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COMBATING PERFORMANCE ANXIETY:
REFLECTIONS OF A PERSONAL ANTI-ANXIETY PLAN FOR ONSTAGE
AND FILMED MEDIA

by

MEGAN FRIEND
B.S. NORTHWEST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY, 2015

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2021

Major Professor: Belinda Boyd

ABSTRACT

In a 2015 survey by the Arts and Minds initiative, findings concluded that mental health issues affect twenty percent of entertainment industry professionals (Hemley, 1). In a more recent 2018 report by Inspire and Ulster University, thirty-six percent of those working in the creative sector suffer from anxiety (Shorter, 32). The effect of anxiety in the entertainment industry has recently come to light with professional actors including Emma Stone (*La La Land*), Dakota Johnson (*The Peanut Butter Falcon*), and Patti Murin (*Frozen* on Broadway), publicly expressing their struggles with anxiety in interviews and social media publications.

As a performer, I am still challenged with thoughts of anxiety, fear, and premeditated responses. This anxiety often prevents me from exploring choices in the rehearsal room and impedes my character's given circumstances during a performance. It has become imperative for me to explore a new way to approach a role psychologically, emotionally, and physically. I hope to eliminate the persistent problem that occurs in my process; the common gap between mind and body that prevents me from creating a dynamic, holistic performance. To do this, I must construct a process that will ground me as a performer while demonstrating a truthful character who remains invested in their own inner life and circumstances. This document will examine two vital stages of the development and application of my new process. As I create the roles of Jessie in Lynn Nottage's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *Sweat* and Lucetta in Aphra Behn's Restoration comedy, *The Rover*, I will experiment with various techniques that promote mindfulness and awareness. The second stage will solidify the process through the creation of self-recorded monologues.

My methodology will include the examination of the common causes of anxiety in rehearsal and performance. I will investigate various forms of meditation and other holistic practices and implement these techniques through daily practice. Additionally, I will examine the techniques of performance theorist, Uta Hagen, who stressed habits of self-assessment and reflection that provide specific pathways for the inward and outward life of the character. My discoveries and observations will be recorded in a daily rehearsal and performance journal. The second stage will result in theatrical video content which will be available online.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank Belinda Boyd, the chair member of my thesis, for her patience and support. Thank you to my thesis committee including Cynthia White and Jim Brown, my experience working with you helped me to grow as an artist. Thank you to my excellent undergraduate professors from Northwest Missouri State University including Dr Theophil Ross and Dr Joe Kreizinger. To the other eleven members of my graduate cohort, thank you for accompanying me on this journey every step of the way. Thank you to my family, this would have been impossible without you. Finally, I want to thank Mark Brotherton, who introduced me to Uta Hagen's work and the importance of having fun.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Public speaking is one of the most feared phobias in the world. As a performer, one of the most frequently asked questions I receive is “do you still get nervous?”. Acting has always served as an escape for me. In many ways, the characters that I portray onstage contain an element of myself that I feel too reluctant or afraid to show in everyday life. The act of performing is cathartic and liberating; however, performance anxiety is often standing in my way of a rounded performance.

Anxiety is more complicated than “stage fright”, or simply feeling nervous occasionally. Anxiety is a response to a perceived threat that involves both physiological and psychological elements aspects such as the arousal of the sympathetic fight or flight response (Beck et al. 22). In my mind, anxiety feels like uncontrollable and frequent irrational thoughts. In my body, anxiety feels like trembling, increased heart rate, breathing issues, and chest pain. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, an estimated 40 million adults in the U.S. have some kind of anxiety disorder. Worldwide, 1 in 14 people are affected. In the rehearsal room and onstage, anxiety makes me feel hypersensitive and hyperaware of perceived threats, whether or not any truly exist. If I perceive a threat and that threat is eliminated, the anxiety can sometimes persist, inhibiting my performance as an actor. Generally, I feel more anxiety in the rehearsal room and the classroom than I do in performance. This thesis is an exploration as to why that might be and a method to combat this problem.

The roles that I had the opportunity to portray onstage include Jessie in Lynn Nottage’s Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *Sweat* and Lucetta in Aphra Behn’s Restoration comedy, *The Rover*. Through journaling these experiences, I was able to identify moments of anxiety and self-

doubt that prevented me from achieving my full potential as an actor. To combat these issues in the future, I developed a plan using Uta Hagen's acting methodology and other mindfulness techniques and implemented this plan in a package of video recorded monologues.

The decision to move towards recorded media for the second phase of this thesis was due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The entertainment industry has moved online with Zoom play readings and streamed productions instead of unsafe live performances. This made for an unexpected and multifaceted study of how acting on camera and acting in live theatre differ and how that impacts performance anxiety. The topic of mental health and anxiety has gained more attention nationally with Americans coping with skyrocketing unemployment rates, pandemic related deaths, political unrest, and social isolation on a massive scale. The entertainment industry is dealing with the loss of grant funding, cancelled productions and tours, union disagreements, and thousands of layoffs. Exploring acting on camera and its impact on performance anxiety was not my intent at the beginning of this thesis exploration, but to ignore where our industry is headed would be a disservice to myself and the craft. I hope that the following chapters will serve as a guide for approaching performance anxiety in acting, whether it occurs live or on camera.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH

Factors of Anxiety in Theatre

In this industry, we demand a lot of actors and this can exacerbate pre-existing anxiety conditions as well as other mental health concerns. Not only do actors need to uphold the basics; line memorization, script analysis, and preparation, rehearsals, and performances but we also ask them to go above and beyond for the craft. We ask them to work long hours and holidays including Christmas and Thanksgiving, for the popular holiday shows. We ask them to live in cities like New York or Los Angeles because it is convenient for theatrical companies to have actors in one place but then when they are booked for a job, they are often asked to travel to a different location. We often ask actors to simultaneously work other jobs including box office, design, or marketing on top of their “survival job” which often requires physical labor such as working in the foodservice industry. The long hours that we ask actors to work, particularly non-union actors, go above the eight-hour workday, which was established in the early 1900s, shifting the work hours from a dated practice to outright dangerous. Typically, acting is not an actors only source of income which adds more hours on top of an already demanding schedule.

Working multiple jobs with several incomes and no benefits is typically identified as the “gig economy”, and these gig workers have been hit hard during the pandemic. Gig workers have relied on unemployment benefits, which have fluctuated in value since March of 2020. Even the most successful Broadway actors are currently experiencing negative effects of the pandemic in theatre. Caitlin Kinnunen, a Tony-nominated actor and type one diabetic said in an interview with CNBC; “How am I going to live? How am I going to afford to live? Should I just find a career that will give me health care so I can have the life I have built up until now continue?” (Picker, 2). Kinnunen’s health insurance was previously obtained through the Actor’s

Equity Association, whose program includes an option to earn healthcare through weeks of paid acting work. If Broadway actors are suffering financially during this time, where does this leave regional or non-union actors? Although much of this issue stems from the capitalist structure of our society, Artists with pre-existing anxiety could be greatly impacted by these uncertainties and more could be done to alleviate some of these pressures, starting with union accountability.

The Actor's Equity Association is viewed as problematic by some, but it does still hold value and credibility in the theatre industry. If an actor is fortunate enough to be in the Actor's Equity Association, they need to pay dues upfront and monthly to stay active in the organization. If they are not in the union, an actor may need to attend graduate school or a "pay to play" program where they will receive admittance to the Equity Membership Candidate program, both of which costs money regardless of any scholarships or financial aid, marking another additional financial cost for actors. During the pandemic, the two unions meant to protect actors; The Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists and Actor's Equity Association, found themselves in a stalemate regarding rights to video-recorded material and many of its members blame poor leadership for the situation. After investigating both sides of the stalemate, Brent Thiessen, a member of both unions, had this to say regarding Actor's Equity, "A union is a group of people who pay other people to do things for them. What do we want those people to do for us? is the question we all need to ask. Because of Covid-19, we have the opportunity to change our world. And I don't believe we are going to get out of the pandemic until we do. But from what I've learned, I am having a very hard time believing that what is valuable to members is of the same value to the staff and leadership of Actors' Equity (Thiessen)". This feud left many actors out of work or having to decide as to whether or not they could afford to stay in either union and many members felt abandoned by their union that they

once supported.

These physical and financial conditions are less than ideal for actors who belong to underrepresented and marginalized groups such as BIPOC Actors, Women, and the LGBTQ+ community. The entertainment industry has attempted to put a band-aid over this problem with solutions such as colorblind or genderblind casting. Maya Phillips from the New York Times describes colorblind casting as a flawed theory; “Though egalitarian, in theory, colorblind casting in practice is more often used to exclude performers of color. It’s a high-minded-sounding concept that producers and creators use to free themselves of any social responsibility they may feel toward representing a diverse set of performers” (Phillips, 1). The result being, the number of acting roles and opportunities for people in these underrepresented groups is considerably less than the cisgender white man. Although my anti-anxiety plan as detailed in this document is for personal use and developed from a methodology that works specifically for me, I would be remiss if I did not mention that my struggle with performance anxiety is coming from a place of privilege. Although the performance anxiety that I experience is valid, there are many other contributing factors to anxiety that I do not experience as a heterosexual white woman. As we navigate through performative Black Lives Matter statements from theatre companies, we await real change from the top theatrical leaders of our community and fight for equal representation for all people.

Theatrical Intimacy

When we take into account elements such as Race, Gender, and Socioeconomic Status we can analyze the emotional toll that certain stories have on actors depending on the content of the material being performed. This is particularly relevant for Black performers who are often asked to perform in plays with slavery and other racial content and people of all races who are

asked to perform sexual abuse, rape, or staged intimacy. It is as true on stage as it is in life that intimacy can take many different forms; it does not always involve kissing or sexual situations. Theatrical intimacy training is a guide to navigating difficult topics and situations while respecting the emotional effort of the actor.

One major issue with theatrical intimacy is the lack of representation. Although there is a separate anti-racism movement simultaneously happening in the industry, many productions are incorporating intimacy practices into their processes to create a safe space for non-white performers. A new movement titled “We See You White American Theatre” emerged in July 2020 and lists demands of change for the current theatre community along with an accountability report listing theatre’s and organizations who have adopted these standards. According to the New York Times, “The group’s initial statement was signed by more than 300 artists and then endorsed by thousands online; among its more visible supporters are the playwrights Lynn Nottage and Dominique Morisseau [...] The demands are wide-ranging and far-reaching. Among them: Black, Indigenous and People of Color should make up “the majority of writers, directors and designers on stage for the foreseeable future. [...] At nonprofit theaters they should also make up a majority of organizational leadership and middle management, as well as of literary departments” (Paulson). Theatrical Intimacy training and knowledge could work hand in hand with these movements to create a space where performers feel comfortable to do their jobs as artists but there must be a diverse population of artists in the room to navigate this effectively.

Anxiety and hesitancy often surround situations of intimacy because actors are unsure of how to proceed safely in intimate situations. After the #MeToo movement, we saw a call for intimacy work in rehearsal and performance. All theatrical intimacy programs have a common goal; educate the theatre and film community on safe and effective methods of portraying

intimacy on stage or screen. This extends beyond intimacy scenes and into workplace conflicts and issues in the patriarchal structure within theatre. I found these issues arising in my educational experiences. I often found myself in uncomfortable situations that prompted anxiety. In one case, I experienced a panic attack prompted by my fellow actor forcefully grabbing my arm in an acting course. This grab did not hurt me, it just startled me. I broke character and expressed that I felt uncomfortable and I was told by the instructor to continue acting and that comfortability wasn't a reason to stop a scene. Chelsea Pace describes this issue with actor training in her book *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy* by claiming "Acting school is an exercise in saying yes to everything... by sending the message that an actor is a person that says 'yes', and takes risks, it comes through loud and clear that a person looking to protect themselves and say no isn't cut out to be an actor" (Pace, 13). Blaming actors for being too sensitive or feeling uncomfortable is a result of authority figures feeling displeased with the emotional response of the actor, a refusal to be considerate of their feelings, and a lack of accountability for their own words and actions. Being mindful of intimacy training in theatre and giving actors a voice in moments when they are being emotionally or physically vulnerable in the classroom or on stage allows for a safer space to create and a more productive outcome.

Internalized Misogyny (Sit Still and Look Pretty)

When examining the factors of anxiety in my performances, I had to look inward at internalized misogyny from years of institutionalized sexism. In a year-end review, one of my instructor's gave me the feedback that I have been told my entire life to sit still and be quiet in the classroom and it shows in my theatrical work. In a field that is dominated by men, it is common to face blatant sexism but what I am now coming to understand is that I continuously

function under a system that works to reinforce or reinstate male dominance, whether the parties are aware of this or not. Although sexism may not be the root cause of performance anxiety or mental health issues; the patriarchal system by which our society continues to abide does impact my emotional state and how I process those emotions. This roadblock in processing emotions makes it difficult to be emotionally available as an actor, particularly when I am the target of misogynist aggression.

For years, I found myself connecting more with female directors, teachers, and creatives without ever being able to articulate why. Through the process of journaling this thesis, I have found that with women creatives, I am not actively working to maintain peace in my environment. When I work with men, I feel a societal responsibility to be soft-spoken and agreeable to the point of unsustainability. I work harder to attempt to “take the note” or get things “perfect” which does nothing but negate my creative process. When I face male hostility or aggression, I shut down completely. Some recent feedback that I have received about my acting work include not smiling, not being enthusiastic or passionate enough, and not being excited about the work. These notes correlate directly with the patriarchal ideal that “[...] women are tasked not only with performing certain forms of emotional, social, domestic, sexual, and reproductive labor but are also supposed to do so in a loving and caring manner or enthusiastic spirit, and mentally available while also maintaining an enthusiastic and caring attitude” (Manne, 10). This is a lot for female actors to balance while also attempting to embody a character and it becomes an unrealistic expectation and something that men are rarely asked to display in their acting work.

A question that came up while journaling was; if I work so hard to maintain peace and agreeability, why am I often faced with more male aggression than my female collaborators who

are more outspoken than I? Kate Manne examines this in her book, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* “ [...] we would expect misogyny’s primary targets to be certain kinds of women: those who challenge or disrupt existing gender hierarchies. But virtually any woman is potentially the target of misogynist aggression. Since any woman can typically stand in imaginatively for a whole host of others, they may serve as an outlet for many different grudges. Expressions of frustration, protest, lashing out, and “punching down” behavior are further possibilities. (Manne, 22) A recent example of a man using a woman as an outlet for aggression in a professional setting happened when Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was called an expletive name by Representative Ted Yoho on the steps of the United States Capitol building. This is a widespread problem not specific to the entertainment industry but we see these issues more clearly when they are in the spotlight, which may be why the #MeToo movement caught fire in the television and film industry but brought to light the mistreatment of women across our country in a variety of professions.

Mental Health Response in Theatre

It wasn’t until recently that I began to see actors speaking out about mental health and performance. When the well-respected film actor Robin Williams died, celebrities everywhere began speaking out about depression, anxiety, and suicide. Including Broadway actor Patrick Page who shared in a Broadway World exclusive interview personal and intimate details regarding his battle with depression. Page accurately described the plight of many actors who struggle with medication and mental illness saying; “I had vehemently resisted medication for 20 years, convinced that it would hamper my ability to access my emotions-both on stage and in life. I knew my depressions might come-- but I felt they were the price I paid for creativity.” (Page, 2). Page eventually did embrace medication as a treatment for his illness and now speaks

out about the false idea that mental health treatment impacts actors and other creatives negatively. Society has a view of the “tortured artist” that is simply untrue. Actors do not need to be miserable to create a good product. They do not need to live the negative experiences of the characters they are playing to accurately portray a story on stage or film. There is a balance between portraying a character and allowing negative emotions to linger in your psyche but the actor must first determine their mental state and come to terms with it to be healthy onstage and off.

More recently, Patti Murin, who played Princess Anna in *Frozen* on Broadway opened up about her struggle with anxiety and panic attacks. Murin describes her anxiety symptoms as “It’s a slow burn, “For me, at least. It starts as a tiny seed in the very bottom of my intestines. The seed grows, little by little, until it reaches my stomach. It feels like a balloon expanding inside of me until it has inflated my entire torso into a massive hollow cage that feels as heavy as lead” (Murin,1) For Murin, she needs at least twelve hours and up to three days to fully recover from her symptoms, this can become an issue when you are playing one of the most well-known, charming, and excitable Disney princesses of the decade. Overall, the response to Murin’s openness has been positive which may signal to Broadway moving in a progressive direction.

As exemplified by Page and Murin, those who are speaking out about anxiety and mental illness seem to be at the top, or the most commercially successful. This level of success makes them untouchable or less likely to lose jobs and future opportunities than it would for a novice actor. Actors who are just beginning their careers are less likely to talk about mental illness or their specific needs because they have been told they need to be easy to work with and unproblematic. Oftentimes an actor will not speak out because there are gender, race, and other negative societal hierarchies at play that make them feel as though they cannot express concern.

This is why it is important to have diverse representation in every room including casting, rehearsal, backstage, and performance.

The realities of this industry can feel crushing at times and we tend to ignore it. The entertainment industry pushes on with or without you. This may be why one in five people working in entertainment have actively sought help for their mental health in 2015 and that number continues to rise (Hemley). It is time for us to acknowledge this problem and create solutions. We are living through a pandemic where theatre is entirely shut down, this creates an opportunity for us to reevaluate theatre and listen to creators. Not only are we taking a look at race, diversity, and the value of storytelling but we are also reflecting on traditions that have negative impacts on the industry as a whole.

Life Through Stage (Augusto Boal)

Identifying sources of anxiety in theatre and addressing the issue of mental illness within those working in the industry illuminate a bigger question; Do we have a responsibility as theatre artists to carry our work outside of the theatre? Many theatrical theorists believe so, including Augusto Boal the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed. Augusto Boal turned the role of the audience upside down. He flipped the role of the spectator into a spect-actor. Actors became audience members, and audience members became actors. He believed that "It is not the place of the theatre to show the correct path, but only to offer the means by which all possible paths may be examined" (Boal 182). This mindset altered how the role of the audience functions in this methodology. With audience members as active participants in their theatrical experience, they were no longer being presented with perfect happy endings or stories with a beginning, middle, and end. Scenarios were presented, facts were dealt with, and the audiences took ownership in their experiences, thus liberating them, albeit even briefly, from their oppressive stances.

According to Boal, "These techniques have two main goals: to enhance our ability to know or recognize a given situation and to help us to rehearse actions which can lead to the breaking of the oppression shown in that situation. To know and to transform—that is our goal. To transform something, first one must know it. Knowing is already a transformation—a transformation which supplies the means to accomplish the other transformation." (Boal 207). This notion is detailed in his book, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, Boal details activities that can be facilitated for actors and non-actors alike. Boal's primary goal in all of this is to educate and transform.

Boal's notion of transformation and liberation resonates with me as both an actor and an educator. Liberation for actors and audience members from sources of oppression in a theatrical space is one of the ways we can achieve true catharsis. Theatre artists need to remember that alienating our audience may heighten our artistic statement but oppress them in the end. Being true to ourselves and following the example of Patrick Page and Patti Murin in being open and honest about mental illness in theatre can help us to reach a wider audience and connect to the art of storytelling. We must keep an open mind and heart while considering what we want our art to say- what is our call to action?

Meditation and Holistic Practices

The ancient practice of Meditation has morphed into a common solution for overthinking or certain day to day anxieties in Western society. This practice has many religious and spiritual ties that have been watered down to fit a health and wellness trend in the United States but this does not negate its benefits. Current neurological studies have shown that "meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness" (Lazar, 1) meaning meditation can rewire neural pathways in the brain and can alleviate or eliminate certain anxieties or triggers of anxiety. While researching meditation practices, I determined that a guided meditation would be most useful to

me as a beginner. While a phone application might not be the most effective form of meditation, studies have shown it is still beneficial with consistent use. In a study of 250 first-year students who used a meditation app, those who used the app with low frequency showed low improvement in psychological distress as opposed to high-frequency users who reported significant improvement in their symptoms (Jade, et al). An iPhone app titled Headspace, created by Andy Puddicombe caught my attention. This application has multiple options for quick meditation sequences that best suited my packed schedule during school and work hours. During the pandemic, they offered more specific meditation sequences for issues such as election anxiety and meditation for sleep. My goals with this meditation app consisted of 1) familiarizing myself with anxiety-inducing thoughts and letting them go and 2) increased body awareness.

In addition to meditation, other holistic practices that I implemented into the plan were diet and exercise. I did not want to make any drastic changes to my diet but rather focus on healthier foods and limiting fried and fatty foods. A study published by the American Journal of Psychiatry found “A dietary pattern comprising vegetables, fruit, beef, lamb, fish, and whole-grain foods (traditional) was associated with a lower likelihood of depressive and anxiety disorders, whereas a dietary pattern comprising processed and "unhealthy" foods (western) was associated with a higher likelihood of psychological symptoms and disorders” (Jacka et al). Mindfulness of the type and quantity of food I was putting into my body became the overall focus rather than an extreme dietary change or program. In terms of exercise, prioritizing movement of any kind including walking, yoga, swimming, or going to the gym for at least 30 minutes a day was a goal for my mindfulness acting plan. Thirty minutes of intended movement a day contained the goal of becoming more mindful of my body with no intention of gaining muscle or losing fat.

Uta Hagen

Uta Hagen is one of the most influential American theatre practitioners of our time. In performance, the German-born actress is most well known for her portrayal of Nina in Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*. This performance brought her rave reviews from critics and thrust her into the American theatre spotlight. Hagen is also known for Tony award-winning roles in Clifford Odets' *The Country Girl* and Martha in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* At a young age, Hagen had to develop a methodology for herself to function in the American theatre scene.

When Hagen's acting career began to dwindle, due in part to her political activism, McCarthyism and her hollywood blacklisted status, she focused her attention on teaching acting. Hagen spent time in New York City developing her methodology and assisting other aspiring actors. She went on to teach at the HB Studio, which remains a valued training institution in New York City today. Their mission states; "Working in partnership with the HB Playwrights Foundation and Theatre, we uphold a standard of performance that can play a significant role in shaping today's contemporary and classical theater – a standard envisioned by our founder, actor/director Herbert Berghof, and championed by the actor and master teacher Uta Hagen" (HB Studio). The HB Studio continues to honor Hagen's legacy with courses, master classes, and a filmed documentary of Uta Hagen performing and teaching master classes. Former students of Uta Hagen include; Judy Garland, Whoopi Goldberg, Amanda Peet, Jack Lemmon and Christine Lahti.

As a writer, Hagen has developed two books *Respect for Acting* and *A Challenge for the Actor*. In this plan, I will focus primarily on *Respect for Acting* because it lends itself to analysis and implementation. In this text, Hagen created multiple activities for actors to further their understanding of the craft that centers around meeting yourself before meeting the character.

Respect for Acting is broken down into three parts; Part One (The Actor), Part Two (The Object Exercises), Part Three (The Play and the Role). Each of these parts details different ways for the actor to make more organic choices centered on a mutual understanding between self and acting.

Part One (The Actor) introduces Hagen's beliefs surrounding the craft. She details the physical and physiological components of acting and stresses that talent is simply not enough. There is an emphasis on education, repetition, examination, and practice for the growing actor. Her method is widely used and viewed as a middle ground. Inside-out and outside-in techniques are often used in educational institutions as an introduction to the method in the craft.

How can Hagen's methodology help me to combat anxiety? In an initial observation, the idea of fitting into a mold or being *regular* is a major hindrance to my classroom and rehearsal experience. I often think about the choices that I am making and compare them with other actors in the room. I want to get the answer correct and find fruitful results in a way that others won't judge me for. Hagen argues that being regular is the downfall of an actor. She claims "If you are affected in your daily life, calculatingly self-aware in your relations with others, you will undoubtedly be a bad actor, because your attention is narcissistic" (Hagen, 32). Although I experience these narcissistic feelings in the classroom and rehearsal, they happen less frequently in performance, the reason being that I feel a 'mask' of the character in performance. In other words, the person you see on stage isn't me as opposed to the person you see in the classroom or the rehearsal room. Hagen addresses this concept of 'the mask', "To seem to want or need a mask behind which to bury one's self often comes, not only from an incorrect concept, but from a distrust in ourselves. We harbor the suspicion that we ourselves are boring, and that only the character in the play is sufficiently interesting to hold an audience" (Hagen, 27). The goal of the exploration of these techniques is to create a better sense of self that will lessen this negative

self-awareness and allow for the removal of the mask in the classroom and rehearsal.

The first step is to identify where you are coming from. Hagen stresses the importance of analysis and creating a “point of view” which is a term we also see in the works of Chekhov, Stanislavski, and Meisner. Hagen is arguing that point of view is essential and can be personal and political. For example, in a commentary on the American theatre she states; “In the United States, we have had several theatres with a point of view that almost made it- or they made it for several years. Many years ago we had the Provincetown Players, the early Theatre Guild, the Civic Repertory Theatre and the Group Theatre. Since then, each decade has brought us further attempts in the establishment of meaningful and permanent companies” (Hagen, 17). Hagen argues that we must know our self-identity thoroughly with a clear point of view so that as actors and theatre practitioners, we may eventually begin to understand another person’s point of view and present that view rather than represent it.

In terms of technique, Hagen introduces the concept of Substitution. The idea is to apply images or moments from your own life and substitute them for the moment or action of the play that may not initially elicit a response from the actor. This technique is thought to be a safer alternative to method acting, where you lose yourself in the character and fully invest in the characters given circumstances in an attempt to ‘live’ that moment. Substitution is a model that Hagen encourages the actor to use through every step of the work and she applies this idea to other techniques as well.

In addition to point of view and substitution, Hagen introduces two other major concepts in Part one (The Actor), the first is Emotional Memory. Emotional Memory is Hagen’s process of finding a substitution for a large emotion onstage such as crying or laughing. The idea is that a large bank of internal images can be developed by the actor and then substituted for the event

happening onstage if it fails to produce the desired response. Emotional Memory focuses on a psychological response while Hagen's second concept, Sense Memory, deals with physiological responses such as hot or cold sensations. In Sense Memory, the same substitution applies but this substitution may also be a physical action or phrase as opposed to an internal image. Part One of the text also addresses the importance of reality, "We must take from life, and what we take must have pertinence. A mere imitation of nature in its familiar, daily aspects is the antithesis of art" (Hagen, 76). Hagen suggests improvisation and the magic-if to combat the falseness that many actors present when attempting to display reality while still maintaining that theatre is not real life.

In my analysis, Part One of Hagen's text will serve as a basis for understanding self-image and a through-line of technique. Part Two of the text deals primarily with exercises for the actor that encourage exploration of self, the character, and the play. In the second section, Hagen encourages the actor to participate in each exercise as themselves for at least two minutes. The object exercises are meant to build on one another accumulating a better understanding of self and the character.

Part Two (The Object Exercises) introduces Uta Hagen's nine questions, a series of detailed questions meant to assist in crafting the world of the play. Hagen encourages a two-minute exploration of a simple task in which these nine questions are answered by the actor.

1. Who am I?

Character.

2. What time is it?

Century, year, season, day, minute.

3. Where am I?

Country, city, neighborhood, house, the room or the specific area of the room.

4. What surrounds me?

Animate inanimate objects.

5. What are the given circumstances?

Past, present, future, and the events.

6. What are my relationships?

Relation to total events, other characters, and to things.

7. What do I want?

Character, main and immediate objectives.

8. What is in my way?

Obstacles.

9. What do I do to get what I want?

The action: physical, verbal.

These nine questions can serve as a point of analysis for the actor to more deeply craft an organic character. This exercise assists the actor in staying in “the moment” by not only answering key questions about the character and the world of the play but observing

psychological or physiological changes within the actor that can fuel the present moment.

In addition to Uta Hagen's Nine Questions, her concept of immediacy resonated with me as "the fight to prevent anticipation, to prevent thinking and planning ahead, to prevent setting yourself for an action already knowing what the consequences will be" (Hagen, 102). Overthinking and pre-planning responses are two issues that I have had consistently throughout my graduate studies. Hagen points out that we might think that we know what is going to happen, and even if we are right, we do not know *how* it's going to happen. To explore this, Hagen encourages an immediacy exercise where the actor searches for a missing object encouraging them to not preplan psychological or emotional responses to finding or the inability to find the object. This exercise promotes living in each moment of the task rather than anticipating reactions or responses.

Part Three (The Play and the Role) assists the actor in preparing for a role. When reading the play for the first time, Hagen encourages actors to read it as an audience member. What is the author trying to say? What is the meaning? She then suggests taking detailed and personal notes on the script using images from the actor's life. In approaching a character, Hagen suggests that the actor use substitution and ask questions about every facet of the character and their life, their objectives, and their relationships. In Part Three, Hagen also addresses performance nerves, saying; "When you are beginning to learn a new correct technique, as your goals get higher and you become more aware of the areas in which you might fail, you may also be temporarily, more nervous than when you proceeded with the faith of an unknowing beginner" (Hagen, 202). This is exactly where I am at as a younger actor in adjusting the idea of technique in acting. Hagen encourages actors to see past these nerves and to allow failure through nerves rather than using them as fuel to propel a performance, as it would be impossible to recreate.

CHAPTER THREE: APPROACH

Personal Anti-Anxiety Rehearsal Approach

The first step in preparation for a role happens long before the role is cast in daily practice. Daily practice is essential to encourage mindfulness and keeping the actor ready for performance. Hagen justifies this view; “All parts of his instrument should be limber enough to respond to the psychological and emotional demands he may make on it when he springs into physical and verbal action in the character in the play” (Hagen, 14). Making the instrument limber means participating in a daily vocal and physical warmup focusing on problem areas or habitual tensions that hinder performance. Creating a daily routine will help to ease the transition into full rehearsals and performances. My daily routine includes a full vocal and physical warmup as well as a fifteen to thirty-minute meditation routine with the Headspace app to keep the mind and body open and ready.

Daily practice includes mindfulness and encouraging thoughts. When a thought enters my mind, I will remind myself that it is simply a thought and attempt to let the thought go. Increased movement such as walking and exercise will be included in my daily practice. The intent behind daily practice is to create healthy habits that will aid in decreasing anxiety in rehearsals and performance.

Meditation will occur daily for fifteen to thirty minutes. This meditation can happen in any location but will most likely be within a found space before rehearsals such as an empty classroom or my car. The goal of daily meditation is to gain increased control over my thoughts and relieve tension in the mind and body.

Uta Hagen’s substitution method of acting will provide an obtainable acting technique that will assist me in eliminating performance anxiety. I will use my gains in self-awareness to

use my life experiences as a way to reach the characters needs or immediate desires. I am hopeful that by using this technique, I can channel some of my anxious thoughts in feelings into something useful for the character. I will attempt to take elements of characters that I am having trouble relating to and swap them with my own experiences or research that I have done of experiences. By doing so, I hope to relieve anxious thoughts such as “Am I doing this correctly?” and “I’m not sure what this feels like” and instead focus on tangible experiences.

Daily journaling will assist me in keeping track of my progress and self-discoveries. I will document any successes or failures in my process as well as any changes or alterations that need to occur. I will complete this journaling either immediately following rehearsal or during rehearsal. Journaling may also occur on off days if discoveries present themselves.

Throughout the daily practice process, it is important to have self-awareness. Concerning self-identity, Hagen states; “You must find your own sense of identity, enlarge this sense of self, and learn to see how that knowledge can be put to use in the characters you will portray onstage” (Hagen, 22). I have heard many people address this concept as “self-confidence” but “self-awareness” or “self-identity” are terms that work better for me in developing the confidence to present myself and my art. In an attempt to build awareness of my self-identity, I will meditate for fifteen to thirty minutes a day. In addition to meditation, I will attempt to expand my images for substitution by having a heightened awareness of how I am feeling physically and psychologically both in this rehearsal room and outside of it- these findings will be documented in my rehearsal and meditation journal.

Another major aspect of preparation before rehearsals involves analysis. Initially, I will follow Hagen’s guidelines on reading the play for the first time. To expand Uta Hagen’s object exercise, the Nine Questions, I will complete the nine questions for every scene of the play that

my character is present in. This will allow me to have a better understanding of my character and their given circumstances in every scene. This analysis, in combination with analysis and study of the overall play, will provide the preparation necessary to allow confident choices in the rehearsal room. Based on the Nine Questions, the character's objectives both immediate and overall should be noted in the script, although they may change in the rehearsal process.

With all of the preparation and materials from the work that was done before rehearsals begin, I will be able to come into the rehearsal space with a better sense of self-identity and concrete ideas to try in the rehearsal room. The idea is that this preparation will allow me to remove that mask that prevents me from taking risks. I will be incorporating sense memory, emotional memory, and substitution in the play while also maintaining a sense of immediacy to allow organic responses and reactions. My daily warm-up and practice routine will continue as well as a meditation plan.

In the second phase of my performance, which includes self-taped monologues, my rehearsal plan will remain largely the same but with more focus on self-discovery and performance. I will focus on answering Uta Hagen's I will note how rehearsing pieces for film differed from my experience of live rehearsals as well as any technical considerations needed for filmed media.

Personal Anti-Anxiety Performance Approach

In live performance, I will make an effort to no longer rely on nerves to fuel the character but instead attempt to achieve true immediacy and moment to moment work by being fully present in the world of the play. I will use my expanded image bank to incorporate sense memory and emotional memory in performance. Hagen suggests that the images may need to be

physically seen in the performance space and I will gain approval to do so if necessary. I will continue my daily practice throughout the performance process and work to avoid a narcissistic world view. I will continue my daily meditation practice throughout the performances and continue to document my findings.

In my filmed performances, I will take note of additional anxieties that may arise through acting in a different medium while continuing my meditation and utilizing Hagen's techniques. I will determine the best performance aesthetic factors such as lighting, camera angles, and makeup. I will use an iPhone 11 Pro to film and basic editing software such as iMovie to create a final product. These pieces will not be streamed to a live audience but the content can be used for my website and other acting submissions in the future.

I will keep a performance journal that details both the processes of phase one and phase two. In this journal, I will note how the processes of live theatre and filmed theatre differ and if anxiety increases or decreases based on environmental factors such as not having an audience and completing a single monologue instead of an entire play. The recorded pieces will receive feedback from my acting instructor, I will document her notes and how they impact my final video take.

Daily Warm-Up Example

Introductory Activity:

- Simple stretching, shakedown, simple yoga poses

Transition to Large X:

- Lay on the ground with limbs spread in a large X shape
- Complete a "body scan", acknowledging points of tension
- Acknowledgement of any anxious thoughts

Breathing:

4 Plains of Breath:

1. Side to Side Breath

2. Front to Back Breath
3. Down and Up Breath
4. Beach Ball Breath
- (5.) Breathe at the site of most tension
- (6.) Ribs, Belly, Belly, Ribs

Vocal Focus:

- Begin small vocalizations while continuing to focus on self-awareness

Muscle:

- Squeeze, Stretch, and Shake muscles of the body while laying in a large X position

Imagination:

- Engage the senses (See, Feel, Hear, Touch, Taste, Smell)
- Imagery: one to two images of the emotional state of the character

Conclusion:

- End in child's pose or modified pigeon yoga pose

Script and Character Analysis

The primary analysis that I will be using for this thesis is Uta Hagen's Nine Questions. After reading the play, I will begin working on each piece by answering the Nine Questions with as many details as I can. The Nine Questions will serve as a springboard for other questions and analysis that I will document in my daily rehearsal journal.

1. Who am I?
2. What time is it?
3. Where am I?
4. What surrounds me?
5. What are the given circumstances?
6. What are my relationships?

7. What do I want?
8. What is in my way?
9. What do I do to get what I want?

The first of the Nine Questions, *Who Am I?* will answer questions directly relating to the character such as; What do I look like? This question deals with physical attributes as well as social, spiritual, and emotional qualities. Is my character an introvert or an extrovert? What are their hobbies? What is their first, middle, and last name? What is her role in society? The second question, *What Time Is It?* pertains to the time of year, season, decade, year, month, day of the week and time of day. This answer could change from scene to scene but it is important to be as detailed as possible in my initial exploration. Time leads into location with *Where Am I?* Location on a broader scale including country, state, and the city should be explored as well as specific buildings and rooms within them. *What Surrounds Me?* includes discoveries from *Where Am I?* but becomes even more specific exploring the relationship between self and space. For example; What is in the living room where the scene takes place? What is on my desk? Are their pets in the home? These questions help to solidify the location and make the space functional for the actor. After determining the surroundings we move to the given circumstances. These given circumstances should be facts about the character determined by the script. Then we can determine relationships with other characters in the play. *What Do I Want?* and *What Is In My Way?* pertain to objective and obstacles. These will change from scene to scene but the super-objective of the play will remain the same. For the recorded scenes, I will focus on the objectives and obstacles of the scene that the monologue is from. Finally, *What do I do to get what I want?* includes tactics. I will write in tactics in the script as well as in my analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRIMARY EXPLORATION

Analysis of Jessi in *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage

Who am I?

I have a strong sense of who I want to be but I am lost. I am a friend and lover. I am a peace seeker. I frighten myself. I am a hippie. I am a drinker. I am stronger than I think I am.

What time is it?

It is the year 2000. It is also the year 2008. It is nighttime and daytime. It is at a time of tension in America. It is during the recession of 2008. It is during a time of intersectional feminism. It is the early morning hours. It is the late-night hours. It is a time of revolution. It is late summer. It is early Fall. It is Winter. It is early Summer. It is Spring. It is September 29th, 2008. It is January 18th, 2000. It is February 10th, 2000. It is March 2nd, 2000. April 17th, 2000. May 5th, 2000.

Where am I?

I am on Earth. I am in North America. I am in the United States of America. I am in the state of Pennsylvania. I am in the city of Reading, Pennsylvania. I am in the Rust Belt. I am In the industrial Midwest. I am near my factory job. I am in a bar. I am in an old bar. I am in a booth at the bar. I am at a stool near the bar counter. I stay near the corners of the bar.

What surrounds me?

Sweat. Dirt. Alcohol. Beer. Fear. Pain. Love. Joy. Friends. Light. Darkness. Money. Poverty. Cake. Glasses. Sticky tables.

What are the given circumstances?

I am in a bar. It is my birthday. It is Tracey's birthday. I have an ex-husband. I am 43. I am Italian-American. I work at Olestead's. I've been married. I got divorced. I drink too much.

What are my relationships?

I still love my ex-husband. My best friends are Tracey and Cynthia. My friends mean everything to me.

What do I want?

I want to be loved. I want to be accepted. I want to travel the world. I want my friends to love each other. I want to maintain my friendships. I want Stan to kiss me. I want to be free. I want to quit my job. I want to fight. I want to drink. I want to forget.

What is in my way?

My job. Capitalism. Alcohol. Addiction. My ex. My past. My future. Fear. Anxiety. Stubbornness.

What do I do to get what I want?

Fight. Drink. Slap. Kick. Flatter. Flirt. Charm. Isolate. Scream. Offend. Attack.

Summary of *Sweat* Rehearsal Journals

Monday, August 26th, First Rehearsal

I found meditation to be very helpful in calming my first-day nerves. I completed fifteen minutes of meditation in the graduate office before rehearsal. I was encouraged by Cynthia White's approach to the rehearsal process. I immediately felt at ease with Cynthia and her confident yet gentle demeanor. She spoke to us with respect and reiterated the importance of the

story we are telling. After the first read-through, Cynthia noted that I brought an emotional depth to the character of Jessi that she hadn't considered while reading the play. This was inspiring and motivates me to explore her emotional depth further as well as why her major monologue is so important to her. Throughout the rehearsal, I was still feeling some anxiety and doubt in my reading but I tried to remind myself that I was prepared and capable. Having a smaller cast is a great way to begin this journey because I do not have a large number of people looking at me or waiting on me to make a move. We spoke about having a safe space to rehearse and what that looks like when triggering words are being used and major conversations about race are happening. This alone gave me the confidence to move forward safely. I haven't experienced this in an educational setting and I appreciated the openness of the cast and crew to address these sensitive topics.

Monday, Aug 26th through Saturday, Aug 31st, Rehearsals

This week there was a dramaturgy presentation that also illuminated some of the most important elements of the show as well as important information about the playwright. This assisted my own Uta Hagen analysis and in many ways made my own choices stronger. I felt a sense of unity in our information and that everyone in the cast and crew was on board for telling the same story in a way that brings honor to the playwright and the real people she based this play on. This speaks to the importance of communication in the rehearsal process. I am currently feeling excited and motivated to work on this show. This project reflects the type of work that I came to graduate school to do.

Monday, September 1st through Friday, September 6th

This week of rehearsal was cancelled due to the approaching hurricane. This created a huge amount of anxiety and stress for me and the rest of the cast and crew. Fears about the future

of the production and if there would even be a show at all kept coming to my mind. During this break, I continued with meditation and found that my worries for a few hours after meditation did subside. I am finding that meditation helps for a short term solution. I am hoping that the more I continue to meditate, the more I will start to see long term positive effects. I am wondering if it is simply the act of breathing that is helping me to relax? I've noticed that I hold my breath or create shallow breaths that don't allow for a release of tension. Meditation allows me to focus on breath and thoughts in a way that I never have before. This break in classes and rehearsals also created an opportunity to relax and focus on calming the mind.

Monday, September 9th through Saturday, September 14th, Rehearsals

I am feeling off this week but it may just be an adjustment to returning to the space and the work. The meditation practices seem to be helping breathe but many symptoms of anxiety are still present. I am experiencing vocal tension on certain lines and pain or discomfort in my throat. I find that during the runs of scenes I tend to ignore my health habits or rather I focus on my negative habits. This creates a cycle where I get into my head about what I am not doing correctly.

Tuesday, Sept 17th through Friday, September 20th Rehearsal (Dry Tech Friday 20th)

Moving into the performance space this week, I noticed an increase in tension in my neck and shoulders. I believe that this tension was brought on by anxiety. I am continuing with my meditation practices and I find that I feel calmer for around one hour after completing the meditation. A full body and vocal warmup are helping me to feel more comfortable in the character and get through long rehearsals. The director of the show is not as focused on acting

notes at this time but I did receive positive feedback about movement. I need to continue to work on projection in Act One Scene Six.

Saturday, September 21st through Tuesday, September 24th

I am feeling excited to complete this tech week but my anxiety has notably increased. I have noticed that the days I attend class are some of the worst days to get my body and mind to relax. The meditation has stayed consistent in terms of helping for around one hour and then dissipates. With the combination of classes and long rehearsals, it feels as though I'm at the peak of stress. Many of my thoughts are negative about my performances and it often feels as though I will not be able to do everything correctly.

Wednesday, September 25th

This was an extremely difficult and devastating day. At the beginning of this final dress rehearsal, I began to feel very ill. I was having symptoms of nausea and a headache. Around halfway through the rehearsal I became too ill to continue acting. I informed the Stage Manager and went home for the night thinking I had come down with the flu or food poisoning. Throughout the night my symptoms continued to worsen and around 2 am I went to the Emergency Room. I was diagnosed with appendicitis and was scheduled for surgery the following day. My doctor and nurses told me I would be completely unable to move for a few days and unable to walk for a week. This is devastating news. Currently, I feel as though all of my work for this show is lost. It also feels as though my work with this anti-anxiety plan has failed because appendicitis can be brought on by extreme stress.

Wednesday, October 2nd through Sunday, October 6th

After missing an entire week of performances, I was determined to complete at least a few performances of this show. I was still in pain and unable to move comfortably but I pushed

myself to perform. I'm unsure as to why I thought this was the correct choice. I believe it was motivated by sadness, fear, and a strange motivation to prove myself. Although the performances went fine and I did not further injure myself, I don't believe I was ready to perform in this active role. I could have easily created an additional injury and the work that I did in these performances was not my best. I was recovering from the pain medications, anesthesia, and antibiotics that I endured over the last week. If I could go back, I would have refrained from performing and gave myself a chance to fully recover. However, there were a few moments of discovery in this performance. On the final show, a fellow actor who was playing Jason fell ill. I knew how frustrating this could be and I encouraged him to go home and heal. The understudy for the role of Jason performed and the energy of the entire show shifted. Everything was different by simply replacing one actor. It made me think about how the show might have changed with my understudy and how art is incredibly unique and personal. This performance experience showed me how important it is to take care of myself, both body and mind.

The performances themselves felt cloudy. I'm not confident that I was mentally ready to perform the role. The reception from audience members was positive but in terms of examining my performance and reflection, I feel hazy. In truth, my meditation and the anti-anxiety plan went out the door after my surgery. I was wholly focused on simply getting through the show without injuring myself. I did not feel confident in my character work and analysis. In terms of measuring my anxiety, I was not necessarily anxious but in a state of recovery and worried about my body rather than the performances. My stubbornness got the best of me this week and overpowered my body's desire to rest and heal. I'm feeling defeated and dejected.

Analysis of Lucetta in *The Rover* by Aphra Behn

Who am I?

I am a woman. I am a jilting wench. I am a whore. I am a lover. I am a trickster. I am an artist. I am sexual. I am romantic. I am devoted. I am flirty. I am desperate.

What time is it?

It is 17th Century around 1640. It is daytime and nighttime. It is early Spring. It is February. It is Carnival. It is the end of winter approaching Spring.

Where am I?

Naples, Italy.

What surrounds me?

Money. Lust. Love. Jewels. Men. Women. Feathers. Colors.

What are the given circumstances?

I am with Phillippo. I am Phillippo's lover. I am at Carnival. I trick Blunt.

What are my relationships?

I am Phillippo's lover. I pretend to lust for Blunt but I do not.

What do I want?

I want money. I want to succeed in tricking Blunt. I want to be loved. I want to be wealthy. I want to be accepted.

What is in my way?

Blunt. Phillippo. Money. Power. Men.

What do I do to get what I want?

Seduce. Charm. Dance. Plead. Trick. Hoodwink. Push. Pull.

Summary of *The Rover* Rehearsal Journals

I was unable to complete a full rehearsal journal for this process. I entered into this process with a lot of anxiety and with each rehearsal my anxiety increased. I failed to implement anti-anxiety techniques and I became focused on the end goal of performance. My journaling became very negative and self-critical and near the end, I didn't have the emotional energy to write things down. However, I will share in this summary pieces of the journal and my experience with heightened anxiety.

A week or so before this process began, I was approached by the stage manager about performing the Epilogue and Prologue of this show. I viewed this as an exciting opportunity that quickly spiraled out of control. At the beginning of this process, I wanted to focus on text work and making sure I knew exactly what I was saying with this difficult Restoration era piece. I defined every single word in both the Prologue and Epilogue and did a full paraphrase for each. After that, I worked on beats, tactics, and objectives. At the first rehearsal, the director gave me contradictory direction to the research that I had found and I had a better understanding of his vision.

For these pieces, I had three one-on-one sessions with the director and two one-on-one sessions with our vocal coach. My rehearsal sessions with the director quickly turned negative and brought me to the point of tears more than once. In the sessions with the director, I received feedback and notes such as:

- Really speak to the audience and interact with them
- Deliver this like stand-up comedy

- You sound sing-songy
- You suck when you do that, but when you do it the other way you don't suck
- Wait for the audience to react before you move on to the next line

Receiving notes like this were difficult for me to interpret because I had the job of envisioning speaking to a large proscenium style audience while being in a small rehearsal room. I attempted to remedy this by color coding in my script the different lines that the director wanted delivered to different sections of the room. The notes also turned increasingly negative and made me doubt my ability to perform this role. These sessions also made me realize how difficult interpreting a director's note can be and that it is important to be on the same page as your director or you won't get anywhere. The director and I were simply not on the same page.

In my vocal sessions, I began to make substantial progress. I was introduced to the basics of interpreting and performing punctuation for the first time and this was massively helpful in lessening the "sing-songy" quality the director wanted to eliminate. I was made a public example in rehearsal more than once of how to interpret punctuation in the text. The vocal coach also worked with me on breath control and projection using multiple techniques including a kazoo.

Additional notes include:

- Vary the pitch and mix it up
- Be careful about playing seduction, we need to believe he (Blunt) is being duped
- Don't break up phrases and sentences- follow until the end of the line
- Use articulators
- Go back to images
- Need to play up the part of lover better

- Not clear about what status you are

The vocal coach suggested that I rehearse these pieces in the space that we would be performing to make speaking with the audience easier but I never got that chance.

After working on the Epilogue and Prologue for months, the director cut both pieces from the show during the rehearsal before tech week began. He also cut a scene that I was in with a fellow actor, who no longer had a speaking role in the play after the cut. Before cutting the pieces, the director asked me how I was feeling about them. I knew he was not happy with them and he claimed that he didn't think I would be able to "get them there" in terms of being performance-ready. I was feeling so defeated that I agreed and said I wouldn't be able to get them right. This was devastating to me. I was incredibly embarrassed that I couldn't give the director what he wanted. I had a conversation with the director later and he claimed the cuts were necessary for time but I was later replaced by a male actor who was asked to do the curtain speech instead of my prologue. I was frustrated that I put all of that work into something that I couldn't even perform and more than that, I was upset with the program that allowed me to be cast in this role in the first place.

At the beginning of the process, I asked the director if I could serve as the intimacy coordinator. I saw a need for an intimacy leader because this play deals with topics of rape and sexual assault. I presented information from the intimacy workshops that I attended as well as my research on how this could be done to the director. He was resistant to the idea but ultimately allowed me to move forward. In the end, many of the best practices of the intimacy standards were lost because there is no unifying vision of what this is within the theatre program. I attempted to implement simple techniques but the idea of intimacy training was lacking faculty support at the time, which was okay because this is a new idea and it will take time to fully

implement. However, I do question why a male director was directing a play regarding sexual abuse written by the first well-known female playwright. We saw this play through the lens of the male gaze and the male perspective of the #MeToo movement as evidenced by the director's note which refers to the world of the play having "rapey culture" with an intent to explore interactions between sexes throughout time and that evolution of communication. A man is going to have a different concept of what that evolution looks like than a woman would and I found it problematic to highlight the male perspective in this play.

The performances are when I began to identify larger issues. An additional scene that consisted of only female actors had been cut from the play after we opened. This was an issue because none of the male scenes were cut or altered for time justification besides the single actor who had his role removed from the play entirely. Although I completed this process, I was upset with myself for being unable to participate in the way I wanted to. My anxiety turned into shame and then anger for what this process had become.

CHAPTER FIVE: SECONDARY EXPLORATION

Monologue 1: Portia from *Julius Caesar*

My first recorded piece is Portia's monologue from Act 2 Scene 1 of *Julius Caesar*.

Is Brutus sick? and is it physical
To walk unbraced and suck up the humours
Of the dank morning? What, is Brutus sick,
And will he steal out of his wholesome bed,
To dare the vile contagion of the night
And tempt the rheumy and unpurged air
To add unto his sickness? No, my Brutus;
You have some sick offence within your mind,
Which, by the right and virtue of my place,
I ought to know of: and, upon my knees,
I charm you, by my once-commended beauty,
By all your vows of love and that great vow
Which did incorporate and make us one,
That you unfold to me, yourself, your half,
Why you are heavy, and what men to-night
Have had to resort to you: for here have been
Some six or seven, who did hide their faces
Even from darkness.

I chose this monologue because I needed a dramatic Shakespeare piece for auditions. My process with this piece involved script analysis, text work, a rehearsal, and a filming day. I implemented my anti-anxiety plan during this time with a focus on the warm-up on the day of filming.

Uta Hagen Nine Questions Analysis for Portia in *Julius Caesar*, Act 2 Scene 1:

Who am I?

I am a loving wife. I am a woman. I am kind. I am stern. I am beautiful. I am hardened.

What time is it?

It is 44 B.C. It is nighttime.

Where am I?

I am on earth. I am in Italy. I am in Rome. I am in a home. I am outside. I am under the stars.

What surrounds me?

A battlefield. Trees. Nature. White stone. Sadness. Fear. Anger. Blood. War. Power. Death.

What are the given circumstances?

Brutus is in a position of power, I am in a position of power being his wife. Brutus is not telling me the details of his situation. Julius Caesar has returned from war.

What are my relationships?

I am the wife of Brutus. I am the daughter of Cato. I do not have friends. My family feels distant. I am alone.

What do I want?

I want my husband to tell me the truth. I want my husband to love me. I want my husband to be

safe. I want to be loved. I want to be accepted. I want to be respected. I want to be involved. I want to help. I want to prove them wrong. I want to end the pain.

What is in my way?

My husband. War. Death. Fear.

What do I do to get what I want?

Beg. Plead. Seduce. Scream. Cry. Threaten.

Monologue 2: Frankie in *The House on the Hill* by Amy Witting

My second recorded piece is from Amy Witting's play *The House on the Hill*, the text of the monologue is below.

“So yes I don't have the memories that you have and I'm sure your trauma is much much worse than mine but people wanted to cradle you Grandpa Joe wanted to nurse you back to health you know what people wanted to do with me? They wanted to ask me how you were. They wanted me to tell you that they were thinking of you and how sorry they were for what my father had done to you. They couldn't imagine how you could go on with your life and how brave it was that you did go on with your life and those were the ones that would talk to me. Our science teacher Mr Montgomery who was friends with your parents would turn his eyes away if he saw me in the hallway. I didn't do anything. It's not my fault I was just a scared kid. I'm sick of this. I've just been sitting in that same fucking town putting on a good face becoming a wife and a mother and dying inside because no one ever fucking asked me how the fuck I was doing! No one ever asked me until the day I went to visit my father and he looked in my eyes and

he said how you doing kiddo and for the first time I thought that someone gave a shit about me!”

Uta Hagen Nine Questions Analysis for Frankie in *The House on the Hill*:

Who am I?

I am a woman. I am a wife. I am an alcoholic. I am anxious. I am beautiful. I am tired. I am damaged.

What time is it?

It is June 9th, 2015. It is daytime. May 1st, 1992 is a memory.

Where am I?

I am in the living room of a West Virginian Farm House that belongs to my cousin, Alex.

What surrounds me?

A yoga mat. Candles. Memories. Photos of Grandpa Joe. Guilt. Shame. An antique couch with a sham. Birthday gifts. Six chairs. A porch with rocking chairs. Trees. Light. Music. Our childhood home. Trauma.

What are the given circumstances?

My family is dead because my father killed them. It is Sylvia’s birthday. I haven’t been my cousin in years.

What are my relationships?

I am the cousin of Alex. She was my best friend. Our relationship is damaged. My family has exiled me but I miss them.

What do I want?

I want my family back. I want to be accepted. I want to be loved. I want my cousin back. I want to be free.

What is in my way?

My husband. My child. My past.

What do I do to get what I want?

Slash. Cry. Beg. Lash. Heal. Confess.

Monologue 3: Laura in *Significant Other* by Joshua Harmon

My final recorded piece is from Joshua Harmon's play *Significant Other* in the role of Laura. I chose this play because I am familiar with Harmon's work and I enjoy his portrayal of female characters. I find the humor in his plays more easily than other contemporary artists.

"I am having a wedding because I want to Bring my world together with his for a night, and except for you everyone else I know gets that- and is actually believe it or not- happy for me. You are the only one who doesn't seem to get it. Yeah Jordan, you're the only one. And I- I'm sorry but I kind of can't believe that you're making me justify this to you that on what is supposed to be the happiest time in my life. The one person I thought was my greatest ally, my biggest cheerleader, my partner, he's the one who's going to be like this, he's the one who's going to come to my bridal shower and sit there GLOWERING at me which I pretend to not notice but of course I fucking noticed and he's going to come to my bachelorette party and throw a little pity party for himself in the

middle of- because what he's not a bridesmaid? Seriously I try to be a compassionate person and I really do but you really test the limits, yeah, you really fucking test the limits. You want to expand on that? You want to fucking expand on that? (pause) I don't want you to come to my wedding Jordan."

Uta Hagen Nine Questions Analysis for Laura in *Significant Other*:

Who am I?

I am a woman. I am a fiancé. I am a best friend. I am grounded. I am strong. I am level-headed. I am an anchor. I am intelligent. I am funny. I am charismatic. I am giving. I am a good friend.

What time is it?

Night time.

Where am I?

New York City. Sitting at a table in a bar.

What surrounds me?

Friendship. Hurt. Love. Wedding bells. Cups. Chairs. Noise. Music.

What are the given circumstances?

It is my bachelorette party. I am getting married soon. Jordan is upset with me because he is not a bridesmaid.

What are my relationships?

Jordan is my best friend. Tony is my fiancé. Vanessa and Kiki are my friends. Helene is Jordan's grandma.

What do I want?

I want Jordan to be happy for me. I want Jordan to be okay. I want Jordan to be more independent. I want to get married. I want to stay single and be with my friends forever.

What is in my way?

Jordan. My fiancé. My stubbornness. Traditions. Marital traditions. My family. Money.

What do I do to get what I want?

Insult. Defend. Educate. Explain. Counter. Eliminate. Exclude.

Monologues Journal Summary

My levels of anxiety working on these recorded monologues were significantly lower. I felt more at ease being in control of my work and the rehearsals. I recorded these pieces during the pandemic so there was some general anxiety happening but my performance anxiety was in control. Meditation to the 432 Hertz Frequency before recording helped me to feel more in control of my breath. A full body and vocal warm up also helped to feel more relaxed and in the moment. I took a total of five to seven takes of each monologue and noticed that my last take was the best one. The overall process of filming these monologues was much shorter than a typical theatre rehearsal process and that helped me to feel at ease. I felt that I had control and could take the time I needed to complete these in a way that I could be satisfied. After watching the tapes, I would like to invest in even better equipment including a colored backdrop. There are certain things I can do production-wise to make my tapes appear more professional and this is a goal for the future.

CHAPTER SIX: REFLECTION

Analysis and Conclusion

Going through a final semester of graduate school with a pandemic and a year of quarantine has altered my view of the theatre industry as a whole. If I could implement things differently into this thesis, I would have placed a greater focus on making my own work. I enjoyed my recorded monologues in the second phase but I think I would've had more success writing and recording my pieces. If not for my pieces, I would have done scenes from film instead of theatre. I would have allotted more time to create my own work instead of waiting for opportunities to present themselves.

Uta Hagen's Nine Questions worked well for me as a form of analysis. In hindsight, an analysis with more a more extensive research element may have been more successful. One of my strengths is emotional connection to characters and having the ability to drop into their emotional states. Uta Hagen's work helped me connect deeper into the emotional but something I was lacking was context and historical analysis. This was particularly true for the second phase where I was filming on my own without a dramaturg or a director.

I have determined that my primary source of performance anxiety stems from power dynamics and authority figures. I have a challenging time working with aggressive authority figures in the room and focus primarily on getting things right for them and their vision. In my primary explorations, I determined that my best work happened in Sweat when the power dynamics were acknowledged and collaboration was encouraged. The Rover was not a successful exploration of my anti-anxiety plan and most of my techniques that I attempted to implement failed. A few solutions to this are; creating my own work and advocating for theatrical intimacy standards in theatre.

One major anxiety solution I discovered from my primary exploration is how to be director-proof or work with multiple directors and their different styles and opinions. The first thing that I want to ask myself is, what am I going to learn from this experience working with this director? This can help me to keep on track with positive outcomes and remind myself that theatre is a learning opportunity and I don't have to have all of the correct answers at the first rehearsal. I will then think about what can I do to combat the negative thoughts and feelings that arise during the process and remind myself that I am more important than the negative thoughts or given circumstances of the situation. Taking negative energies or comments and deflecting them or refocusing them elsewhere instead of internalizing them will help me to eliminate certain anxieties and make me happier in the long term.

In my secondary exploration, there was no authority figure present and the performance did not happen live. This was when I felt the most comfortable and led me to the conclusion that film could be the next step for me as an artist. In the past three years, I received more positive feedback with filmed media than I did theatre. My anti-anxiety plan was easier to implement while speaking to a camera than it was speaking to an actor onstage. I feel more in control of filmed media and more confident in my abilities in that area. Meditation and analysis did help to ease my anxiety with these projects but ultimately film is the medium I feel most naturally comfortable in. There are many reasons as to why I might feel more comfortable in this setting but ultimately my acting is better suited for film. I often get feedback that I am too big or too little with my acting- I find that I am able to "do less" with film acting in a way that suits my emotional availability. The process of filming is less intimidating to me as whole and I look forward to pursuing it more actively in the future.

I don't feel as though the monologues I chose for the second exploration in this thesis best fit my theatrical type and the kind of art I want to put out into the world. I am in a place in my career where I am unsure what my type is or if typing actors should continue to be the standard for casting or success in this field. It is worth noting that I had other performance expectations for this program and the third-year internship. The pandemic eliminated a lot of opportunities but it is difficult to understand how or why some students would receive more opportunities than others when we are all accepted into the same program. I wasn't expecting to have limited opportunities to perform in my third year of my Master's program which made this phase of my thesis hurried and at times unpleasant.

This exploration has also shown me how to interact with students who may be experiencing anxiety or apprehension in the classroom or on stage. Our art is incredibly personal and to deny students' experiences by gatekeeping or alienating them, we harm the future of our art as a whole. A diverse representation of women, LGBTQ+, Black, and BIPOC educators, directors, and actors is the key to bridging the divide we are seeing in educational theatre. There are certain behaviors that authority figures exhibit that promote collaboration and creativity but this takes great effort on the part of the authority figure. I am in a place where the joy I once felt for performing and acting has lessened due to negative experiences and feedback. Many other artists and students are feeling the same way and it is essential to consider how race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other societal factors can impact levels of anxiety in performance.

My research has illuminated that our industry is evolving past the need to uphold the white misogynistic theatre standards that have been in place for years now. Art has never remained stagnant and all art revolutions happened with the rejection of the status quo and a

group working towards change. I have found that I may not always fit the ideal female body type or personality for a theatrical ingenue as it is currently defined but there are theatre companies, films, and projects that are working towards facilitating change to become more inclusive and reject the current standards and practices of American theatre. For example, there are artists who are actively working towards being anti-racist and holding themselves accountable with their actions instead of cleverly worded mission statements. This is not to say there will be no mistakes along the way but attempts to facilitate real change within this industry is where I would like to be.

The journey of the past three years has shown me that people will try to mold me into the artist they want me to be. There are so many rules, regulations, and standards that artists are meant to adhere to, it becomes overwhelming, anxiety-inducing and ultimately impossible. I have learned that my anxiety is something that I can manage through meditation and healthy daily practice but sometimes some situations are simply out of my control. Safe spaces are not always going to be there for me to work and create art. I now understand that I can choose to remain in that space and manage my anxiety to the best of my ability or I can remove myself from the space if it becomes too overwhelming. My anti-anxiety plan has illuminated my power of choice. I have realized that not every situation is the best one for me to learn and grow and it's acceptable to pause and find a solution instead of fighting my situation. I now have better control over thoughts that I allow to enter my mind as well as the duration and impact of negative thoughts. I credit this discovery mainly to meditation but also a newfound sense of self-worth and appreciation for small moments in life that came during the year of quarantine.

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