroticism [...] and Broadway, with its often puerile sophistication and its sterile romanticism, may never be the same.” The experience explores the “happy sensation of having witnessed something unusual and aspiring, something vital and new” (“Rock ‘n’ Roll” 1, 3). Both Wedekind’s *Spring’s Awakening* and the new Broadway adaptation need to be produced and presented to the current youth who are searching for answers to the same questions that Moritz, Melchior, Wendla, and Ernst posed. Aside from all of its

other positive social qualities, Isherwood claims that *Spring Awakening* is “also exhilarating. When was the last time you felt a frisson of surprise and excitement at something that happened in a new musical? For that matter, when was the last time something new happened in a new musical?” (“Rock ‘n’ Roll” 1).

Therefore, *Spring’s Awakening* was seen as something different to different people. For example, “[t]o the Right, this was pornography and anarchy. To the Left, it was truth and freedom. In short, it was initially regarded as political theatre and so radical that it could not be performed in any country that the published script had reached” (Bentley xxxii). The play and subsequent musical explore issues that are ever present in the minds and in the lives of today’s youth. According to Goldman: “*Spring Awakening* is one of the great forces...paving the way for the birth of a free race” (Goldman 128). The realization and acceptance of these youth issues shape who they become as adults and how they then shape the lives of their children just as their parents did or did not do. The concept of truth and truth in the face of the taboo is ever present. As Brecht notes: “The theatre concentrates entirely on whatever in this perfectly everyday event is remarkable, particular and demanding inquiry” (115). This is the mode by which this play is to be explored, experienced, and understood—seeking the truth of one’s life in the greater scheme of one’s surroundings for these truths cannot be taught, but must be found individually with potentially great success, regret, error, shame, and understanding without silence allowing youths to begin their search for sexual identity.

So, then, what is the role of the theatre educator who must carefully skate the artistic line between choosing a musical work that is challenging for the students and challenges the audience? Our role is to consider and speak to the needs of students each and every day regardless of the artistic output. Some days that may require a season with a classic Broadway musical—perhaps Rodgers and Hammerstein—for students learn about the craft, the art, and this intrinsically American art form. And some days that will require a responsive teacher-artist to hear the songs being sung before and after class, in the halls, and backstage to tap into and develop the needs of the ever-changing student-artist—perhaps *Rent* or *Wicked* or even, one day, *Spring Awakening*. The key is that decisions are not for the community shock factor, but rather for the same reason Wedekind wrote *Spring's Awakening* in the first place—to answer the unanswered calls and to make the unspoken speakable. Listen to your students. Engage your students. Develop your students for they are the composers, lyricists, choreographers, designers, and directors of the new Broadway—a Broadway that will leave its roots in the past, but allow the form to flourish in new and unimaginable ways.

I shift my argument now from the overtly-sexualized to the de-sexualized by exploring the development, performance, and recreation of Disney's direct-to-TV success, *High School Musical*. Although, at the time of this writing, there are three different film versions (*High School Musical*, *High School Musical 2: School's Out*, and *High School Musical 3: Senior Year*) of this property, my interrogation focuses solely on the first movie and the subsequent recreations of musical numbers from that movie on YouTube by young people.

CHAPTER 3

INTERROGATING THE PHENOMENON OF DISNEY'S *HIGH SCHOOL* *MUSICAL*

Introduction: The Culture of *High School Musical*

The following two chapters explore Disney's *High School Musical* (HSM) as a commercialized consumable product as well as reproductions created by young people. First, I present an analysis of HSM and the positioning of the Disney Industrial Complex⁴. Simply, why *High School Musical*? Why did Disney decide to create, produce, and mass market this particular offering over their other pre-teen product lines? Then I turn my examination to exploring the HSM phenomenon both as an ephemeral theatrical experience and in the case of the film series, as a permanent representation of youth culture captured in a certain place and time. I provide two ethnographic moments to highlight *High School Musical* in this capacity. As a consumable commercialized product, I examine both the stage show produced at Walt Disney Parks and Resorts and products available at a local retail store. As a self-created reproduction of the production, I turn my gaze to YouTube and sample a few of the several million videos that appear under the heading of *High School Musical*. Specifically, I examine how youth appropriate and recreate the material from the original Disney

⁴ My development of the Disney Industrial Complex is based on my first-hand knowledge, experiences, and creative work with Disney products and, foundationally, stems from Marxist thought. However, the concept also implicitly references (as it is not a direct influence) Susan Willis' *Inside the Mouse* and Elizabeth Bell's *From Mouse to Mermaid* among other critical analyses of both Disney products and Disney places where both listed texts consider cultural production and the performance of gender, race, and class.

Channel film. I hope that this exploration provides entrée to examining a product that has both captured youth popular culture as well as our theatrical spaces around the world.

Disney's *High School Musical* was released as a Disney Channel Original Movie (the most successful one to date) in January 2006, followed by a sequel in 2007, and a third feature theatrical release in 2008. At first glance, the plot of *High School Musical* is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The movie follows two high school juniors from rival cliques—Troy Bolton, the handsome captain of the basketball team, and Gabriella Montez, a beautiful and shy transfer student who excels in math and science. Individually, they try out for the school musical, are cast as the starring couple and, as a result, divide the school and begin a war with the reigning drama king and queen. Despite other students' attempts to thwart their dreams, Troy and Gabriella resist peer pressure and rivalry, inspiring others along the way not to “stick to the status quo.”

High School Musical 2: School's Out premiered in August 2007 at the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim, California. This movie takes place between academic school years focusing on the same cast of characters introduced in the first film. The movie opens with Troy Bolton stressing over getting a job, with the price of college expenses looming on his mind, as well as trying to make sure he and Gabriella are able to stay together all summer as they began dating during the first installment. This situation attracts the attention of Sharpay Evans—rival drama queen—who attempts to steal Troy for herself by hiring him at her family's country club. Fortunately, the entire cohort is hired at the country club and it is a

summer of hard work, fun, and lasting friendships where they learn that their differences unite them and build a stronger friendship bond (even if some started their relationship as enemies). This movie ends with the close of summer and the return to high school for the highly-anticipated senior year.

High School Musical 3: Senior Year had a nation-wide theatrical release in October 2008. Although the film opened to mixed reviews, it grossed \$50 million in the first three days of its North American release with an additional \$40 million overseas, setting a new record for the largest opening weekend for a musical film. This final movie in the series follows the same main six characters that were introduced in the first direct to TV movie. This time high school seniors Troy, Gabriella, and Sharpay are faced with the challenging prospect of being separated after graduating from high school. Joined by the rest of their East High School Wildcat friends, they stage an elaborate spring musical reflecting their experiences, hopes, and fears about what the future holds for each of them as they enter college.

I wish to explore *High School Musical* as both an entertainment offering and a commercialized consumable and reproducible product. First I will interrogate the material circumstances which permit *High School Musical* to exist in the first place in order to understand (or attempt to understand) how *High School Musical* functions as an artifact of youth material culture. I contend that the material circumstances which exist around youth-related products and entertainment offerings (*High School Musical* specifically) work to create a

Disney Industrial Complex (DIC).⁵ In this chapter, I consider some of the possible material circumstances which have assisted in the wide-spread permeation of all things *High School Musical* across youth material culture as an illustration of my concept of the Disney Industrial Complex and as a pre-cursor for youth to recreate aspects of this empire themselves. Moreover, when considering producing this piece or any of the three as a theatre educator, what becomes our responsibilities as educators once you are aware of hegemonic effects of the property?

Welcome to East High School

The movie opens on New Year's Eve where two teenagers, Troy Bolton and Gabriella Montez, meet at a ski lodge during winter break at a youth activity celebrating the New Year. With inspiration from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the two teenagers come from opposite cliques (Troy is captain of East High School's basketball team and Gabriella is an academic whiz) and have parents with specific expectations. During the youth party, the two are randomly chosen to sing karaoke together ("Start of Something New"), foreshadowing the beginning of a new relationship for both. There seems to be some romantic interest as they exchange phone numbers before leaving following the end of their duet and the beginning of a new year.

⁵ For me, the Disney Industrial Complex stems from my understanding of other industrial complexes such as the NPIC (Non-Profit Industrial Complex), the PIC (Prison Industrial Complex), and the WIC (Wedding Industrial Complex). The Disney Industrial Complex is a theoretical tool that allows me to examine the commercialization of childhood as a social construction. And to understand Disney as an industrial complex depends on neo-Marxist theories that look at how industry recreates itself through identities practiced through consumption patterns.

Following winter break, Troy notices Gabriella in his homeroom, and she explains that she just moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico and transferred to East High School over break (also evoking a main *Grease* plotline). Taking initiative, Troy decides to show Gabriella around the school. While touring the facility, they pause in front of the Drama Club's audition sign-up sheet for the winter musical. Fearing competition, the Drama Club president, Sharpay Evans, assumes that Gabriella, the new girl, is interested in auditioning for the musical. Wishing to eliminate all potential competition, Sharpay investigates Gabriella and arranges for the scholastic decathlon captain, Taylor McKessie, to find out about Gabriella's past academic achievements.

During basketball practice, Troy has trouble focusing because he is thinking about Gabriella and the idea that he might actually enjoy singing—a fatal move for a jock (“Get’cha Head In the Game”). Ultimately, Gabriella and Troy go to the musical auditions where Sharpay and her twin brother Ryan perform (“What I’ve Been Looking For”) but both are too shy to audition. When Gabriella finally summons the courage to step forward, Troy offers to sing with her, but Ms. Darbus, the eclectic drama teacher, tells them that they are too late. After Ms. Darbus leaves as the scheduled auditions are completed, Kelsi Nielsen, the winter musical's composer, trips spilling her musical score across the stage. Troy and Gabriella rush to help her, and they sing together as Kelsi plays piano (“What I’ve Been Looking For (Reprise)”). Ms. Darbus overhears them and gives them a callback for the winter musical.

When the callback list is posted, Sharpay is furious to learn that she has competition for the lead in the musical, and the rest of the Wildcats are shocked that Troy and Gabriella have auditioned for a musical. With Troy and Gabriella's unintentional social move, the other students confess their own secret passions and talents ("Stick To The Status Quo"), alarming both Taylor and Troy's friend and teammate, Chad Danforth. Since Gabriella has agreed to join the scholastic decathlon team, both Taylor and Chad want their teammates to focus on their upcoming competitions rather than the musical. To help Troy and Gabriella return to their expected roles and cliques, Chad decides to trick Troy into saying that Gabriella is not as important as basketball while she watches through a computer link established by Taylor and the scholastic decathlon. A hurt Gabriella ("When There Was Me And You") refuses to talk to Troy and decides not to audition for the musical after all. Chad and Taylor feel guilty for ruining Troy and Gabriella's [potential] relationship, and elect to reveal the truth. After Chad reveals the truth and apologizes for not supporting his friend, Troy goes to Gabriella's house and they reconcile and their relationship begins to move forward.

With Troy and Gabriella reunited, Sharpay begins to concoct an alternate challenge for the duo. She convinces Ms. Darbus to change the callback time to coincide with both the basketball championship and the scholastic decathlon, so that Gabriella and Troy will not be able to participate. Fortunately, Kelsi overhears the conversation and partners with Chad to work together and come up with a plan that would allow Troy and Gabriella to participate while also seeking

redemption for their original attempt to separate the pair. On the day of the competitions, Taylor and Gabriella use the school's computer system to trigger a series of mishaps that delays both the big basketball game and the academic decathlon. With both competitions delayed and Taylor and Chad redeemed, Troy and Gabriella rush to the auditorium, and Sharpay and Ryan finish performing their song ("Bop To The Top"), confident that their plan worked until Troy and Gabriella audition ("Breaking Free") and Ms. Darbus casts Troy and Gabriella in the lead roles, making Sharpay and Ryan their understudies. Troy and Gabriella both win their respective competitions—hoping to steal a congratulatory kiss when they are interrupted. The film closes as the entire school gathers in the gym to celebrate their victories ("We're All In This Together").

This description provides an overview of the first film in a way that creates a foundation for the rest of this chapter and the one to follow. Even in this short overview, middle-class value systems emerge as the driving ethos of the film. Moreover, the myth of meritocracy built on innate "talents" nurtured through hard work and parental involvement is absolutely crucial to not only the plot line of the film, but to the way in which the youth in this film (and the subsequent two films) view themselves. Moreover, the concept of meritocracy is applicable and, perhaps, imbedded in theatrical performances as a whole as those performing onstage have achieved their position through hard work and innate talent.

Where Fantasy Becomes Reality

Families are mingling around Sunshine Plaza—the entry hub to Disney California Adventure theme park—when a young voice fills the air asking if the crowd is “ready to sing, dance, and celebrate the pop sensation *High School Musical 3: Senior Year*?” Several children in the area respond with a wildly energetic: “YES!” And as if their response to this disembodied voice is a cue, two giant gates swing open and a parade float emerges with a cast of fifteen young singers and dancers who begin dancing and singing to *Disney’s High School Musical 3: Senior Year*. As the parade float moves into its show position (directly in front of the entrance of Disney California Adventure theme park), families gather their children and begin to form a standing-room only grouping around this moving street party. Once in place, the performers begin to set the stage for an 18-minute reinterpretation of the third and most recent *High School Musical* installation. As I survey the crowd, I notice that both children and parents alike are singing (and in some cases dancing) along with the performers. Another layer of the audience’s participation and celebration of this cultural phenomenon is displayed in the form of human billboards as many of the children watching the performance are also wearing *High School Musical* t-shirts, hair clips, wrist bands, tennis shoes, and cheerleader outfits among other paraphernalia—this, of course, is not specific to *High School Musical*, but to the larger Disney branding machine. Interestingly enough, this audience is already part of the *High School Musical* culture and they have come to experience a

shared cultural practice—through an event that has been created, rehearsed, and performed long before their arrival to Disney California Adventure theme park.

Following my viewing of this performance (Fall 2008), I wander through the World of Disney—a department-size store that sells everything Disney—in the Downtown Disney district of the Anaheim resort. I am on a hunt. I want to find the *High School Musical* merchandise displays. When my first stroll through the store proves fruitless, I inquire with a merchandise cast member as to where all the *High School Musical* merchandise had gone. Was there no *High School Musical* merchandise to be purchased? The cast member redirected my search to the interior of the store—deep within the “youth” section of the store stood a single display that on one side displayed a wide range of *High School Musical* merchandise and on the other side was all I could ask for in terms of *Hannah Montana* merchandise. At first glance, I was surprised that there was not more *High School Musical* merchandise (for I knew it existed), so I asked the cast member, “is this it?” He chuckled and then explained that with the pending Halloween season, the store was reorganizing and preparing for the costumes that would be coming into the store (some of which would be *High School Musical* costumes). However, he directed me to other stores throughout the Disneyland Resort where I could find other types of *High School Musical* merchandise in addition to the items on hand at the World of Disney. So, in effect, I could spend the better part of my vacation on a hunt for all things *High School Musical*.⁶

⁶ This conversation with the merchandise host made a brief reference to the massive merchandise planning and organization that occurs at the Disneyland Resort for I would need to travel into both theme parks (which of course requires park admission), and then seek out the

Now, while it made sense to me that I would find a captive crowd at the Disneyland Resort, I wondered if the accessibility to these products is as prominent outside of the “Happiest Place on Earth.” Upon my return to Tempe, Arizona, I spent some time at a local Target in the Tempe Marketplace. As I walked through the toy section of the Target, I encountered a mother with her two daughters—one seated in the store shopping cart and another slightly older girl scanning the shelves for the perfect item—parked in the middle of the aisle. This aisle appeared to be marked (by the store designers?) as the “girl” aisle with one side containing *Hannah Montana* items and the other side selling another part of the Disney empire, *High School Musical*—a set-up that resembled the organization of the same products in the World of Disney back in Anaheim. Now, while the items seemed to focus on the third installment of the movie-musical sensation, there were some remnants of the first movie. These traces came in the form of the two young girls who were shopping this Saturday afternoon, for they had on *High School Musical* shirts and the youngest girl carried a Sharpay doll dressed in her bathing suit from *High School Musical 2: School’s Out*.

The mother explains to her daughters, while they survey the racks for an item, they could each purchase a small item or they could pool their financial resources together and purchase one single larger item that would then need to be shared between both girls. While it was clear that the two girls did not particularly like the idea of sharing one item, they did realize how sharing could

merchandise in different stores such as “The Emporium” on Main Street U.S.A. in the Disneyland Park or “Greetings from California” in Disney California Adventure theme park.

allow them to purchase a more coveted *High School Musical* toy such as the *High School Musical 3: Prom Girls* (4-pack). This is the item the girls chose, as I suspect they were able to do the simple math and realize that even if they shared the toy, they would each get two dolls, which is still more than one smaller item. The *High School Musical 3: Prom Girls* (4-pack) is a set of four dolls, one for each of the four main female characters from the movie (Gabriella, Sharpay, Kelsi, and Taylor) in their prom gowns accompanied with a corsage for the young lady who has received this toy and retails for \$34.99. In fact the package claims that “a corsage is included so that you can take part in the senior prom festivities” thereby placing the young girl into the world of *High School Musical* and making this toy more than just dressed-up dolls. The owner of this toy takes on a role in the HSM world and is now part of the larger HSM performance external to the actual movie. The corsage provides not only inclusion in the world of HSM, but makes the owner as much of the story as the actual characters themselves. This toy sells much more than four dolls. Rather, the toy sells the HSM experience and that experience is sought after by a massive cross-section of young people around the world.

Once home, I search for this product on Target online and discovered a section where consumers could review and post comments about the product. At the time, there was only one review from a grandmother who purchased this toy for her granddaughter. “Nana” notes that “I love the High School Musical characters and all the different items Target has that you can’t find anywhere. My 4 year old granddaughter Amelia is so taken with the songs and they are so

wholesome. I love TARGET” (www.Target.com). “Nana” gave this product five out of five possible stars and two additional consumers noted that “Nana’s” review was helpful when making their own decision about purchasing this product. What exactly was helpful about “Nana’s” observations is unknown as the raters are anonymous and did not comment themselves. From “Nana’s” response, the combination of Target and Disney appear to be the winning partnership for both her brand loyalty and her shopping dollars. It is from the combination of Disney’s development and mass marketing and Target’s ability to make the products available on a localized level that *High School Musical*’s material circumstances are able to gain and create a youth identity through consumable modes of cultural hegemony. My experience in the Anaheim theme park and at a local Target illuminates the pervasive nature of the Disney Industrial Complex. It is necessary to create a larger foundation for that form of theoretical thinking within the context of cultural materialism.

Marxism & Cultural Materialism

As a scholar, I examine *High School Musical* as a phenomenon and its intersections with history, economies, society, cultural influences, and material circumstances. In particular, I funnel *High School Musical* and its subsequent products through a cultural materialist lens. In other words, *High School Musical* is woven into the fabric of contemporary popular youth culture providing tangible material output for every person to own. Cultural marxism “begins with the assumption that literature can only be understood if its full context – historical,

economic, social, economic, cultural—is taken into account” (644). I contend that this concept extends past the study of literature to the interrogation of the cultural spaces of childhood, more specifically to investigate *High School Musical* material in the social life of children. According to Marx, “we are all situated historically and socially, and our social and historical contexts ‘determine’ or shape our lives” (644). The two young girls in the Target are situated within the continuum of the *High School Musical* phenomenon historically and they have access to the product as well as its message (both intended message and understood). “Child” is a fluid social construct since “definitions and understandings” of childhood change over time. *High School Musical* and its subsequent products market towards this age of “childhood” or to the “tween” market or to “adolescence”—all of which are constructed for a particular [economic] purpose.

In terms of childhood, I turn to Althusser’s concept of Ideological State Apparatuses. Althusser claimed a person’s desires, choices, intentions, preferences, and judgments are the products of social practices. The key question to this premise is how society makes the individual in its own image. Within capitalist societies (like the US), the individual (read adolescent) is generally regarded as being a self-conscious responsible agent, whose actions can be explained by his or her beliefs and thoughts. For Althusser, however, a person’s capacity for perceiving him or herself in this way is not innate. Rather, it is acquired within the structure of established social practices, which impose roles on individuals. As a child enters a store, such as a Target, there are visible signs

that call that child into being or hail the child from the large sign hanging from the ceiling that says “youth” to the packaging on a box which suggests the age for optimal use. The location and the placement of items marketed and created for youth work to highlight “youthness” from the positioning on the shelf, to the size of the package, to the colors and images used, the list of course goes on. Young people then recognize that the *High School Musical* material in both the World of Disney and the local Target is for them and not, for example, for their parents. The items also depict other youth experiencing the item in a positive way which reinforces how a young person should share in that (re)constructed experience.

In another example, schools (both imaginary as in the film *High School Musical*, as well as actual schools) are also Ideological State Apparatuses functioning within the larger construct of the education system by providing students with just enough skills to enter the work force and, according to Marx, defining their use value as workers in the economic sphere. Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus is present in *High School Musical* (both on stage and on film) as the young people in the play/movie are endowed with specific skills that also appear to be innate as they enter school with these qualities. For example, Gabriella is intellectually gifted, Troy is exceptional in sports, Kelsi can compose original music, and Sharpay is an accomplished performer. None of these skills sets were developed in the school. In fact, it is through the school that these skill sets are further divided and the students learn to function within their own social groupings which would lead them to optimal adult success which reifies the larger hegemonic structure of contemporary society—the performance

of value and identity which naturalizes the distinct “individual” (ISA). Target is responsible for selling the material, but Disney and the authors construct a middle class take on what makes people “special.” Here, the movie itself takes on the role of Ideological State Apparatus having more influence, perhaps, than actual schools by reifying the narrative of middle class success built on “innate” talents honed through hard work and focus. Fundamentally, all theatrical events function ideologically, but *High School Musical* reinforces approved values and codes of behaviors. I further illuminate the developing Disney Industrial Complex through the Althusserian concept of Ideological State Apparatuses and an ISA’s role in reinforcing cultural norms.

I evoke Marxist and Althusserian ideas because these concepts provide an entrée into a way of thinking about the cultural production of theatre for young audiences and youth culture. Neo-Marxist thought allows me to consider Disney’s *High School Musical* from an angle that does not rely on analyzing script and character arcs, but rather the “why” of the characters’ existence in the first place. The concept of Ideological State Apparatus provides me with a way to explore the frame constructed around *High School Musical*. However, I realize that in just attempting to explore and verbalize what is “happening” in *High School Musical*, I dangerously posit what is “happening” in *High School Musical* as I perceive it.⁷ And merely by exploring the material circumstances (which are fluid and dynamic) surrounding *High School Musical*, I run the dangerous risk of

⁷ My personal lens is clouded by not only by my personal affinity with the Disney experience, but by my first hand knowledge and work on a production which developed the movie into a digestible 18-minute parade / show for general public consumption at Disney’s Hollywood Studios in Florida.

equating them or using them to explain what is *High School Musical* and what it means to youth culture instead of asking why things are the way they are? The web of material influences is endless and these examples only illustrate one way to consider the impact of a specific event—*High School Musical*—in the larger scope of childhood studies and youth commercial culture.

Cultural Materialism and the Disney Industrial Complex

Cultural materialism draws from post-structuralism and feminist theory and was popularized as a literary theory by critic Raymond Williams. Williams coined the term cultural materialism and used it to describe the theoretical combination of culturalism and Marxist analysis by examining specific historical documents and attempting to recreate an understanding of the surrounding factors that brought items into existence. By beginning with the class-based analysis of traditional Marxism, Williams shifts the focus to the marginalized. In my example, the marginalized are children. For me, this form of cultural materialism which explores the marginalization of children (extending Williams) by considering the economic factors that help sustain childhood as a category, yields a helpful approach to the Disney Industrial Complex. The Disney Industrial Complex exists, in part, because the category of childhood, as a social and cultural construct, can easily be commercialized while maintaining children in certain social locations. Although the child can consume messages, products, ideas, and so on without the consent of an adult or parent, adults are generally the individuals behind the marketing of childhood as well as enforcing the meaning

and performance of “child” and “childness.” Located in a web of material circumstances, childhood allows for not only the potential success of a product like *High School Musical*, but also provides a place for that product to emerge, grow, and multiply within the larger scope of the economy and cultural norms. An extension of this understanding of culture rests with the writings of Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. Roger N. Lancaster in his book, *The Trouble with Nature: Sex in Science and Popular Culture*, notes that “Gramsci correctly identified the salient features of capitalism in the era of mass production: its rationalization of labor and demand, its preference for economies of scale, its centralization of resources, and its tendencies towards regulation, administration, and discipline” (306). Moreover, Lancaster contends that, learning of Ford’s America at the end of the 1920s, Gramsci “argued that personal life, no less than economic life, was being progressively fed into the calculus of new relations of production and consumption” (307). Production and consumption are two of the lifelines maintaining *High School Musical*’s existence in popular culture. Furthermore, Lancaster comments that “in today’s libidinal economy, commerce is foremost about harnessing desires and marketing them to disparate populations, thereby soliciting new needs, new wants, new identities, and new experiments in lifestyle” (315). Again, Lancaster’s “disparate” population is comparable to the niche marketing of children coupled with their desires to become the very characters they see popularized in the media.

High School Musical can be said to promote Disney’s ideology which is a series of conservative values that speaks directly to the middle class (“Stick to the

Status Quo” and “We’re All In This Together”) while attempting to empower youth to define themselves outside of the confines of mainstream beliefs (“Breaking Free”) all the while adhering to the larger hegemonic cultural structure which maintains children as a non-classed identity. Also of note is how Disney has commercialized “dreams” and “magic” in a way that if I believe in working hard, developing myself, and listening to my parents, I can achieve anything. In *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*, Stacy Wolf asserts: “the wonder of the musical is its ability to do double duty—to promote conservative values *and* to provide empowering representations of women [and children], sometimes simultaneously” (vii). As Wolf notes, “the American musical offers ways of being, and it suggests that the best being happens through song and dance” and this way of being reflects the ways of being presented by the creators of the product (xii). In some cases, this way of being is in conflict with another’s view of being. Wolf claims that “for musicals, as for any novel, film, musical composition, dance, or performance—any cultural work, that is—meanings emerge through a negotiation or a ‘struggle over meaning’ among text, context, and spectator. Any reading, analysis, or interpretation of a performance, then already incorporates all three terms” (4).

However, *High School Musical* exists on another level having premiered on television before being transformed into a stage musical and then a theme park parade. It is here that Wolf begins a conversation about performance. She claims: “I do not attempt the futile task of reconstructing a live performance. Instead, I am interested in how representations, visual and aural, can evoke a

sense of a live performance, perhaps one witnessed by the reader and now lodged in memory or perhaps one only imagined” (6-7). What stands out to me about her observation is that young people are attempting to capture the live performance through multiple viewings of *High School Musical*. Moreover, by purchasing *High School Musical* materials, young people recreate the moment of live performance in addition to the recreations that appear in various digital forms and communities such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Like adults, young people use social media and popular culture to perform their identities, try on different ones, and connect with like-minded peers (remember Connell and Butler). This desire to recreate and to capture the essence of live performance serves as another, albeit more abstract, material circumstance that allows for *High School Musical* to continue thriving in youth culture, and the presentation of *High School Musical* on television allows for significantly more access than if produced only for the Broadway stage. Therefore, not only does the means of production influence the audience, but also the way in which the message is received. For *High School Musical*, the physical television serves as a vehicle allowing the message to be watched, learned, and repeated. Plus, the musical as an art form stands in as both a meaning-making and a culture-making device. Which does not answer the question, “Does *High School Musical*’s consumption change when the form changes?” Each version targets a certain audience and demographic and represents youth culture in a specific way. From the television version of the first film to the feature release of the third film to junior versions of the stage musical, *High School Musical* is canonized differently for different

audiences and different potential production needs to reach the widest range of potential youth consumers.

Without question, the overriding message of *High School Musical* is constructed to be consumed by the spectator in a certain way. However, a person's subject position alters how that message is received, of course. As a viewer, my social class, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, and access to material goods all influence how I understand, interpret, and share the message of any product with which I interact. Therefore, my entry point to *High School Musical* is very different than the targeted youth audience. The universal appeal of the Disney Industrial Complex is, however, that we both (the youth and I) leave the experience knowing that we can celebrate our respective individuality while still being a part of a larger homogenous community as "We're All In This Together." The message here is the Disney message, and that message attempts to speak for all potential audience members. As a result, this message works to reinforce cultural hegemonic norms while "mainstream criticism both shapes and reflects the ideological workings of the dominant culture whose concerns it represents" (Dolan 19). I would add that while speaking to the generic youth spectator, the piece must also appear to evoke individuality and encourage agency while maintaining cultural norms in order for the young person to identify with the individual characters and the product overall.

With this textual foundation and my understanding of how material circumstances have allowed for *High School Musical* to exist under the suggestion of the Disney Industrial Complex, I shift my argument to examine

what youth are saying and doing with this product line specifically. This chapter provides the foundation for the next chapter which explores youth performance recreations inspired by *High School Musical* and shared for all the world to view on YouTube.

CHAPTER 4

DISNEY'S *HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL* AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

Everyone is special in their own way

We make each other strong (we make each other strong)

We're not the same

We're different in a good way

Together's where we belong

[Lyrics from "We're All In This Together"]

Introduction: Methodological Approach

By considering theatre as a form of representation, this chapter explores the self-representation of youth on stage through the lens of the pop-culture phenomenon Disney's *High School Musical*. I posit two questions: How did *High School Musical* become a cultural phenomenon for young people and how is this phenomenon being recreated by its target audience through different modes of self-representation? Specifically, this chapter explores how youth have adapted the original movie and stage version to create their own interpretations of the show's musical numbers. Here, I consider young people's work who recreate musical numbers and characters from the original movie and then publish these recreations on the self-broadcasting web site, YouTube. I suggest that youth, through their embodiment and reinterpretation of the original product, reflect the show's anthem: "We're All In This Together" while subtly working to either align with or push the boundaries of cultural hegemony explored previously. This

embodiment occurs through the literal collection of bodies on the physical stage (or screen) and then virtually through their videos posted on YouTube.

In building my understanding of performance as a constructed space, I make use of several theorists who have explored the construction of meaning (and by extension the construction of self) in different modes of performance. First, I evoke Erving Goffman's 1974 work *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* which explores and extends the concept of "role theory, a school of thought in social psychology which analyses human activity in terms of its enactment of socially determined roles," to the youth determining what role he or she should "play" and then how that role is enacted (128). Negotiating topics like self-presentation and social interaction, Goffman "focuses on the performative dimension of ordinary behavior, the way individuals adopt and enact given personae as a means of negotiating established interpersonal situations" (129). In the case of Disney's *High School Musical*, the interpersonal situations include the high school environment, family life, romantic relationships, and competitive teams. The youth recreate moments from the movie by consulting the characters created in the film. They also create with the knowledge of how each personae functions in their own personal relationships with other contemporary peers by embodying the performance and posting it on YouTube. Goffman notes that in "play [...] those involved in it seem to have a clear appreciation that it is play that is going on" (42). This is certainly the case in the videos I surveyed on YouTube as the youth knows he/she is (re)creating a performance as do the other members of the YouTube community.

Finally, Goffman outlines the central concept in frame analysis: “I refer to the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else” (185). This concept of the frame applies to the performances posted on YouTube. In this case, the primary framework is the environment of the high school depicted on the small screen. However, this frame is then transformed when the youth decide to recreate an image of self through these characters by posting an original video on YouTube. Once on YouTube, the youth recognize that they are not actually Troy and Gabriella, but are “playing” Troy and Gabriella thereby making these characters their own. In the process of creating these stories for the screen, the young people are aware that their bodies are now being watched by others. Ultimately, the young people are making these characters their own for the purpose of being gazed upon (and rated) by others. This action reflects Goffman’s assertion about how the participants alter and view the meaning of the activity as something different than the original source material.

In another theoretical extension, Clifford Geertz (1973), an anthropologist, examines cultural practice which encodes meaning. It is his “thick description” that bridges the act with its cultural context in an attempt to determine the significance to a specific group of people. What is the social and cultural significance of not only Disney’s *High School Musical*, but of the recreations that appear on YouTube as defined by the re-creators themselves? Specifically, Geertz in “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” employs Jeremy

Bentham's concept of "deep play," but in a reversal. While Bentham believes that "any practical, utilitarian dimension to such entertainments makes them merely pointless," Geertz claims that the absence of utilitarian dimension in actuality demonstrates the events' symbolic importance (71). It is Geertz's conceptualization that I wish to employ in this chapter.

Through the seemingly impractical nature of recreating scenes from *High School Musical*, the youth create symbolic importance and work to advance their interpretation of the original work for a different community of viewers. According to Geertz, the function of such events (referring to the Balinese cockfight) is "interpretive: it is a Balinese reading of a Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves" (84). With *High School Musical*, the initial story is the movie, the story that the viewers and participants recreate to tell about themselves (by broadcasting for all to see) is the actual duplication of the initial source material. The youth are not only commenting on their beliefs and social structures, either by recreating the work literally or creating a parody, but they are leaving the created piece as a permanent remnant of a specific moment in their lives. This creation then becomes an archival trace of their performances for future audiences. The youth have positioned their physical bodies in a mediated environment for public consumption and critique by other young people, thus affecting an extension of young people's embodied identities. Goffman claims that it is through these experiences "that society is built and individuals are put together" (228). Indeed, a society is built both in the film version of *High School Musical* (literally in the movie in addition to the community of viewers) as well as

within the smaller recreated videos on the on-line community of YouTube.

Evoking the research of the previous theorists illuminates how the Disney Industrial Complex circulates youth identities and how youth actually use and reuse those identities through a social media platform. Therefore, through the recreations of identities, the youth reify that original construction and, generally, infuse themselves in the recreation.

Implementing the theories of Geertz and Goffman to help frame how to interpret these young people's recreations on YouTube, I examine not only how the youths respond to these recreations, but also how these recreations are inscribed on the body. *High School Musical* is a created world that lives in the real world of the youths doing the recreating. This concept reinforces Geertz's claim. In fact, many items are defined by their surroundings and the meaning changes when the surroundings change. This is seen most clearly in the recreations that attempt to copy exactly the original and are praised by other YouTube users, whereas those youth who recreate in the spirit of Disney's *High School Musical* are encouraged to work harder and rely on the original. Therefore, the viewer's experience is culturally constructed and formed by fusing multiple ways of seeing the performance as constructed on the body. *High School Musical* stands in as a reflection and a construction of contemporary society. The youth then recreate this construction either reaffirming the construction implicit and explicit in the movie or by altering the original material to reflect their individual perspectives, thereby constructing new cultural contexts for this work.

How is *High School Musical* framing youth culture and does this presentation reflect how youth are constructing and embodying various identities as presented on YouTube? I examine the role of four musical numbers in the stage adaptation, and how youth recreate those musical numbers on YouTube while noting how these individual youth or groups of youth chose to interpret and embody a particular song. I compare the original incarnation of “Breaking Free,” “We’re All In This Together,” “Start of Something New,” and “Stick To The Status Quo” with that of their recreations on YouTube.

YouTube

A basic search on YouTube (the videos discussed in this chapter were created and posted to YouTube between July 2006 and August 2007) reveals that there are over 165,000 videos and threads related to Disney’s *High School Musical*. Now, many of these videos are either scenes from the actual movie, interviews, TV spots with the actors, or videos of the theme park shows. All of these offerings are not considered in this chapter. However, by searching for the actual song title in conjunction with Disney’s *High School Musical*, the search results reflect original videos created by youth. Another interesting facet of YouTube is that the interface is organic. Most videos have comments from other YouTube members and sometimes original creators post comments about the video and what inspired their work. One question I consider is who is posting the videos on YouTube? In the case of *High School Musical*, the original source seems to vary, but many of the videos I found that displayed pre-adolescent

children were posted by adults and/or parents of the children in the video, whereas the videos that featured pre-teens and older youths were posted by the teens themselves and was usually filmed in the youth's bedroom or other private home space.

“Breaking Free” and the Controlled Body

Similar to the film version, the stage version of “Breaking Free” comes at the end of the production and is the moment when Gabriella has lost her courage and Troy encourages her through song. Gabriella claims: “I can’t do it Troy. It was much easier when it was just you and me—” (Simpatico 105). With Troy’s support both of them sing, reflecting that “There’s not a star in heaven that we can’t reach / If we’re trying, so we’re breaking free” (Simpatico 105). As the song progresses, the other characters join in realizing that they, too, can “break free.” It is by experiencing this song that Coach Bolton (Troy’s father) realizes how great his son is, and if his son wants to pursue a musical theatre career instead of a basketball career that is okay, too. Coach Bolton claims: “You can be anything you want, don’t let anyone ever stop you. Okay, son?” (108). After a shared hug on stage, the entire company (including Coach Bolton) sings the final verse of the song. The conflict of the play is resolved through understanding and an open mind. Diversity is celebrated and friendship and honesty prevail.

On YouTube, “Breaking Free” was one of the most popular postings with 4,930 related videos. Videos of “Breaking Free” ranged from same-gender lip-syncing and the song presented in several different languages including French,

Spanish, German, Hebrew, and several Chinese dialects to anim  versions of the song. The recreations of “Breaking Free” embrace the spirit of the song by envisioning the performances in ways not presented in the original material. The creators take ownership of the material. As a result, the material develops in ways reflecting the aesthetics of the youth. In addition, some of the videos are parodies (most of the same gender performances) while others are rehearsed and fully planned pieces. In two different videos, teenage boys play both the male and female singing parts. In both cases, the boy playing the female role embodied female characteristics either by wearing something on his head or by incorporating stereotypical female mannerisms as copied from the movie itself. The performance of this song seems to allow for the least amount of staging and theatrics in the YouTube versions. Most of the videos were simply sung or lip-synched without any additional props or costumes, unlike “Stick to the Status Quo” which, in all viewed cases, staged the number and employed costumes as well as props like those used in the movie.

In one video, fifteen-year-old Chantelle plays the piano while singing live with the male voice dubbed into the recording. In the background, the viewer can see various types of recording and musical equipment. The room looks like a make-shift recording studio. She has several videos of her performing “Breaking Free.” Other videos include performances at several school events and talent contests as well as different renditions of other *High School Musical* songs. After viewing the video, Chantelle asks the viewer: “What did you think? Rate it!” (YouTube). For Chantelle, performing the song is not enough; she wants her

viewers to also rank her work as compared to other YouTube videos. This particular video has been viewed 314,444 times and has received 3,202 ratings (four out of five stars). In addition, Chantelle's piece has received 3,633 comments and been listed as a favorite on 1,652 other YouTube users' accounts. Clearly, Chantelle takes full advantage of the interface for viewers to comment on her work. One viewer, "JonasBrosRokUrSox33" claims "you are so good, wish you the best of luck with your music career, because you are going to be famous someday!!!" (YouTube). Many of Chantelle's comments echo this sentiment. They are encouraging and positive like the message of the movie itself. Chantelle even has young admirers herself. "ashsadlerxxx" comments "according 2 every1 i look like her!! X but shes pretty" (YouTube). So, a subculture develops as Chantelle's viewers want not only to connect with the original *High School Musical*, but also with Chantelle's recreation of the songs. Therefore, Chantelle now stands in as a representation of *High School Musical* through the manifestation of her innate talent (a theme explored in the movie as well). Chantelle's viewers recognize her as a viable singer and performer on the same aspiring level of the actual performers from the movie and stage show. In addition, Chantelle's fans have created several web sites showcasing her work, and Chantelle appeared in local newspapers since she has over one million cumulative hits on YouTube.

In a final example, two teenage boys lip-sync the song. They are both shirtless and there is a third teenage boy with his shirt open dancing in the background or "soaring" as the lyrics would indicate. The youths attempt to

recreate the gestures and facial expressions of the original performers. However, their viewers know that the performance is just lip-syncing and is designed to be humorous. This video has been viewed 3,317 times and has received eleven ratings—all of which acknowledge that the piece is funny and that the boys are hot. For example, “nikkikopp” states: “uh that’s pretty hot i guess” and “liseisabelle” laughs: “hahaha the guys on the background! Anyway you guys are funny” (YouTube). In this example, both the creators of the piece and the viewing audience assess the material through the lens that it is not the original nor is it a legitimate entry as a performer (like Chantelle). The youths appear to be just “playing”—a reoccurring theme in the movie and stage version. Moreover, the comments are not complimentary like they were for Chantelle; rather, these comments note the fun of the video and the performance is not taken seriously—unlike Chantelle’s comments where viewers provide career advice. In this example, each boy takes on one of the roles—one male and one female. There is no attempt to put one of the boys in drag or to indicate that one performer is female. The three boys create a light-hearted video demonstrating that this song is accessible to either gender and that it is not “off limits” because there is a female part. The role of gender in this song does not prevent either boy from identifying with the song or wanting to recreate the piece themselves. Rather, the boys perform “gender” in ways both subtle and overt as they are able to remove their shirts—an act that their female counterparts would not be able to make—thereby playing both roles in this male recreation just as the commentator references the boys’ “hotness” which reinforces traditional stereotypes about

masculinity. Ultimately, the boys are reinforcing Coach Bolton's claim (and Disney's too) that "You can be anything you want, don't let anyone ever stop you" (Simpatico 108).

The Gendered and Sexualized Body

In the first example above, Chantelle is in control of her body and supplements the male part with a voice over. In the final example, the three boys attempt to control the image of their own bodies by negotiating gendered and sexual performances in playful ways. However, in this example, the two men are not taken seriously for their cross-dressing interpretation. They find their performance humorous and the comments reinforce stereotypes. It is precisely because the two boys represent the heteronormative standard that their piece can be viewed through humor. However, if this piece were to be performed seriously by an adolescent gay couple, I cannot imagine that it would be assessed in the same manner. Chantelle, on the other hand, is not only being rated on her talent to execute the song well, but also on her "pretty" and "talented" body. Therefore, the on-line community is stepping in to inscribe wants and desires underscored in the song on Chantelle's body itself. Chantelle's videos have become so popular because her interpretations seem to reify the message of the song and the movie as a whole when the desire to create the video in the first place could be precisely for the opposite reason.

Both male and female youths recreate genders in their videos just as they do in real life. The videos reinforce the importance of Butler's idea that gender is

a performed social construction. In Butler's *Undoing Gender* (2004), this mode of construction is called "doing." Butler notes that "[i]f gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical" (1). Although, I would contend that the "doing" and the "knowing" are connected and that the youth are, in fact, aware of what they are doing while knowingly constructing at the same time. However, the action of doing remains organic, fluid, and the opposite of the original construction in the film. This organic construction occurs when the role of performance and the performative nature of gender and sexuality enter the conversation. To do something is to perform it. Therefore, to be or do male or female, and heterosexual or homosexual, is to perform those terms and to either reify their construction or deconstruct an accepted meaning—and sometimes both. However, I argue that rather than gender having a polarizing effect, gender performance can be subtle, varied, and shaded by multiple understandings by both the performer and the audience. Moreover, it is through the continual performance of these roles that the meaning and normalized performance of those roles are questioned, explored, and expanded into a modern context and understanding not only of performance, but of gender and sexuality specifically.

Butler notes that "[t]o understand gender as a historical category, however, is to accept that gender, understood as one way of culturally configuring a body, is open to a continual remaking, and that 'anatomy' and 'sex' are not without cultural framing" just like adolescents and children (9-10). It is important to highlight the role of the body in constructing a performance. For me as a

researcher, the role of gender performance and construction yields a grounded understanding of the youth performances as an intersectional entry point. Their willingness to embrace a lifestyle and performance mode that reflects who they are and their personal artistic aesthetics while placing that aesthetic in a world that refuses to recognize it is exceptionally fulfilling. YouTube users note the elements of cross-dressing and, for some undisclosed reason, the fact that the songs are recreated by two members of the same gender does not seem to affect their reaction to the recreation.

Butler writes that “[g]ender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized” (42). This “deconstruction” occurs through the construction of another gender and approach to understanding the construction of gender. Butler notes that “the alternative to the binary system of gender [male, female or heterosexual, homosexual] is a multiplication of genders” (43). The concept of a multiplication of genders is not only interesting in light of this argument, but highlights the constructive and performative nature of gender itself. As Butler asserts: “I want to reiterate that displacing the binary model for thinking about relationality will also help us appreciate the triangulating echoes in heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual desire, and complicate our understanding of the relations between sexuality and gender” (151). This triangulation is one of the successes of the youth created performance of self, for they challenge how the viewer understands both the gender of the character depicted as well as the gender of the performer on

the video itself. This potentially conflicting image asks the viewer to come to a new understanding of not only the gender being performed in the movie and the recreated gender in the video, but also the gender being performed by the (silent) viewer.

The Proficient and Competent Body

High School Musical's anthem, "We're All In This Together" ends both the movie and the stage version of the show. The lyrics of the song suggest that "everyone is special in their own way" and that "dreams have no limitations" (Simpatico 112). This song functions as an ensemble piece and involves the entire cast. Similarly, the recreation of this number on YouTube also relies on many people. Almost all of the recreations are lip-syncs because the focus is on the dancing and choreography and less on spotlighting individual voices. "We're All In This Together" stands out as a group video whether that was in a dance class or out in the street with 1,540 video threads. This song appears popular at local talent shows and in dance studios across the country. Also, due to the focus and attention to mimicking the choreography from the original movie, the comments posted by viewers usually noted whether or not the dancing was accurate or if more rehearsals would be helpful⁸.

One example is two girls dancing in their living room. They sing an occasional refrain of the song, but nothing more. The girls are completely focused on the musical number's choreography. The video has been viewed

⁸ Choreography as well as all the performance arts as "recreation" is intriguing considering that we train young artists not to recreate someone else's performance as that empties the art and makes it merely imitative and reductive.

2,218 times, received ten ratings (four out of five stars), and ten comments. The comments run the positive spectrum from “great vid” (“rubyhsm”) and “that was awesome” (“samp92”) to some viewers who are also *High School Musical* fanatics and note that they did not get all the moves correctly: “Hey umm yea the moves...my friend and i actually know all of them we might put a video on but hey u guys have good effort and are brave to put this on the internet” (“nibneb”). This viewer acknowledges that this number is difficult and should be done with great precision, but also includes herself in the recreation of the song by claiming that she, too, knows the moves and might put a video on YouTube.

Another video is composed by three teenage girls (Anna, Rosie, and Lauren) who create a performance space, assign each other specific roles in the song, and create a final video where the color of their costumes change as the video progresses. This video has been viewed 1,247 times with three ratings (four out of five stars) and three comments. One comment reflects on the theatrics of the performance: “How cool is that, changing coulours! (sic)” (“ureete26”). Another comment harkens back to the previous video’s comments by connecting the viewer to the actual recreation of the material: “This has to be my 2nd fave ‘High School Musical’ song [...] I went back and watch this scene on the DVD and you three actually do the dance really well” (“ChrisDilke”). This response underscores the importance of the original source material. “ChrisDilke” checks the dancing in the recreation to that of the original so that s/he could accurately rate the new video and provide its creators with constructive feedback about their performance. So, s/he is both youth consumer as well as art critic and maintainer

of the original source material. Most of the comments related to recreated videos of “We’re All In This Together” provide the artist with critiques to ensure that the recreated material reflects the original as close as possible. These types of comments were not present in the cases of the other three songs which would indicate the more performative nature of “We’re All In This Together” based around replicating staging and choreography as opposed to reinterpretation.

Unlike the movie version, the stage version of *High School Musical* opens with a Wildcat cheer and then transitions into the ski lodge where Troy and Gabriella bump into each other at a karaoke contest and begin singing, “Start of Something New.” The structural focus is the same. This song immediately introduces the two leads romantically. They realize through the song that they were reserved and cautious and now they have awakened something in each other that will come to fruition once they accidentally discover each other again at school. Troy sings: “Living in my own world / Didn’t understand / That anything can happen / When you take a chance” (Simpatico 6). Gabriella responds by proclaiming: “I never believed in / What I couldn’t see / I never opened my heart / To all the possibilities” (Simpatico 6). And then they both sing together about their realized friendship and perhaps something more: “This could be the start / Of something new / It feel so right / To be here with you / Oh, and now lookin’ in your eyes / I feel in my heart / The start of something new” (Simpatico 6). As cliché as the lyrics might be, the song explores that moment when one person awakens to his/her own sexuality and begins noticing how those feelings interact in the adolescent world—a theme to which all of the new video creations relate.

Here again, the work of Butler helps to frame the actions of the adolescents working to (re)present versions of themselves.

In one version of “Start of Something New,” two youths lip-sync. They both stand in front of a curtain covering a sliding glass door creating a theatrical environment and each hold a real microphone that is connected to an audio system. They perform the whole song with energy and intense facial expressions and commitment. This piece has been viewed 42,625 times and has received sixty-five ratings and is listed as a favorite on twenty-eight other YouTube users’ accounts. The comments range from the simple and straightforward, “cute” (“Aprilscherzchen”) to the more in-depth comment posted by “rhpsqueenforlife”:

this was beyond adorable. Im not too big a fan of HSM at all but I found this to be so worth watching. You two have cute chemistry and seemed to be having such fun. Plus, in my honest opinion, you did better than the original actors in the movie. Seemed to be more free and more confident in having a good time. I think you should definitely do more songs. Perhaps something from the 2nd one?
Very good. (YouTube)

This comment not only makes a judgment on the recreation, but compares the new piece to the original concluding that the recreation is better. The viewer is so convinced of the performer’s work that the viewer suggests that they create more videos. This comment moves the lens of representation from the creators lip-synching to suggesting observations made by the viewer. Although the viewer is

not an avid fan of the movie, the viewer recognizes the work and passion behind this particular lip-sync.

Another version is created by two girls who sing the song using the Karaoke track. This video has been viewed 7,357 times and has received seventeen ratings (two out of five stars) with forty-two comments. The girls sit in chairs in the basement of a house reading the lyrics of the Karaoke prompter which is not visible in the video. Occasionally, each girl looks at the camera when she seems to be comfortable with the lyrics trying to connect with her viewing audience. There are several moments when the girls make a mistake and laugh at themselves, but continue performing anyway. Since the girls are not standing up, they sway to the tempo of the song while sitting in their chairs. Unfortunately, both girls are off key and their viewers let them know it. Most of the comments are kind and suggest that more practice would make them better: “u wernt dat bad but remember practice makes perfect!!!!” (“t123rulz”). Some comments are even apologetic: “ok, ummm. sorry!!!! kinda bad” (“biaspeich96”). Nonetheless, the girls felt comfortable creating this video that would be shared with an online community of their peers. Their created work is an example of unforced playful artistic expression, which seems to result in a form of positive gratification.

A final example of this song is another lip-sync by “idanmat.” This video is of two youths playing out the roles of Troy and Gabriella. In the user’s description, he lists the word “sing” in quotation marks to indicate that they are really not singing the song. This video has been viewed 25,877 times and

received seventy-one ratings (three out of five stars) with eighty-nine comments including one video comment. Overall, the comments are not encouraging as “Peruanita28” notes: “ur not singing, at least learn how to fake it” (YouTube). Other comments echo the same sentiment: “bad lip synicking you guys suck I could hella tell” (“F4Lover”) and “what talent does this show? you can read?” (“shankdrummer06”). These comments suggest that the viewing audience wants some level of performance and wants the new creation to take the original seriously. The viewers recognize that the performance is not professional, but wish to maintain a certain level of acceptable performance on YouTube. In addition, the video comment is actually posted as a response to the original video. The posting is by a young girl who sings the song in response to the previous video’s lip-synching. Her video has been viewed 251 times, it received one star and seven comments. She sings *a capella* and with a close-up shot of only her face. The comments posted about her video are not complimentary or constructive. One comment attempts to be encouraging by telling her to “keep up d spirit ;)” (“clicheddisaster”) while others tell her the opposite: “I have never laughed so hard” (“TakingBackSubway”) or “you have GOT to be kidding me” (“slmh18”) or the simple and straightforward “usuck” (“jackassnevermore”).

This scenario is interesting because this particular member posted a video in response to another video, so her visceral reaction is not entirely from viewing the movie itself, but by being familiar with the product and having enough of a passion about *High School Musical* that she would subject herself to anonymous critics to express her version of “Start of Something New.” Her posting asserts

that lip-syncing is not a viable performance mode nor is it good enough to be labeled as *High School Musical*. So, she attempts to create a different and perhaps more accurate representation of the song by singing it live. Unfortunately, she is nervous and does not sing well as the comments posted on her video would indicate. Her willingness to provide an alternate option demonstrates that *High School Musical* is about high performance standards and expectations of talent, particularly vocal talent.

The Body as Parody

“Stick to the Status Quo” ends act one of the stage version while appearing early on in the movie. This song identifies the cliques and impenetrable groups of the average US American high school. However, the song encourages each individual student to embrace his or her passion and “break free” from the constraints and regulations of the status quo. It is through this song that Troy decides to sing, Gabriella accepts her intellectual prowess, Martha raps, and Chad bakes. However, the play will have to run its course for each character to realize his or her individual journey of self-actualization and acceptance. Ultimately, each character recognizes that: “inside I am stirring / Something strange is occurring / It’s a secret I need to share” (Simpatico 53). It is important to note that *High School Musical* encourages breaking from the stereotyped world, all the while recreating and reinforcing stereotypes. A new status quo is instituted that does not alter the social structures that currently disempower youth. Rather, the appearance of breaking down stereotypes through self-empowerment

is conveyed and the youth discipline themselves and their bodies by reinstituting cultural norms and expectations that have been informed by adults, but approved by young people.

Searching for “Stick to the Status Quo” yields the lowest number of submissions with only 387 videos. On YouTube, the youth take their work seriously. Most of the videos I viewed were not a parody of the original movie. Rather, the youth in the videos faithfully captured their own passion around the themes and music of *High School Musical*. One video recreated a full production number with eight performers while their parents sat in the background and watched. In another video by “hischoolmusicalover,” she notes that “this is what happens when you put the ‘High School Musical’ shirt on! You can’t help but dance!” (YouTube). One of the comments posted with this video claims “You made my life” (YouTube). Although the other youth in the room do not engage in her performance, their laughter and smiles reinforce the familiarity with the product and the normalcy that embodied play is an acceptable afternoon activity just like doing one’s homework or baking cookies. As a theatre teacher, I have to put more emphasis on the value of the “play” within the play as parents continually need reinforcement that the arts are a viable and worthy activity for their children.

In one video, four teenage girls create a school environment where they can act out the entire song. The room is decorated with sports paraphernalia to match the opening of the song. Suddenly, the video cuts to an academic scene featuring four new teenage girls. The video cuts again to a group of five mixed-

gender teenagers performing the third section of the song. The lip-synching is precise, the dance is well-rehearsed, and the video appears to be professionally edited. The end of the song continues to transition between each of the three different groups performing different aspects of the song. In total, this video involved over twelve different teenage performers. This video has been viewed 21,528 times, received sixty-seven ratings (four out of five stars), and seventy-nine comments, in addition to being listed as a favorite on fifty-four accounts. The comments are pretty consistent: “that was good!” (mamelottikala”), “better than awesome” (“coolgirl1209”), and “Oh My Word! That Was Amazing! And How You Made All The Different Bits Fuse Together It Was Wicked Good Go You Guys! You Should Make More! Wow!” (xpaigexalicex”). This video incorporates the more performative aspects than any of the other videos surveyed. The creators use costumes, props, and mimic the dance and gestures of the original to recreate their own high school cafeteria scene. This video is not just a random filming in one’s bedroom, rather it required more intense thought, extensive planning, casting, rehearsal, and a large amount of “research” time with the original source material to appear to recreate the musical number so effortlessly and flawlessly. The commitment to play and the execution of this remake demonstrates the incredible impact that *High School Musical* has made on its youthful target audience.

In terms of demographics, *High School Musical* attempts to represent all of the students in a culturally aware way, even if the awareness is through stereotyping. The script breaks down the characters in terms of cliques such as

“the jocks, the nerds, the thespians, the brainiacs, the skater dudes, and other students,” while the representation on screen reflects a Latina and an African American girl in lead roles with another African American male in a supporting role (Disney Theatrical 1). Moreover, the script does not denote race or ethnicity in the casting. However, the representation of those ethnicities on screen has certainly influenced the actual casting of the production across the country and on tour. However, on YouTube, all racial and gender lines are blurred. The characters are universalized and unconsciously subscribe to a new form of cultural hegemony—a form that has been created and recreated within the world of *High School Musical*. Youth create new videos without adhering to the gender of the original singer (even if the video is a lip-sync where the change is obvious). They simply recreate a song that they connect with on an individual level and, through this recreation, create a cultural context (e.g., Geertz) for this recreation that is specific and defined by the creator.

Youth’s Contemporary Body

During the course of my year leading the musical theatre program, I witnessed many of the students temper their biological changes with their emotional ones as they negotiated a developing identity. In addition to my practitioner observations, many of these sentiments were captured in focus groups I held at the end of the academic year and our musical season. In the focus groups, I asked questions that challenged the students to think about what influenced them and how they thought about their own identity construction

through external forces (specifically the theatre). I present some of their responses as their observations add a nuanced level to my argument, reinforcing my observations and their acknowledgement of their understanding of the role that power, talent, and sex plays in identity construction.

The presence of youth glorified in contemporary popular culture is a clear example of the power of youth culture and the creation of youth superstars. That conversation is not the focal point of this discussion. The focus group observe that talent and sex create a youth symbiotic relationship. This relationship aligns with the struggles experienced by the characters in *Spring Awakening* as well as foreshadows the bubble gum environment of *High School Musical*. When asked about the perception of youth identity in contemporary popular culture, one comment captured the feel of the group. Carlotta responded simply: “I think they are all sluts!” When pushed to explain her answer in more detail, she provided examples of this spectrum calling out Hannah Montana (Disney), Miley Cyrus (Disney turned anti-Disney), Ke\$ha, Avril Lavigne, and Britney Spears as proof that young female artists must chose between youthful and sexy, but never the combination of the two. Kate noted: “the media pushes young girls to do things that’s gonna sell them records.” Gertrude reaffirmed this, asserting that “sex does sell, sex always...sells.”

I challenged the students to think of examples where young artists have maintained what they perceived as artistry, integrity and their personal identity. The group was able to populate several stars—Raven Simone and Lindsay Lohan. Early in their careers, both stars were Disney products and therefore not

sexualized. Here is where talent and sex challenge one another. The focus group recognized that a young star would not turn down an opportunity to be represented by Disney and, at the same time, recognized that if you work for Disney, your popular image will be controlled and managed in a way that is in line with Disney's corporate image and brand. Sandy notes: "they had no choice but to go to Disney because Disney offered them something. You don't turn down Disney...if you do that, that's dumb." Without evoking Disney specifically, Carlotta comments: "you have two paths to go, the sexual way and the button-up-shirt-way. And if they're [producers] like we want you to be sexual, then you go that way and it has nothing to do if you're a good girl or a bad girl." Carlotta alludes to the role of talent. That is, if Disney approaches a young artist and offers him or her a contract then the artist must be talented as Disney does not represent untalented young people. This underlying sentiment is represented by most of the comments noting that an artist cannot turn down a Disney offer and at the same time must accept the guidelines (and the hegemonic message) that comes with being represented by a global entertainment giant.

Although these observations are small, they are representative of a culture which consumes mass production of youth sexuality restricted (Disney) and youth sexuality exploited (Miley Cyrus, Britney Spears). The incongruity comes from when these two elements have previously occupied the other's space. I argue that the lens of intersectionality clarifies that these potential poles are always in conflict as the emotion associated with them exists in every young person and are tempered by their parents, their peers, and the larger hegemonic society distilling

their opposing images into one socially acceptable (and expected) persona. The students clearly articulate the dichotomy of being Disney and being sexy and the challenges that arise culturally as well as from an identity perspective when a pop star (or youth product) is created as one thing, but then appears as another. It is this poorly communicated message (much like Wendla's conversation with her mother) that encourages the youth to examine both and then determine the appropriate choice for them based on their personal subject position as it evolves over the course of their lives. Yes, youth identity is constructed in commercial musical theatre, but it is also constructed as a result of exposure to commercial musical theatre and their replication of musical theatre. The identity that prevails is the one that speaks to the youths' multiple points of intersection and where those intersections are accepted by mass culture, all the while appearing to oppose the status quo.

Interestingly, both the characters in *High School Musical* and the students in my class noted the nature of hard work, innate talent, and parental involvement in their overall understanding of self and, by extension, success. HSM is as performative as all the popular culture "stars" mentioned by the group, and the students are aware that, in order to be successful, it is necessary to create a publically consumed (and traded) character which can be different from their at-home personality. Carlotta notes: "It's [performing/creating a character] like playing an adult game of dress-up." This one short statement encapsulates so much of the struggle Wendla felt searching for knowledge and stepping into the adult world to the community the students of East High School create to an actual

youth trying on genders and identities as they move toward adulthood (Butler and Connell). Although, performance has something to do with talent, moving from youth to an adult has nothing to do with it. Nonetheless, performing allows youth the opportunity to try on an adult characteristics without having to formally commit to them for an extended period of time. The successful performance of hegemonic norms are accepted (and in some cases celebrated) by adults unless the sampled behavior is sexual. It is at this point, that youth are reprimanded and encouraged to “act” more like a child or “act” more like an adult and by doing so completely ignore the sexual in-between stage of both categories.

Conclusion: Material Circumstances and Beyond

This chapter outlines the material circumstances that make a product such as *High School Musical* possible both in its production as well as in its consumption by its target market. Jill Dolan suggests that “ideology is based on assumptions about how the culture operates and what it means” (41). Dominant cultural meanings are both constituted and reconstituted through representation and this constitution is for a particular viewing subject. *High School Musical* is possible precisely because of the material circumstances which allow it to operate within a contemporary culture. Should these circumstances be different or assembled in an alternate manner, the window of opportunity could be lost or missed altogether.

David Simpatico, author of Disney’s *High School Musical* (the stage version), suggests that you (the reader, the actor, the student, the director, and the

teacher) are the circumstance that makes *High School Musical* possible. According to Simpatico, the individual is the sole material circumstance. He directs the reader: “as you venture into the hallowed halls of *High School Musical*, the most important thing to remember is to have as much fun as you possibly can” (vi). Having fun seems a little harder now from the moment when I was standing in Sunshine Plaza watching 15 highly energetic and talented young people recreate and celebrate the underlying cultural norms that *High School Musical* subtly and not-so-subtly professes. But the author assures me and all other potential directors of this piece that “the characters of *High School Musical* may seem exaggerated on the surface, but there is something very real and recognizable in each of them” (vi). It is the characters’ “universal” appeal that should make me want to produce *High School Musical* at my theatre, for then I could reach the widest possible population—a population that would reflect the all-encompassing racial casting of the film. Finally, the author evokes performance talent as the final component to successfully mounting a production by asserting that “we’ve [the creative team] done our best to craft these characters on the page through speech, action, and song – now it’s your job to show the audience what makes them tick” (vi).

Aside from my questions, I am left with one more challenge, and that is the challenge of writing about performance. Wolf claims: “all writing about performance is incomplete, but usefully so.” As Peggy Phelan argues, ‘Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of

representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance” (7). I believe that it is this “something other” that as a scholar I am trying to understand and contextualize its meaning on a larger scale. I cannot be in every child’s living room when he or she first views *High School Musical* or first discovers a product related to the movie to capture the essence of what *High School Musical* means to this one individual child. Nonetheless, I work to understand the phenomenon anyway. I attempt to place myself in the place of the child and imagine what role(s) *High School Musical* plays in my life. Unfortunately, just as the synapses of a young child’s brain are endless, so are the possibilities. But there is “something” present and I come to understand that something by exploring the material circumstances that surrounds the phenomena known as *High School Musical* while working to ask and answer the “why” of *High School Musical* and its subsequent offspring through the larger framework of the Disney Industrial Complex. It is the combination of a phenomena, the ideology explored to explain the phenomena, and the phenomena’s material circumstances that allows for the existence of the event in conjunction with the approach that childhood in contemporary society is constructed and commercialized in a way that has allowed for the creation of the Disney Industrial Complex.

In all of the videos surveyed, there is a great attention to detail both on the part of the video participant(s) and the videographer. The recreation of songs from *High School Musical* appears to be a desirable activity by the creators. There is no indication that the youths take into consideration their “low budget”

recreations (even though some videos had a high production value) as these recreations are in the mode of creative play and are not being produced for either TV or the commercial stage like the originals. The simple, straightforward, and familiar structure of the play makes it accessible to its target audience. Young people can identify with the themes and the characters of the play. So, it is easy for them to recreate the world of the play for themselves in their own personal spaces. Evoking Geertz, *High School Musical* is a story of youth living in a specific time and a specific place, all the while serving as a foundation for future youth-marketed culture products. Now, whether that story is an accurate representation of their individual overall lives is worth consideration. The world of HSM is an idyllic dream that has been created and packaged by adults for youth consumption to encourage youth to accept and strive for a place within the larger hegemonic society. As a result, HSM is a contemporary ISA that prospers because it represents a larger shared dream. The overall message of the piece (stand up for what you believe and be who you want to be) makes the cross-gender recreations acceptable as young boys play girls and young girls play boys. After all, they are merely playing, not orchestrating a physical altercation.

Disney's *High School Musical* serves a need to present family-friendly entertainment that celebrates individuality and the self through either direct copycat videos as explored through lip-synching or through original pieces that include the performer's own voice. The belief exists that some adults, parents, scholars, etc., consider the *High School Musical* empire frivolous and reinforcing stereotypes and cultural hegemony which is irrelevant to the target audience. The

power of this new phenomenon is in its audience and this audience (generally) is not composed of adults—it is an audience of wide-ranging youth who have connected with an entertainment offering that speaks to them. For this reason, it is necessary for adults to be aware of the message being conveyed in the original product and engage a young person critically about the images represented in *High School Musical*. They are the Troys, Gabriellas, Sharpays, Ryans, Kelsies, and Chads of the world. They want to be noticed. They want to be able to acknowledge themselves and their own passions in an over sexualized youth commercial world that celebrates getting to adulthood instead of experiencing one's youth.

Young people want to belong to a society that accepts them as they are and celebrates their passions and interests. *High School Musical* serves this immediate need and drives a new social clique—those that know *High School Musical* and those that do not. *New York Times* theatre critic Charles Isherwood acknowledges that *High School Musical* proclaims that “it is O.K. to be yourself, even if it means whipping up a mean crème brûlée after basketball practice. Especially, if it means whipping up a mean crème brûlée after basketball practice” (1). It is this acknowledgement that celebrates individual diversity in a sea of stereotypes that has made *High School Musical* successful (even though the movie itself reinforces stereotypes). Isherwood concludes that “whether this accords with current reality in American high schools I cannot say, and frankly doubt. But [...] devotion is not really about encountering the harsh truths of the world, but about seeking some solace for them and finding the inspiration to

change them” (1). Ultimately, Disney’s *High School Musical* frames the immediate perceived needs of the youth who have chosen to make this production part of their popular culture. Rather, *High School Musical* represents an environment where the underdog, undervalued, and simply not noticed can achieve their dreams that popular culture prevents through a complete assimilation into the predominant hegemonic norms as created, maintained, and followed by the same adults that the students of East High School try so desperately to oppose. The basketball player becomes a musical star, the nerd lands the lead, and the league of outcasts find their solace in areas of the school that were socially forbidden—Chad bakes, Martha raps, and Kelsie composes. However, *High School Musical* has become a cultural phenomenon, and with 165,000 *High School Musical* related videos on YouTube representing both official materials as well as thousands of original copy cats from across the globe, it is nearly impossible to avoid the influence and the wide-reaching effects of Disney’s youth sensation, *High School Musical*.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

The Audience Warm-Up: Why Youth?

“I don’t think I identify my life as any one specific category [...] because I’m constantly changing as a teenager and growing up and maturing and developing who I am, but I think I identify as an artist all the time because I’m constantly creating art and I think that’s something that won’t change.” – Gertrude, 16

Gertrude reveals a key truth for my exploration. That is, socially-constructed categories could be understood as fixed if individuals do not recognize the categories as created, but rather as personal. For Gertrude, the category of “artist” is fixed for her and how she understands herself while her personal desires may change over time. In this work, I trace the beginnings of a field of inquiry (Childhood Studies) and fuse that research with my 21st Century understanding of how young people live, develop, and interact with others. Childhood Studies, as a field, examines youth at all levels and on all accounts, but the actual category of inquisition—the child—is ever-changing and, as a result, so is the field. My interest in this field of inquiry has come from my direct interaction with young people in the arts for nearly two decades, coupled with my own experience on the stage. Our work as educators comes from our everyday partnership with the young people in our lives both in an academic classroom as

well as part of the drama club. This is the wonder of working within educational theatre. My hope is that you find young people as interesting and rewarding to work with in a theatrical setting as I do and will be able to take from this research a deeper understanding of the connection between your students' actions and their actual lived experiences (which are, at times, discordant).

I chart my own marvel as a theatre educator and practitioner through forms that have spurred my own interest in youth; from personal development (*Spring Awakening*) to self-actualization and theatrical recreation (Disney's *High School Musical*). Both sites provide a foundation through which to funnel my fascination with the concept of intersectionality and, from that fascination, emerges the Disney Industrial Complex. For me, the Disney Industrial Complex is another youth intersection specifically reflecting one global organization's approach to youth material culture and commercial consumption. I unequivocally believe that intersectionality will continue to play a necessary part in the continuing, rich examination of youth commercial and representational culture. So too, the Disney Industrial Complex can be another tool through which the circulation of youth material culture can be examined.

Certainly, since performance is ephemeral, so then, on some level, is this research. What remains, however, is that young people (and adults) around the globe continue to connect to varying forms of youth commercial entertainment which attempts to capture the "honesty" of youth. Sometimes this honesty comes at varying costs from lack of knowledge to even death (*Spring Awakening*) and at other times this honesty arrives at the hands of a friend, a perceived enemy, or an

adult (*High School Musical*). Regardless of the source, youth are consuming, interpreting, and (re)creating these circulating stories and key components of identity formation. To that end, each generation will shift the foundation to fuel the development (and popularization) of other *Spring Awakenings* and other *High School Musicals* (e.g. *Glee*, *Smash*, and the new Broadway musical, *Bring It On*). These entertainments are designed for youth (by adults aligning the product's message with prevalent hegemonic beliefs) all the while being funneled through the youth's individual identity.

This conclusion is structured to showcase three major themes and their potential application to your classroom as it relates to commercial musical theatre and youth identity formation. First, I compare the role of youth power and knowledge acquisition as presented in both *Spring Awakening* and Disney's *High School Musical* coupled with student responses around the same topic as visible in popular culture. Secondly, I navigate the tenuous line between exceptionalism and meritocracy as it relates to innate talents and hard work in all three cases. Finally, I consider the presentation of sensual sexuality and idyllic romanticism as presented in each site. The culmination of this document uncovers glimmers of *what it means to be a youth in musical theatre* and how that understanding applies to real life.

The Journey

A close examination of *Spring Awakening* reveals the explicit power of youth knowledge acquisition—knowledge of oneself (Wendla), knowledge

possession (Melchior and the adults), and the power of sharing knowledge (Wendla, Moritz, Melchior, et al)—as it relates to identity formation. Through the lens of intersectionality, this power / knowledge structure highlights the destructive nature of the lack of knowledge at key developmental periods in a young person’s life from biological maturation (Wendla and Moritz) to academic success (Moritz) to sexual experimentation (Ernst and Hanschen) and sexual consummation (Wendla and Melchior). The musical adaptation serves as a modern mirror reflecting the contemporary within the century-old story. For the musical, much like the original, asks the young people of the play (and the viewing audience) to consider their role in understanding love, the trials of puberty, and the role of true friendship in the heart of adversity without guidance from the adult community. The absence of adults physically requires the young people to make decisions by themselves and for themselves directly influencing their overall identity formation through their interactions with power and knowledge structures.

My examination of Disney’s *High School Musical* shifts from implicit understanding of self to the performative and (re)creative self evidenced not only in the play inside a play model of the movie musical, but through the youth-generated recreations on YouTube. Through the application of intersectionality emerges the Disney Industrial Complex—a concept that considers the true impact of the “magic” of stepping inside a Disney fairy tale. As a parallel to *Spring Awakening*, *High School Musical* also asks the young people of East High School (and the viewing audience) to consider their role in understanding love, the trials

of puberty, and the role of true friendship at the heart of adversity with the *inclusion* and guidance from the adult community. This small change makes all the difference, as no student within the world of *High School Musical* must truly face challenging decisions related to oneself alone—a marked difference from the youth of *Spring Awakening*. This marked difference in power and knowledge structures reinforces the idea that with parental influence and guidance the young person will subscribe to the dominate power structures and work to both recreate those structures and then pass those beliefs onto their children thereby reinforcing the dominant culture beliefs. Ultimately, the power and knowledge acquired is that of the dominant society and absolutely reinforces those structures even if the original desire for knowledge was in contrast to the current belief.

The student focus groups also noted the role of knowledge and power. When the students were asked if they believed a young artist could influence how their image was created, marketed, and controlled their answers were split further accentuating the challenging space in which power and knowledge lives. Carlotta notes: “I think that if they [the producers] were like you HAVE to [do] this...Avril Lavigne I hear, I read about her. They wanted her to be like Christina Aguilera and Madonna and all that and she said no and she did her own thing.” Whether Avril Lavigne’s career was a direct result of doing her “own thing” or was constructed by the producers to appear that way to the public will never be known for sure. However, the perception remains that Avril Lavigne was able to exert artistic power to drive the development of her own image while fully acknowledging that image—a true asset to budding artists.

Personal knowledge and the understanding of how to wield personal power is directly related to how the characters of *Spring Awakening*, *High School Musical*, and the student focus groups come to see youth identity constructed in commercial musical theatre and construct identity in real life. Knowledge—like gender, race or class—becomes constructed on the body and is visible to others. Ultimately, knowledge is power and contributes to the predominant norms and sets the stage for a driving distinction between exceptionalism and meritocracy.

Meritocracy, a system in which the talented are chosen and moved ahead on the basis of their achievement, directly influence a youth's perception of self and presents an internal struggle as the youth attempts to navigate the two concepts simultaneously. This concept is evident in *Spring Awakening* and *High School Musical* and ebb and flow from over the course of each production.

Academic study and success is a driving theme in *Spring Awakening* as it relates to both Melchior and Moritz. Both are hard-working intelligent young people, but for Melchior study comes easy where it does not for Moritz. Moritz struggles for the entire play to exceed both his parent's and his teacher's expectations and strives to be exceptional. Through hard work, endless study, and an understanding that passing his exams determines all future steps in his life, he makes the academic cut or so he believes. There is a brief moment (after sneaking in the school to view his academic records) of elation when he learns that he has passed his exams and will be promoted. Unfortunately, the teachers deem Moritz unfit even though he has passed. They decide not to promote him to the following grade as student enrollment is strictly controlled. Once Moritz

learns of this (knowing that he did pass and should have been promoted) the pressure is far too great and he commits suicide. *Spring Awakening* functions within a regimented world where even the skilled are passed over for others more exceptional.

On the other hand, Disney's *High School Musical* professes that any young person can be exactly who they want to be through hard work blended with innate talent honed through even more hard work and social acceptance. *High School Musical* can be said to promote Disney's ideology which is a series of conservative values that speaks directly to the middle class while attempting to empower youth to define themselves outside of the confines of mainstream beliefs all the while promoting the larger hegemonic cultural structure. This empowerment and potential "success" as a young person is a direct result of "following one's dreams." The concept of dream-seeking is possible because Disney commercializes and commodifies "dreams" and "magic" in a way that if a young person works hard, develops him/herself, and listens to his/her parents, achievements are endless. *High School Musical* has constructed a world where individual exceptionalism supports a meritocratic system while appearing to directly defy it. The students of East High School are made to feel that they are "special" because of their innate talents and skills, which will come to fruition through hard work, dedication, and subliminally adhering to the cultural norms.

Fundamentally, all theatrical events function ideologically, but *Spring Awakening* and *High School Musical* reinforce approved values and codes of behaviors while suggesting a conflict between innate skills to determine success

and hard-work and skill development to determine success. However, in both cases, success is measured by complete assimilation into the dominant society while hiding that assimilation in a myth of difference. Difference is not celebrated or even encouraged in *Spring Awakening* and while it appears to be celebrated in *High School Musical*, true acceptance is accomplished once the “difference” is shared by all.

The student focus groups had the same challenges verbalizing the role of talent and aligning with expectations in similar ways as the characters of the musicals. Lucy stated: “my parents have been together for 32 years, I have a brother and a sister, 2 dogs, and we live in the same house [and] if someone said [...] you have to teach your daughter that she has got to get married and she has to do this, that would be offensive.” Lucy lives in a world that aligns with the dominant, but as a young artist the concept of continuing in that path seems unfathomable and almost grotesque. However, Carlotta highlights that “you end [up] acting a lot like your mother or your father, you’re probably not necessarily rebelling against them.” So much like the students of East High School, rebellion is a phase—a phase that concludes with the young people subscribing to the lives of their parents.

With a slightly different understanding Aldonza suggests that “I have created like who I am with like values and morals and stuff like through like relationships with my family members, obviously, and then like through the coincidence of me becoming a dancer and like being part of like a dance company at my studio and then here and like going to a public middle school and then

moving over to the art school.” Aldonza presents a blended understanding where her external relationships influence who she is becoming, combined with a conscious awareness of self. Sally concurs: “my parents never pushed me really to do anything, they were more open to me doing what I wanna do with my future and so that’s why I came to this school. I’ve always been artistic and I’ve always painted and played music. And so I think by that, they’re letting me express myself and letting me find out who I am.” But, have these parents actually allowed their children to find their own way or is this path controlled in ways that are simply not visible to the student? Sandy recognizes this space and counters: “I kinda felt ashamed for who I was to know that I couldn’t be the best that I know I could be, so I didn’t put all my effort in and I knew I should have, but I didn’t want [...] to outshine someone else.” Sandy is acutely aware of herself, how she is perceived by others, and how she wants to be perceived by others as it relates to her passions around the subject matter.

The students carefully negotiate their understanding of self by considering who they want to be and the messages they receive from external sources such as their parents or friends. They also recognize that perhaps in this moment they want to be something, but that their familial foundation will shape who they will become and that result could be a mirror of their parents. Ultimately, the students want to be the exception (or at least suggest that) and to be recognized for their artistic skill and talent which could lead to a professional career in the arts and will set them apart from their peers.

Spring Awakening focuses on the sexual awakening and concurrent identity construction of youth in the play and traditional romance has no place in this world. From Melchior's rape of Wendla (in the original) to love-making (in the Broadway musical) to masturbation to same-sex encounters, *Spring Awakening* is more the about the exploration of sexuality without confines even though the dominant adult culture desperately tries to control youth sexuality from emerging.

High School Musical presents a "crush" sexuality. One where, affection will turn to love and a committed long-term relationship will result in sexual expression at the pre-determined age both chronologically and in reference to length of relationship. Troy and Gabriella are the only couple in the musical romantically paired. There are playful hints at other potential couples or at least interest, but none that are realized. The first installment of this franchise does not even allow for Troy or Gabriella to share a kiss. Yet youth sexuality and gender identification is present clearly inscribed on the body and reinforced through actions and appearances.

Collectively, my real life students engaged in a forthright conversation with an astute awareness of how they and current artists navigate sexuality in public. Kate claims: "I just think cuz sex sells and I know the media pushes young girls to do things that's gonna sell them records, I mean you're not going to sell records talking about Barney and Care Bears." Certainly, you could sell records about Barney and Care Bears to a specific demographic. However, you cannot sell those products to a sexualized youth audience. Eliza echoes the role of choice

by commenting: “sometimes you don’t have a choice whether or not you like sell sex, but outside of your performances some of them [popular culture female artists] dress like sluts and party all the time.” It is important to the students that there is a choice at the beginning, but that is extinguished by the quick realization that if a young artist wants to be a part of the popular culture landscape then he/she may have to forego choice to align with what is marketable and commercially consumed. Interestingly, the students spent no time discussing romantic or idyllic sexuality. Rather, their focus was on the extreme overt sensualized (and publically consumed) sexuality. Carlotta references a televised performance: “at the VMAs, Miley Cyrus was humping an ice cream truck.” There is some shock in her voice and mild acceptance as if to say “she did what she had to/was asked to do.” Gertrude suggests an alternate option: “there are other girls who don’t sing about sex who wear button up shirts and who, you know, don’t care about makeup.” Collectively, the group has trouble populating a list of commercial artists who fit this second category. The sensualized shifts to a conversation around voyeurism and real versus perceived [sexual] actions by young people. Aldonza states: “Yeah, which is awkward I mean, I mean you, you, you get in trouble as an adult, so like you know, people think it’s creepy. Like I would think it’s way creepy if I was walking around in a skirt and you were like ‘Well, hey’ but like they can do that on TV and girls can like flaunt their vaginas on TV at my age and like be OK.” And, by “OK,” Aldonza suggests consumed by both the target peer group as well as the full age spectrum of the viewing audience. An adult’s consumption of youth sexuality is key to Aldonza’s

statement, but was not directly explored in either the focus groups or the case studies. Finally, Gertrude claims: “I can assure you that if you go to a high school, the majority of high school students have probably had sex or done something sexual.” And with this one statement Gertrude references the moral panic of Wendla’s mother and her desire to control her daughter’s sexuality, and perhaps one of the only innate skills not explored in any of the *High School Musical* properties—youth sex.

Ultimately, romanticism is encouraged and supported by dominant cultural beliefs and is present in both *Spring Awakening* and *High School Musical*. While, overt expression of youth sexuality consummated prior to marriage or without the option of conception is controlled, punished, and utterly extinguished by the same culture. Youth sexuality is only celebrated and endorsed when it is heterosexual hand-holding and courting (in preparation for adult life) as played out in *High School Musical* while expressed sexual acts are veiled, denied, and ignored by the dominant parental structure in *Spring Awakening*.

The Future

I believe that constructing an intersectional theoretical framework provides a conduit through which to consider the creation and circulation of youth culture (material and ephemeral) through the Disney Industrial Complex (DIC). This academic tool explores youth culture in a way that is both accessible and understandable and as a means of helping adults to understand this period of

“storm and stress” in a way that is not full of conflict, but rather a “bridge” over the child-adult gap. Together, youth and adults are co-learners and the art we create together benefits from more holistic understandings of youth. Theory will always remain somewhere outside of practice, definitionally, so it becomes the job of the teacher to infuse theory with practice, thereby allowing theories to live and breathe in an actual environment of exploration. This union of theory and practice will continue to pave the way for future research. Research, I believe, that will be mutually beneficial to both the current work with and about youth and to the youth themselves allowing them to experience life as a personal journey and not a wholly prescriptive one which appears unmalleable.

In addition, implementing a case study methodological approach to think about commercial musical theory opens pathways of discussion around relevant and important topics affecting youth culture. There is, without question, real-life application. Both *Spring Awakening* and Disney’s *High School Musical* explore childhood sexuality through song, dance, literary devices, and real-time demonstrations. However, through the exploration of youth sexuality as seen on the stage or screen, conversations emerge about practical application to sex education for young people around the world, but more importantly as a human aspect not to be feared or controlled. Rather, youth seek understanding and understanding of self, of each other, of the adults in their world, and of their larger communities. This understanding provides a conduit to internalize all of the external signals that prescribe who they should become. This adult prescription becomes the source of “storm and stress” and not the actual biological, emotional,

and intellectual change that a young person experiences during this fluid period in life. In fact, the underlying norms of the adult world with which the youth struggle to understand and to craft an identity.

Action Steps

Childhood Studies is as rich as childhood itself. My hope is that this document serves as an entry point for melding theory and practice as it pertains to exploring youth and youth culture in your sphere of influence. Not in static places, but rather as a way of opening up discussion around the issues that concern educators and theatre practitioners and youth. Theatre remains a useful and necessary tool for examining life in real time as youth culture is ever-changing. Youth culture's presence among social media (Facebook, Twitter, Four Square, Instagram, etc.) and other instant forms of communication has changed traditional approaches to understanding youth. Youth are no longer distant from their peers and only connected by private conversations or written texts. Rather, youth are connected (literally and figuratively) twenty-four hours a day across the world to their closest friends and to others whom they have never met. This large web of connectivity plays an intimate role in identity formation and a role that may be completely void of adult interference. Youth culture is viral but so is adult-mediated art designed for their consumption. This art can take many forms and be anywhere with a click of a mouse. Therefore, it is not youth culture that needs to be corrected, guided, or altered, but the way we understand the material commercialized products designed for consumption by youth.

The case studies and the student responses suggest that students are acutely aware of adult concerns when considering their role within performance—power, talent, and sex. Young people recognize the role of power as internalized through the lack of key information when determining how to make decisions about their bodies (*Spring Awakening*). They work to develop an accepted level of natural and developed talent recognizing that one needs both rare innate theatrical skill as well as a passion for the arts (*High School Musical*). And they delicately balance their understanding of how sexual awareness informs the previous two and how a sexualized identity becomes one that exudes both power and talent (icons of contemporary youth popular culture).

Ultimately, representations of young people on stage and in movies are important and complex creations that require your attention as a theatre educator and, more importantly, your active engagement. I believe that as an educator and theatre practitioner I can learn from my students—learn about them, learn about me, but only when I engage with them within their world and attempt to derive my understanding of youth from that experience. As you return to your classroom (whatever form that takes), actively engage with them as a means of exploring, understanding, and appreciating youth and the richness they bring to our own lives.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: Madelaine Adelman
WILSN

From: Mark Roosa, Chair
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 11/09/2009

Committee Action: Expedited Approval

Approval Date: 11/09/2009

Review Type: Expedited F7

IRB Protocol #: 0910004488

Study Title: "Who Am I: Constructing Adolescent Identity Through American Musical Theatre"

Expiration Date: 11/08/2010

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.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.

APPENDIX B

“WHO AM I?": STUDENT QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Administered: December 14, 2009

Responses: 20

Female: 18

Male: 2

1.) Please list three (3) adjectives that describe what you think of when you hear “musical theatre”.

- 1.) Playful, dramatic, harsh
- 2.) Bright, big, melodic
- 3.) Excitement, love, magical
- 4.) No response
- 5.) Over dramatic, cheesy, music
- 6.) Cheesy, over dramatic, happy
- 7.) Fun, cheesy, dramatic
- 8.) Fun, exciting, pleasing
- 9.) Fun, different
- 10.) Theatrical, energetic, exciting
- 11.) Cheesy, glee, childish
- 12.) Fun, enjoyable
- 13.) Challenging, cheesy, entertaining
- 14.) Loud, jolly, energetic
- 15.) Dance, lights, stage
- 16.) Entertaining, energetic, hilarious
- 17.) Dance, energy, music
- 18.) Interesting, climatic, entertaining
- 19.) Fun, dramatic, musically
- 20.) Jazz, bright, loud

2.) What was your first musical theatre experience?

1. *Spring Awakening*
2. Watching *Jesus Christ Superstar* with my family.
3. My first musical theatre experience was when I was going into 7th grade. I did this summer program and we did *Once on this Island* and I was Asaka.
4. High School Musical
5. My first musical theatre experience was in 4th grade in church when I was Eve in *Joseph's Technical Dreamcoat*.
6. *Cats* on Broadway
7. *Spamalot* on Broadway

8. I've watched various musicals on film, but my first staged performance was *Sweeney Todd* at Gammage.
9. I was 7 when my parents enlisted me to be in my church's production of *South Pacific*. But musical theatre has always been a part of my life because my parents love it.
10. I went to see *Rent* at Gammage.
11. This class.
12. Watching *Mamma Mia* in London.
13. *The Wizard of Oz* in 7th grade. It was put together extremely poorly.
14. My first experience was this class, but I used to hate musical theatre so I never went to see any.
15. When my mom decided I could watch *Mary Poppins*. After that, every movie I watched (for a long time) was a musical. I first was in a musical in kindergarten when I played a goat.
16. My first real experience was *Annie*.
17. A *Hairspray* workshop.
18. When I was 8 years old, I performed in a musical called "Somebody Love Me." I had to play an abused child abandoned by her mother, switching between many foster homes.
19. When I started my musical theater class and we put on the play *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*.
20. One of my very first was *The Wiz*, it was amazing.

3.) Was this experience as an audience member or as a performer?

1. Audience
2. Audience
3. Performer
4. Audience
5. Performer
6. Audience
7. Audience
8. Audience
9. Performer
10. Audience
11. Performer
12. Audience
13. Performer
14. Performer

- 15. Audience
- 16. Performer
- 17. Performer
- 18. Performer
- 19. Performer
- 20. Performer
- 21. As audience members: 9
- 22. As performers: 11

4.) Describe the experience.

- 1. It was very interesting and fun. It was nice to watch but also a little annoying because sometimes I didn't understand what was happening.
- 2. It was great, humorous, and entertaining. I was very young, so the singing and drama kept me incredibly entertained.
- 3. It was magical because I made a best friend and I still have that best friend. It helped make me realize that I need to be doing this my entire life.
- 4. It was alright.
- 5. It was fun but not something I was passionate about.
- 6. I loved it especially because it was on Broadway and they were able to turn into cast...the make-up was great.
- 7. My uncle took me to see it in New York. It was a lot of fun. The songs were all purposely cheesy, and it was a lot of fun to participate in.
- 8. It was very exciting. I loved the excitement of watching live people perform one of my favorite musicals.
- 9. I was just an extra daughter of the main character, but I love it. I love the feeling of family a cast can get.
- 10. It was really good. I've seen musicals on DVD but seeing it in an actual theater as so much more real.
- 11. I got a roll in a performance and performed.
- 12. Fun.
- 13. The experience varies depending on the director – how organized they are and whatnot. Although the director of YAGMCB was organized, fellow students unfortunately were not.
- 14. It was awesome. It was hard to perform, but it was a ton of fun.
- 15. The music is what actually brought me into the film and because I was so young, having the music made the story make more sense to me as well as bringing “magic” to the film.

16. I was Lilly and I had to have an accent and sing obnoxiously on stage.
17. We had five days to cast and had over nine songs performance ready by the end of the fourth day because the firth was for the performance.
18. My experience was amazing. I went through many experiences; pouring fake blood on my head, screaming warm-ups, it's what genuinely got me interested.
19. Good, we messed up kind a lot but all in all it was a good performance.
20. It was really fun, I found it enjoyable.

5.) Why did you sign-up for the musical theatre course?

- 1.) I thought it would be good for me to experience because I am a performing arts major.
- 2.) I am a musician. I took acting last year, and loved it. Also, I wanted to be more comfortable on stage.
- 3.) To further what I love to do.
- 4.) I enjoy being in this type energy. I couldn't get acting, so I got in here.
- 5.) To play piano.
- 6.) I wanted to be able to believably portray a feeling while doing something else (i.e. singing).
- 7.) My major was theatre and I liked to act, and sing, and dance, and it was there so why not?
- 8.) Everyone told me I should. I love musicals and performing, so why not?
- 9.) Because I have always loved musical theatre.
- 10.) I signed up for this class because I've always wanted to be a performer. I thought it would be a fun experience.
- 11.) Because I wanted to be in theatre, but when I auditioned and sang, they put me in musical theatre.
- 12.) To learn more about myself as a performer.
- 13.) That's a very good question. I'm a theatre major and I want to be well-rounded performer. I couldn't take acting this year and I needed some kind of performing arts.
- 14.) Because I needed to expand as an actor.
- 15.) I didn't. I didn't think I could do it.
- 16.) I love to sing and act.
- 17.) I love musical theatre and there isn't anything else I'd rather do.

- 18.) I am a musician already and I have always loved musical theatre. I decided to try.
 - 19.) To help my stage presence.
 - 20.) Wanted to perfect my performance quality.
-
- 6.) What were/are your expectations about your role as a student-performer in this class?
 - 1.) To be able to learn and perform musical theatre.
 - 2.) To learn and progress in creativity, comfort, and skill.
 - 3.) Very high because I want to be the best I can be and push myself further and harder.
 - 4.) I expected to meet the love of my life.
 - 5.) I expected to learn music and scores to accompany the class.
 - 6.) I didn't really have any knowing the history of the school.
 - 7.) I think I expected to be a lot "better", I guess.
 - 8.) To be given an equal chance to grow as a performer.
 - 9.) To learn my part, listen to what the director says, and be there for my other classmates.
 - 10.) To be able to experience performing as an actress and singer at the same time.
 - 11.) I was just thinking everyone in the class would take it seriously.
 - 12.) I didn't learn much.
 - 13.) To grow through my characters I expect to learn and become a better performer. I expect to do well and enjoy myself during performance.
 - 14.) To not do very well in this class since I didn't do it before.
 - 15.) I didn't think I would be doing much performing off the bat and I thought that there would be more academic work involved.
 - 16.) To become a better performer in general.
 - 17.) I am expecting to expand my knowledge and ability to perform and immerse myself in a world I love.
 - 18.) I'd like to put on a great performance that even people who are not from this school/parents of kids from the school would love.
 - 19.) To do my best.
 - 20.) I work hard and I expect everyone else to.
 - 7.) Do you see components of yourself represented in any aspect of musical theatre?

- 1.) Yes.
- 2.) Yes.
- 3.) Yes.
- 4.) Yes.
- 5.) Yes.
- 6.) Sometimes.
- 7.) No.
- 8.) Yes.
- 9.) Yes.
- 10.) Yes.
- 11.) Sometimes.
- 12.) Yes.
- 13.) Yes.
- 14.) Yes.
- 15.) Yes.
- 16.) Yes.
- 17.) Yes.
- 18.) Yes.
- 19.) No.
- 20.) Yes.

8.) If yes, what aspect(s)?

- 1.) Musical theatre is kind of chaotic and really dramatic like a teenager's life.
- 2.) Bright, happy, dramatic! Very musical.
- 3.) I am musical theatre.
- 4.) Dramatic and loud.
- 5.) Dramatic, energetic, amazing.
- 6.) The performing part I like to please people, but it's cheesy and not very realistic and I like to keep it real.
- 7.) n/a
- 8.) I am kind of like Roxie from *Chicago*. I see life in a musical.
- 9.) When performing you need to do your best and try your hardest. I try to do that with ever aspect of my life.
- 10.) A lot of performers in musical theatre have a lot of energy and usually I'm very energetic and randomly start singing.
- 11.) The performing and singing kind.
- 12.) No answer.

- 13.) I come out of every show learning something about myself I didn't realize before you have to know who you are to be someone you're not. So, to have a good performance, you need to learn about yourself and know who you are. I don't know...it's all about communicating and experiencing what it's like to be...human. You don't think about in everyday life.
- 14.) Acting of course.
- 15.) Everyone in musical theatre loves to sing and act. I really love to do both but I find it weird putting them together.
- 16.) Singing, acting, having super fun.
- 17.) I am a person who naturally always needs music, also my mother makes life a musical by randomly bursting out in song.
- 18.) Music. Theatre. Singing. Acting. Dancing.
- 19.) n/a
- 20.) The performer.

9.) If no, why not?

- 1.) My opinions of myself as an artist have changed and I see myself not as a performer anymore, but a fine artist.
- 2.) Because stuff like high school musical and glee club turns me off.
- 3.) There isn't must to express as an ensemble.

10.) What external influences shape your own personal identity (or how you view yourself in the world)?

- 1.) I think pretty much everything you come across in your life shapes the person you are.
- 2.) I view myself as a supporting role. Not the best, but hiding in the background is not for me.
- 3.) Doing musical theatre changed my life. I shaped me to be the person I am today.
- 4.) Parental, friends.
- 5.) The external influences that shape my personal identity is my family, social class, friends, and the activities I pursue.
- 6.) Traveling, family or lack there of, friends, theatre
- 7.) Other people's opinions of me, what my peers say about my work.
- 8.) Music is my world and my life.
- 9.) Well, I try not to get influenced by anything, but of course I can't help but get influenced my biggest though would be my family members.

- 10.) I think that everyone has some type of impact on me no matter how little it is. I take a lot of the criticism and advice I get and apply it to my character. My family is also a big impact.
 - 11.) I like to think I'm different and that because I hate most people.
 - 12.) I view myself as one littler person wanting to be big
 - 13.) Well obviously my friends, art, stage, theater, scripts, writing, literature, school, relationships, strangers, my father
 - 14.) School and family
 - 15.) I don't really realize what influences me that much but the normal things affect me that affect everyone else...magazines, friends, parents, and stuff like that. Also, things that I'm into affect me. Like if I was into cooking, food and place like France would influence me.
 - 16.) My family effect who I am and so do my friends.
 - 17.) My mother is definitely a hug influence on me. I strive to be like her fun, hysterical, and good at everything she tries.
 - 18.) My parents, musical theatre, musicians, friends, home life
 - 19.) Music is something that's always made me happy, so that has really shaped me into the person I am today.
 - 20.) I mostly influence myself, but maybe my mum or anyone who cares about my stake in the world also they yell at me and push me to work harder.
-
- 11.) What are three (3) adjectives you would use to describe yourself?
 - 1.) Out going, pleasing, truthful
 - 2.) Honest / open, loud, outgoing
 - 3.) Imaginative, exciting, honest
 - 4.) Arrogant, driven, charismatic
 - 5.) Creative, authentic, focused
 - 6.) Determined, different, dedicated
 - 7.) Creative, open-minded, independent (prefer to rely on myself)
 - 8.) Cut, energetic, fierce
 - 9.) Pushy/controlling, leader, bitchy
 - 10.) Energetic, dramatic, determined
 - 11.) Pessimistic, creative, honest
 - 12.) Little, wanting
 - 13.) dynamic, stubborn, motivated...inspired
 - 14.) focus, exuberant, outgoing
 - 15.) frumpy, focused, silly
 - 16.) silly, fun, energetic

- 17.) funny, reliable, stubborn
- 18.) musician, confident, soft
- 19.) shy, funny, musical
- 20.) determined, artistic, loving

APPENDIX C

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focus Group 1 ~ May 18, 2010
Focus Group 2 ~ May 25, 2010

Interview Questions:

- I: What was your knowledge of musical theatre before enrolling in this class?
1. Prior to your enrollment, what was your perception of adolescent identity in contemporary popular culture?
 2. How do you believe a person shapes and develops one's identity?
 3. Has your participation in musical theatre (thus far as you perceive it) altered the development of your identity?
 4. If yes, in what ways?
 5. If not, why do you think it has not?
 6. Recalling your own experience with musical theatre (either in an academic setting or in a production setting, what moment, scene, or song impacted you in a specific way? How or why?
 7. How have you come to create an identity in your life?
 8. How does it feel to play a character on stage?
 9. How is this portrayal different than your actual life?

APPENDIX D

MUSICAL THEATRE FOCUS GROUP 1

I: What was your knowledge of musical theatre before enrolling in this course?

Charlie: None! I never did musical theatre.

Sandy: I knew a lot, I had done musicals before this, sorry, this class, and so I was very aware of what I was getting into.

I: OK.

Kate: Me as well.

I: You, meaning you had also had experience, yes.

Eliza: Me too!

I: OK.

Roxie: Same thing.

I: You had experience?

Roxie: Yeah.

Carlotta: I had had experience in performing, um, in other areas but not so much in musical theatre.

I: Any of you who did not, who had no knowledge or no experience prior to being in this class?

Aldonza: Me.

I: You had not performed in musical theatre before?

Aldonza: No.

I: Who else? Anyone else?

Charlie: I had not performed in musical theatre.

I: Aldonza and Charlie, the rest of you have performed in a musical theatre performance of some aspect in some venue? Prior to your enrollment again, what was your perception of adolescent identity in contemporary popular culture? My dissertation is about the construction of adolescent identity in musical theatre, so these questions are going to deal with how you see yourself in other areas as well as on the stage. So the first again...how did you perceive adolescent identity, meaning you, other people, like you, your age group 13 to 18, in contemporary popular culture, which could be in any, of any media of your choosing?

Carlotta: I think they are all sluts!

Charlie: That was my answer!

I: You think all who are sluts?

Carlotta: I think all of the adolescent performers. I mean not all of them, but the majority...

I: Who specifically?

Eliza: Miley Cyrus.

Carlotta: Ke\$ha, Ke\$ha.

I: OK.

Carlotta: She talks about beer and she's like what...17?

Roxie: She never, she just, she, I really honestly don't think that she's really done all that stuff, I think that it's just supposedly popular...

Carlotta: But she still talks about it...

Eliza: She's a whore.

Kate: Have you seen Ke\$ha?

I: So you're all...we're all still talking about Ke\$ha right now, yes?

Roxie: Yes.

Eliza: Hannah Montana.

I: Hannah Montana...So, why, why...Carlotta why do you say sluts?
What about them gives that image?

Carlotta: Okay, so at the, at the VMA's Miley Cyrus was humping an ice cream truck, and then uh, Ke\$ha...uh,...she like, even if she, even if she hasn't done it before, like, she's, she, I'm sure that there is a majority of like 8, 9, 10 year olds that listen to Ke\$ha and her songs, like...

I: So, why is that bad?

Carlotta: Because she talks about, uh beer, having sex, drugs...

Roxie: "Wake up in the morning with a bottle of Jack..."

Sandy: Ya, that's not the words at all.

Roxie: "Brush my teeth..."

I: But yes, she does brush her teeth with a bottle of Jack, right?

Roxie: Either way it's Jack.

I: Ok, so that is the music feel. So other examples of how you see adolescent identity being perceived, how do you perceive it? So you say negatively, that's what you mean by sluts?

Kate: Well...

I: Kate, yes?

Kate: I don't think they're sluts, I just think cuz sex sells and I know that the media pushes young girls to do things that's gonna sell them records, I mean you're not going to sell records talking about Barney and Care Bears.

Carlotta: Even so, if I got, if I got signed to a label and they said, and they said, and they said you have to, you have to be like, you have to put yourself out there and like, dress skank skanky and stuff like that, I wouldn't do it.

Aldonza: You got, you got, you got artists that are out there that are making money and they haven't sang about sex, like Jeff Buckley or like...

Emily: Isn't he dead?

I: Do you think you really could, Carlotta I wanna go back, do you think really as a young artist you would have the agency to be able to say "that's not how I want myself to be portrayed in order to become an artist?"

Roxie: NO.

Carlotta: Yes, I think that, I think that if they were like you HAVE to do this...Avril Lavigne I hear, I read about her, she, they wanted her to be like Christina Aguilera and Madonna and all that and she said No, and she did her own thing.

Gertrude: But it was because she was able to market herself as something new, you know?

Carlotta: So could I.

Gertrude: No, yeah, but there are and there are other girls who don't sing about sex who wear button up shirts and who you know, don't care about makeup or...

Carlotta: ...have their own identity...

Gertrude: whatever who, yeah, who are already out there and so they want you to be new and they want you to be either new and original or they want they want you to be—sexy, because sex does sell, sex always...sells...

Lucy: Sex ALWAYS will sell.

Gertrude: But girls who wear ties and tutus don't always sell, so that's, that's why they market girls as like sexy...

Eliza: It's not even like, just like their music like and how they perform like yeah, sometimes you don't have a choice whether or not you like sell sex, but outside of your performances some of them dress like sluts and party all the time you see the pictures, its like...

Carlotta: Lindsay Lohan

Eliza: ...how can you pretend to be something your absolutely not?

Lucy: I'm sorry what was the question?

Charlie: Yeah, why are we talking about celebrities?

Roxie: It's like pop culture, right?

I: Right, how do you see adolescents, young people, being represented in popular culture, that's really the question. So you're

saying negatively in a way that sells an adult commodity, which is sex, right?

Aldonza: Yeah, which is awkward I mean, I mean you, you, you get in trouble as an adult, so like you know, people think it's creepy. Like I would think it's way creepy if I was walking around in a skirt and you were like "Well, hey" but like they can do that on TV and girls can like flaunt their vaginas on TV at my age and like be OK.

Roxie: I also think that

Aldonza: I think that's stupid

Roxie: I also think that is really has something to do with how you were raised, like...

Aldonza: Not necessarily

Roxie: NO, but if you've grown up like all your life like Hannah Montana has always been, her dad was a star and like she's always been out in that public stardom thing and like, and especially after she's been a Disney star she wants to change her, you know, her look, she's gonna be sexy, like you can't go, you have to go to one extreme to the next, you can't just be like ok well now I'm gonna be this cute little Disney star into my own self now, cuz that not gonna...

Kate: May I interject? That's why Raven's unsuccessful.

Carlotta: Raven Simone?

Kate: She wasn't able to leap from one spectrum to another.

Roxie: Yeah.

I: And so she has, made, especially made a career of just being a Disney Channel star, right, and now as kind of almost an adult really, still part of the Disney Channel Network.

Gertrude: Also, at 17, 18, 19, 20 however, you know like a young adult, you care about sex. Like it's something that you like to do.

I: Say more, Gertrude.

Gertrude: or that you do...NO I mean that, I...I'm not saying it like "oh, I fucking love to have sex," but like I can assure you that if you go to high school, the majority of high school students have probably had sex or done something sexual, and when you listen to songs like that, you like to be able to connect with songs...

I: Songs like what? What one specifically are you thinking about?

Gertrude: I, I'm not thinking of anything specifically, but that's also why young adults also connect with like EMO culture because they're also going through like heart-breaks, and they're going through uncontrollable hormones and so when you're able to connect with songs or have fun with songs or do something like that, then you connect with that sort of culture.

I: So, you're saying, and correct me if I'm wrong, that then the culture that's geared for your age is ultimately speaking to things you're experiencing anyways?

Carlotta: Can I disagree with something earlier?

I: Of course you can disagree...

Carlotta: So I kind of disagree with Roxie, I don't think it has anything to do with the way that you were raised.

Roxie: At all?

I: How you then are perceived?

Roxie: It has a little bit to do with it...

Carlotta: No, how you are perceived has nothing to do with the way you were raised...

I: With your nurture? Nurture is completely removed?

Carlotta: Because, no, if you are famous, if you are famous, I mean right now, obviously like if Sandy was raised by bad parents, then she would be like bad right now and I wouldn't like her, whatever and, so, but I mean like if you're famous and their like cuz we were talking earlier about how you have two paths to go, the sexual way and the button up shirt way, whatever, and if they're like we want you to be sexual, then you go that way and it has nothing to do if you're a good girl or bad girl.

Roxie: But, all, that's true, but you said yourself earlier that YOU, if you were, you had been raised right or what, it doesn't matter.

I: Right.

Carlotta: but like if you have your own morals, you can choose which way to go...

I: Right, you yourself said you would not, you would not market yourself as an artist in that way.

Roxie: SO that's what I'm saying, it does matter how you were, somewhat how you were raised, because if you didn't have those morals while you were raised then you wouldn't...

Carlotta: Well yeah that's true

Roxie: ...go the sexual way.

I: And it doesn't prevent it, right? Joe Simpson has pretty heavily managed Jessica Simpson's career and the point is those images can be managed heavily as well, certainly, the *High School Musical* characters that have their other stuff, what's her head, the one that plays Sharpay and Vanessa Hudgens are trying to break out of that...

Sandy: Well Vanessa Hudgens is doing, she's doing...Well yeah it's called "Beastly," but she's also playing Mimi in *Rent* and that's the slutty...

I: A completely different version

Sandy: ...completely different from, from what she's used to but I mean...

Lucy: She's not even a good singer.

Sandy: I don't, I don't think like, I think if they want to break away from what they are known for just because they're not little kids anymore, they're not, that, that, that even, um, they're not trying to, I don't even think they're trying to be slutty, I just think, I just

think they're trying to break away from being the little goody good from where they had no choice but to go because Disney offered them something. You don't turn down Disney, you don't turn down Nickelodeon, that's, if you do that, that's dumb, I'm sorry.

I: So the only option then if you're going to turn away from that is to then go from the childhood star to sex...

Roxie: If you wanna stay famous because that, like what Lucy said: "Sex does sell, sex will always sell" and it, it's sad that that's how it has, has to be, but I mean, that's how our society, how disgusting our society is, you know?

Aldonza: OK so uh, so I just think that it's wrong, like if you think about it, there's pornography, why can't we just play pornography in the mid, in the middle of the day.

Carlotta: exactly, that's like all it is

Aldonza: on TV, like why, why, why can't we display pornography and yet we can display...

I: Can you define what you mean by pornography?

Aldonza: Pornography - people having sex

Charlie: We do show that.

Aldonza: like no, like like literally, like like into sex like penis and vagina out there. Like why can we sing about that on the radio?

Carlotta: That's a very interesting...

I: OK, thank you for connecting that, I wasn't sure where you were going with that...So what your saying is the songs are singing about those things but yet to visualize them in other forms of media is kind of against what we'd understand?

Carlotta: Yeah, it's completely wrong...

Aldonza: Yeah, it's like okay, if you, if you sing about it, but it's not okay if it's like...

I: You can sing about swiggin' Jack and going out and picking up boys at the strip club...

Aldonza: and smacking someone's ass and ripping off their clothes...

Lucy: You can talk about it...

I: But you can't show it?

Aldonza: Yeah.

Rachel: And you can have that commercial that Britney Spears had, where she was rollin' around on the bed with that guy.

Carlotta: Yeah, what the hell was that?

Roxie: To sell perfume? Was it perfume?

Aldonza: Yeah.

Carlotta: Or that other thing where that lady was washing the car with a Big Mac, did you see that? She's like "Uhhh (*sexual*) and it's like dripping all over the place.

Gertrude: Or that, uh, commercial where those guys are all wearing like Hanes underwear and its like "You wanna BEEP me, you wanna

BEEP me” and it’s like obviously they’re saying “fuck” and it’s just like, oh and they’re like grabbing their junk and you’re like you wanna see more, you wanna see more? You wanna fuck me, you wanna fuck me?

Lucy: Yeah, and it’s like a Hanes commercial that’s like, “Great, ya great, look at how great my junk looks in this underwear.”

Sandy: actually it was weird, because Mr. Oates, our English teacher, showed us that, and um, I never thought I would see it on TV, and I saw it on TV once and I was like shocked because...

I: Was it on a cable network?

Sandy: I don’t know...it probably was, but it was really vulgar, yeah, it was really vulgar and it’s just kind of like why...like why was, I mean, I, I, the thing is that like even with Victoria Secret stuff like that, not everybody looks like those models do, so obviously if I put on that bra and panty I’m not gonna look the same way they are. So it’s kinda like that advertisement just kinda puts me down since its just like well “FUCK, I don't look as skinny as her, so why the fuck am I gonna buy this” and like oh it’ll enhance your breasts...

I: But if you do buy it, you COULD be just like her

Sandy: Oh its that what, is that, so

I: Right, that’s the, that’s the embedded message

Roxie: There's boobs, so, if you're, ok I thought about this, if they're getting those super push up bras...if they're getting those super push up bras to be sexual and to get men, then when they get them, they're gonna know.

Sandy: Exactly, then you like take your bra off and they're like what the....

Lucy: You guys, but you don't, you don't have to take your bra off to have sex.

Sandy: That's true.

Lucy: what confuses me as to why you can sing about fucking but you can't fuck, like you know.

Charlie: I'm, I'm not surprised at all about how things are going. Every movie I see some girls showing her tits and there is like even more dick on TV right now like in movies I see more penis, I'm like oh my god, but like, like every movie now somebody is showing tits, it's getting worse, I'm not shocked at all and actors and singers are doing more daring things because we've already done everything.

I: Well certainly for good, or, or bad, or indifferent, Twilight has, there are people writing dissertations about Twilight because of things like that, you know when I first saw that, I had not read any of the books, but when I first saw that first movie, I don't think I was as shocked as how sexuality is portrayed in that movie. You know the fact, the fact that he can't be around her and can't control her because he smells her is an entirely different level of kind of

the portrayal of adolescent sexuality. Like it almost drives him over the edge because he smells her...

Eliza: But also I have read the books, um and like I read, I was listening to, I don't remember what radio station it was but, Stephanie Meyer, the author of the book, was, ah, having a little, you know, talk with whatever... And so ah, she was saying, cause in the 4th book they do have sex and she was saying how she didn't feel like she needed to go in depth with the sex, it was up to us, the reader, to use our own imagination, to go which ever direction we wanted to...exactly!! And so it's just, but, but then afterwards like, the beginning of it was, um, he swept me up out of the water and there is a break in the page and then it says the next morning I'm covered in feathers and it's just kind like, what kind of sex is this? This is like rip you up sex and, and.....

Lucy: Yeah, obviously it's not, I mean it's...and she wakes up, she wakes up with bruises all over her too. I mean, yes it's a vampire, but like I've read plenty of other vampire books that have had sex that there's....like she, she said her Mormon values didn't need her to go in depth, but she went a different way like it was just kind of strange that she went in that...

Eliza: ...and like, it's just like, Twilight is supposed to be like this book that's geared towards...kids...but the thing is that, the thing is she

asks, the only thing she wants in life before she becomes a vampire is to have SEX and it's like...

Charlie: And the guy wants to get married...that's a joke

Lucy: It's like it's supposed to be geared towards younger kids and where not even suppose to be having sex, but she, the only thing she wants in the world is to have sex with her boyfriend before she becomes a vampire...and she doesn't WANT to get married?

I: OK so this is tangential, so this isn't really all that useful, I mean it's useful for a different reasons, because you're still talking about Pop Culture so you've talked about music, you've talked about young adult literature, considered YA Literature, right? Twilight is an example of that.

Gertrude: Wait, wait, can I say something? I think that in Pop Culture, right now, especially for young adults, is exactly like what we just said, that it's more about, it's not like Oh, have sex, it's, but it's not geared tow, geared toward like get married and have sex and have a baby and have a house, because that's not how things are anymore, people don't live with 2 parents necessarily, they don't have a brother and sister, they don't have a perfect house with a dog you know, people struggle to get by, or their parents are divorced or there, they have 2 moms, and its like so now it's not really like politically correct to be like OH hey, what you need to do when you grow up is get married to man if your a women or to

get married to a women if your a man and, you, you have a job and then you have a baby when you're financially stable because that's just not the way it is, and it's like almost offensive if you're like you have to do all these things because everyone knows someone who doesn't fit into this category.

I: You don't believe that's the over riding message anymore as kids? Like your goal is to finish school, get married, have a house, have a family?

Gertrude: I think it's, I think it's to finish, finish school, but I think it's more about finish school and have a job unless people care about whether or not you fall in love and have kids and have a financially stable house with a, with your soul mate, or whatever the fuck you want to call it. And they care more about like, get an education, get a degree, even if it's a bullshit degree, and then go, uh, du like, start your life with a job, like and it's not focused as much as, especially because like before, men were like hey, you guys get the job and then women would practically taught to just stay home and...

I: Is this the message and have these conversations come out of things in your house?

Lucy: No, not out of things in my house, things at school. I mean especially because I'm like...

I: I only ask since your family is the opposite of what your describing...right? Your parents...

Lucy: Yeah my parents have been together for 32 years, I have a brother and a sister, 2 dogs, we lived in the same house.

I: Right, it's the opposite of everything you said, which is why I am curious.

Lucy: Yeah, and it's not so much that, but like my sister was pregnant with twins in high school, she went to her Prom in a prom dress that would normally she would NEVER wear because she was pregnant for twins and like, she was HUGE and so, now, if someone said to me like not knowing who she was like, Oh, you have to teach your daughter that she has to get married and she has to do this, that would be like offensive towards her because its like, that's not what I did. And so, now, in culture, it doesn't really matter, it doesn't really matter about that kind of stuff and it's just sort of whatever because, that's what's happening, that's what's...

Aldonza: like, like what you're saying with like how it isn't the message that you need to get married and start a family and all that stuff anymore, it's like the same thing, like if we're talking about like the messages that people are sending about what you should do with your life...it doesn't make sense for people to talk about whether or not you should go to high school and graduate with a degree because there are many people in the world who have lots

of money who dropped out of college and were able to start a music career or an acting career and it's like...it's like how do you like...still believe in the image of going through high school and then getting a job and getting married when there are tons of people who have tons of money that didn't do any of that shit. It just doesn't make sense.

I: Yeah

Carlotta: OK, so I, I find it very interesting because what Emily was saying, it's almost weird because probably only 10 years ago the politically correct thing was to have a house and a dog and married family, and now it's almost politically incorrect to say that to somebody, you know? Cuz it offends them, and now the politically correct thing is to say, you know your fine, if you have, if you married to another woman, if you're a women and it's just interesting because everything has gone all topsy-turvy like the past 10 or 15 years, so weird...

I: Ok, good, keeping these same threads of conversation in mind; how do you believe a person shapes and develops their identity? So think of yourself in this case. I would contend that you're identities are in development right now as you're figuring out who you are, so what factors...I'm asking you what factors contribute to the shaping of your own identity.

Gertrude: Your relationships both with friends and romantic, um, your family and how you react to them, because if you end up acting a lot like your mother or your father, you probably not necessarily rebelling against them, kinda of thing, relationships between your parents. And then it really really has to do with relationships with the people that you surround yourself with that you don't like. Like in your class, or, in, in your something. No, because, because if you don't like those people, you tend to not do what they do. You know? If you're like AH, FUCK those girls who drink and have sex, you're probably not going to drink and have sex, and that shapes your identity. Or if you're, an, and a lot of that has to do with...

I: OK, I'm gonna have you all say something to this, this time.

Lucy: Well...

I: Speak to yourself first and you can refute that by how you define it for you.

Lucy: Ok, how do I define, define it for myself? My identity? Um, people, it's just people. It's not other like, it doesn't really matter if you know them or not, it's just like how you like...do that doesn't even make sense...how do you define yourself?

Lucy: Define myself through my acting...

I: Ok, through the roles you create?

Lucy: Yes.

I: So then your identity only exists through a creation of a secondary role?

Lucy: No, I...from that secondary role I find something in myself that I didn't really ever...

I: Ok, do you have a tangible example? Give me an example. It'd be great if you could talk about your roles you've had this year...

Lucy: And I'm not a Soprano, um, no, I don't know...

Gertrude: She likes to tell me things that aren't true

Lucy: What??

Aldonza: Well personally like I have like created like who I am with like values and morals and stuff like that through like relationships with my family members, obviously, and then like through the coincidence of me becoming a dancer and like being part of like a dance company at my studio and then here and like, going to a public middle school and then moving over to the art school and like, just like the differences in that and like the people I've met along the way kind of...

I: So art has had a hand in you defining how you...

Aldonza: I wouldn't say art like specifically, like in the general theme, dance specifically.

I: Good...great, Roxie?

Roxie: I think it really depends on um, I dunno, a lot of the people you meet in like, I think like. NO I mean I agree with Gertrude in

some aspects, like I, it depends, like if my, say my parents like pushed me to be like I dunno, a doctor; a lot of the times when parents do that, I feel like, like people, in general, just like go back, like don't wanna do what's pushed on them. And like it just depends I think and then from me going from a public school to an art school and more I would think it makes me, um, really think more about who I am, like depends on like what kind of people surround you, like, what people you LET yourself be surrounded by.

I: Good, ok, that's a good distinction...Sally?

Sally: I think as everyone said it definitely has something to do with the people that surround you and how you grew up. I mean like my parents never pushed me really to do anything, they were more open to me doing what I wanna do with my future and so that's why I came to this school, I've always been artistic and I've always painted and played music. And so I think by that, they're letting me express myself and letting me find out who I am, and especially by coming to this school, cuz it's...an art school. Ya, so the people that surround you and the people that help you become who you are, that help you find who you are, as yourself, so...

I: OK, Sandy?

Sandy: Ok, so uh so, well, you know. Uh, but ever since I was little, uh I always knew that I had, uh, like I always loved to be in the center,

like the spot light, like the center of attention that was who I was and so it was hard, I'm not afraid.

I: It's ok, go ahead.

Sandy: It was really hard for me to make friends because of that, so for a lot of my youth growing up, yes I did have the occasional one best friend every now and then, but I really didn't have the big group of friends, I was never popular, so I was kinda, even though I was outgoing and everything like that, I was still very shy, so I um, didn't have, I didn't have a big family or anything like that, it's always been me and my mom, so I think with coming to this school it's helped me out a lot, but I knew when I was growing in middle school and uh, the late elementary school, I did hang out, not with the wrong group of people but the group of people that...weren't the smartest, who did, get in trouble. Right, that, and not even values, but like because I didn't go to an art school, no one had the same love for singing or acting or anything like that as I did. SO I kinda took me a while to find friends that I liked, but then coming to this school it really changed me, but definitely doing my first musical *Rent*, that sculpt me to know who I was, what kind of friends I had, cuz I have the same...best friends for 2 years, but they're more than that, they're like a family, you have like when you do, I think when you do theatre, you have a family, and so...that became my big family because I never had...it was

just, it's always been me and my mom and my uncle and my aunt and my grandma, that's really it, but there not that great, they haven't been around that much. Um and so with doing theatre, I've found a family and I now know who I am and who I deserve to be...

I: Charlie?

Charlie: Um, I think it's definitely from the experiences you have, like, my dad's a crack head, so I don't like drug addicts. I think you learn who you are going through life and you're growing everyday and changing who you are. And I, I would know I've always wanted to be an actor, but I don't think that defines me.

Carlotta: OK, so Uh, um, so my parents got divorced when I was 8 and my mom got with this guy who wasn't really nice, and she's still with him, and I think that has also sculpt, sculpted me into the person that I am right now, not, not generally good, I mean like even, like if I hear an inkling of yelling, even if it isn't towards me, if it's towards somebody else, I get freaked out. Like that's probably because of what happened after my parents got divorced. But I've always had these morals, like ever since I was REALLY little and knew what sex was, I always said I was going to wait until I was after 18 to have sex, and I'm still sticking to it, and I think that, I really think that...you just like no I'm serious, I'm serious.

and I just think that it's like, it's like what you do and who you are and how you learn and stuff.

Charlie: Can't wait 'til that 18th birthday huh??

Carlotta: I know!

I: How do you identify yourself, how have you come to identify yourself?

Carlotta: Um, ok, so, when I was ...9, a month before I was 9, um, am I just telling my life story here?

I: How, What, what you telling...what your telling me is, how do you think a person shapes their identity, so how have you come to shape your own identity, how do you identify?

Carlotta: Oh there's a lot of things that shaped who I am now...um

I: Just gimme a couple, gimme the top...the top hit list

Carlotta: Uh, my mom, when my mom died, I..I struggled with her being dead for a while, but now I kind more so, not as freaked out about people dying. Um, I have a, I guess a better outlook on death, it doesn't really bother me as much. Um, my dad, he is a psycho, and he basically taught me what I did not want to be so...I mean there were good things about him, like the fact that he was so...rich at one point and um, how motivated he is, that, I mean that helped me, I really not motivated, but I'd like to be. And um, just things like that, major things I guess.

I: OK next question...has your participation in Musical Theatre, as you perceive it, altered the development of you identity?

Sandy: uh, well, I think that being able to do these shows was...really cool, but I don't think that us, as a group, personally, went further in depth, into, the characters with the show itself to really have developed it more than...the next...like I know I personally am a very strong...aspect to this class, and so I know I am and I hope...and so, um I don't want to say I didn't want to over power the next person, but I know that I didn't want, cuz this was a class thing, it wasn't like this was...

I: Alright, so how has that affected your identity?

Sandy: Well...I think I kinda...I don't want to sound mean or anything like that, I know we're trying to be honest, but like I kinda felt ashamed for who I was to know that I couldn't be the best that I know I could be, so I didn't put all my effort in and I knew I should have, but I didn't want, I, I, I just, this is gonna sound really cocky, I didn't want to outshine someone else, and even though I probably did, but I didn't want to have someone, have someone's parents be like, oh da da da da da, and everything like that, and it's just kinda like, that's what I was, I know that people thought of me as a bitch at the beginning of the year, but that was just because I cared so much, because I wan, I wanted this class to be amazing like this, like the people in here, for the most part are the most talented

people for musical theatre, and it's just like upsetting to know that know, not everyone took it seriously. And like, I now that I should have...been, like the class should have been more up to par with or, if not then we shouldn't have 1, 2, and 3 in one class.

Charlie: Um, I'm kinda the opposite of Sandy, musical theatre scared me shitless, cuz I've never done it. But I think doing it I've learned a lot about myself, and...Such as, I can sing, and it's way different acting for musical theatre than acting for what I'm used to doing and I mean I hate it, but I think it's good to have it in your repertoire it'll definitely come in handy later as an actor, so I think was an overall good experience in my identity as an actor.

Carlotta: Soooo, I totally, I dunno. Um, I don't think...musical theatre has made me grow, but I definitely think my experience as a performer has made me grow. I think I'm probably the only one here that, besides like Lucy that has had experience other than musical theatre, like with personal music that I performed. So that is definitely so I think that has definitely helped me grow because it helps me show people who I am and stuff.

I: Ok, and you feel that your original music is more of an indication of who you are than taking on and creating these roles that are already created?

Carlotta: Uh, in a sense yes, because it comes from you and what you feel and if your, if your taking a character like Mazie, then somebody's

already thought it up and it's them. You, no matter how much you try to change it, it's still them.

Roxie: I can disagree and agree with a lot of these people. I have been in other community theatre, musical theatre thing and I'd never been close to those people even though I was with them throughout like a long length of time and like I really do believe that, through this, I've become more opened and more, um, aware of who I am, like. I dunno, more open to...no I mean like more un, more of an awareness of who I am and like, and what I want to do, like more open to different roles, but I never would have thought that I'd be like, Sally, the list little girl, I never, I dunno, I LIKED that role, like it was a lot of fun but I didn't think of that you know what I mean? Like a lot of the stuff...it, I think it really, it's nice to have it on your repertoire like Charlie said...

Gertrude: The question was how do you think musical theatre has shaped your identity this year? I don't think this class has shaped my identity really at all, I mean, I think that it would have if I took a dance class this year or if I did advanced acting or if I did something else that allowed me to be on stage and allowed me to be creative it would have helped me shape my identity just as much as this class did.

I: Ok.

Gertrude: Um...I've, I feel like my identity was shaped more in my visual arts class that I took this year because it was the first visual arts class that I took and it, like, let me develop a completely different style that, I could express myself with, but, otherwise I feel like unless, like for me personally, unless it's, it's something you're doing for the first time, like you're acting for the first time or you're dancing for the first time or you're singing for the first time - which it wasn't the first time for me really doing any of those things, then...you, and unless it's like your life or something like that, then it's not really something that's gonna like eye open, like be eye opening to like who you are inside, because basically all I learned is here is I can be a bitch.

I: Are you saying it can't be or it just wasn't for you?

Gertrude: It wasn't for me and I feel like the dynamics of this class it necessarily wasn't because it's not like we really went in depth or, or pushed ourselves, or, or did something INCREDIBLE, I mean we did cool things and we did 2 shows and a concert and a performance...you know I mean a lot of stuff if all of these things you've done before this isn't like an extreme.

Aldonza: Like Gertrude said before with how like creating a role can help you figure out things you didn't know about yourself, that's like a true, like, statement in, when it come to musical theatre cuz like with musical theatre is more like extravagant than regular acting,

so like, your characters have to be bigger and like, it can really like push you to your limit and like, really like help you see how much of a stronger person you can be.

Roxie: Yeah, and it can make like, it makes you it makes you go to like places that your kinda uncomfortable and be goofy or like the, like that's why I think it's may, like, I think that Gertrude was right when she said that. I would like to do musical theatre in my future and I think that's why this means a lot more to me, it's cuz I've never done like a huge show, like *Seussical* even though it wasn't that huge here, but like, it's, I've never done like a show that was that long and...

Sandy: Um to say something to what Carlotta said, um, about...characters and how like um, yes the character is already written out a certain way, you as the actor are supposed to create this character and make it be completely different then how um, someone else has already done it, because if you do it the same as them, that's basically plagiarism. No it's not written plagiarism, but its still plagiarism because that person thought of all those character choices, thought of all of that to copy them that's not, that not right for them, they had, they used their brain they thought of all that stuff so, I think that with, with developing a character you can fine tune more and create, cuz you can create yourself into the character because that's fine, cuz no one else is you.

- I: OK, this is going to require each of you to think of just a specific example. So recalling your own experience with musical theatre, either in this, an academic setting, or in a production setting. So it can either be in this class or outside of it, what moment, scene or song impacted you in a specific way?
- Gertrude: “Still Hurting” from *The Last 5 Years*. I mean and so I sang it, so I was able to bring it full, like, it was easier to sing than it was if I had just been like bullshitting it.
- Sandy: OK and for me was, uh winning first place at competition, because it’s the first anything I’ve ever won and to know that I accomplished something that great with at a nationwide setting, uh, made me really proud of myself cuz, I never thought I was that talented and obviously I was...
- Carlotta: Um, I agree with that and I think the thing the made me really grow this year was playing Snoopy because I have always thought that I have no sense of humor and I really learned this year that I did and I could make people laugh so that was, that was a lot of fun to learn.
- Rachel: Um, “Alone in the Universe” definitely, with like, it’s like an emotional, like it’s not an emotional song, but it’s like an uplifting sad song, I guess, but like, it’s just really like about like never being alone kind of and like, that just kind of....not exactly hit

home, but it like, is a reminder kind of...so yeah, that like there are always like people there.

I: OK, we are going to stop here because we are out of time, but we will resume this next Tuesday.

APPENDIX E

MUSICAL THEATRE FOCUS GROUP 2

May 25, 2010

I: Ok this is, Part 2. Ok so the question is: "How have you come to create an identity in your life?"

Aldonza: As a musical theatre student?

Kate: I think we all...

I: In any way, in any way you understand that question.

Aldonza: We already answered that.

I: No

Roxie: What was the question?

I: How do you identify - how do you self identify?

Gertrude: um...ok, how do I identify my life? Um...

I: How do you categorize yourself?

Gertrude: Oh, did we start this one and never finish it?

I: I think maybe we might have, yes.

Aldonza: That's what it was.

Gertrude: Oh no...Um, I don't think I identify my life as any one specific category or something because I'm constantly changing as a teenager and growing up and maturing and developing who I am, but I think I identify as an artist all the time. Because I'm constantly creating art and I think that's something that won't change, but you know...that's about it....

Carlotta: I...I

I: Carlotta?

Carlotta: I identify...uh...I identify as a...whatever you want to call me,
singer/musician

Roxie: Female.

Carlotta: Female, all the time, like I don't change, I've never changed, I've
been a musician or singer whatever since I was like 8...

Roxie: ...teen.

Carlotta: So...since I was 18. I'm done

I: Anyone else?

Charlie: Um, I identify myself as an actor...

I: OK.

Eliza: I identify myself (*laughing*) as like a dancer.

I: OK.

Eliza: Genius, a genius - you know.

I: A genius dancer?

Kate: I identify as a vegetarian

Eliza: A genius midget dancer!!! HAHAHA

Gertrude: Actually, that is a pretty big thing I identify as, I identify as a
vegetarian too. It's basically things I believe in, if I believe in it, I
identify as it.

Carlotta: We're not as serious as we were on...whatever day.

Roxie: It's because I'm so angry

I: It's because seven days have gone by, why are you angry?

Roxie: That you didn't not appreciate that...

Carlotta: Roxie identifies as an angry women

Roxie: I express myself through music and art, but I don't identify myself as that like that's what she is, ART...like that's how I express myself...

I: ok, so then how do you identify yourself?

Roxie: How do I make myself...

I: What, like when someone says who are you, what would you say?

Gertrude: If you had to like explain yourself in, in so many words or sentences to like a college to get a scholarship...

Roxie: Really?

Gertrude: Hmmm, I don't think I could do that...I would say...

Aldonza: Are you, um...

Roxie: If I was trying to, if I was trying to do that for a college application or something, I'm pretty sure I'd say something along the lines of...I dunno, just trying to live life to the fullest?

Gertrude: an individual, live life to the fullest and never...misses an opportunity.

Carlotta: That should be on a bracelet

Roxie: Oww.

Gertrude: Live life to the fullest.

Lucy: I think Roxie is pretty optimistic

Roxie: Yeah, like I just...

Lucy: very optimistic and goal oriented...

Gertrude: And determined...

Lucy: so...she's just like a dedicated individual in general I think.

I: Ok, so aside from telling the rest of you figuring out what Roxie is, how about back to the question.

Roxie: That what...

I: I think that's, yeah, I don't think you're going to say anything else.

Roxie: Yeah, we can't

I: OK, how does it feel to play a character on stage?

Gertrude: Great!

Carlotta: It feels like I'm naked.

Charlie: Um...

Roxie: Carlotta come on!

I: What does that mean Carlotta?

Hannah: Oh, if you don't like...

Carlotta: I'm being completely serious....

Lucy: No, I completely agree with her.

Gertrude: Yeah.

I: What does that mean? So elaborate...

Carlotta: It feels like you're, you basically strip yourself of all...of your morals and uh, views and you have to turn into somebody else basically. And you have to, you're basically, not naked in the physical sense, but you...

Kate: It's a natural drug.

Carlotta: You have to, you have to like, you have to give yourself to the part if you, if your really serious about it...

I: And this part may or may not coincide with your own set of beliefs and morals in life...

Carlotta: Exactly, but if it doesn't, then you're completely stripped of everything that you believe in, no, but for when you're on stage in front of thousands of people or hundreds of people or...

Charlie: Or two.

Roxie: Or two.

I: You agreed with her, Emily, so what were you going to say?

Lucy: What was the question again?

I: That you feel naked on stage.

Lucy: No, what was your question?

I: My question was: How does it feel to play a character on stage?

Lucy: Ummm....you know, like you're naked. No, it just, I mean, ugh...

I: Well what do you understand that to mean?

Lucy: It's the same thing, I dunno what you want me to say...

I: I don't necessarily want you to say anything, I want you just to define what that means for you.

Lucy: eh, I can't...

Gertrude: I feel hilarious. I mean I think it's the only time were I feel like completely confident in being like either emotional or um, like telling a joke, or like talking about something or being ridiculous,

because it's not, it's not something that um, people can't judge you for it because that's what you're supposed to do.

Roxie: You are...

Gertrude: I'm TRYING to tell you my answer...

Roxie: Why do you get distracted so easily?

Gertrude: Yeah, little douche bag.

Roxie: people judge you for it.

Gertrude: Well yeah they, I think they judge you, but I feel like it doesn't

Roxie: YOU ARE STUPID.

Gertrude: it's not like

Aldonza: anything that you worry about...

Gertrude: ...ya, it's not like ...

Aldonza: ...judgment.

Gertrude: like if you, if you walk into a classroom crying, you're like
Ohmigod, all of these people are looking at me I wish they'd just
stop looking at me, but if you're crying on stage, it's like Oh wow,
all these people are looking at me and it's a different kind of like,
like feeling, like you don't feel as self conscience...

Sandy: The audience is gonna judge the character, they're not gonna judge
you...

Charlie: Yeah, they do!

Lucy: I see I judge the actor like...

Gertrude: Well when...what did...

Lucy: You are so dumb right now, you really are.

I: Were you going to say something Roxie?

Roxie: Ok, when I play a character, depending on what kind of character it is, I really feel like, um, I agree with Emily. It, I feel more comfortable, I'm nervous, there's always the aspect of being nervous, but I

Gertrude: because people judge you...

Roxie: I am a lot more confident in what I do, because I'm, I, it's like when we did *Seussical*, I'm not someone who like just goes out there and is like "Hey, I'm sexy and my dress is up to here and blah blah"...but when I went out there it was fine because that who I was playing and I felt more confident in being that person.

Gertrude: Because people definitely, people definitely judge your abilities and your acting or your singing or your act, dancing but they don't, you know if you say, if you say something really stupid on stage, people aren't like oh wow, that person is stupid, because that's the character. You know, if you says something funny, that doesn't necessarily mean you're a funny person, it means that you're playing a funny character, and as a character it allows you too be really like open with yourself or be really like something that your not, and you can feel comfortable doing it because that's not, you know it's not you changing or you out of you comfort zone as a person, it's you as an actor or actress.

Lucy: I don't think you have to be comfortable in order to play somebody else, like you have to be comfortable with yourself in order to play somebody that you're not.

Kate: That's true too.

Eliza: Um, like, I feel like creating a character is like really like....an invigorating process 'cuz like every single time I create a character I find something else about myself that I never knew, and like...it's just, it's really fun to be able to like slip into someone who's totally not you and like...

Roxie: Yeah, it's fun to be not yourself for a little bit.

Eliza: Like to be exaggerated for musical theatre most of the time, or like be more dramatic or like live this life that you've never lived before.

I: Why is it fun to not be you?

Eliza: Well it's not like it's fun to NOT be me, but it's fun to experience someone else's life, in a way. Like their experiences,

Roxie: It's fun to not be you...

Eliza: ...and like...

Roxie: I think...

Aldonza: It's fun to take on other peoples problems and then at the end of the play you're, you're just back to yourself.

Gertrude: Yeah, it, it's fun to not think about your own stress or your own relationships or your own family problems and instead take on

other stress, other family problems, other relationships and then have them be done, because that's not how I mean that's not how...

Lucy: you forget yourself when you're on stage, you just forget like...like, there, there have been so many times that I'm like acting on stage and then I like go off or something 'cuz it's like my time to exit and I'm like, Dude, that was like just not me, at all. I mean not in this class necessarily, this class wasn't like that, I'm really sorry, but when it actually happens, it's just like, when you're like up there, and there's like an audience and you're like at your full potential and it like....you're just saying your lines or whatever, singing your song, it's just like, it's an a-mazing feeling to be able to do that, because if you have, if you're going to be a good actor you have to be able to have the audience be like, okay, I'm going to watch you and I'm going to accept that you're going to be this other person and I'm going to feel this for you. And when they do that, it feels really good.

Carlotta: I agree, I feel like, I feel like every time I every time I uh, I perform and I feel like I'm doing a really good job it's almost like an out of body experience.

Gertrude: Yeah, and, an like, I, I get more of that singing than acting because I haven't done like super serious acting roles, but like even if its not a song that makes me need to be out of character, even if it's

not like a character song, like a musical theatre song. You can't be up there and think about your own problems if you want to deliver a great performance, like you can channel your emotions or what you're dealing with at the moment, but you can't be up there like "ahh, fuck, did I turn off the oven?" you know, because that not, then your not like channeling your energy the right way and so I feel like, um, it's, it, like takes you out, it makes you like different, and it helps you create a role, even if it's not like a, an acting role.

Eliza: Like, that kinda goes with um, like, with dancing you have to, be like acting too, and like, it's fun to be able to like walk off stage and be like "aww, shit, I just messed up" and then like the second you walk back on stage you're completely that character again, you don't care that you just messed up, and like, you don't care that there's an audience full of people because you're living this separate life from the one that you're actual self knows.

Carlotta: It's almost like playing an adult game of dress-up...like it's fun, like you get to, it's almost like being....the, like being in an imaginary world, like...

Lucy: Being naked like being vulnerable.

I: Ok, good, the last question is, how is this portrayal different than your actual life, and I think you have touched upon some of that without directly necessarily working to answer that.

Roxie: Like how...

Carlotta: Portrayal of what?

I: How is the portrayal of these characters different than the character that you are in your life?

Roxie: Well

Carlotta: You could play a blood thirsty murderer.

Sally: There's diff...there's different boundaries for, cuz, as a person you have certain boundaries and then the character you play might have totally different boundaries. It's just like the...

Carlotta: Which is why it's also good to do a character analysis.

Lucy: What was the question?

Gertrude: Umm...

I: How is the portrayal of a character different than your actual life?

Are there similarities in creating those characters? Or differences?

Sandy, yes.

Sandy: Um, I think that yes there is a differences (laughs) between yourself and the character, but I think you can always find something about the character that is you...so even though you're trying to take yourself out of the character, it's still, you're always going to be it, just because you yourself are still playing it, or even you'll create the character to do something that you do or just those little mannerisms or something like that, but I think that you are somewhat always the character or the character is somewhat always you.

Roxie: Well, uh, when, like, sorry, when I, when you create a character, like when I create a character it's, when I start to create it, it's easier for me to find something in common with it, but that it's totally, it's completely different from me, but I still have to find maybe like an inkling of like the same similarity for me to relate and then to start playing this person or thing.

Charlie: I...

Eliza: It's...like, the total opposite with me, like, I like starting with a blank slate, like no similarities no nothing, because like, if you start with similarities, often times when you get a stuck, like at a stopping point with your character you go back to those similarities and you just create someone that is almost exactly like yourself. So like, I like starting with a blank slate so it's completely different and completely new and like, it's nothing that I've ever personally done before or ever been before.

Charlie: When I create a character...(sounds dejected)...when I create a character...when I create a character I don't look for any similarities or things aren't similar because I'm not important in that situation, everything is about the character, so I don't really feel the need to look for things that are alike or that are the same because it, it's not me at all, I'm

Kate: How do you create the character?

Charlie: ...from the text and...character creativity

Lucy: Creating a character doesn't...necessarily mean like, ok I'm gonna sit down and I'm going to like write out a character bio and like, some people get their inspiration just simply from the text, you know what I mean...

Kate: That's true.

Lucy: ...so it's just, it depends on where you get your inspiration, if you get your inspiration from yourself, then it's like "yeah, ok, I need to find like things that make us similar in that", but if it's just like, where it's like, it's all about the character, you're gonna look through the play and your gonna look through what people say and like what...

Charlie: what they say to them and what they say...

Lucy: their lines are and how they say it and like how they act in certain situations in the play.

Roxie: I totally forgot what the question was...

Gertrude: Um, I will tell you...I'll tell you because I just read it (laughs) and I wanted to...ok, "How is this portrayal of um, playing a character on stage different than your actual life?" and, ok...um,...not in any performance that I have ever done that involves me being on stage or me being in front of an audience and performing, the character that I portray, personally, is always confident. And even if it's not like, like elite confident or overly confident, it's, it's not...it's not backing down...so...which, I don't...ok, different from

my real life is obviously I'm not always confident,
and...um...different than my actual life is obviously I'm not always
like, like, ohh so like flossy flossy or I dunno I don't really know
what, I don't really know what that means, but for some reason I
just remember someone saying it...yeah.

Roxie: I have a question.

I: Yes Roxie?

Gertrude: It's about like how you portray yourself.

Roxie: Are you asking the characters we've portrayed in like all of the
things we've done, or can it be...

I: Just in general.

Sandy: Did you um, OK, I know, um, ah, last summer I did a show called
"Bare" and I played um,

Charlie: a bear? (*laughs*)

Sandy: SHUT THE HELL UP! and um, I played the character who was
uh, the larger of everyone, fat meaning, um, and who didn't have
very many friends and all that and she didn't get along with people
and she just didn't fit in and um, in situations like this there are
some times where you can find a character that is a lot like, a lot
like yourself and think and especially with that character I know
that, um, I connected with it very well because that has been my
life for a long time now and so I think it just depends on
what...kind of character your portraying or what the story is to

really be able to judge if it is your everyday life or not, so, kinda goes, like with every show, and no you shouldn't put yourself as yourself playing that character you should always be that character no matter what, but still...

Lucy: AWWWWWWW!

I: Good, ok, that's good.

[End of session]

