Braving the Discomfort: An Examination of Hate Speech and Racially-Motivated Violence Onstage, and How We Should Approach It

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BRAVING THE DISCOMFORT: AN EXAMINATION OF HATE SPEECH AND RACIALLY-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE ONSTAGE, AND HOW WE SHOULD APPROACH IT

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of best practices in regards to creating a safe space within the theatre for artists to feel comfortable creating without risk to their emotional or physical safety. These safe spaces are particularly needed around shows which call for onstage racial violence or racist language. Methodology for these best practices includes theatrical intimacy, safe space creation as utilized by various advocacy groups, Theatre of the Oppressed, and drama therapy. In addition to these best practices that apply to the entire production, ideas for individual practice are explored. As a case study, Theatre UCF’s production of Sweat by Lynn Nottage is examined; the successes and areas for potential growth within the work to create a safe space.
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In loving memory of Mark Brotherton.

To my parents and Mary, who made me the person I am today
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

American theatre has often been cited as a “safe space” for participants with a myriad of intersecting identities to not only create art that challenges and inspires, but also to be free from societal norms and oppression. In fact, a 2019 survey at Illinois State University found that 70% of theatre artists surveyed believed that theatrical spaces should be mandated as “safe spaces” (Goyer 1). While the term itself is under discussion across disciplines, the call for specific action to make the theatre safe is growing. For example, in his article on creating theatre from interviews, Michael J. Richardson argues “for theatre as a ‘safe space’ for participant narratives negotiated within the political arena of representation” (Richardson 1). While this is specifically dealing with theatre that has a biographical element, the idea of this “political arena of representation” is relevant to all theatrical forms. If actors are expected to enter this arena and potentially represent a wide variety of themes, stories, and people with their own bodies, then it is essential that they are protected and safe within that space.

Intimacy and Safe Spaces

The theatrical intimacy movement is a recent development in regards to the desire to be more inclusive and more intentional when dealing with an individual’s identity and potential trauma. The first article on the subject of theatrical intimacy was published in the Spring 2014 issue of the SAFD magazine Fight Master. Theatrical intimacy has since expanded into an international movement with at least four recognized organizations dealing with the complexity around physical touch, sexual violence, and other intimate acts performed onstage. Intimacy has been cited as a contributing factor to making theatrical spaces more comfortable and inclusive to
empower artists to create their best work. While some groups state that their practices can be expanded to encompass all sensitive topics onstage, the methodology and application thus far has been mostly limited to sexual intimacy and scenes of sexual violence. While dynamics of gender and sex must be addressed in any performance space, equally important are dynamics of race and ethnicity. At this time, there are very few guidelines for theatrical productions involving hate speech, racially motivated violence, and other racially sensitive topics. If we want to continue to refer to theatre as a safe space, we must address these topics head on.

In order to build upon what the intimacy movement has started, it’s important to understand the main groups addressing these issues. Tonia Sina, the author of the aforementioned 2014 SAFD article, founded Intimacy Directors International (IDI), “a not for profit 501c6 organization pioneering the best practices for theatrical intimacy, simulated sex and performance nudity for theatre, tv and film” (“Organization” 1). They have since disbanded, and have been absorbed by Intimacy Directors and Coordinators (IDC), which serves as both a platform for groups to hire intimacy coordinators, and a means of training them (“About US” 1). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, they have also begun to offer a variety of online workshops and training sessions.

Theatrical Intimacy Educators (TIE) describes their organization as “a consulting group specializing in researching, developing, and teaching best practices for staging theatrical intimacy (“Mission” 1). They are most interested with the educational environment. They conduct workshops across the country but do not offer any kind of certification training, as they feel that having a certification system could keep people who have only taken a workshop or two from lending their expertise to situations where they happen to be the most qualified. It is better
in their opinion for everyone to become educated to a point that a choreographer or consultant for intimacy would no longer be necessary. Both TIE and IDC are working to create a safer space for all performing arts professionals, responding to a need for more standardized practices.

In that vein, another organization that bears mentioning is the Chicago Theatre Standards or #NotInOurHouse (CTS). They were created after an article by Aimee Levitt went viral in the Chicago theatre community. The article describes the abuse perpetuated in a non-union Chicago theatre and calls for companies, unions, and other organizations to have clearer guidelines around sexual intimacy (#NotInOurHouse 1). The CTS specifically deal with non-union actors who don’t have the resources available to Equity actors. While they were created in reaction to Chicago Theatre, they have been used as a template for theatres around the country, including Orlando Shakes and Theatre UCF. The three organizations I have mentioned (CTS, TIE, IDC) are the largest and most influential, and the ones I have personally come most in contact with, so although other organizations exist these will be the three I reference.

These organizations have different methodologies and terminologies for the various subjects that arise when dealing with intimacy in a space. To my knowledge, none of them overtly address race. I aim to expand the application of this methodology to race for a few reasons. First, intimacy is already being introduced to many organizations, so it would be easy to expand the focus of the existing field. Second, the framework is essentially asking people to embrace situations that could be mentally taxing or triggering in regards to sexuality, so broadening this to race is a logical next step. In fact, some of these organizations, most notably TIE, already talk about how intimacy really encompasses any subject that can put the actor at risk, not just sexuality. Finally, as we enter the next chapter of theatre post-COVID, theatre
companies may be less inclined to hire yet another consultant or be trained on another protocol. If they already have an intimacy coordinator, this could be an easy responsibility for that person to absorb. It is imperative that we include race under the umbrella of intimacy, so that more companies will address these issues head on in meaningful ways.

What is a Safe Space?

In addition to expanding intimacy, we must look at the wider concept of safe space. While the term has been used since the late twentieth-century women’s movement (Roestone 1346), many cite the Roestone Collective as the authority on modern safe space practices. This duo, comprised of Heather Rosenfeld and Elsa Noterman, defines the term as follows: “In feminist, queer, and civil rights movements an understanding of safe space has developed that is associated with keeping marginalized groups free from violence and harassment” (1347). After a long discussion on the pros, cons, and means of creating a safe space, they suggest that “those interested or engaged in cultivating safe spaces aim to be as intersectionally inclusive and integrated as possible, but not to avoid experimenting with exclusivity and separatism” (1363). In other words, it is better to integrate and engage with difficult conversations and topics across identity differences, but at times it may be beneficial to provide a specific space for marginalized individuals to build their own supportive communities with people who may have experienced similar prejudice and harassment. A safe space is ultimately a place where people from a variety of backgrounds can come together and dialogue without fear of violence, harassment, or other forms of retaliation.
Rosenfeld and Noterman further complicate this definition arguing that: “discursive, pedagogical safe space is…not static, but a constant movement between safe and unsafe, individual and collective, agreement and disagreement (1355). This description is purposefully vague in order to leave room for different groups to create their own guideline best suited to their demographic. Certain complications such as power dynamics, personal differences, and other issues are not explicitly addressed, but nevertheless the Roestone Collective’s description of safe spaces has been the launching point for many social movements including second-wave feminism and LGBTQIA+ advocacy. Today, the terminology is often used to indicate safe spaces for historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups, though frequently in a vague declaration of safety as opposed to what it should be: a commitment to upholding that safety, challenging the hierarchies that exist in our society, and being actively anti-racist.

The idea of theatre as a safe space for dialogue and exploration is not limited to the United States. Malte Phillip Gembus, a practitioner in the UK who uses theatre as a way of creating dialogues in multi-generational Somali communities, describes a safe space as “a practical term in youth and community work as well as in educational or therapeutic settings to describe the creation of an environment where people feel ‘at ease’ and comfortable to express issues, thoughts or experiences that may otherwise be kept silent” (Gembus 434). In order to discuss difficult issues, people have to feel safe and free from retaliation, or they won’t be able to be brave enough to enter the discussion. It is not enough to simply state the space is safe; there have to be practices in place that hold members accountable (such as conflict resolution practices or theatrical intimacy techniques). In the words of Henri Lefebvre, “space is never empty: it always embodies a meaning” (qtd in Gembus 435). Theatrical spaces are not fully separate from
the world: the social hierarchies, systems of oppression, and other interpersonal dynamics are still present in the room. Even within an ensemble-based collective, individuals in the room will have different roles and privileges in society that cannot be ignored under the pretense of equality. Steps must therefore be made to keep the space safe and equitable, or these outside systems will interfere with the ensemble’s ability to engage with theatrical material in a meaningful way that challenges themselves, the audiences, and society at large.

Indeed, the creation of a truly safe space enables audience members to be included in that safety and feel more comfortable opening up to challenging issues. Through his work on creating theatre with second-generation Somalis, Gembus concludes: “drama requires a safe space in order to allow people to engage in the ‘act of acting’ (to overcome inhibitions, and feel confident enough to perform), on the other hand safe spaces are also created in the liminal space opened up through performing” (434). While his work was done in the UK, this statement can still serve as a lens for work in the US as our theatrical systems are similar. Gembus’s stance is invoked in the theatrical intimacy book *Staging Sex* by Chelsea Pace. Pace writes that “most [non-actor] people spend a fair amount of mental energy negotiating boundaries” but that within the rehearsal room, these get even more complicated as people step into different roles and negotiate the balance between “the truth of the stage story” and “the reality of the people in the room” (1). Actors must deal with their own personal boundaries in dialogue with the character’s potential limitations, and then present this private study to be viewed and critiqued. Pace addresses this balance described by Gembus, specifically his argument that people must feel personally safe in order to create a new space where larger dialogues can occur. This is an extremely complicated balance, and certainly intimacy is not the only factor in creating these spaces.
Challenges

In theorizing about these solutions, potential problems begin to arise. One of the largest is that of power hierarchies within these spaces. While adding a point person such as an intimacy coordinator could help vulnerable people advocate for themselves, this point person will enter a space with their own biases, areas of expertise, and areas where their knowledge is less. If a production were to give the power of oversight to this one individual and that individual themself becomes the problem, the system will fail.

Many places will not even begin to have the conversation. As many production companies have an artistic director or managing director who oversees most if not all decisions, if those one or two persons don’t want to implement better practices, they won’t. As we find ourselves in what may prove to be another Civil Rights movement, the hope is that those people who remain unmovable will finally be moved or unseated, but in the meantime some of the ideas in this thesis will not even be considered by certain organizations.

There is also the growing issue of pushback against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. This pushback has been fueled by policies such as the Trump Administration’s ban on DEI trainings. A recent article by Eve Tahmincioglu for Diversity Inc. cites examples of pushbacks as drastic as threats of physical harm directed at leadership for major corporations (Tahmincioglu 1). Her recommended approach is to let everyone share the ways that they are diverse and to uplift all voices within a workspace. The flaw in this is that it is an equality over equity mindset. As majority voices are already uplifted above others, having a diversity training that doesn’t uplift marginalized voices might simply be providing another avenue for those dominating voices to dominate once more.
Ultimately adding an intimacy director, implementing safe space practices, and taking other steps outlined in this thesis is not going to singlehandedly dismantle systemic racism. In fact, we can all be committed to permanently dismantling these systems, but no one actually knows exactly how to do it; it has never been done. My hope is that projects like mine will continue to become more and more abundant, and that diverse voices from all backgrounds will contribute ideas on how we can diversify and decolonize theatrical spaces. We might not be able to fix the entire system right now, but improving individual experiences is a start.

The Structure of This Thesis

This thesis is an exploration of what theatrical standards around scripted hate speech and onstage racially motivated violence can and should be, and how we can enact them in a way that will actually keep people within a production safe, both physically and emotionally. I, friends, colleagues, and countless others have experienced innumerable production encounters where potentially uncomfortable or challenging themes are ignored, laughed at, or engaged with in a way that does not truly address the myriad of power dynamics and political and social forces at play within the space. In this thesis, I will present recommendations for what policies and practices individuals and organizations can enact in order to dismantle hierarchies, avoid trauma, and create brave spaces when performing works that deal with these issues.

As a white woman, my voice should by no means be the only opinion on the subject. However, as someone who benefits from the white supremacy upon which this country and many of our artistic forms were founded, I believe it is my job to add to the conversation on how we white people, who are almost always the ones in power in rehearsal and production spaces, can do better. We created the problems, so it is our job to try to fix them. Additionally, it is
fraught territory for white people who are asked to portray these racist and violent characters. We need these guidelines so that the people portraying the victims feel safe and secure to explore their craft, but also for the benefit of the onstage perpetrators. Given that the bulk of American acting technique is based in an interpretation of Stanislavski, most actors are encouraged to explore their own emotional life and how it relates to their characters. If this is expanded to asking an actor to really put themselves in the mindset of a person committing a hate crime, the potential for psychological turmoil is immense. This is another reason that in addition to group guidelines I will provide some analysis on how the individual actor can create safeguards during their own process.

The bulk of the practical research for this project was done during Theatre UCF’s 2019 production of *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage, in which I played the character Tracey. In this production, we began to experiment with a few different techniques inspired by intimacy practices and other safe space standards, with the goal of creating a more comfortable space for dialogue around the play’s racist and ableist slurs and racially motivated violence. I was not in any official intimacy role, but did my best to lead discussions, check-ins, and other practices. At the end of the process, I created a survey to gauge the responses of the actors, designers, and technicians involved in the production. While open to all, the survey was mostly completed by the principal actors and understudies, some of who portrayed characters receiving or committing the racist acts. As it occurred over a year prior to the completion of this thesis, I have since reassessed some of the work that we did and have come up with complementary and, at times, better ways of dealing with the issues we attempted to engage with. As I explore these broad production guidelines, I will also be focusing on some elements unique to educational theatre. This is for
two reasons: my most recent experience is in the academic sphere, and I believe this is one of the environments in our industry where the actors are the most vulnerable and the power dynamic is the most skewed. Being an educator myself, I hope to address these issues and encourage my colleagues to do the same.

The basis of intimacy is communication. It provides many ways for the individual to speak up for themself, and for those in positions of power to create standards upon which the company can build. As an actor, I need both technique for my own practice and ways of speaking up without being unnecessarily disruptive. Intimacy provides a basis for both of these things. A thorough examination of how these techniques can be applied to racially challenging situations as well as acting methodologies related to emotional disengagement will help theatre practitioners challenge themselves and others in a safe and equitable way.
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

In theory, creating the perfect space for theatre is a feasible task. Conversations could be had and rules and regulations could be implemented to create such an environment. In actuality, the process is much more complicated. In this chapter, I will be responding to the question of how we create a safe space and how we keep that space continually safe for people of all identities. I will be looking at various methodologies and analyzing how they could be applied to different theatrical spaces. Some of these techniques are for the actor as an individual and some are for a group. Regardless of the practitioner’s role in a production, it is important to have a range of tools to create safe environments, so that they can provide for their own mental health and that of others. The solutions will not be perfect and will have to be adapted and revisited over time. The bodies in the room will have different intersectional identities that will inform their outlook and how they respond to various people and situations. While I am entering the conversation with this thesis, I am aware that my own lenses, identity, and lived experiences are creating my own biases and my own ideas about what is necessary. This cannot be a how-to manual, because I am in no position to prescribe for all scenarios. Instead, this should be taken as ideas that I find helpful in my own practice and that I have used or intend to use in the future.

Before jumping into methodologies, it’s important to note the unique challenges theatrical spaces present. Theatrical spaces present a strange mix of what John Palfrey would call “safe spaces” and “brave spaces.” In his book Safe Spaces, Brave Spaces: Diversity and Free Expression in Education, he cites the need for both safe spaces and brave spaces. The former he defines as “environments in which students can explore themselves and express ideas in a
context with well-understood ground rules for the conversation” (Palfrey 20). Brave spaces, in contrast, are “learning environments that approximate the world outside academic life” (21). I believe that theatrical spaces, in particular those within educational settings, are often a hybrid of both. Extra care must be taken to provide for participants’ mental and emotional safety, but the work must also challenge and push student actors outside of their comfort zones to provide maximum growth. Uncomfortable dialogues will occur, especially when they are around a problematic script or character. It’s important, therefore, that spaces are set up to accommodate these conversations and that there are built-in ways for actors and others to take care of themselves.

Intimacy and Racial Subject Matter

Chelsea Pace begins her book Staging Sex with the phrase “Boundaries are complicated” (Pace 1). She goes on to describe how in addition to the many boundaries we negotiate in our everyday lives, there are further complications in the rehearsal room. We are pretending to be other people, so we will often be doing things that we would never do as ourselves. Her response to this has three prongs: “Create a Culture of Consent,” “Desexualize the Process,” and “Choreograph it.” The rest of the book deepens the reader’s understanding of these three principles and provides specific examples of how to do them. While Pace does not apply them directly to onstage hate speech and racially motivated violence, many of the practices she outlines can apply to those circumstances. During the rehearsal process for Sweat for instance, much of our conversations around creating our space involved methodology from intimacy, and Pace’s teachings can be fundamental for creating structures that empower and challenge student actors safely.
Creating a culture of consent basically means that people should have a way of saying yes or no to situations presented to them onstage. This happens first in the audition process. Actors should know exactly what they are signing up for (Pace 102). This means that there should be consent forms at auditions describing what exactly will be said and performed in the show. We can’t assume that everyone will have read the script, so everything must be outlined, and the production team must promise that these actions will be choreographed if they involve a physical attack or other particular movement of any kind. Additionally, consent can only be truly given of someone’s own free will, without fear of retribution. Since auditions are environments where everything that the actors do is being evaluated, consent cannot be freely given in the moment, as people will feel that they must consent to do the action then and there in order to get the job. Therefore, if scenes from the play are being used, they should not be scenes of violence or hate speech, as actors will feel pressured to do things they may not feel comfortable with.

The consent conversation continues into the rehearsal process. There needs to be protocol for the cast to check in with each other, both as an ensemble and for specific individuals that may be involved in particularly challenging scenes. During the rehearsal process, the actors and directors must check in daily to decide how the scenes will be rehearsed (15). If a scene has a slur, and the rehearsal is for the director to see what the blocking looks like, for example, the actor could substitute by literally saying “n word” or omitting the slur entirely. If it’s a rehearsal where the focus is the impact of the moment, it may be essential that the word itself is spoken. In script analysis and table work, actors should be mandated to not say the actual hate speech if they are talking about it. For example, if asking a motivation question, the actor could say “When the character says *the slur*, why do we think they use that word in particular?” The power and impact
of these words cannot be diminished even though the actors may eventually be saying them eight shows a week. Deciding when and how frequently these words should be actually said not substituted will depend on the script and rehearsal process. The director needs to facilitate conversations about use of the words at every rehearsal. For example, they could use the following template when starting rehearsal:

DIRECTOR: Hello cast. Today we will be rehearsing Act 1 Scene 1 where Jason uses the n-word. I am interested in exploring the emotional weight of that word, so I would like him to say it. What are your thoughts?

Notice how the director asks the final question in an open way that does not need a yes/no response. American actors are taught that they must say yes to everything in order to keep the scene going and be easy to work with. This means that asking a question such as “are you ok with that?” may provoke a knee-jerk reaction from the actor to say “yes”, even if they are not in fact ok with that. Open ended questions are always best (Pace 16).

There is, of course, an ongoing debate about whether or not racial slurs should be used in media at all, and how much. An example of this would be the conversation around the work of Quentin Tarantino, who has written the n-word as many as 110 times in films such as Django Unchained (Sharf 1). Artists on both sides have weighed in on this issue—on what it accomplishes and what it means to have an actor say these words. Production companies should absolutely consider the material they are choosing; if every single show in the season features language such as this, perhaps that is something to reflect upon. That said, if the language is chosen then eventually it will have to be said onstage.
When the day arrives that the actors will need to be saying the words every time they go through the show, the procedures may change somewhat. I would still encourage having a check-in before every rehearsal, with the understanding being that actors will have to be more comfortable with saying the words. Some of this will have to be felt out by the director, as every group will be different. It’s challenging territory, because most actors will never feel 100% comfortable saying a racial slur (and they probably shouldn’t). This is a time when the brave space mentality must take over as actors will need to acknowledge that there is something more essential to the process than their discomfort in that moment.

Pace’s second tenet, desexualizing the process, does not apply exactly here, but racialized subject matter can be talked about in equally clinical terms. If the room feels sexually charged, then students are more likely to feel unsafe. This can also apply to hate speech and violence. If the hate speech is talked about in highly emotional or sensationalized language, the actors will start to take that emotional weight on. Additionally, if actors’ own names are substituted for the characters, they will start to find it more and more challenging to extricate themselves from the attacker/victim mindsets of their characters. For example, instead of saying “let’s do the scene where you, Bob, attack Sarah,” we can refer always to the character’s actions and use scene numbers or scene titles. Instead of referring to the incident itself, say, “let’s do Act II Scene IV” or “let’s do the laundromat scene.” These moments should be broken down and choreographed moment to moment to be as clear and specific as possible (11). Students should be encouraged to take breaks whenever needed and extra breaks and debrief time should be worked into blocking/choreography days for all people involved to discuss what is going on and how everyone feels about it.
This is also a great way to use a dramaturg, who can focus on why this language or violence is happening, and provide resources for people who may not be familiar with the historical and emotional context of such words or actions to learn more about them. For example, some people may have only encountered the n-word in rap music or the occasional novel. While non-Black individuals will never be able to fully understand what that word really means to the Black community (and indeed there are many multifaceted responses therein), they should at least be provided with resources to try to understand how that word might provoke very different responses in different people. If a dramaturg is not involved with the production, a willing individual should be chosen to research and present this information to the company and perhaps the audience.

In regards to choreography, there, of course, needs to be a fight choreographer for any onstage violence that may be occurring. I think there is room to take this further, however, and appoint an intimacy director or safe space consultant for the process. This person could be an existing member of the group or an additional hire, and would be in charge of introducing and maintaining different guidelines and practices for the entire team in regards to the sensitive content in the piece. I will discuss this role further in Chapter 4, when I analyze the process of Sweat and my experience being an unofficial consultant for the production.

Accountability

It is also essential that there be a clear chain of command for if and when issues occur between members of the production (Pace 101). In many places, this structure likely already exists, perhaps from an external body such as AEA or a university. Community and regional
theatres that do not follow any superimposed structures must come up with their own. Pace describes these policies as the following: “definitions of theatrical intimacy, nudity, and sexual violence, casting policies, rehearsal and production documentation guidelines, and any best practices (desexualized language, Boundary Practice, etc.) that the theatre wants to adopt” (Pace 101). The Chicago Theatre Standards implement a similar practice that they call “Concern Resolution Path (CRP)” (#NotInOurHouse 8). The goal is to clearly set up policies, and then if an individual does experience a problem, they know exactly what to do and who to talk to, in what order. These policies and pathways will be different at every theatre, and may even vary depending on the show. The important thing is to keep them up-to-date and to check in with company members to ensure clarity and comfort.

On a person-to-person level, companies must have policies in place to allow production members to hold each other accountable without getting others involved. Pace advocates for describing physical violations (i.e. forgetting choreography) as “boundary crossing” instead of “boundary violation” to avoid making a situation more confrontational (37). Additionally, these moments can often be noted by a stage manager watching the rehearsal; stage managers should be trained and understand the choreography so that they can correct these mistakes before the actors feel like they have to confront one another. In terms of interpersonal issues, Pace advocates for the following: “Own your mistakes,” “Apologize,” “Thank them,” “Figure out the way forward” (38). CTS advocates for the “Ouch, Oops” system, as described below:

Speaker A is trying too hard to be funny and makes a thoughtless remark.

Speaker B says “Ouch!” This cues Speaker A to realize that the funny
remark was potentially hurtful. Speaker A says “Oops” to indicate recognition and regret. Then there’s a Pause. It’s up to the Ouch-caller whether this moment requires some conversation. (#NotInOurHouse 32)

Different companies and groups will likely respond better to one system or the other, or a hybrid of both. The important thing is that the chosen systems are clearly communicated to everyone involved, and that the entire organization backs the implementation should the need arise.

Complications and Power Dynamics

All of this on paper is somewhat uncomplicated and straightforward. In actuality, all of these standards and guidelines will be different depending on who is in the room. Production companies need to overtly address the societal factors at play when people of different identities come together. This becomes even more complicated in an educational setting, especially if the director is white. In Penelope J. Moore and Susan D. Toliver’s 2010 article on the relationship between Black faculty and Black students, they state that Black faculty will often be perceived as having a “common African American culture and experience [that] enables them to relate to students with genuineness, authenticity, and creativity in ways that White faculty members are not equipped to do” (Moore 933). While this does not apply to every student, some BIPOC students may find it difficult to relate to and trust white faculty because they cannot relate in the same way. White directors must be aware of this potential mistrust or lack of immediate connection—a barrier that they are less likely to have with white students. They have a responsibility to address this in a way that will support the exploration of difficult themes in the rehearsal process.
People are complicated and do not fit into boxes, so this is not a one-size-fits all “Black students like Black teachers and white students like white teachers.” Indeed, walking into a rehearsal space with this mindset may only deepen any potential mistrust or lack of understanding. However, we do live in a country built on the colonization, radicalization, and capitalization of the abuse and mistreatment of BIPOC bodies. This does not magically go away when we walk into a rehearsal room. The collective trauma Black people experience from living in a country that has terrorized their ancestors, their families, their communities, and themselves is something that will affect how certain students engage with authority figures. Acknowledgment of this is the first step. The next steps will again vary depending on the space and people, but it must be informed by recognition of the societal racial tensions that exist in our world.

The relationship of actor to director is further complicated when the director is the actors’ professor. In addition to explicit powers that a professor has including grades, ranking in a program, future letters of recommendation, career advising, etc., there are also implicit powers given to teachers in our society. As Karen T Romer and William R. Ripple write in their article on educational power structures, “Particularly in the case of undergraduate students, authority tends to be seen as a static feature inherent in certain individuals (professors) and not in others (students)” (Romer 1). In other words, students are taught to view their professors as having the authority regardless of whether or not they use it well. Romer and Ripple argue that in order to change that, all must recognize that “Power, like knowledge, is a social construct; and like all social constructs, it is not static” (1). This is a collaborative process to find that equal ground, and it takes work.
This power is also held up by symbols. Romer and Ripple cite a professor sitting behind a desk as one such symbol: immediately a student feels lesser when they are on the other side. A similar barrier in theatre could be the directing team sitting on chairs behind tables while the cast sits in front of them on the floor. In order to begin to disrupt that, the professor “needs to be conscious of the distinction between the organic authority rooted in knowledge and inherent in one's person and the authority of power that the condition of being learned gives one over others” (2). The person in power must always question why they have the power, and if they are using it appropriately. The professor/director must also be open to the authority shifting in some way as the student becomes more and more learned, and they must welcome this growth and encourage it instead of seeing it as a challenge.

It is the professor/director’s job to confront these barriers in any way that they can in order to create a safe space for their student/actors. This could mean the removal of certain signifiers of authority, be it a physical position in the room or a certain manner of speaking that can serve as a signifier. The professor/director must allow and encourage students to challenge the professor’s ideas in a respectful and thoughtful way so that growth can occur together. As the person with more power, the professor/director must accept this responsibility before they can even begin to address implementing some of the procedures detailed above. Holding oneself accountable is an extremely challenging task that requires confidence and self-reflection. This could also be an opportunity to give power away explicitly; perhaps with the addition of an assistant director or other people with whom the director could check in about their own behavior.
That is not to say that the student/actor is free from responsibility in this process. Ultimately, individuals must be responsible for their own mental and emotional health in any environment. Even in a production with systems in place to help with all of the potentially triggering situations, individual actors must have techniques and methods to keep themselves safe and sane. Likewise, they must be engaged enough in their own process that they feel empowered to speak up for themselves, and potentially admit when they are wrong. As Paulo Freire writes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “This lesson and this apprenticeship must come, however, from the oppressed themselves and from those who are truly solidary with them” (Freire 45). The oppressed, in this case the ones who have had the authority taken from them, must be the ones to even out the power dynamic because they are the only ones who truly understand it. The challenge here, as Freire writes, is that the oppressed will at first attempt to become the oppressor, as this is the only system they are aware of. In the educational theatre realm, this could manifest itself by students completely rebelling against a director who makes a mistake or is not as open as they should be, commandeering the process to a point where no one feels safe and it becomes toxic. The desired balance is hard to achieve.

**Teaching Methodology to Facilitate Equity**

Beginning to upset the status quo can and should occur in the classroom, where college professors are responsible for not only the factual education, but teaching students how to think for themselves and how to engage with the learning process. Professors must encourage the students to “perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” (Freire 49). The professor must themself believe this to be true: that the oppressive structures and racial hierarchies in our society are
situations that can be challenged and transformed. The rehearsal space and the classroom become places where these hierarchies can begin to shift. This is an incredibly difficult process, and Freire does not always give us concrete ways to do any of this. One thing he advocates for is to do away with the idea of a “narrative structure” in education (72). This structure makes the educators the “subject” and the students the “patient, listening objects” who passively receive information and are filled up with it (71). The knowledge is “bestowed upon” those who are deemed worthy (72). He calls this process “banking,” and argues against it.

The disruption to this process would be “critical thinking and…mutual humanization” (75). The teachers and students must engage in a partnership and communication to achieve a more harmonious balance between all parties. This, again, is incredibly difficult, as most people have been brought up in an educational world that is much more “narrative” in structure, so attempting to liberate themselves from it is uncomfortable and painful. In a theatre department, teachers should be implementing these ideas into their courses as well as their productions so that students can experiment with their own autonomy before they are suddenly thrust into a theatrical environment that advocates for this type of autonomy and expected to immediately adapt. This is a huge challenge for any theatre department, as professors all approach the work differently, and most faculty members are people who were brought up and educated exclusively in a narrative structure. They are also typically well-intentioned, and telling them their entire approach to education is oppressive would cause uproar of emotion. This is a challenge that I don’t have a solution for, but I hope that over time if this sort of thinking and instruction is introduced slowly by some professors, then perhaps it will have a slow effect on students, and eventually the entire department.
Techniques for the Actor

Separate from this dynamic, students should have their own techniques that they can implement to make challenging plays less harmful to their own emotional and mental health. One such technique is that of “de-roling.” Originally used in the drama therapy sphere, the term’s use has expanded to the field of theatre in general. In her 2017 article which defines and explores de-roling, Savannagh Lassken defines it as “a process where the role play ceremoniously ends and awareness is essential to validate contributions attained from playing the role and gain neutrality” (Lassken 166). This can be accomplished with a variety of techniques, with the goal being for the actor to remind themself of the real world they are in instead of the pretend one of the play.

Within drama therapy, this transition is important not only to distance oneself from what happened, but also to reflect on what personal psychological revelations may have arisen from the experience. Lassken writes that any discomfort that may arise can become “an opportunity for integration, exploration and curiosity” (166). She therefore advocates for certain elements of the role to stay with the practitioner and cites this as an opposition to how de-roling works within a traditional theatrical space. I disagree that this is a true opposition; sometimes the discomfort or strong feelings that an actor takes away from the role can be essential to the actor’s growth as an artist and a person. However, as a theatrical production is not a therapy session, it is true that a firmer separation must occur for the actors in order to keep themselves safe and to avoid unloading emotional baggage on castmates. Furthermore, when the onstage issues are racial, a castmate using their role as a therapy session may be traumatic for other actors. For example, if a white actor decides to explore their role as a racist to help them understand their own racism, this
is not something that their BIPOC scene partners should have to undergo. Directors and actors need to establish clear guidelines at the beginning of the process in regards to discussions around what their roles might bring up for them. This is an area where the safe space/brave space dichotomy may once again be challenged. Issues that feel safe to one actor may be in a brave territory for another. This messiness is inevitable; therefore, it is important that actors are doing their own work in de-roling and engaging with their own emotional responses so that this does not become unloaded upon the rest of the cast.

The concept of de-roling has been adopted by some intimacy organizations such as TIE, which uses the term. Pace describes it as “maintaining the separation between the truth of the scene and the reality of real life” (Pace 33). She says one way to do this is for the actor to state what they are doing in the scene and how that is different from what is happening in real life. For example, after a challenging scene I could say, “As Tracey, I am calling for violence to be committed against Oscar. I am shouting and yelling and instigating this because Tracey is afraid and hurt. As Sarah, I am following my blocking and the scene as written. I would never hurt anyone, and I would never call for any harm against another actor or anyone else.” An exercise like this would be repeated daily, so that it becomes a part of the actor’s routine and is cemented in their emotional reality around the challenging moments.

De-roling is also referred to as closure. Organizations such as IDC use this term, but most attribute it back to Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed. In his Manual for Educators on Theatre of the Oppressed, Gopal Midha states that before closure participants should have a debrief session where they “describe what they feel or think” and then are asked “probing
questions [to] gently help them inquire into the source of such feelings and thoughts” (Midha 15). This manual is written for group sessions, but it could easily be used by an individual by way of a journal. First, the actor would write down all that they felt and thought, and then they would go back and analyze more deeply these thoughts. I do think that this debrief idea is an important companion to closure/de-roling, because if an actor is going to try to distinguish their own thoughts from the emotions that come up from playing a character, it is important to identify what these emotions might be.

Midha does not give a strong definition for what closure is, just that “The aim is to help the participant transition out of the [Theatre of the Oppressed] workshop” (18). The activities he gives all center around the group coming together, breath, and mindfulness (64-65). Mindfulness especially seems to be one of the most important aspects for actors coming back into themselves. Mindfulness forces the actor to be in the present, in the real world, using their senses to be fully in the moment. While actors onstage are also encouraged to be “in the moment,” this is within their given circumstances. If the actor has been successful in creating these given circumstances, it stands to reason that they will need to make an effort to bring themselves out.

In fact, many of the exercises that Boal uses in his book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* use similar techniques to mindfulness activities. Mindfulness is defined as the following: “an individual’s ability to consciously focus on the sensations of the present moment with an open and accepting stance” (Rowland 436). While Boal uses these techniques to bring the actor fully into the moment of the character, they can also be used to come out of it. If an actor enters their character by dreaming up the sensory experience of the character, then they can come out of
it by noting and engaging with the sensory experience in the real world. For example, coming into the piece the actor might take note of the walls and furnishings of the character’s living room. Then, coming out of it, the actor might touch the plywood beams backstage supporting the walls in order to remind themself of the reality of the moment. This is something I began to explore in *Sweat*, which I will discuss in Chapter 4.

If we use all of the techniques described above, we can successfully leave the world of the play, which is full of racism, hate speech, and violence. The irony is that we then enter our own world, which is, of course, equally full of racism, hate speech, and violence. How do we give ourselves closure around issues that have no closure within the real world? The answer, of course, is that we can’t. Coming out of the role and into a perfect utopia would be nice, but that’s not the world we live in. We can, however, use these techniques to let go of the trauma that may have occurred on stage so that it becomes more manageable. Once that is let go, practitioners will hopefully make discoveries and feel inspired to make change. Indeed, if we learn from Theatre of the Oppressed, the whole point of theatre is to create dialogue around pressing issues, which will eventually lead to change in society. In that case, American theatre that grapples with such issues needs to work to incorporate more discussions about said issues with both the theatre practitioners and their audiences. This is another great place for a dramaturg to step in and create opportunities for community engagement before, after, and possibly during a show.

With a discussion at the end, we come full circle with the discussions during casting explored at the outset of this chapter. Communication throughout the process is key. It will be impossible to entirely avoid hurt feelings, disagreements, misunderstanding, and potential
triggers for participants, but the hurt can be lessened and resolution can be easier. Art is messy, and even when we are doing our best to create our safest, bravest, spaces, once we add people into the mix nothing will stay within the clean lines we’ve attempted to draw. All we can do is try, and this is what we did with Theatre UCF’s production of *Sweat*. The results were not perfect, with some incidents in particular that I will explore in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS OF SWEAT

In order to contextualize my experience working on *Sweat*, I will provide an analysis of both the play and the role of Tracey. The experience was extremely challenging for a variety of reasons. On top of working to incorporate intimacy components into the production, I was also working on the hardest role I had encountered at that time. This tension is apparent in the next chapter, where I will analyze my journals throughout the process. To understand all that I discuss in those, it is important to examine what I was working on in regards to the play and the role.

Script Analysis

*Sweat* is the story of a group of steelworkers in Reading, PA. The play takes place in a bar, and focuses on two generations: Tracey, Jessie, Cynthia, Brucie and Stan, who are all in their 40s, and Jason and Chris, who are Tracey and Cynthia/Brucie’s sons, respectively. The play mostly takes place in 2000, when Cynthia, who is Black, is chosen for a coveted promotion, only for the company to start laying off workers in favor of moving the plant to Mexico and hiring outside of the union. Tensions build within the friend group, with Tracey, who is white, igniting further tension with Cynthia as her racism becomes apparent. This animosity is also directed towards Oscar, the bar’s busboy who is Colombian-American. Tracey and Jason blame all Latin Americans for stealing their jobs, and when Oscar eventually does cross the picket line to make more money, this tension escalates to the point of violence. The action culminates in a brawl, during which Jason and Chris attack Oscar, only for Stan to intervene, resulting in Stan sustaining a traumatic brain injury. There are scenes interspersed throughout the play that show the characters in 2008, and what has become of them.
The town of Reading is real, and the play is based on a series of interviews and other research that playwright Lynn Nottage conducted over two years. She chose Reading because it “exemplified what she calls the ‘deindustrial revolution’” (Soloski, Breaking "Sweat": How a Blue-Collar Drama Crossed Over to the Great White Way 1). Kate Whoriskey directed the original production and joined Nottage for some of this research. Nottage described the experience as follows:

One of the first questions we asked was, how do you describe your city? People would respond by saying: “Reading was…” They were incredibly nostalgic for this glorious imagined past. It nearly broke my heart. I thought this is a city that cannot conceive of itself in the present or future tense. It is a microcosm of what is happening in America today. We are a country that has lost our narrative. We can’t project our future because we don’t know where we are going. (qtd. in Crompton 1)

Nottage interviewed some participants multiple times, getting to a deeper level than initial conversations. The characters in the play are not directly modeled after individuals, but are amalgamations of multiple people. After the play premiered Off-Broadway, the cast travelled to Reading to perform it for the residents (Soloski, Breaking "Sweat": How a Blue-Collar Drama Crossed Over to the Great White Way 1). Nottage described the response as “breathtaking,” with audience members engaging with the material and sharing stories of their own (Clement 1).

While the directing team hoped that more people from rural communities would continue to have access to the play (Clement 1), it is unlikely that people from these communities were able to view the Broadway production. That being said, a free tour across the Rust Belt did occur
in 2018, with audience responses similar to those observed in Reading (Marks 1). This tour performed in any space available: churches, union halls, and centers for recently released ex-offenders. The idea of this sort of tour is unprecedented. There have also been hundreds of regional productions, with American Theatre citing *Sweat* as the eighth most produced play of 2018 (Tran 1). This play reached people of all backgrounds and resonated with a wide variety of viewers.

Each scene begins with a stage direction about what is going on in the world during that year and month, from politics to pop culture. In the UCF production, this was communicated via radio announcer voiceover. The play deals with cruelty and violence that people commit against each other, but the ultimate villain of the play is economic disparity and poverty. While the characters eventually turn on racial lines, with the white characters fully assuming their roles as oppressors, this is all sparked by the economic issues plaguing the community. The Broadway production opened shortly before the election of Donald J. Trump, and many now cite it as the first play of Trump’s America (Soloski, *The Writer Who Foresaw the Trump Era* 1).

The undercurrent of racial tension begins instantly in the play. The first scene is split between two meetings with Chris and Jason and their parole officer. Jason is covered in white supremacist tattoos and is argumentative, culminating in him shouting “n*****” at the Black officer (Nottage 10). We then switch to 2008, in what scholar Courtney Mohler calls a “dual-time dramatic structure.” According to her, this device “supports two levels of interrelated tragic irony: first, the societal foreknowledge that we as a nation are headed for disaster; and second, a more personal, direct knowledge that Chris and Jason embody through the devastating loss of
their friendship, well-being, and freedom” (Mohler 2). The audience is aware from the beginning that things will not turn out happily for the characters or arguably for America.

When Tracey first appears onstage in the second scene, she is at her birthday party with her friends. While the scene is mostly light, Tracey does have a moment of racial aggression towards Oscar, saying, “You Puerto Ricans are burning shit down all over Reading” (Nottage 20). This scene introduces the plot point of the promotion that is coming available, with Cynthia saying that she is going to apply and Tracey initially scoffing at the opportunity but reconsidering it when her friend says she will. Between the racial slur in the first scene and this aggression from a white woman, it is immediately clear that this play will be dealing with complicated themes. It also, argues Mohler, is a wake-up call for any audience members encountering initial nostalgia for the Clinton era, a time before Trump (Mohler 5). The reality, as demonstrated by conversations around NAFTA and other 2000-specific incidents in the play, is that America has been on this track for a long time.

The following scenes show Chris and Jason’s hopes for the future and possibly getting out of Reading contrasted with Brucie and Stan’s perspectives as older men who lost their jobs and were not taken care of by the company. When conducting her research, Nottage described certain interactions with middle-aged white men who shared stories that absolutely broke my heart. I hadn’t anticipated I would be moved in the way I was. I hadn’t anticipated that, sitting with them in a circle, I would feel we had a shared narrative – one of struggle, disillusionment and frustration with our government and our society. (qtd in Compton)
While Brucie is Black, these two characters seem to fit this mold the best, as the people who have already lost so much at the outset of the piece. While Brucie is still struggling with his job loss and his opioid addiction, Stan has moved on and created a new situation for himself. The fact that he ends up with physical and cognitive disabilities at the end of the play shows the inescapability of the “shared narrative” that Nottage speaks about.

When Cynthia gets the job, the tension begins to escalate. Tracey has a scene with Oscar where she laments the end of the respect for the working class and he shares that signs are going up in Spanish for jobs at Olstead’s. At Jessie’s birthday, Tracey confronts Cynthia who denies her involvement in the changes at the plant. Jessie also tells Stan that Tracey is “whispering that the only reason Cynthia got the job is cuz she’s Black” (Nottage 45). The act ends with Chris and Jason learning that the machines are being moved away, indicating that people’s jobs may soon be on the line. At this point, the group is mostly unified, though tension is building between Tracey and Cynthia. This tension is partially due to what Emine Fişek calls “perceived abandonment,” both from the white characters’ Black friends and by society at-large (Fişek 103). The white characters have no perception of how the Black characters’ aspirations for the future are not a threat to other peoples’ happiness; instead, they blame them for the changes.

This rift deepens in Act II. The act begins with 2008 scenes with Jason and Tracey then Chris and Cynthia. It is the first time the two mothers have seen their sons since they were released for the assault of Oscar and Stan. Tracey is addicted to opioids and her reunion with Jason is tense and angry. Chris and Cynthia have a tenderer scene of reconciliation, though Cynthia still harbors anger and confusion about what happened in the past. Tracey is completely
rooted in the past, while Cynthia is striving to improve her future. This is in some ways a reflection of the divide between the right and the left of today: “Make America Great Again” versus “Change.” Both families are single-mother households, what Fişek describes as “redressing the middle-class tableau of women as (unpaid) household laborers” (100). In the 2000 world, the women are a part of the manual labor workforce, against stereotype. It is therefore interesting to note that in this 2008 scene, Cynthia has become a cleaning woman, a fact that deepens the sense of loss; she is no longer a part of the reversal of the gender labor gap.

The script then goes to 2000 where the group is upset with Cynthia because the machines are disappearing. Cynthia tells them that the plant is going to cut their wages and benefits, and Tracey declares that they will fight. The next scene is Cynthia’s birthday, where it is revealed that everyone has been locked out of the plant. This is the third and final birthday scene in the play. Each birthday occurs at a different moment with tension heightening throughout the year. This event is the most fractured, with Tracey accusing Cynthia of being a “traitor” and describing the emotional impact this has had on her. The next few scenes show the fallout from the closure, with Tracey and Brucie both using drugs, and Oscar revealing that he has crossed the line. The action culminates in the bar brawl that Tracey incites, with Jason and eventually Chris attacking Oscar and Stan suffering an accidental head injury as a result.

These last scenes are a nonstop escalation towards the final fight, with very few moments of release interspersed. This escalation is mirrored by a fact about Reading: “racially motivated crimes have risen in recent years” (Mohler 9). Indeed, racially motivated violence had increased by almost 3% in America in 2019 (Allam 1). The historical events of the play—the plant shutting
down, the political events, and others—are framed by facts such as this increase in hate crimes, facts that Nottage does not put in explicitly but are mirrored in the action. It is no wonder that the final scene of subdued and awkward reunion between Oscar, Chris, Jason, and the permanently disabled Stan provides a chilling portrait of where America could be heading.

Stylistically, the play lives in a realm that is not quite realism. In addition to the time jumps, the language is stylized. Nottage has stated that she views the play as an opera of sorts, “structured [so] that each of the characters has their own aria” (Brown). Her poetic language led her to win the Pulitzer for the play (“Sweat, by Lynn Nottage.” 1). The play is written in a climactic structure, but the piece is focused on an ensemble as opposed to a protagonist, with a variety of characters in focus at any given moment.

Character analysis

Tracey is described as being 45/53 years old in 2000 and 2008, White American of German descent. She is frequently intoxicated, being described as “a little too drunk” in Act I, Scene II, and then drinking in most of the following scenes. She is also a narcotics user, with the most blatant example being in Act II, Scene I, with the stage directions “it becomes evident that Tracey is strung out” and “She grows antsy. She needs a fix” (Nottage 57). Tracey is a widow, her husband Hank having passed away from an unnamed disease sometime in the last twenty years (Nottage 69). They had one son, Jason, who she kicked out when he turned twenty-one (Nottage 27). She has a brief sexual history with Stan. Jessie and Cynthia have been her best friends since she was a young woman. She represents the under-educated working-class, having gone straight from high school to working at the steel plant.
The intersectionality of this character is interesting to examine. Kimberlé Crenshaw, one of the first persons to write about intersectionality, states that “the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class” (Crenshaw 1242). The term violence here can be extended to include all discrimination and other disadvantages linked to identity. Tracey is white, which makes her privileged. She is also, however, working class, a woman, a single parent, and does not have a formal education past high school. These all complicate her identity and privilege. Another complication comes when Cynthia becomes higher ranking than her and is not at risk of losing her job anymore. Tracey sees this as a complete hierarchical shift, but the reality is more complex. Cynthia may now reside on a level above Tracey in the professional sphere, but this is occurring within white supremacy in America. Intersectionality means that this relational power dynamic is not static as Tracey views it, but nuanced and ever-changing.

In terms of speech, Tracey is abrasive and sarcastic, swearing frequently. In the first scene, there is the stage direction: “she’s a laugher, it’s her refuge” (Nottage 16). She is confrontational, inciting the majority of the conflict in the play both physical and verbal. As with many modern playwrights, the punctuation in Nottage’s plays is extremely important. Tracey’s sentences are often very long run-ons as opposed to short and to the point. Tracey is desperate for attention, and her sentence structure reflects that. Her run-ons show that she doesn’t want to stop talking or pause for too long and let people talk over her or ignore her. According to Fişek, the way that Tracey talks about her own experiences as separate from the political realities around her demonstrates that these political and historical events “cannot be distinguished from personal biography, familial history, and the sedimentation of this past in their respective bodies”
The women in this play, like most people, focus on their personal lives, perhaps aware of the bigger picture but not always cognizant of how they fit into it.

For Tracey, the main conflict in the play is that Cynthia wants to better herself, to create positive changes for herself and her loved ones, while Tracey wants everything to stay the same. Tracey craves respect from everyone, but she doesn’t want anyone to know that. This is shown most acutely in Act I, Scene II, with Tracey initially scoffing at the idea of a promotion but changing her mind based on her friend’s response. The fallout from this comes when Cynthia receives that promotion, with Tracey initially saying she doesn’t care in Act I, Scene V, and then blaming Cynthia when the job layoffs begin. When the final confrontation between Tracey and Cynthia happens in Act II, Scene III, Tracey’s main line of attack is to talk about how things used to be between them. She is a person who is constantly reminiscing about the past and wishing that things were the way they were before. As Cynthia does the opposite, talking about and planning for the future, the conflict grows more intense.

This nostalgia hinders Tracey, making her unable to move past change and forward to a better future. This nostalgia, referenced directly in the play by Stan, is summed up by Nottage as follows:

In the play one of the characters says, ‘Nostalgia is a disease’, and I do believe that it’s a disease that many white Americans have. They’re holding on this notion of what America was, even though we know it never was that. It’s this false notion of America. It was never great, at least from my point of view. It was always problematic. The ‘golden age’ was for like a handful of people. (qtd in Smith 1)
Tracey has the two diseases of nostalgia and addiction to contend with. They hold her down as Cynthia rises.

Tracey’s attitude and actions worsen as the play continues. Tracey’s interactions with Oscar get more and more hostile, until she incites the violence against him in the final scene in 2000. She also insinuates that Cynthia only got the job because she is Black and attempts to turn their friends against her. While from a thematic analysis angle the villain of the play is economic disparity, in narrative terms, Tracey is the antagonist. Nevertheless, Nottage provides enough context into Tracey’s life and history that it is possible to sympathize with her, from her husband Hank’s illness and death to her relationship with her grandfather. As David Román writes in his section of the previously cited collaboration with Mohler, “The play is anything but polemical and thoroughly open to having audience members pass their own judgments on the characters and their situation” (Mohler 18). Nevertheless, in comparison to everyone else in the play, Tracey is the least redeemable. While Jason is the one who actually commits the violence in the play, when we see him in 2008, he is working to better himself and make amends. Tracey in 2008 is strung out, living in a dirty apartment and desperate for cash. She is somewhat pitiable in this scene, but she is not redeemed.

Her overall arc is from a middle-class working woman who has stable friendships and employment to someone who is extremely impoverished, addicted to drugs, and unemployed. Her worldview worsens, with her invoking racial stereotypes more and more and her delivery of these aggressions going from small insinuations to outright racism. She destroys all of her personal relationships throughout the play until she is completely alone in the 2008 scene. The
play is not sequential with these flash forwards, so her actual final scene in the play is when she incites the violence against Oscar. This final moment is a harbinger of how isolated she will become, as she stands alone in the wreckage of what she created and calls out for Stan.

Production Analysis

There were a variety of challenges that came from playing this character. As I mentioned earlier, Tracey is a narcotics user. In Act II Scene I, in particular, she is strung out. There are other scenes in which it is implied that she is using, and since the play is set in a bar, she is usually drinking or has been drinking. This added another level of complexity: the challenge of portraying her under the influence. It also complicates Tracey’s motivations for what she does in every scene, as it can be inferred that some of her choices may be due to lack of inhibition or other effects of intoxication. As an actor, I tried to map out her intoxication levels throughout the play, and I did research to see what being on narcotics looks and feels like. My mother used to work at a methadone clinic so I also asked her for advice. As I developed this character, I found it very difficult to play intoxication in a scene without overdoing it.

In regards to the action, one of the hardest scenes for me was Tracey’s monologue about her grandfather in Act I, Scene V. Nottage has stated that she tried to feel empathy for each character, and, as previously stated, that she gives them each an “aria.” Tracey’s “aria” is spoken to Oscar, about how her grandfather was a craftsman and respected for it, but the value of manual labor has gone down so much that people aren’t appreciated for it any more. Fișek writes that “for Tracey, generational comparison and the memory of older forms of working-class labor forms the basis for both experiencing deindustrialization’s traumas, and seamlessly legitimizing
its racisms” (Fişek 8). It’s the most emotionally vulnerable that Tracey gets in the piece, and it’s spoken to Oscar, who she is usually at odds with. It is hard to find a reason for why Tracey would open up like this to someone she dislikes and is racist towards. I felt like this was the moment to try to show the audience who Tracey is beneath all of her hate and anger. This meant that I put extra pressure on myself to “get it right” and redeem this person. This was the scene I worked the most on, both alone and with the directing team.

A challenge to my personal portrayal of Tracey is that I was 25 when playing her. She is 45 in 2000 and 53 in 2008. She is also a lifelong manual laborer. All of this would change her physicality, among other things. Being asked to play an older character occurs most frequently in academia, and so in preparing for the real world it’s not something that we often study. The only time I have experienced this in the professional world was in ensemble pieces where I was playing a variety of roles, some old and some young. The difference there is that those plays rarely are in the realm of realism, whereas Sweat’s beauty lies in its authenticity. I struggled immensely with how to play a character so much older than myself, from such a different physical background. I eventually stopped obsessing over it and instead went back to the emotional and mental side of the character, but this was an element that never felt fully resolved to me.

Another challenge to our production was the performance space. It is essentially a diamond, with audience on two sides and the other two sides being the set wall. The sides with audience are at a right angle, but the playing space is more of an arc. This presented blocking challenges that I had not previously encountered, most exemplified by the final fight scene.
Masking the fight (making sure that the audience can’t see how the choreography is not real) was incredibly challenging. The two actors playing Jason and Oscar are experienced actor-combatants, so the choreography was more complex than it might have been with different actors. This meant that we ran the fight frequently. In some ways, running it so often may have numbed the emotional weight somewhat, because we all knew exactly how certain elements were being simulated. I would often see the actor playing Stan practicing how to fall in a way that made it look and sound like he was smashing his head. I think that having the entire cast know exactly how the violence was faked was helpful when it was time to disengage from it, but it still presented an emotional challenge to witness this simulation in an already challenging scene.

As an actor, I was not used to playing such a problematic person. I always felt the first moment with Oscar very acutely, as the audience went from enjoying Tracey’s charm and vulgarity to displaying a physical and sometimes vocal reaction to her racism. After shows, I would have complete strangers come up and say that they hated me. On one occasion, I met a friend’s parent who is Latino and saw the look of discomfort on his face when I extended my hand. While this could indicate a job well done, as a performer it is an uncomfortable feeling to interact with people as yourself and see them respond to you as if you were still in character. I had never experienced this before, as I had only played protagonists or lovable villains.

In the next chapter, I will present an analysis of my acting journals. I will go into much greater detail about the challenges that a script such as this presents, and how we began to address them as an ensemble and as individual
CHAPTER 4: PRODUCTION EXPERIENCE

When beginning the rehearsal process for *Sweat*, I knew that I needed to come up with an idea for my thesis. The play was exciting, the role was challenging, and I felt like it would be a great opportunity to not only work on acting technique, but to come up with an idea for a more analytical approach as well. I realized early on that it could be a great opportunity to incorporate my growing interest in intimacy and the Chicago Theatre Standards into an academic project. As this idea came to me during the first week of rehearsal, I did not have time to fully research different methodologies. As such, my technique was mostly limited to what I had read on the #NotInOurHouse website (#NotInOurHouse) and to my limited experience working with an intimacy director on another production. It’s interesting now to go back and read these journal entries, because I brought up so many questions that I now have better answers to. Additionally, I talk about certain feelings resulting from not distancing myself enough from the character, so I am glad that I now have a better understanding of how to do that.

As it has now been over a year, I have enough new information that I find it important to reflect on the experiences I had. This chapter, therefore, is not merely my journal entries, but also a reflection on my process. While I have edited the journals slightly to provide anonymity to other people involved in the process, I have largely left them unchanged. This means that they are quite lengthy, so I will not be including them all here. Instead, they are located in their entirety in Appendix A.
Production Policies and Cast Rituals

While we were not able to discuss our goals around safe space creation and intimacy on day one, we eventually were able to sit down as a cast and discuss what bringing intimacy techniques into the space would mean for the process. Here is an excerpt from that journal entry:

Today we had a group discussion around the CTS and how they can apply to our rehearsal process. I started the discussion by talking about my research so far and how we can all work to minimize the impact of the language in the show. I talked specifically about not always using the slurs when they are not necessary, i.e. when you are practicing your lines, you might not need to use the n-word. This carried over nicely into the stumble through, because we had just talked about it. The actor playing Jason chose not to use the n-word in the rehearsal, because it was a blocking/stage pictures rehearsal as opposed to a legit run.

We also talked about checking in with scene partners and making sure that they are good before you do the scene. We all did this after the discussion and before we started the stumble through. This was another way that talking about it carried over into the rehearsal.

I also talked about how it is important for us all to not take these standards for granted and make sure that we have a good understanding of them and feel empowered to lead discussions as we leave UCF. Many spaces that we will work in will not necessarily incorporate these standards, and I feel very strongly that the undergrads especially should take initiative now so that they can feel comfortable having these conversations later.

One actor brought up how there are multiple situations that could be uncomfortable for people, for example the word “b*tch”. This is a word that is used by many people casually, but can be very upsetting or even triggering for some. Another actor mentioned how he feels really guilty and upset sometimes about his character’s speech and actions, and that the checking in process would be good for him so that he doesn’t feel like people are mad at him or upset and so he doesn’t have to carry that with him for the rest of his day.

I also brought up how in Stanislavski we rely on our personal experiences, but in this show we want to be careful. For example, if in a show we are asked to portray the death of a parent, we could call on a memory of the death of a pet or something that is less
traumatic but feels similar. In *Sweat*, what we want to avoid doing is saying, “when is a
time that I felt racist”, and instead substitute “when was a time I felt unfairly judged or
that someone was given an unfair advantage”. The assistant director suggested a book
that talks about this acting method, but I can’t remember what it is at this time.

One thing that was discussed was doing some sort of fight call for moments of racial
tension. This was discussed for a while, as well as the individual check-ins. What I
suggested was that we should check in with our partners, and then if we feel that there is
a moment that needs to be run, we could then request to do so. The issue with running
every moment is that it would take a very long time with this play. We also don’t always
want to linger on upsetting moments, as this can actually make it more triggering.
Sometimes it’s better to plow through and treat it in a clinical way if need be.

Tied into this was the idea of red space, yellow space, green space. One of the actors
brought this up. The idea is that with difficult moments, we start out in red space, then
when we begin to check in we hit yellow space. Only when we hit green space can we
proceed with the moment. This was what led into the discussion about running every
moment. As I stated before, running each moment is not possible, but I think one of the
ways to reach green space is to check in with partners every day, and multiple times in a
day if need be. Another actor also talked about how consent is only consent if it is
revocable and refusible. (I can’t remember his exact words). We have to create an
environment where people feel free to take consent back.

The directing team brought up ouch/oops, and I explained in greater detail what
ouch/oops might look like (“hey you look fine today” “ouch I don’t like people talking
about my body” “oops, won’t happen again”). This can deescalate situations and give
people the tools and the language they need to feel comfortable standing up for
themselves. It can be really hard because we want to be polite and nice, so it’s important
to have tools in place so that we can safely bring up areas where we don’t feel
comfortable.

After the discussion, we all breathed in the space together. Then the directing team asked
if we wanted to leave out any of the language. The actor playing Jason said he didn’t
need to say the n-word. When we got to that moment, he just left it out. Another actor
suggested that if we run a moment more than once, we don’t need to say the word over
and over if we don’t want to. No one else had any other things they wanted to omit. We
ended rehearsal by “breathing each other in” again.
Looking back at this journal entry, I get the impression that I was hyper-focusing on “doing it right” based on what limited knowledge I had of intimacy, instead of focusing on what would actually make people feel better within the space. While I do believe that having a discussion around the language was important, reading this entry back over reminds me that the conversation became centered around the language in the play, instead of the emotions, power structures, and other unquantifiable forces that we were contending with. This makes sense, because it’s a lot easier to talk about how we should avoid using certain language than it is to discuss how to address and dismantle systemic racism in the room and in ourselves. We clearly discussed the idea of intimacy calls and check-ins, but I still don’t think that we really defined what that is or why it matters. In other words, we did create a “Culture of Consent”, but we didn’t really talk about why; we may have “Desexualized the Process”, but it was not done mindfully.

That being said, some check in rituals did pop up, such as small individual conversations, hugs, and tiny dance parties. However, they weren’t always built into the process. The one thing that remained consistent was the breathing in circle before and after rehearsal. This was introduced by the director, and helped us see each other and come together before and after the show began. I did not yet have the vocabulary of closure, but I know now that this “bookending” device was exactly that: a way to consciously step out of our everyday person lives and into our actor skins, being aware of when the role began and when it ended (de-roling/closure). I was not entirely mindful of this, however, so I was not successful in trying to keep my character from bleeding into my normal life.
In fact, I wrote frequently about how much the check-in and out circle meant to me. One interaction that stands out is on 9/18 when I wrote:

Anyway, after that I felt down on myself so when we breathed in together, I was really checked out. One actor clearly noticed because he came over and gave me a hug afterwards. So in that way, maybe the circles do help as long as we are actually looking at each other and registering each other. I don’t know if he would have noticed otherwise.

Prior to this interaction, I was enjoying the circles but I didn’t really have anything tangible to show why I thought they were working. This incident was something that resulted directly from circling up. I also think that I was being a bit too intense about the whole thing, trying to “do it right.” The circle is useful for a variety of reasons: it is a chance to literally see everyone and, in that way, acknowledge their presence; it can serve as a bookend for the process; and at times it can lead to interactions like the one above. It is hard for me to not always have a concrete reason for doing things, something that I can point to and say that this is working. I know that other actors have the same mindset, so I think that moving forward I will be more intentional with defining and discussing why we circle up.

As rehearsals continued, the cast grew very tight-knit. I commented on this, saying, “What I love about this cast is the comradery. I have not felt this way in a very long time about a rehearsal process. I think a large part of that is due to the conversations we’ve had as a group.”

The following day I elaborated on that sentiment:

Going back to yesterday’s journal, I really am just blown away by the environment of this show. It’s by far the best environment I’ve worked in in a long time. I think a lot of that is due to the director. She is approachable but authoritative when she needs to be. I think we all respect her a lot. The other great thing is the discussions and checking in and beginning and closing circles we do every day. That is really building an environment that we all feel safe in. I feel like I know these people better than I actually do. I haven’t
had that in a really long time, probably since undergrad. It’s really special and I hope it continues.

As we were doing the scene of violence where Jason uses a racial slur (s**c), the actor did not say it at all until we ran the entire thing. It made me feel more comfortable to not hear the word over and over. I could tell it made him feel better as well. I am not sure about the rest of the cast as I am not sitting in their shoes. I need to do some interviews I think.

It’s clear that I was feeling stronger connection to the cast. As I wrote above, a lot of this had to do with having excellent leadership. This was also the smallest cast I had worked with in years, and it’s easier to have a close group when the group is smaller. The group work we were trying to incorporate opened up space for communication that hadn’t always occurred in other rehearsal processes. In addition to the breathing in circle, we also had individual check-ins before and/or after challenging moments. If we were doing a scene with violence or racial slurs, we would talk about it beforehand to make sure that it was clear whether or not we were going “full out” in saying the language and playing the full objectives and emotions, or if we were omitting the language and/or marking the tension/stakes. Though our attempts were not perfect, the fact that people were communicating at all made me feel safer and more willing to try difficult things. Communication builds trust, and without trust, it’s impossible to take risks.

Trouble Spots

The downside to some of these techniques is that at times, it was hard to tell if the omitting of the language during certain rehearsals was inadvertently making it more challenging to hear. I am not someone who typically hears words like n***, and so when I hear them, I am taken aback. I think if I were to hear these words every day (if we weren’t omitting them), this would not be the case. I wrote about this on 9/11.
Today we used the slurs and such and it was very jarring to hear people say n**** and s**c. I think that’s how it should be. I need to work on not reacting as my character when that happens because I don’t think Tracey would care. But I do appreciate not feeling desensitized. As hard as it is, it is probably time to start incorporating them more so that I can feel less shocked every time it happens.

It’s clear that I was trying to process hearing this language. On a personal level, the use of racial slurs makes me extremely uncomfortable. I think this is a good thing. But I wonder if that is still a good thing if it jerked me out of the moment in the rehearsal. I addressed this the next day, writing, “I think some of the issue is we have overly mystified this show. It’s just a show. It’s not heart surgery.” I was not in a good mood that day, so some of that was my own attitude coming through. However, it is interesting to explore the idea of how treating the language with such care could actually give it more value than it has inherently. If we are giving even more weight to words that already have weight, perhaps we could be inadvertently triggering people by forcing them to grapple with challenging emotions. I have experienced this in shows dealing with sexual assault; on one occasion, a director attempted to give gravitas to the situation so that we would acknowledge the importance of the moment, but in doing so the blocking rehearsal became extremely emotionally-charged to the point where people had to leave the room. I think it is really important to acknowledge challenging language and treat it with care, but this may have been a moment where we were not “de-sexualizing the process”, we were not being as clinical as we should have been and perhaps intermingling personal experience too much. I don’t know that this balance will ever be possible to achieve perfectly: between acknowledging the emotional weight of certain words and tipping so far into the emotions that suddenly we are traumatizing ourselves. It’s clearly very delicate.
Another issue that arose is that sometimes the conversations around challenging topics did not occur at the perfect moment. When the show opened, we started taking about five minutes before the breathing in circle for anyone to share any thoughts prior to starting the show. To me, I viewed this as a time for constructive words of wisdom and things like that, but at one point it got out of hand.

First of all, an actor confronted another actor in front of the entire cast during our pre-show circle time. It was not the appropriate time and threw me off for the first two scenes. So I would like to look into some techniques on how to be less thrown if unexpected things happen right before a show. In addition to this, however, I think that it is important for my research. Before we breathe in together before shows, we have added a period where people can bring up anything they feel is relevant to the show. This actor took the time to air personal grievances about certain cast members. This fully disrupted the environment. So how can we prevent this from happening to future productions?

The first thing I would say would be to be proactive and address this in the first conversation. Being direct and saying, when we check in as a cast, this is not the time to air personal disputes. It is the time to address things that affect the entire group. Another solution would be to not have the conversation time, only the breathing in. However, I feel that other days people have shared really lovely things, like some have shared words of wisdom, and another day another actor shared some song lyrics that have spoken to her throughout this process. So I’m not sure if it’s worth ignoring all the good stuff for moments like this.

This incident arose from hurt feelings and miscommunications. It was a conversation that needed to happen, and all parties involved needed their voices heard. The issue was the timing, as it threw people off-kilter emotionally before they had to perform an emotionally taxing show. Perhaps what could be added to the rehearsal process is establishing when it is and isn’t appropriate to have personal conversations. I am not sure how exactly to address this, because different people will have different preferences. Maybe this is something that I should just address on a personal basis in regards to my own boundaries -- for example, at a first rehearsal.
making it known that a personal boundary is that I don’t have personal conversations at rehearsal. The issue with this is that I think I would come off looking like a diva or high maintenance, and possibly miss out on personal connection that could happen with other cast members because they were afraid of stepping on my toes. Maybe it’s also just a matter of accepting that certain interactions will rub me the wrong way, and my job is to use closure techniques to let that moment go before going back onto stage. This may have also been a lapse in the chain of reconciliation: perhaps the actor truly did not know to whom they should talk to about the issues and so they were brought up in front of everyone.

In general, it can be a challenge to get everyone on the same page because everyone has different ideas of what is appropriate, and different approaches to the work. Everyone has their own perspective, as well as their own view of what is appropriate to say and do, and so it’s impossible to set up a perfectly balanced space. I wrote a few times in my journals about incidents that had made me uncomfortable for various reasons. For example, on 9/21 I wrote the following:

One thing that did happened was we got a prop that has Spanish all over it. People have been having fun reading it and trying to make their high school Spanish. I wonder if this is making any of our Latino castmates uncomfortable? I know it’s not meant in a pejorative way but that’s how it is. So I wonder if there are any negative feelings around it.

At the time, I didn’t say anything because I didn’t want to be an invasive white person stepping in and trying to save people if they weren’t even feeling uncomfortable with the joking around. Unfortunately, it didn’t end there. On 9/30 I wrote:
Additionally, something I didn’t write about before was that on the Saturday of tech, some of us were having fun translating the flyer that is in Spanish and one actor started saying random words like “taco” and “burrito”. I know that it was a joke, but in light of everything else, it does give me pause. How do we really create a safe space?

I don’t think this actor was trying to be hurtful or racist. He may have been making fun of himself more than anything else, since so many people in the cast had at least a small knowledge of Spanish and he did not. In the moment, it hit a nerve for me but again I didn’t want to call out a behavior that may have not bothered other people, especially since this was an actor I am not close with. I think I probably should have said something because at worst I would have come off as intrusive or overly sensitive. As is, it’s possible that someone was hurt by these words and I said nothing. Maybe another element of these standards is when to speak up and how to be an active bystander.

With all of this talk about intimacy and safe space standards around the violence and slurs in the play, we essentially forgot to talk about the sexual intimacy. Because I was not in any sort of official intimacy directing position, I was not clear on how much I should be involved in the staging of the one kiss in the play. I wrote the following when we first staged that scene:

Today we added the kiss with Cynthia and Brucie. I don’t think that we were totally following intimacy standards but I kept butting in to try to make everyone comfortable. The directing team said closed mouth no tongue. I suggested we impose a time limit but I don’t think we totally did that. Also, I said that they should have it fully timed out themselves, because it’s written that Tracey interrupts the kiss but that makes it so they are no longer in control of the situation. Another actor suggested that they do a forehead touch then a kiss then a forehead touch. I passed this along to them and the directing team agreed that this could work. I would really like to come back to this as I think one actor in particular is uncomfortable with just doing it loosely. I don’t know when we’ll have time for that. Maybe I’ll ask if we can go into another room sometime and work on it.
It was hard for me to assess the feelings around this moment because I was not involved in the actual kiss. Because I was in a peer role, I didn’t have authority around the moment either. I think the directing team wanted the actors to feel comfortable so they left a lot of the decision-making up to them, but the result seemed to be that they didn’t totally know what to do.

A few rehearsals later, I wrote

In terms of CTS, I am a little concerned about the Cynthia/Brucie kiss. I certainly wasn’t informed about there being new blocking there. It seemed like they kind of just “went for it.” I would like to check in with them about that later. Maybe still see if I can work with them on it.

This was something that never really got resolved. I didn’t talk to the actors at the time because I didn’t want them to feel uncomfortable and I didn’t want to overstep, but now I wish that I had. It’s possible that I was projecting my own discomfort about CTS rules not being followed exactly, or that I perceived some other discomfort between the two that had nothing to do with the kiss, as this is the only scene that those characters interact onstage. I don’t really know what I would have done differently. People are complicated, so my perception of what was going on was probably only part of the story, or perhaps not an issue at all. When I am in an intimacy role in the future, I think I will have a conversation with the director and the actors before the scene is being blocked, so that we are clearly on the same page about what needs to be accomplished and what people are comfortable with. The way we did it, these conversations happened after or during the blocking, so I think people did not want to be too honest for fear of disappointing expectations. I was viewing the “problem areas” as the hate speech and violence, and so I may have let slide this other moment that had the potential to be just as fraught. While I was not an
official intimacy consultant for the production, there was still an opportunity here for me to get involved.

Personal Challenges

Throughout the process, I wrote a lot about the challenges that came with the role, some having to do with the actual script, in terms of the language and the character being far older than me, but others having to do with the emotional and mental burden that I felt the subject material was causing me. After the first rehearsal, I wrote the following:

In regards to the subject matter of the play, I do feel like I am lacking in the areas when my character gets violently angry and either encourages violence or says racial slurs or uses other racially charged language. I am interested to dive more into this, but I am also somewhat wary. I don’t know how to tap into those emotions without it feeling too real. I don’t have a frame of reference for this genre of emotions, which makes it a lot harder than other things I have had to imagine onstage.

I was approaching the role from how I had been taught the Stanislavski method, in that I needed to be recreating the emotions and thoughts of the character herself. Now that I have researched closure and de-roling, I know that I should have taken more time to approach this work as separate from myself. Closure can’t just happen at the end of rehearsal every night; it should also be set up at the beginning of the rehearsal. In order to have a clear ending, there needs to be a clear departure, and I definitely wasn’t doing that.

In addition to this inner turmoil, I also began to experience some uncertainty in regards to how I should be interacting with other actors with whom I shared challenging moments. Again, prior to our group discussion on intimacy, I wrote the following:
In regards to intimacy, this scene does have a brief interaction between Oscar and Tracey. We didn’t have any kind of interaction going into the scene, but on break I checked in with Steve and asked him if everything was good and if he was comfortable and everything. He didn’t seem to understand my question because he talked about his character’s trajectory in the moment, but perhaps this was his way of answering my question: that he was focusing on his character’s motivation and emotional state and not feeling upset himself.

I am excited for Saturday to try to establish this all a bit more concretely in terms of how to create a safe space for everyone. I am still feeling really uncomfortable with the racism that my character uses. It feels really awkward and I don’t feel like my actions are strong. I am physically not engaging with the moment. I think that perhaps a quick session with just me, the director, and the actor playing Oscar could be helpful perhaps, almost as if it is a fight or kissing scene. I don’t know how to get more comfortable with this material.

I also felt tonight that I was really uncomfortable a lot of the time. It’s a ton of pressure to be in this role. I also am really aware of my own physical habits right now and I’m driving myself crazy trying to break them (which is ridiculous because I can’t cure them all in a few weeks). I just want to be good in this role, as childish as that sounds. In class today our voice teacher talked a lot about how we all have habits and tactics that we use all of the time and that to be a chameleon actor we have to figure out our tactic palette and change that for the character. I was getting a little obsessive about this, and then my characterizations felt really fake.

If something is uncomfortable is it because I’m being fake and dishonest or just that it’s new? Maybe both? How do I make new bold choices while still basing them in reality? I remember that I had this a bit in a Chekov acting class as well, and it sort of related to the universal/particular qualities explorations we did with elements work in mask class. You can choose a physical or vocal trait, but it has to be grounded in emotional honestly, actions, breath, etc., because those are the universals of all characters.

A lot of the tension in this journal entry comes from my not being able to tell if my own discomfort was due to the challenge of the role or my discomfort as a person being asked to do hard things without clear establishment of technique. I think this is actually a reflection of the tension that comes from finding the balance between a safe space and a brave space. The part of me trying to work within a brave space was trying to do quality work with a challenging script,
which requires taking risks and trying things that are not always easy. The part of me that craved a safe space was concerned about how my actions would reflect on me as a person and/or potentially cause harm to my fellow castmates. Of course, I had not yet discovered the existence of these two terms and what they can mean in the liminal space of the theatre, so I was struggling a lot with how to navigate the balance. I think what would have helped is having a more clear acknowledgement of the difficulty of the script, and then allowing myself to let go of the fear and dare to do it wrong, knowing that a misstep in tactic or acting technique is not the same as a micro-aggression. I was putting so much pressure on myself to “do it right” because I feared that “doing it wrong” would mean that I was somehow disrespecting the stories of people who have actually lived the experiences of the characters in Sweat. That’s a heavy burden to bear, and it only hindered me in my process.

Some of my difficulty would have been lessened had I been using closure/de-roling techniques from the beginning. However, it also speaks to a larger need for a separation of character and self. Often in American theatre, we refer to our characters as “I” and seek to truly put ourselves in the shoes of the person we are portraying. While this can be a useful technique for finding common ground with unfamiliar characters and putting ourselves in a different headspace, if this isn’t done mindfully, it can become an unnecessary emotional weight. I think a part of the group conversation at the start of a rehearsal process should perhaps include this element: that we are not our characters and it is ok to do and say things in the script without really meaning them. This may sound obvious, but I think a group acknowledgement would have perhaps eased some of the pressure I was putting on myself.
Final Thoughts

One of the biggest takeaways I have from re-reading these journals is that I was having a hard time emotionally throughout this process. I was very self-critical and obsessed with being perfect. While some of this is just work I needed to do as an actor, I think part of it was that I had very little self-care throughout the process. It was only towards the end that I began to realize how much the play had been taking a toll on my mental health. On 9/30, I addressed how my mental health had been affected and how people in my life commented on my changed behavior. My response was to change my warm up and add a warm down, both of which now centered on mindfulness. It’s interesting, because this was before I had researched the idea of closure or de-roling so I really came to this from figuring out what my body needed. It definitely had a positive effect on my mental state. I wrote about how before I came to this conclusion it had felt “like I was being rude by not fully investing, or that my energy would be wrong for curtain call or something.” I quickly realized that this was not the case, and that I would actually be in a better place after leaving the theatre and talking to audience members or friends and family. As I continued to work with this newfound warm up and warm down, I wrote, “If you aren’t aware of where you are at going in, how can you be aware of how the show is affecting you? I wish that I had been more in touch with this during the rehearsal process, but it was all so fast.” This is the biggest takeaway I have from this entire experience. I will not always be able to control the environment of a show, and I might not always have the ability to make my voice heard. What I can always control, however, is how I approach the work. I can always implement things into my routine that help my emotional, mental, and physical state both in and out of rehearsal. I have gained a new appreciation for self-care and my overall wellbeing during a production.
While this rehearsal process was not as informed as it would be if I were to participate now, there is still much to be learned from my experience. As an individual, I learned more about how to shape my own process around my own mental and emotional wellbeing, and how this can actually make a performance just as strong or stronger. As a member of the group, I discovered how certain group activities can lead to stronger connections between actors and a better work environment. My process also illuminated more difficulties that can arise when attempting to implement these structures. In the next chapter, I will examine other peoples’ responses to the production experience, and further discuss how we can all move forward with these ideas to create safe spaces to be brave in.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Survey Results

Upon completion of the production, I sent out a survey to all who were involved in the process. Fifty people received this email, though only about twenty-five of these were consistently and actively involved in the production. I had thirteen people respond, of which six were actors, one was a part of the directing team, two were designers, and four were production/stage management. The survey collected responses to how the inclusion of intimacy and other safe space techniques helped the production. The response was overwhelmingly positive. When asked to rate feelings of safety on a scale of 1-10, the average was a 9.96.

An issue for many was that they were not aware that these techniques were being integrated or to what degree. I was not in an official role of intimacy or safe-space coordinator, so the things that I facilitated were done informally as an actor. This led to gaps in awareness, particularly among technicians and other production members who were not interacting regularly with the cast. As the cast was a small enough group, we were able to come up with routines like check-ins and other conversations amongst ourselves, but as none of this was official it was not always communicated to the entire group.

I don’t have a control group, so it’s impossible to say how a feeling of safety would have compared on a project where we didn’t use any of these strategies. That said, answers to other questions indicated a strong desire for similar techniques and efforts to be used for every production. When asked what could be improved, almost every answer was a variation on wanting more productions to use intimacy and safe space techniques and for everyone to be
included from designers to production staff to cast. By my own experience, I know that I felt much safer and more secure in making bold choices without having to worry about cast misunderstandings or judgment. By creating a space where we could talk to each other, we cut down on wasted time, and at end of the process I did not feel traumatized or negatively affected by the material. Instead, I felt more experienced and educated on how to address these difficult issues in life and in further production experience. I am excited to see how much further I can take these techniques now that I have a more solid foundation of research.

Moving Forward

The easy answer to what comes next is that we have to start incorporating these practices in all rehearsal processes. The worst that can happen is that there is no result. The best would be that they help all participants avoid triggers and trauma and create new understanding and growth that will carry over to performance and beyond. The challenge is that finding the perfect guidelines is impossible. Every room has different people, and those people are going to be in a different place every day. Establishing this environment takes work and the willingness to be vulnerable and to fail at times. It requires a voluntary yielding of power, and it requires students and other traditionally disenfranchised groups to rise to the occasion and take up this power responsibly.

The individual responsibility is immense, and at times it will be the only option available to a participant. We can’t always control a group, but we can always control what we do on our own. Having a process that incorporates self-care and a mindful warmup and warm down is something that all actors should embrace. Young people in particular need to be empowered to
discover their boundaries and then permitted to express them. If we want to be brave, we have to feel safe, and we’ll never feel safe if we don’t know our limits. This is something that I as an individual need to continue to explore. It will undoubtedly change with age as well, as my life experience opens me up to certain things and makes others more complicated.

Something I would like to explore further is how to introduce these ideas to younger age groups. Most students are not encountering these ideas until college if they are encountering them at all. I think that introducing the ideas of community guidelines and individual self-care at earlier ages would be beneficial. Most high schools are not going to be doing shows that have the amount of violence and language as *Sweat*, but there are popular youth shows that begin to grapple with these issues such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Ragtime School Edition*, and *A Raisin in the Sun*, to name a few. Beginning to have discussions about how we approach subject matter of this nature could be crucial to making change within the industry. The younger generation is already extremely vocal, and including them in the conversation now could start the change earlier.

I also want to continue to experiment with different group-wide techniques. This thesis project led me to the conclusion that the most control I will have is over my own practice, but that doesn’t mean I’m giving up on group practices. I want to further explore how to make group rituals and guidelines work, especially in different settings. In professional settings with a mix of AEA and non-union actors, for example, a new power dynamic is introduced. The same goes with casts that have children. I would also be interested in exploring majority-BIPOC environments and how that affects all of this, though I am not sure that I am the right person to
do that exploration, as my presence would immediately change the dynamic. I know that I am just scratching the surface with this project, and I hope that this field continues to expand.

The biggest gap in my research is that this is largely my own perspective and my own thoughts. I would like to continue with these questions to seek out the viewpoints of other theatre artists in a variety of settings. There is also a huge need for the perspective of BIPOC individuals who will approach some of these situations in ways I cannot understand. Our industry has been dominated by white voices for a long time, and while it is essential that we participate in reform, the problems will only be continued if our voices are held in higher esteem than those belonging to the groups most drastically affected by a lack of adherence to best practices.

The line between a safe space and a brave space is something that is ever-evolving. I am increasingly wary of leaders who declare a space safe with nothing to back up that assertion up. These claims have to be met with accountability, especially when accusations are leveled or a boundary is crossed. A safe space is something that is constructed over time as trust grows and is affirmed. When trust is violated, this temporal space changes, and the perceived safety may be reduced. A brave space emerges out of a safe one. If a brave space is where we are empowered to step into uncomfortable situations, it stands to reason that the space must feel safe enough to do so. An example of this would be using a racial slur in a play. Having the conversation about it beforehand and discussing when and how it will be used in the production would be making it a safe environment. Using the word may be a small step into brave territory for some people. Having a discussion about the moment afterwards would pull the group back into the safe zone. This is only one example, and it’s something that I am still grappling with. The next time I work
on a piece with this subject matter, it’s something that I will be reflecting on and bringing to the group.

Racial injustice is an issue that affects all of us to varying degrees. More and more plays are being written that confront these topics and attempt to bring clarity into challenging situations. If we go blindly into these productions, we risk exacerbating the divide, inflicting harm on ourselves and our colleagues, and creating work that is founded upon the very principles we are attempting to subvert. It is our duty to approach this work in a new way, a way that will strengthen us as individuals and as a community, and in doing so begin to undo centuries of harm that continue to plague us today.
APPENDIX A: JOURNAL ENTRIES
8/26/19

First rehearsal was really good! I felt like the energy is really positive and supportive and that the cast is very talented and has a good understanding of the characters. I am feeling very nervous but also excited. I have no idea how to play a woman of this age and of this amount of anger, not to mention the drug and alcohol components. I need to work more on how the substances could be affecting the character.

In regards to the subject matter of the play, I do feel like I am lacking in the areas when my character gets violently angry and either encourages violence or says racial slurs or uses other racially charged language. I am interested to dive more into this, but I am also somewhat wary. I don’t know how to tap into those emotions without it feeling too real. I don’t have a frame of reference for this genre of emotions, which makes it a lot harder than other things I have had to imagine onstage.

I also have no idea what it is like to have an adult son. An adult son who I don’t really get along with, who I have kicked out of the house, who I treat pretty poorly. I need to find more motivation for this- is it that he reminds me of my dead husband? Tracey is pretty selfish which I think comes from the neglect of others, so I think with Jason maybe she just wants to have some things for herself and not share them with her child. Maybe he was a difficult child as well.

We all talked a lot about the themes that are painfully relevant to today, such as the gun violence mentioned on page 76, DOW falling, and the 2000 primary having candidates that are self-funded. It’s interesting to do this show in a year close to an election.

Some other questions that came up tonight are in my monologue, how much do I really open up to Oscar? Is this a tactic as well as a moment of genuine rawness?

Why do I tell the story of Cynthia attacking the big boob lady? I know what I want her to feel, but how much do I enjoy the telling and how much am I really doing it to hurt her and prove a point?

Again, how does one get to a place where they are yelling for violence, for their only child to commit an act of violence against someone they know?

Do I feel even more betrayed by Oscar because I told him all about my Opa and my family history?

I also am interested to track how the timeline shifts for me, how much happens in those gaps of a few weeks or months. How does my character arc continue?
I also would like to watch a video/listen to some audio of what the factory might look and sound like so I have a slightly better idea of what this character goes through every day. How do I recreate this character’s experiences when I have never had a manual labor job, let alone for 20+ years? It’s interesting how much everyone talks about the past. All of the older generation characters have at least one monologue about the past.

It’s also interesting that Tracey never recovers from these incidents. She never goes back to work, she is an addict. Is this because of guilt? Her son? Or would this have happened regardless just because she lost her job?

In short, there are a lot of challenges ahead but I am very excited to experience a role so different from what I have played.

8/28/19

I feel that I have a lot on my plate with this role. We did I/iii today and it just felt like I was juggling so much. On top of trying to read the script and say the lines, I had to try to manage how drunk I am, how much I really mean the racist comments directed at Oscar, playing a role that is almost twice my age, and any particular aches and pains that could come with my job. Not to mention using tactics and objectives and all of that actor stuff. I feel like I have a ton of work to do but I am not totally sure how to do it.

I don’t think that writing actions in my script was as helpful as I hoped it would be. I ended up not using a lot of them. I do however need to focus more on my objectives, and beat to beat what I am trying to do to my scene partners. I also need to get comfortable having my back to the audience so much. It feels really weird but I need to trust the directing team.

In regards to intimacy, this scene does have a brief interaction between Oscar and Tracey. We didn’t have any kind of interaction going into the scene, but on break I checked in with Steve and asked him if everything was good and if he was comfortable and everything. He didn’t seem to understand my question because he talked about his character’s trajectory in the moment, but perhaps this was his way of answering my question: that he was focusing on his character’s motivation and emotional state and not feeling upset himself.

I am excited for Saturday to try to establish this all a bit more concretely in terms of how to create a safe space for everyone. I am still feeling really uncomfortable with the racism that my character uses. It feels really awkward and I don’t feel like my actions are strong. I am physically not engaging with the moment. I think that perhaps a quick session with just me, the director, and
The actor playing Oscar could be helpful perhaps, almost as if it is a fight or kissing scene. I don’t know how to get more comfortable with this material.

I also felt tonight that I was really uncomfortable a lot of the time. It’s a ton of pressure to be in this role. I also am really aware of my own physical habits right now and I’m driving myself crazy trying to break them (which is ridiculous because I can’t cure them all in a few weeks). I just want to be good in this role, as childish as that sounds. In class today our voice teacher talked a lot about how we all have habits and tactics that we use all of the time and that to be a chameleon actor we have to figure out our tactic palette and change that for the character. I was getting a little obsessive about this, and then my characterizations felt really fake.

If something is uncomfortable is it because I’m being fake and dishonest or just that it’s new? Maybe both? How do I make new bold choices while still basing them in reality? I remember that I had this a bit in a Chekov acting class as well, and it sort of related to the universal/particular qualities explorations we did with elements work in mask class. You can choose a physical or vocal trait, but it has to be grounded in emotional honestly, actions, breath, etc., because those are the universals of all characters.

So basically, acting is hard and I have a lot of thoughts. I really hope that Saturday we address some of the intimacy stuff. This scene has a ton of disability slurs aimed at Stan. No one in the cast or creative team has a visible disability but that doesn’t mean we all have the same ability, and even if we do we should still be mindful of all this stuff.

9/6/19

I cannot abide paraphrasing. It’s disrespectful to the playwright, especially since Lynn Nottage is such a genius and crafted this all so well. It really felt like it held us back today, because certain actors kept trying to rehearse without the script and then would fail and go back for it, taking more time to search for their place.

I have been practicing my lines saying “r-word” instead of “retarded”. I was worried that this would make it difficult to say them with the actual word but I had no problem in rehearsal. So that was great.

I feel very comfortable working with Steve. I want to continue to make sure our communication is really open so that he feels comfortable as well. I think this will be helped greatly by talking with everyone tomorrow about the emotions around this project and how to create a safe space. We did not check in at all since I felt a bit weird the last time we checked in (I felt like he was uncomfortable when we checked in last time).
The biggest focus for me now is to memorize and get very comfortable with the language. It’s important that I feel completely comfortable with the words so that I can craft my character without having to think about what I’m saying all the time.

In terms of bookwork, I think once I am memorized it will be easier to go back to actions. This is not always the case for me, but it seems to be the case so far.

My head right now is so focused on actions and creating my character that I don’t feel like I have space to check in about a lot of the racism—both from my perspective and trying to be open to others’. We also haven’t gotten into a lot of the really intense scenes, so the work will get more important as we go along.

9/7/19

Today we had a group discussion around the CTS and how they can apply to our rehearsal process. I started the discussion by talking about my research so far and how we can all work to minimize the impact of the language in the show. I talked specifically about not always using the slurs when they are not necessary, i.e. when you are practicing your lines you might not need to use the n-word. This carried over nicely into the stumble through, because we had just talked about it. The actor playing Jason chose not to use the n-word in the rehearsal, because it was a blocking/stage pictures rehearsal as opposed to a legit run.

We also talked about checking in with scene partners and making sure that they are good before you do the scene. We all did this after the discussion and before we started the stumble through. This was another way that talking about it carried over into the rehearsal.

I also talked about how it is important for us all to not take these standards for granted and make sure that we have a good understanding of them and feel empowered to lead discussions as we leave UCF. Many spaces that we will work in will not necessarily incorporate these standards, and I feel very strongly that the undergrads especially should take initiative now so that they can feel comfortable having these conversations later.

One actor brought up how there are multiple situations that could be uncomfortable for people, for example the word “b*tch”. This is a word that is used by many people casually, but can be very upsetting or even triggering for some. Another actor mentioned how he feels really guilty and upset sometimes about his character’s speech and actions, and that the checking in process would be good for him so that he doesn’t feel like people are mad at him or upset and so he doesn’t have to carry that with him for the rest of his day.

I also brought up how in Stanislavski we rely on our personal experiences, but in this show we want to be careful. For example, if in a show we are asked to portray the death of a parent, we
could call on a memory of the death of a pet or something that is less traumatic but feels similar. In Sweat, what we want to avoid doing is saying, “when is a time that I felt racist”, and instead substitute “when was a time I felt unfairly judged or that someone was given an unfair advantage”. The assistant director suggested a book that talks about this acting method, but I can’t remember what it is at this time.

One thing that was discussed was doing some sort of fight call for moments of racial tension. This was discussed for a while, as well as the individual check-ins. What I suggested was that we should check in with our partners, and then if we feel that there is a moment that needs to be run, we could then request to do so. The issue with running every moment is that it would take a very long time with this play. We also don’t always want to linger on upsetting moments, as this can actually make it more triggering. Sometimes it’s better to plow through and treat it in a clinical way if need be.

Tied into this was the idea of red space, yellow space, green space. One of the actors brought this up. The idea is that with difficult moments, we start out in red space, then when we begin to check in we hit yellow space. Only when we hit green space can we proceed with the moment. This was what led into the discussion about running every moment. As I stated before, running each moment is not possible, but I think one of the ways to reach green space is to check in with partners every day, and multiple times in a day if need be. Another actor also talked about how consent is only consent if it is revocable and refusable. (I can’t remember his exact words). We have to create an environment where people feel free to take consent back.

The directing team brought up ouch/oops, and I explained in greater detail what ouch/oops might look like (“hey you look fine today” “ouch I don’t like people talking about my body” “oops, won’t happen again”). This can deescalate situations and give people the tools and the language they need to feel comfortable standing up for themselves. It can be really hard because we want to be polite and nice, so it’s important to have tools in place so that we can safely bring up areas where we don’t feel comfortable.

After the discussion, we all breathed in the space together. Then the directing team asked if we wanted to leave out any of the language. The actor playing Jason said he didn’t need to say the n-word. When we got to that moment, he just left it out. Another actor suggested that if we run a moment more than once, we don’t need to say the word over and over if we don’t want to. No one else had any other things they wanted to omit. We ended rehearsal by “breathing each other in” again.

Beyond that, it was a blocking rehearsal. I feel like some of the emotional arc of the character is coming along for me, but I’m still having trouble connecting with the moments of anger and distress. I think focusing more on my objectives will help. The directing team and I discussed a
bit the moment where I talk about my grandpa to Oscar. I have trouble understanding why I would suddenly open up to him. She pointed out that he is actually listening when I talk about how Butz harassed me. Also, the entire party inside is focusing on Cynthia and I really just want to explain where I am at and why I feel disrespected. Not only did I not get the job, but it’s also frustrating that a management job is more valued than manual labor. I feel victimized by that.

The lines are coming along, with the exception of the last scene I think I could have done it off book. I have not even started memorizing Act II so that will be more of an effort. It will be nice to have the whole thing blocked so I can really dive in on this memorization. Memorizing it will also help a lot with the emotions and the objectives. It’s hard to really pursue an objective with language like this that is so precise and poetic, and dense at times.

9/8

Today started really rough for me. I don’t feel comfortable playing a drug addict yet. It helped to run it a lot and talk to another actor about her experiences as well as our shared experience. I think it’s really important to check in with your understudy and cultivate that relationship so that we don’t get frustrated with each other or competitive. I am trying to check in with myself a lot and remind myself that I don’t have to be perfect or “get it” all of the time. It helps though to hear from her that she is supportive and that she agrees I don’t have to be perfect all of the time.

The rehearsal ended on a high note, with lots of laughter and me breaking a lot. I didn’t really check in individually with anyone. But we did end with hugs. That scene with Cynthia is hard. We were both feeling it a lot. But it’s not a scene where the racial tension necessarily comes into place. It’s more that we are having a personal issue in our relationship. Which I can fully relate to as a human with friends. Female friendship is complicated.

I don’t think I have totally figured out how to communicate with some people as actors. We ran one of the challenging scenes a few times but I just didn’t really feel that connection. Some of that might be the other actor, I don’t feel their vulnerability totally and I don’t think they are always playing a direct action to me. But I’m sure this goes both ways. If it continues to be a problem I’ll talk to them about it, because I think that scene and that relationship is really important.

The other challenge of this rehearsal was the dang overlapping lines! Rehearsing that is so hard.

What I love about this cast is the comradery. I have not felt this way in a very long time about a rehearsal process. I think a large part of that is due to the conversations we’ve had as a group.

9/9
Today we worked on the final fight scene. I think I was definitely holding back because I am tired and I just don’t really want to go there right now. I also think I might be a little sick or having bad allergies, either way I’ve got a tickle cough (again) and my throat feels raspy. This seems to be the way things are just going for me right now. Since we started school it’s just off and on all of the time.

Going back to yesterday’s journal, I really am just blown away by the environment of this show. It’s by far the best environment I’ve worked in in a long time. I think a lot of that is due to the director. She is approachable but authoritative when she needs to be. I think we all respect her a lot. The other great thing is the discussions and checking in and beginning and closing circles we do every day. That is really building an environment that we all feel safe in. I feel like I know these people better than I actually do. I haven’t had that in a really long time, probably since undergrad. It’s really special and I hope it continues.

As we were doing the scene of violence where Jason uses a racial slur (s**c), the actor did not say it at all until we ran the entire thing. It made me feel more comfortable to not hear the word over and over. I could tell it made him feel better as well. I am not sure about the rest of the cast as I am not sitting in their shoes. I need to do some interviews I think.

Like I said, I was not fully geared in today. This is a really hard scene. I was trying to focus on freeing up my body from tension and making sure I was breathing at all times. I am a little confused on the notion of having tensions your character would have, but I think this is an understanding that I will gain over time.

9/11

First run through AND first designer run? hooooooy! I was able to get through Act I without my script which is awesome. I also did the final scene I’m in in Act II without, which is good because that’s the fight. Another thing that went well was we didn’t stop! There was a little bit of breaking and some blocking that got messed up but mostly I did all my blocking or at least got on track when I messed it up. I also remembered all of my props. I.i. felt great, emotionally real and grounded. I had occasional moments of clarity with other scenes as well, but it definitely got muddled at times.

A few things I want to work on going forward. First of all, I am creating a lot of vocal strain because I think things sounds cool. This is dumb. It probably doesn’t sound or look cool if I am hurting myself. Habits are so intrusive sometimes! I also want to work on how I can incorporate age more. I know that speaking in a higher register tends to be more comfortable because I am better at projection when I have a higher register. How can I do this in a more grounded low
register? I also want to notice and monitor my movement more so it is within the world and the character. Not too young.

Other things I need to work on: monologue in the Oscar scene, and that scene in general. I have memorized it but I don’t feel like I’m saying anything or doing anything to him. I need to focus on my actions and tactics, and make sure I’m checking in with him on things.

I need to make sure that even as I try to up my pace a little bit I am not stumbling over things. I don’t want to have epic pauses in between every line, but I also can’t speed up to the point of tripping over my words or co-articulating everything.

I want to make sure that Tracey is NOT a victim. She plays the victim sometimes, but she is not a victim. She is a survivor. I have to remember that,

Today we used the slurs and such and it was very jarring to hear people say n**** and s**c. I think that’s how it should be. I need to work on not reacting as my character when that happens because I don’t think Tracey would care. But I do appreciate not feeling desensitized. As hard as it is, it is probably time to start incorporating them more so that I can feel less shocked every time it happens.

The checking in and out process has been pretty smooth. We circled up after we had already run some scenes. We included all of the design/tech people. I did feel a little bit uncomfortable starting scenework without circling in first, but I also understand waiting because I think it was good to include the spectators.

I think this cast is very good about checking in on a personal level. In addition to it being with scene partners before or after intense moments, it’s also little things like “I know I messed up my blocking, sorry”. Anything like that.

9/12

The start of today was a challenge. I had a bad day at school and then I got to rehearsal and the director wanted us to work the Tracey/Oscar showdown but I just couldn’t deliver what she wanted. She also gave me the note to be more grungy or gritty which she said came from the designer run. The directing team seemed like they were trying to process the feedback that came from spectators, so the environment felt different today.

Anyhoo. I am trying to be better with my mood and I am trying to just take the good with the bad. The good news is my Act I lines were THERE. Yay. I paraphrased a bit in my monologue but the rest of it was fine. Barely had to call line or anything. I also felt decently successful incorporating the movement/grunge thing into my character today.
I don’t think I’m pursuing an objective in most of the scenes. So that’s a problem. I also don’t think that I am using tactics. Yahoo. I am just overall really tired and frustrated and OVER IT. I just want a fucking break and I want to go home.

Biggest thing I need to work on is the Tracey/Cynthia scene (2.3). Damn. The director also announced that we are supposed to be off book for Act 2 by Saturday. (Today is Thursday).

**Notes: Being on drugs: don’t play the obstacle. Play the objective. Don’t come to a slow grinding halt. Explore the objective not the obstacle.**

You can’t go too quiet. Have to have consonants and get them really clear so that the audience can HEAR us.

If my intention is clear, you’ll be able to understand what I mean.

**WHAT IS MY PASSIONATE NEED?!**

Race stuff-wise was business as usual. We breathed in before the rehearsal so the designer in attendance (costumes) wasn’t here. We breathed out together. I think some of the issue is we have overly mystified this show. It’s just a show. It’s not heart surgery.

9/13

Well today was a lot better, mostly because we didn’t have an audience and could actually dig into things. I am continuing to work on characterization. Speaking in a lower register and slowing down. It’s really hard and kind of uncomfortable to really slow it down and make my words heard. I don’t think I’m always playing tactics and objectives and stuff but I can do that another time.

Today we added the kiss with Cynthia and Brucie. I don’t think that we were totally following intimacy standards but I kept butting in to try to make everyone comfortable. The directing team said closed mouth no tongue. I suggested we impose a time limit but I don’t think we totally did that. Also, I said that they should have it fully timed out themselves, because it’s written that Tracey interrupts the kiss but that makes it so they are no longer in control of the situation. Another actor suggested that they do a forehead touch then a kiss then a forehead touch. I passed this along to them and the directing team agreed that this could work. I would really like to come back to this as I think one actor in particular is uncomfortable with just doing it loosely. I don’t know when we’ll have time for that. Maybe I’ll ask if we can go into another room sometime and work on it.
I definitely am noticing more things about my habits. Trying to let my tummy go all of the time which will be really hard when I’m in some of my costumes as they are very tight. I will have to get comfortable with that. Memorization is going well overall, I think learning my lines really slowly is helping. Maybe that’s because the character’s speech is written to be slower, so honoring that makes it easier to get into her head and understand her thought process. I am also giving myself room to breathe when I do that so that helps me remember things as well.

9/14

Well this run was about a thousand times better than any of the other runs we’ve had! I am so exhausted that I don’t think I was the most focused. I was trying to concentrate on relaxation and breath and my physicality. I also am really trying to make sure I am actually talking with my partner and connecting with them, and in doing so playing an action.

1.2 is still going well. I think that’s my most solid scene. There were some moments when I was trying something new and said a line completely differently. That was really cool because it means I am not falling fully into old habits or patterns.

We also got through the whole show without stopping! I mostly remembered my new blocking, with the exception of the Oscar scene and the “Fucking traitor” scene. Those had just changed so I forgot that a little bit.

In terms of CTS, I am a little concerned about the Cynthia/Brucie kiss. I certainly wasn’t informed about there being new blocking there. It seemed like they kind of just “went for it.” I would like to check in with them about that later. Maybe still see if I can work with them on it.

The checking-in circle is working for me, I wonder how it is working for other people. I think I really need to interview everyone after this process is over. I do still think we are all getting closer which is great. We all walked over to eat lunch together today. That was very nice.

I need to work on some lines this weekend. That’s really the only Sweat-related activity I’m going to do.

9/18

Second day in the space! I forgot to journal yesterday, but it was mostly just getting notes and exploring the space. We respaced the Brucie scene and the Cynthia confrontation scene in Act I but besides that it was a lot of waiting around, seeing props, etc.
Tonight we started with fight call. I don’t know why but I started getting really anxious about thesis. Too much time sitting around I suppose. Then I was told we would be working on some things about my character, specifically my monologue. We were going to wait, but then other people were working on a scene that didn’t include me so we went into the hall to work. I was getting really upset, partially because of my earlier stress, and partially because I felt kind of attacked. Which is silly, but I was just feeling very sensitive because of the attention being given to me specifically. I know that some of the directing team feels an attachment to Tracey. I also feel like I, specifically, have been given a lot of attention. This makes me feel like I’m doing a terrible job and they view me as the weakest link.

I think it’s also hard when you all go to the same school. I was getting notes and receiving questions like “what are you doing” or “that’s not a Tracey habit that’s a Sarah habit”. That isn’t wrong, but the delivery felt like the expectation was that I was sharing this for the first time. When you all work in the same environment, it’s safe to assume that I’ve heard the same things from other people. I definitely felt myself getting defensive. When people ask me what I am doing in a scene or what my objective is, I was saying “I don’t know” or “I know right?” Because I’m not an idiot, I have clearly thought about these things. If they aren’t clear it’s because I’m not expressing them well. Just because I’m not loudly and vocally warming up in the space and making my process VISIBLE doesn’t mean I’m not working hard. I just am working more privately.

Anyway, after that I felt down on myself so when we breathed in together I was really checked out. One actor clearly noticed because he came over and gave me a hug afterwards. So in that way, maybe the circles do help as long as we are actually looking at each other and registering each other. I don’t know if he would have noticed otherwise.

We went backstage then to prep for I.ii. I.i took a full hour so I had time to chat with other actors about how I was feeling and I was in a much better mood when we started. I was playing a lot with freeing up my body and making really big choices. I hope I can continue this energy throughout the week. It’s always such a fun scene that really flows. I also made another actor break because I (in character) was making rude faces at him, so that was a good time.

When we got to the Oscar scene it still felt a bit weird but the part I had worked on with the directing team was better and I could actually see one of them nodding along with me so clearly I did something right lol. I felt like I kind of just yelled the whole thing after that. I’m having trouble with beat shifts. I think I am either taking too much time with them or barreling through them, neither of which works. So I also need to figure that out I guess.

We also worked on the scene with Jason, which got a lot better. The blocking has been freed up, so I am in motion for most of the scene, and that really helped actually. It helped me feel the
character more in that moment. The director described it as “she doesn’t know what to do with herself” and I was like lol same. Which I think made people uncomfortable but oh well. Anyway that helped.

I think tomorrow we’ll probably work more on the monologue. I would love Steve to be a part of that so that I can actually be playing with him when we’re working on it instead of just giving it to the air. I don’t always see him react during my monologue, but maybe that’s just because I haven’t given him a reason to react? So I should probably talk to him about that. I think that will help it feel more like a scene instead of a random monologue given to the air. Though I’ve also been given the note to deliver most of the stuff about going downtown and the woodwork and such to the air. So damn. It’s just the hardest monologue I have ever worked on. It’s such a story and it’s just so long and detailed, it’s really hard to figure out how to play it. I hope I get it!

Checking out was better, I didn’t feel as distanced from everyone. I don’t feel like anything we’re doing right now I can use for thesis but I figure it’s important to journal anyway so that I can get a good impression of what’s happening in my head as that could be relevant later.

9/21

Oh man I have been bad about journaling the last 3 days. So here is a rundown of everything that has been going on lately.

Thursday we ran the show for the first time in the space and it went ok but I was really upset at the beginning because I was basically given the note to be less awkward. It was meant to just keep playing with physicality and stuff but the delivery was not great. So I was really upset but then I ended up playing with a lot more stuff and focusing on being confident and in control. Turned out that actually worked pretty well because they liked a lot of what I was doing, and I think I’ve found more to this character. The next step is adding some vulnerability back in and making sure that I am Being the victim, not playing the victim. Ie I view myself as a survivor not a victim, I am going to GET THROUGH this.

Friday (yesterday) we did more individualized work on the monologue. I think I was playing the physical choice and the surface more than really getting to the meat. I think I was afraid of making Tracey too vulnerable, especially since she’s talking to Oscar who is not her favorite person. But with the blocking and turning away from him for so much of the monologue, that has helped a lot. Instead of me just waxing poetic to a dude that I hate, I am telling a story mostly for myself that is about something I really care about. It has made it so much better. Then we moved back into the space and started working on transitions. This was very tedious and continued into this morning. It was helpful, but not a ton of character work was happening because it was more
about doing the transitions and figuring out the set and lights. So that’s part of why I haven’t been journaling, because I just haven’t had much to say.

One thing that did happened was we got a prop that has Spanish all over it. People have been having fun reading it and trying to make their high school Spanish. I wonder if this is making any of our Latino castmates uncomfortable? I know it’s not meant in a pejorative way but that’s how it is. So I wonder if there are any negative feelings around it.

We haven’t been breathing in and out at all. We did on Thursday but that was the last time we have. I should remind everyone to do this.

After dinner we started working through the show. We then changed a bunch of the transitions so it got more complicated again. We are all just doing our best! Lines seem to be a lot more there so that’s good. I feel bad for the understudies. I am feeling pretty good about this show though. I am trying not to yell too much. I am trying to vary my tactics. I am trying to drink water! We did not get through the show, we stopped at intermission.

9/22

Well we didn’t breathe in again, I forgot to remind everyone. Today I am working to keep my physicality and not get too tense when I am angry. Also to keep driving the pace and remember all my lines. That’s been going pretty well so far! I am excited to get some good work in after dinner, as I am assuming we’ll do a full run. We also have shoes today so that’s exciting!

We have had so much down time the last few days and I think that is helping us all bond more. I feel like we are all super comfortable together. That’s always the nice part of such a small cast as well. I am really excited to hear other peoples’ opinions about how this process was!

9/24

A few things to talk about! First of all, someone ad-libbed a slur during the fight. That definitely gave me pause for a minute. I think this is probably something to address in the future before it happens. During the initial conversation perhaps about cast standards and all that. I don’t know if it bothered anyone or if anyone besides me even heard it. I think this is really important as well to have those standards in place and a good chain of command of who to talk to about this stuff. Can it just be the cast rep? How do we choose the cast rep? Is there another way of doing that so it isn’t just the random white dude who volunteers?

The second thing happened today. I was asked to wear shapewear pantyhose under the tight dress that I wear in the show. They ended up changing the dress to something less form-fitting but keeping the hose. I felt very uncomfortable with this, because I a. am a human woman who has body image issues as does any person ever, and b. I don’t believe in altering my body onstage
unless it is for a reason that is extremely relevant to the time period or character. Women have fat rolls when they sit down. Period. Most men do as well. It is normal and human and doesn’t need to be edited out. Furthermore, I have decided to let my belly hang loose as a part of my character as I was told to be more relaxed and messy/grungy looking. I don’t feel that it’s appropriate to edit or reshape my body, because I am in a unique position to affect change in how we are perceived. Also, I think my body rocks and I don’t want it to look any different than it currently does.

So I walked around for a while and then decided to talk to the designer. I said that I wanted to clarify why I was wearing shapewear in the show, if it was for the underwear lines or the way the dress was hanging on my body. She said both and also because it’s winter in the play and it would make it look more like it was cold outside. So I said I just wanted to check in about that and that I needed to clarify but I didn’t want her to feel uncomfortable. She then asked if I had felt uncomfortable to which I responded that I did. I said that I couldn’t remember if it was her or the directing team that had delivered that note initially, but I wanted to make it clear that I was not upset and did not want to overstep my bounds, because it was not that big of a deal. We are all learning. She said that it was totally fine. Another designer was also there for this conversation and confirmed that it was not a big deal.

9/26

The dress/shapewear conversation came up again today. I really feel that we are lacking language around the body and body positivity. I think this needs to become part of the conversation that happens in this department and at the beginning of the show process. Size is one of the categories of intersectionality that we are just not always aware of, and it can be really frustrating and sensitive.

Anyway, we had our preview last night and it went really well. We had a lot of great feedback from the people in the audience, including that it was the best play they’d seen at UCF. I received a really helpful note, that I bend my knees to release energy instead of releasing it up through the voice. No professor has noticed that, but I have noticed it about myself. It’s cool that our assistant director is so perceptive. She has grown in this process.

We breathed in tonight and shared thoughts about the process and the show. It made me feel a lot more connected to everyone. I also always hug and check in with the actress playing Cynthia before the show and after our final scene together. It’s really helpful to have those moments with her. It helps me drop into the scene more as well, especially checking in at the beginning when we are still friends.

9/27
Opening night last night! It went well! We checked in again before the show started but we didn’t do anything at the end. It’s hard with everyone splitting off in different directions. But I really appreciate hearing what people have to say and everything. I wish there was a way to check out, but the most important one for me is with the actor playing Cynthia, and we’ve been able to figure that out anyway because we always see each other in the dressing room right after.

I feel like my awareness of myself has increased so much during this process. I noticed last night that I was fussing with my hair in a way that is not Tracey, it’s Sarah! So I was a little distracted by that but not too much so that was good.

I am just so exhausted I can’t even think.

9/30/19

Somethings that have been going on:

First of all, an actor confronted another actor in front of the entire cast during our pre-show circle time. It was not the appropriate time and threw me off for the first two scenes. So I would like to look into some techniques on how to be less thrown if unexpected things happen right before a show. In addition to this, however, I think that it is important for my research. Before we breathe in together before shows, we have added a period where people can bring up anything they feel is relevant to the show. This actor took the time to air personal grievances about certain cast members. This fully disrupted the environment. So how can we prevent this from happening to future productions?

The first thing I would say would be to be proactive and address this in the first conversation. Being direct and saying, when we check in as a cast, this is not the time to air personal disputes. It is the time to address things that affect the entire group. Another solution would be to not have the conversation time, only the breathing in. However, I feel that other days people have shared really lovely things, like some have shared words of wisdom, and another day another actor shared some song lyrics that have spoken to her throughout this process. So I’m not sure if it’s worth ignoring all the good stuff for moments like this.

Additionally, something I didn’t write about before was that on the Saturday of tech, some of us were having fun translating the flyer that is in Spanish and one actor started saying random words like “taco” and “burrito”. I know that it was a joke, but in light of everything else, it does give me pause. How do we really create a safe space?

I think our channels of communication have gotten twisted once again. If the actor with the complaints felt comfortable talking to the other actors directly, would he? I have no idea. The frustrated part of me thinks they enjoyed the spectacle but I wonder if they also felt like they
didn’t have options. Then there have been the things that I have felt uncomfortable about but haven’t said anything. Our cast representatives are not people I feel comfortable talking to, which has happened before at UCF. We need a better system of reporting. We are going to have more intimate and personal relationships within casts at UCF than we would in the real world. So we need to plan for people having personal differences and how that can affect a show environment and a cast dynamic.

In other news, I was starting to feel like I was really taking the show home with me. A friend and I had a hard conversation on Friday about things that have been going on that have been bugging me, during which I realized how much of a pain I have been during this process. I have been internalizing way too much, and not actually processing things that I need to process. So Saturday and Sunday I actually warmed down after the show and holy cow it helped! I did a mindfulness activity at the end of the show both days. Saturday I also did some nose breathing/counting exercises. I try to really bring my awareness to the space, to the set, how it’s not real, proving to myself that I am not in a real environment. I have been more mindful about checking in with myself during the show and can say that it is definitely that final fight scene that gets me so much. It’s one thing to get in a really bad fight with a friend every night, it’s another thing to convince my brain that I am actually seeing two people get killed every night (yes they don’t die but Tracey doesn’t know that). Also to get myself to want someone to be killed. That’s some crazy shit! So a more mindful warm down has been great. I also got more sleep those days which probably helped as well. I was much more chipper after the shows, was able to talk about more than just the show with friends. Other days I would be driving home talking to people on the phone and feel unable to talk about anything besides the show. Sat/Sun we could talk about other things without my being annoyed or feeling neglected by the conversation.

My warmup has also changed. I’ve been doing a sort of meditation where I imagine the oxygen and the air flowing into all parts of my body, systematically focusing on the parts as I go. I then do scrunch/stretch/shake/release and do some hip stretches. All of this is while sighing on sound. I then get to my feet and do more of a traditional vocal warmup (buhbuhbuebuhbuhbaybuhbuhbye) and some Linklater zu wo shah. Sometimes I do mold, float, fly, radiate. I try to walk around as myself in alignment and then as Tracey. I listened to Lizzo before the Sunday show and that was amazing. It’s so cool getting more in touch with myself and getting that awareness in. I think that is key! If you aren’t aware of where you are at going in, how can you be aware of how the show is affecting you? I wish that I had been more in touch with this during the rehearsal process, but it was all so fast.

I also am not allowing myself to be present during the final scene (which I am offstage for). Before, I felt like I was being rude by not fully investing, or that my energy would be wrong for curtain call or something. Guess what, it doesn’t matter. Curtain call is for us to be us in front of
the audience. We don’t need to be checked in to the show. The onstage actors will not be affected if I am not upset backstage. I can emotionally remove myself from the action. It would be too harmful to not.

Some people don’t warm up as far as I know, so that’s probably why certain people have been having such a hard time. That’s a lot to carry in and take home every night.

I think I am just really interested in how micro violations lead to larger incidents. If I had called out other behaviors earlier, would the angry incident during check-in have happened? Or is it that I tease people; did hurt more than I intended? I’m not taking responsibility for others’ actions; I am just really interested in how we can all learn from this experience.

One other thing that’s interesting. I say, “are you r****ded?” to Oscar and it’s been getting a laugh! How weird. People also laugh sometimes when Jessie is drunk and stumbling and yelling the ableist slurs at Stan. They are probably laughing because of her drunkenness, but still it’s weird to hear someone say “cripple, you fucking warlock” and then people laugh. I think ability is still something that we as a society are more comfortable discriminating against in our language. For example, people still say handicapped parking instead of accessible parking. It will be really interesting when the principal actor is back in the show this week to see if those lines are received differently at all.

I am going to be really sad to say goodbye to this show. It is such a joy to perform. An emotional journey but dang it’s fulfilling. It’s really cool that people like it so much. I think I care a lot less about whether or not they like my performance than I used to, but it’s still great to hear the feedback.

10/4/19

OK so Wednesday did not feel great! First of all, one of the actors was in a BIG MOOD. I think maybe some of this may have been in relation to the incident during check in last week? The energy had definitely been off since that. I think it’s crazy how much this can affect a performance even a few days later. I don’t know how to possibly combat this in the future. It was also weird because we’ve been swapping in and out the understudies so this was the first show with the full principle cast. Also the audience was mostly theatre survey. The talkback was fine, I was really out of it and felt like I wasn’t helping when I answered a few questions.

But then yesterday was great! Honestly I think it was my best show yet. I was so relaxed and grounded. We did a lot of ab and shoulder openers in class so I think that had a huge part of it. My breathing was just solid. Then I was also trying to really focus on just breathing and pursuing my objective and listening to everyone and meeting their levels and all that. Some of the scenes were really different! Especially the fight scene with Cynthia, I was not nearly as pissy as usual.
I wish that I could hear feedback from people about that moment in particular in terms of how effective it was, how it read, if that’s what the director wanted. I will try to be more aggressive tonight because I think that’s what she wanted maybe? But also the actors and I have at times wondered if we are doing what the director wants so part of this anxiety may be a product of this discourse.

I am not feeling the feelings as intensely as I was before, but I also think I am relaxing more and not pushing so it might just be that the feelings are different because I’m not forcing them. At the end of the show I just had the most euphoric feeling and I didn’t want to let it go. Tonight will be really interesting, I am super excited to see how the show goes.

Another thing I have been noticing is that Tracey’s vernacular has been infiltrating my speech. I have been swearing way more, and I have been using a little bit of AAVE in my day to day, which I try to avoid. I talked with the directing team a bit earlier in the process about how Tracey has some moments of being really appropriative, and it took me a while to embrace that. Now that I am embracing it more, it’s coming up in my everyday speech more. I want to avoid this, because I am not Tracey. I know this has happened with other character’s I’ve portrayed in the past though, so I think some of it is just how my brain works. Is this something that I could work on with better technique and distancing myself from the character? Or is this something that we just have to let in? I wonder if there is any research on this.

10/9

We closed on Sunday! It was an AMAZING show Saturday, I felt extremely grounded and connected to my breath. I felt like I could really connect with everyone onstage and that my decisions were being made honestly and in the moment. It was a really awesome experience. A lot of this had to do with how open and free my breath was. I was really relaxed, warmed up, and ready to play.

I have some thoughts about this process at the closing. I have never played a character that is this problematic or has so many worldviews so far from my own. As the performance process went on and I was really hearing about peoples’ reactions to Tracey, at first my feelings were hurt. It’s hard to have people come up and tell you that they hated you. After KCACTF, the adjudicator said that he hated me, but clarified that this is a good thing, because he was invested in hating me. It was an active hatred, which shows that I was doing something compelling. I actually had this idea echoed by a few audience members. As the process went on, however, I did notice a few things. First of all, every night when 1.2 was going on, I would have a moment of discomfort before I started the racist interrogation of Oscar. This occurred throughout the rehearsal process as well. I think it’s because it sort of comes out of nowhere in the scene, so it’s very effective for the audience. It’s also hard because I don’t think Tracey thinks she’s doing anything wrong, but
Sarah knows that she is. Before that moment sometimes I would think to myself “bye bye audience”, because I knew that for a large part of them, it would be the last time they liked my character. Meeting Ana’s parents after the show I didn’t feel like they wanted to talk to me, and when they did it was awkward and they seemed almost uncomfortable around me. All I can say is, “I am not my character!” It’s so interesting to have those reactions from people.

It was also hard not to compare myself to other actors. People gushed about certain performances, as they should because they are beautiful. But it is also interesting to note that the actors who receive more of this feedback are portraying the more sympathetic character. So some of their love has to come from that, right? The performance is amazing because I cared so much about you. I am probably still just being competitive, but it would be interesting to do a study of how often people feel like the protagonist was the best part of the play versus the antagonist.

I had a fun experience one night when I said the line, “All I can read is Olstead’s, the rest is gibberish.” Someone in the audience scoffed and said, “It’s Spanish!” I love that our work was touching her enough that she was moved to vocally respond. It was a little distracting being right there but it was cool that she was actively responding to Tracey.

Breath, warming up, sticking to my objectives, punctuation were huge in discovering this role.

During both talkbacks but especially the second, we talked about feeling comfortable in the space and taking care of each other. It really seems like the majority opinion of the cast was that it was a safe space and that people felt comfortable to be nasty to each other onstage. After the fight between actors during the check in happened, I definitely felt less comfortable onstage. When characters got angry with me onstage, I felt really uncomfortable and less safe to really go all in emotionally. So I guess that’s evidence that this stuff works to make the space more conducive to playing safely. That aside, I saw so much checking in between people before and after scenes. It was a very mindful environment. People called out my work in both talk backs as being key to creating the safe space and holding the group together. They also talked a lot about our director being a huge leader for keeping the environment strong and focused.

I think that for me I felt most able to be really nasty and horrible to people when I was feeling comfortable. When I was feeling really connected to my scene partner, it was almost fun in a weird way. Fun is not the right word, but it was thrilling and fulfilling.
APPENDIX B: SURVEY EXEMPTION
EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

October 17, 2019

Dear Sarah Hubert:

On 10/17/2019, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

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This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Kamille Chaparro
Designated Reviewer
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Q2
What was your involvement with Sweat? (actor, designer, technician, production team)

test

Designer & Production Team

I did marketing and communications for the production, specifically creating the playbill, coordinating the lobby

Actor

Director

Actor

Actor

Stage Management

I was an actor

Designer

Light Board Op

Actor

Production team (backstage)

Cast
Q3
Were you aware of an attempt to include safe-space creation around Theatre UCF's production of Sweat?

Yes

While I was not aware of a specific attempt for Sweat, based on past productions of this nature and the subject

I was aware of the attempt to create a safe space for our production, but I was definitely not aware that it was part of a thesis or research.

Yes

Yeah the space was super safe

Yes

There were numerous attempts at creating safe-spaces throughout the production. We were encouraged by the production team to implement exercises to separate actors from characters due to the potentially destructive nature of the text. One such exercises was standing in a circle before each rehearsal/performance and inhaling and exhaling together while making eye contact with the people in the circle. This encouraged us to connect as

Yes

Yes. This was made clear by Sarah Hubert, who incorporated the Chicago Theater Standards during one of our rehearsals. We also took the proper precautions when doing scenes that involve harsh language, sexuality, and

Yes

Yes. By everyone from the crew to the creative to the cast.
Q4
What do you remember from any group discussion around keeping the space safe and making sure everyone felt comfortable?

I remember group breathing and the permission granted to hug and express personal feelings regarding actors separating themselves as people from the character they portray.

I was not in any of those group discussions.

What I really liked/remembered from the group discussion was the action checking in with each other before doing any scenes that had vulgar words.

I remember as we were setting guidelines that a couple of actors suggested not using some of the harsh language when we were repeatedly working those scenes. It was as often the actor having to say the abusive word breathing in and out together while making eye contact.

(2). Sarah Hubert having a conversation with the cast and crew on how to deal with sensitive language and Make sure you check in with everyone before the show or rehearsal. Was one of the main things we did to make sure the language used was safe.

I remember having a group talk during a weekend rehearsal about incorporating discussion of boundaries in our breathing circles. During our circle time before and after rehearsal, we were free to bring up anything that we felt was uncomfortable.

I remember a large group discussion in which many of the exercises and precautions described in the previous answer were suggested. There was a sincere sharing of feelings and fears about the nature of the production.

Yes

Sarah Hubert's explanation of "Ouch/Oops", Cynthia White urged us to use offensive language only when necessary, and our fight choreographer's attention to detail with the fight scene.

During talkbacks, actors emphasized how before they fully engaged with the script and the intentions it entailed, they all made clear that the things said were not at all connected with the person. They all made sure to keep the language safe while the actor's were using it. If someone felt uncomfortable with the language being used at any particular time, there was every sense that they could speak up and the cast and crew would respect their
Q5
What do you feel worked in the implementation of these methods?

Test
In general, there was acknowledgment as to the difficulty of the subject matter. As a designer, it allowed the process of creating to go smoother because everyone was aware and prepared for the difficulties that could

Back to the “Checking-in” method, I think this really helped a lot of us with the rehearsal process. Coming into the first rehearsal I did not know anyone in that production besides one of the stage managers, so as we started rehearsing with those racial slurs it was kind of tough to hear and take in. As a Latino, I have been confronted by people who have felt that they need to tell me to “go back to your country” or to “Speak English cause this is A show with this sort of language is STILL hard on the soul. I realized after the fact that I needed to rest and recover from this play for a few weeks.

- Not using sensitive words unless absolutely necessary for the rehearsal or performance process.
- The check-in’s before and after the rehearsal or performance.
Breathing in before and after the rehearsals helped and not using certain words until we had to use them was I think leaving the floor open for people to talk during the circle time was really effective because it gave us a judgement-free zone with everyone present to bring up any issues.

The implementation of the methods kept rehearsals safe and largely conflict free. The nature of the show would have made it easy for tensions to run high, but these methods kept us thinking about each other as people and avoided personal feelings being hurt.
D In discussions between actors (was not present)
At the end of the rehearsal having a collective “Check-out” with the full cast and crew I felt comfortable being in a potentially uncomfortable situation. Most of this was brought on by the fact that there is more attention being paid to safety in intimacy/violence on stage in this program.
I believe it allowed everyone to properly portray the characters and their feelings, and by knowing that the ideas being expressed wouldn’t harm their partners they didn’t hold back, which allowed the story to be told as it was I think these methods created a wonderful dialogue for the actors – and anyone else involved in the show, particularly in the rehearsal process – to use if they every felt uncomfortable in the room. There was never a sense that there would be judgement or retaliation if someone spoke up about a problem they were having. This
Q6
What do you feel could be improved to further these methods?

Although I was aware of the exercises put in place by the actors and director in the rehearsal space, I would’ve like this to be shared more with the designers and production teams so that we could all participate. I think it

As an understudy, I feel that the leads who would perform all the time could have checked in with us as many times as they did with our "upper studies."

I don’t know.

- Clearer universal guidelines for Theatre UCF on how to deal with intimacy.
I felt like we did a great job with the time we had and creating a safe environment the cast all worked together I think making sure everyone knows that it is appropriate to bring up any and all issues during this time could be improved. No matter how big or small, someone deserves to have their issue addressed.

I think a greater emphasis on the necessity of daily consent check-ins for intimate and psychical moments could always be improved.

No opinion
having a period of "Check-in" with all of the actors which each other
I think the check in process could have been a little more concrete. I believe that breathing in with each other is important, but due to the intensity of the show, I wish we warmed up more. There were a couple rehearsals

Make sure they are applied in every play, not just on the ones that include strong content.

Nothing specific in the Sweat rehearsal process, just that I am hoping that these methods become a priority in every rehearsal both inside and outside of UCF.
Q7
Was there an incident or incidents that stand out to you as a success for these methods?

test
Seeing the actors still express caring and loving feelings towards each other after some of the more difficult scenes.

There were none that I could think of right now.
I loved that Sarah (I think) said at a meeting after the run that the breathing in and out of performances had continued through the run. That makes me happy.

No
Breathing in and checking in and breathing out when we would leave
I think discussing what offensive words we were choosing to omit in rehearsal that day was really successful as it was never an uncomfortable situation for one to say that they don’t want to say or hear a certain word that day.
There was a moment where I witnessed one actor who was the target of a racial slur in the text approach the actor who was delivering the line. The actor 1 said, "Hey, I just wanted to let you know that when you said your line last night it hurt. Can we talk about it". Actor 2 responded, "Absolutely!" and the two actors went to find a private location to have their discussion. When they returned, the two seemed calm and ready to play. I think the camaraderie of the cast.
The inhalation and exhalation at the end of runs
The entire process was affected by how safe the environment was. I don’t think the story would have carried through with the same momentum if we didn’t have a conversation about how heavy this show is.

No
Because these methods were so consistent throughout the entire rehearsal process and inclusive to everyone in the room, not just the people working in the scene that day, it really made every person involved in the show feel as though they were part of the team. It is easy for the people not on stage to sometimes feel a part from
Q11
Were there any incidents that stand out to you as a failure of these methods?

No? I don’t think there was failure anywhere, just a lack of spreading the safe space to everyone.

There were none that I could think of right now.

No

No

Not to my knowledge
When an actor brought up an issue he had about a comment made to him by another actor before a show, he was shot down by a cast member telling him it was inappropriate that he brought it up. I believe that there was an incident when tensions ran high. Before one of our performances, during our check-in exercise, the group was encouraged to share their feelings and one actor expressed that they had felt insulted and emotionally harmed by other actors in the circle. One of the actors who was accused responded in kind and the two had a small verbal altercation in front of the group. It significantly hurt the purpose of our check-in, and

None

Not really

N/A

No
During our circling up times, there may have been a misunderstanding about what kinds of things should be brought up during that time. It was an opportunity to express discomfort, feedback, questions, etc. The boundaries were set pretty clear in my opinion but it wasn’t a time to bring up any problems someone may have
How necessary is it for a rehearsal process to include a discussion around theatrestandards, comfort, and safe space?

OMG! So important. I wish it would happen in every production. When people are uncomfortable, mistakes are made and feelings can often be hurt.

Incredibly important. Incredibly necessary.

VERY. Especially when doing a show as intense as this one. It is so crucial to make sure that everyone feels comfortable and safe during the rehearsal process of a show because 1. we see each other every day and that alone can be tiring and annoying at times 2. If we don't make sure that everyone is comfortable and safe then the rehearsal space and process WILL feel heavy and no good work will get done under such an atmosphere.

I think in the last year or two, it has entered our vocabulary and has become absolutely necessary.

It's vital. If every artist in the room isn't on the same page regarding standards, there will be incidents. Very necessary because the safer you feel the more creative and free you feel while working.

It is 100% necessary no matter what show it is because there may always be points where someone is uncomfortable. Letting them know that is it okay to have discomfort and helping them address it clearly to the

I believe it is necessary. Theatre, to its actors, creatives, and audience, is a deeply vulnerable and emotionally intrusive experience. In order for it to have its desired effect, we must ensure that all those involved feel safe enough to get what they need from the process. These methods help facilitate that.

Very.

It's very important to make sure that all members of the team feel comfortable enough to voice their opinions. It is extremely important. There is no way for anyone involved to be present if they are experiencing an unsafe feeling of discomfort. It's important to address the discomfort of a situation and allowing ourselves to feel that it is very important. Because it will allow the actors to expand their comfort zones and explore new perspectives, with the security that they are not being harmful to others and vice versa.

I think it is extremely necessary. If actors, crew members or creative team members don't feel safe, don't have an affective line of trustworthy communication and feel as though they are not being heard, it is not possible to create an environment that would breed the best possible work. There needs to be a level of trust between
Q9
Please rate your feeling of comfort and safety during this production of Sweat, on a scale of 1-10.

test

9
10.

10
9-10

9
10 I was super comfortable

8

8
10
8

9

10

10
Another comments regarding this subject in this production?

I loved it. Just hands down loved it.

Sarah, you did an incredible job at making sure everyone felt safe and comfortable throughout the rehearsal process and you should be so proud of yourself for that. Thank you for speaking up during rehearsal for those of us who did not want to seem annoying or weak for being hurt about some of the things that were in that script. In a way, you were like Stan when he was defending Oscar before the big fight scene, so again, THANK YOU! It was extremely helpful having a member of the cast who was also focused on this process (because part of her thesis). It is also so helpful that our UCF stage managers are learning the skills to talk about and manage intimate

I was happy to be apart of this production the people were amazing that goes for the actors, directors, stage

I think it is necessary that these methods meant to encourage safe-spaces not just be for the actor/director/stage manager relationship. I believe that it should be extended to all those involved in the process. Designers, choreographers, and all creatives should be expected to follow the standards and methods put in place.

No

Cynthia still scares me

This was my first time working for a UCF production, and I was scared at the beginning not knowing what to expect or how the environment was going to be like. However, once I understood the director’s dynamic of
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