When the stage is shaken, and the lights go dark: Discovering how performance and social work can continue to share the spotlight together!

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By Lisa S. Dyment, B.A., B.S.W.

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Descriptive Note

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AUTHOR: Lisa S. Dyment, B.A., B.S.W. (McMaster University)

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ABSTRACT

Since March 2020, community-based performance social groups have shifted drastically. With COVID-19, quarantining and social distance protocols, the ongoing pandemic has altered in-person social work and the way communities interact. The information shared in this thesis is drawn from 4 semi-structured qualitative interviews. The data showcases folks who are community leaders, teachers and social workers who use performance techniques with their clients. My study asked the Participants about their history using theatre arts within their practice and investigated how COVID-19 impacted their endeavours. The data collected implies that community work using theatre has an ongoing potential to support social change efforts toward rebuilding and sustaining connection. Yet, the data also discovered a growing divide that is further affecting marginalized folks who can not access community within a digital world. Inspired by the works of Lisbeth Berbary (2011) and Jonathan Gross (2021) this thesis artistically re-imagines the collected data as a social performance amongst the Participants involved. With permission from the Participants, an ethnographic screenplay using a creative analytical approach (Berbary, 2011), transformed the semi-structured qualitative interview findings to highlight key discoveries. These key discoveries outline a nuanced understanding of how performance for social change has been transformed and the tensions that arose, particularly the growing social divide for access (the divide between those who can access online community performance groups and those who lose out from a lack of technological accessibility). Analyzing these conflicting advantages and disadvantages can help build toward an inclusive and equitable approach for theatre as a vehicle for social justice.

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A Poem of Appreciation Written by Lisa S. Dyment
A light that can spark can only be sustained with winds guiding its flame.
Since knowing you my life will never be the same.
I've had to change my path and take different trains.
Even though my dreams felt big, I know in reality, it's only a grain.
But thanks to you, that dream grew, and thanks to you, I overcame.
Thanks to you, I never stopped trying.
Thanks to you, I finally stopped hiding.
And…Because of you and your time, I found that my small spark could actually shine.

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To my Parents: I would not be able to be where I am today without your support! Thank you for everything you have done for me and thank you for being there for me when I went back to school. I love you.

To Jordan: I have loved being your sister, because everything good that has happened in my life is because of you. You've shown me the powerful love of the arts, and because of the tremendous love you have in your heart, I have been inspired to devote the rest of my love to social justice. Thank you for being that "wind beneath my wings" and know that I am so proud of the love and rainbow light you give to this world!

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"There's only one answer that matters, even if your heart has been shattered.
Whatever you want. Whatever you are after. Love Is Still the Answer" – Jason Mraz

Dedicated to Bubbie, a Rebbetzin & Baba (RIP)
For the women who are the seeds that sparked my heart and fueled my rainbow soul.

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Chapter 1 – Introductory Thoughts

Fade Into:

ACT I - INTERIOR (INT.) LISA'S APARTMENT – DAYTIME – FALL – YEAR 2020

LISA, a woman in her 30's in a flowery dress, sits in front of a computer desk. Behind her is a red and black tapestry with green plants on the left and cups of pens on her right. Lisa turns away from her computer screen and looks out to the window beside her and watches the trees sway in the summer breeze. Lisa hears a notification on her phone, looks at it sadly, and then turns off the phone's screen. Instead, Lisa turns her laptop on to the music of Jason Mraz singing "Look for the Good". Lisa nods along with the peaceful beats and begins to write.

<div align="center">LISA (VOICE OVER, READING)</div>

> Before I could talk, the way I expressed myself as a child was through emoting with performance. When I was older, participating in community theatre and film productions was my way to connect within society. However, when the #MeToo movement began, this movement pushed me to reflect on my 20+ year freelance career in the independent arts in Toronto. I knew I wanted change.

Lisa takes a deep breath.

> I wanted to learn how to use performance for social justice. Acting had always provided me with a protective, powerful outlet for creative expression and community connection. I wanted to explore how social work and an arts-based approach can be used for community development. I saw potential for how performance can aid in storytelling by sharing different sides of a person's perspective, as well as the process of playmaking and theatre to achieve common goals with folks.

Lisa sings along to the music quietly, as she starts to write.

> When I got into social work, I discovered social workers, teachers, and community leaders had already been using arts-based approaches since their inception. I spent over 20 years working in theatre, film, television, and photography, behind the scenes and on stage. Since transitioning into social work my art experiences have motivated me to conduct research and seek out groups and individuals from social work, as well as community leaders, who use performance for social justice or as a healing modality within their practice, their studies, their research, and/or community work.

Lisa pauses, touches her face poignantly and continues to write.

LISA (VOICE OVER, READING) (CONT.)

I know that performance can be used as a therapeutic technique, as an advocacy tool to support activism, as a teaching tool, or as a format to support social work research. I have found social work literature that supports the potential for the arts as a means to work toward social justice and social change from various studies. The literature review for this thesis will however delve deeper into the attributes of performance that are understood by researchers and practitioners to support performance as a tool for social work and social change.

Lisa hears a notification on her cell phone. She picks it up and sees a message.

TEXT READS: *I hope you are staying home. Be careful of COVID-19. Love, Mom.*

Fade Into:

ACT II - INTERIOR (INT.) LISA'S APARTMENT – DAYTIME – SPRING – YEAR 2021

Lisa sits down at her computer. As she prepares to write her thesis, a smile slowly crosses her face. She starts typing.

LISA (VOICE OVER, READING)

This thesis will explore what literature and a small group of research participants have to say about the ways theatre and performance have uncovered stigma, broken down barriers, and revealed the need for community healing and reunification, both in the past, in the context of a pandemic and moving forward. Currently, academics, community leaders and social workers are discussing the uses of theatre and performance during COVID-19. Social distancing has impacted performance and uses of the arts, and these social impacts will be explored. In a post-pandemic world, I believe that ideas of using community theatre for social service work can continue to be a driving force for change. For now, new characters are slowly entering from backstage through a dimly lit door, to take their mark on stage left. This thesis will need to take its next cue and move toward centre stage to recite the rest of the scenes so that we can continue to work toward achieving that standing ovation.

Lisa stands up with her laptop in hand, after she stands, she moves over to the balcony where a warm breeze is waiting to meet her.

Fade Out.

Setting the Stage: Introducing the Thesis's Creative Format

We are now opening the academic stage of performance for social work, by looking at alternative ways of presenting a thesis. As well, we will explore ways theatre arts, such as screenplays and performing, can be a vehicle for encouraging change within a community. In this thesis I will be taking you on a journey of exploring the potential of performance for social work as a tool for healing, for social change and community justice. I want to address why I am using a screenplay format to present parts of my thesis. The reasoning behind wanting to use an ethnographic screenplay format was to present my data in an alternative format that could challenge readers. My drive for using an art-based approach has also been informed by the Participants within this research. Discovered research has also informed the further potential of using performance within community to help elicit social change. After setting the stage, I will present some information on how performance and social work have been impacted at the time of writing by this ongoing pandemic, namely COVID-19. Following the literature review and the theoretical framework, I will then explore research design and methods to help unpack how the research was conducted. What follows is my presentation of the findings from and discussion of one-on-one interviews with 4 people who have been active during COVID-19 within the performance arts. The Participants were candid, passionate and forthcoming when sharing their lived experiences with the theatre arts. Everyone was generous with their societal perceptions, especially when offering up their wisdom on performance for justice. Therefore, the time the Participants gave to this researcher was instrumental in informing ways performance may be used by service users and/or groups, and that performance could help bring concerns to the metaphorical centre stage in society. Ultimately, the research process made a strong case for presenting data within an alternative ethnographic screenplay format. The overall idea that this

thesis suggests is that social workers could use similar art-based tools within their respective community practices for justice.

I will be sharing what I learned carrying out this research using an arts-based approach. I have chosen to do this because of my personal experiences within the film and theatre industries, experiences which I knew I had to honour, through the use of an artistic modality to guide my thesis work and write in order to do "representation differently" (Berbary, 2011, p. 186). These experiences have led me toward ethnographic screenplay writing. Craig Batty (2018) discusses the possibilities of exploring issues through a creative screenplay structure. Screenplays are used to communicate about social issues that are generally explored through forms of critical analysis. Inspired by the creative format, from years of independent art projects to college, to using those transferable skills within social work, I found that "…Using creative structures, characters and language 'as an alternative form of academic discourse to the conventional essay" (Batty, 2018, p. 7) matched well with my research process. Using a screenplay format supported the formal process of discovering the main findings, informing the thesis's analysis, guiding how I interpret the data (Berbary and Johnson, 2012) and how I have written the thesis. Transitioning into this writer's headspace through screenplay format – a new Act introducing each chapter – is intended to help set the stage for the sharing of the data. A screenplay places the data in an imaginary realm where folks can come back together. Returning to group engagement in a creative manner is meaningful, particularly during a time where a global pandemic has halted most of the face-to-face contact because of the necessity of social distancing.

Setting the Stage: Exploring Performance for Social Justice in and Beyond a Pandemic

In Act I, I reflected on why I came to this thesis research, what I planned to do before COVID-19 hit – to explore the possibilities of performance for healing and social justice in

social work. I had unearthed a plethora of academics, in a pre-COVID-19 context, sharing

examples of theatre for social change and the possibilities of collectively using performance arts

as an alternative tool for change within social work when working with service users and

communities. However, with the recent impacts of the pandemic on both social work services

and theatre performances, COVID-19 has shifted practitioners' and social workers' ways of

working with communities and with community theatre groups and social justice organizations.

This shifted the focus of my social work research to explore what can be learned from the

pandemic experiences of social workers and performance artists to inform the use of arts for

social change in social work in a future post-pandemic society. During the writing of this thesis, I

found a critical lens lent well with understanding the elements of theatre providing an outlet for

social discourse. The literature demonstrated (at least in pre-Covid-19 times) that theatre appears

to be a space where folks can share a place to understand different ideas. Theatre could

potentially provide a space for community reunification, because of the artistic merits of how

audiences and performers process a shared narrative. Processing narratives from personal stories

on stage could provide an opportunity for folks to open themselves up to thinking differently and

connecting socially. However, with all that potential aside, it is imperative to consider how this

processing has been shifted by COVID-19 and social distancing. Theatre may have been used as

a vehicle for change, but COVID-19 may have pivoted these potentials – we know COVID-19

has changed people's lives, resulting in mental health issues, death, and community separation.

  A consideration of what the post pandemic future will look like brings up for me some

consideration as to how theatre may be used for potential individual, political and social change

in both the current pandemic context and a post pandemic society. Theatre has the promise to

address stigma and mental health concerns, encourage critical and social discourse, both

acknowledge and challenge societal barriers and systemic flaws, bring forth opportunities for

enhanced well-being, and reunify community through creative information sharing (Aikins,

2020). However, we cannot ignore the complexities of creating and enacting a community and/or

individualized therapeutic process toward community justice, given the undertones of the many

impacts of COVID-19. For example, responses to COVID-19 have been influencing health

policies within communities in Ghana as a call for action to reimagine and restructure neglected

healthcare by pushing for social protective systems, attending to issues that have been happening

previously, during the pandemic, and which need to be addressed in post pandemic society

(Aikins, 2020). Arts such as cartoons, songs, skits etc., have helped to advocate for restructuring

health care during COVID-19 in Ghana, yet this is just one example that illustrates how society

could benefit from an artistic critical discourse for social change (Aikins, 2020). Using critical

education could support further restructuring within society.

       While critically reflecting on a re-imagined social and political future, Jonathan Gross

(2021) discusses how this can be achieved with performance and theatre, for example, with

Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. Gross (2021) suggests that Boal's practices can be

integrated into research, teaching and activism associated with pedagogy of the oppressed and

Gross (2021) indicates that theatre can nurture conditions where folks can narrate their

circumstances in order to transform them. When considering theatre as an educational pedagogy

in the pandemic context, Adam Cziboly and Adam Bethlenfalvy (2020) speak to the importance

of drama as a means by which to reconnect with communities, comprehend the complexities of a

crisis and reflect on how drama can be an educational tool to connect students. Collaboration for

solutions with diverse communities with varying backgrounds has brought together actors and

health professionals who have been connecting during the pandemic to offer support to front line

workers. For example, performers who wear restrictive costumes are engaging online with medical staff who must wear PPE, supporting their professional practice by sharing actors' tips on how to communicate with a face being obstructed, how to navigate a restrictive space and promote self-care with stress techniques for physical comfort (Mermikides, 2020). Providing mutual support through artistic solutions also showcases how the arts have not been null and void during a global pandemic. Professor Anne Marie Rafferty has defended the idea that arts can help society face uncertainties that the world is collectively facing and that the arts is a path toward building resilience and solidarity through strength, especially within the healthcare community (Mermikides, 2020). Rafferty believes that recovery of the arts within the healthcare sector must occur within education and that standing in solidarity with culture and the arts will result in, "…Shared commitment to mutual support" (Mermikides, 2020, p. 818). It is therefore implied that the arts help build community, and through this implication, an allyship through tumultuous times could provide ideas for creative and constructive solutions.

Relevantly, Gross (2021) considers theatre able to be representative of any social issue, quoting Mark Cousins, a lecturer at the Architectural Association school in London, England: "…What makes theatre theatre is that it can represent any time and any place except now and here" (Gross, 2021, p. 6). Theatre has the ability to take any social issue and represent it on a stage for the public to watch, listen to and hopefully learn from. Gross (2021) affirms what Cousins claims that: theatre could transcend time and place and potentially be used by anyone and therefore be adapted by anyone. Theatre, in that it is flexible and able to adapt a group and/or individual's vision, is explained further by Kathleen Gallagher (Gross, 2021). Gallagher is described as a global theatre-based researcher, who explains that theatre could be used to challenge neoliberalism and share people's desire to change capitalists' perspectives, because

neoliberalism is deeply rooted in social life (Gross, 2021). That theatre can challenge the status

quo is suggested to be useful for youth for whom, Gross (2021) explains, imagination is critical,

and as young folks, they have every right to question social order.

Gross (2021) goes on to suggest that arts-based research practices can foster enlightening

environments where folks can, "…Move between the possible, the plausible, the probable and

the preferable [when] developing new relationships with their futures" (Gross, 2021, p. 7). Gross

(2021) describes that "…It's a contribution that would take on greater urgency and efficacy by

forming new connections with the anticipatory methods employed in futures studies, and with

practices in critical education and theatre research in which transformative processes of

individual and collective self-narration are the modus operandi" (Gross, 2021, p. 7). Reflecting

on the prospective power of critical education and theatre as a methodology within research and

social work could support the process for community transformation. Gross (2021) supports the

idea that the ideology of an artistic critical discourse may also provide compassionate creative

spaces for political imagination and could support community healing and growth (Gross, 2021).

This transformative process could include storytelling, sharing beliefs and being performative in

ways that feel comfortable.

With Gross' (2021) connotation of the imagination being transformative during

tumultuous times brings up implications of challenges of COVID-19 being able to support this

process within a community and/or social group. Kathleen Gallagher, Christine Balt, Nancy

Cardwell, and Brooke Charlebois (2020) are researchers who contemplate how performances

need an awareness of "social and aesthetic considerations of intimacy" within the artistic online

process (Gallagher, et al., 2020, p. 642). The kinds of intimacy made possible by in-person

engagement are no longer achievable and the artistic process is altered. Community work,

education, and theatre have moved online, which impacts the social aesthetics of each and affects

the quality of intimacy. Social work, the ways we interact, advocate, and socialize, have also

been digitally transformed, with people from different social locations from all over the world

being brought together as a means of working to (re)connect students (Gallagher et al., 2020).

Their data about the relational impacts of connecting drama with the diversity of groups from

different geographic locations during the pandemic (Gallagher et al., 2020) fuels a critical

discussion for understanding the effects of different types of educational intimacies and raises

the question whether face-to-face interactions promote better community inclusion than online or

vice versa. However, this begs the question of who may be left out of the process, considering

online technologies may help and/or hinder folks and may not always be accessible. Moving

online is resulting in some global collaboration with performance arts which has been witnessed

to promote self-expression in a newfound changing world, however, social intimacies are being

lost online, creating peculiar and new challenges (Gallagher et al., 2020).

      In a re-imagined post-pandemic society, there is a need for a fuller, deeper understanding

of the implications of how rediscovering arts-based community works and communally led

performance projects can be useful examples of alternative social work tools for change.

However, this re-imagining will require building upon existing research within, for example, a

thesis investigation. The research investigates ways performance for social justice can benefit

individuals and communities in a post-pandemic world, by looking at the lessons learned by the

impact of COVID-19. The literature focuses on the use of theatre and arts for social work toward

social change, pre- and present COVID-19, which helps to anchor the data collection. The

questions asked of participants served to inform data analysis as well – to better understand, from

the perspective of participants, the pandemic's impact on community ventures, and the

possibilities of creating new ways of working post pandemic. It is theorized that performance can

expose injustice and promote collective healing toward reunifying a community, a community

that has spent far too much time socially distanced within a global pandemic.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Performance for Social Justice: Unpacking Theatre Uses for Social Work

Fade Into:

ACT III - INTERIOR (INT.) LISA'S APARTMENT – DAYTIME – SPRING – YEAR 2021

Lisa sits at her desk, cup of tea in hand; she places the cup beside her laptop and adjusts herself. She writes.

<div align="center">

LISA (VOICE OVER, READING)

</div>

> In person engagement has not been the same since March 2020. Theatre for social justice during this COVID-19 pandemic has ultimately been impacted and social distancing has shifted its potential to challenge society. The tension is, can theatre still promote change through performance if people do not attend live theatre anymore. In June 2021, Ontario continued to struggle with stay-at-home orders, and live theatre engagements with large groups were still halted. Society is changing, and critical reflection is needed to analyze how to transcend the ongoing turmoil. When the pandemic ends, can theatre still bring social justice on stage and engage audiences toward collective justice?

Lisa looks down on her desk where *Theatre of the Oppressed* is opened; her eyes focus, and she continues to write.

> Theatre is best experienced live, for its interpersonal nature is what brings community together. Yet physical engagement has drastically changed because on March 11th, 2020, The World Health Organization [WHO] declared a global pandemic where individuals and communities must socially distance themselves to prevent a spread of a deadly virus called COVID-19, all of which shifted indefinitely how the world interacts (World Health Organization, 2020). This fact brings us to the central theme of this literature review: how can theatre still be a conducive tool for social workers, for art practitioners addressing injustice, and in challenging politics and creating social change during an uncertain socially distant world? Pre-pandemic, theatre showed tremendous potential as a tool for social justice, as will be investigated by exploring Augusto Boal's teaching about the potential of theatre in being a tool to challenge stigma, break down barriers, encourage social discourse, facilitate community well-being and reunification. My literature review will also explore ways theatre and performance are being used to help community, which will help my own research by building upon these pre-existing data. Data will showcase how theatre and performance can be a tremendous tool for social change and justice in a post-pandemic society. I feel this

> literature review will provide potential for social workers and
> community leaders with ideas for alternative artistic means of support
> when the pandemic subsides. Therefore, this literature review will
> uncover ideas on how alternative means of community social work can
> benefit from theatre for social change in a post pandemic new world.

Lisa sighs deeply, turns to her cup, with softer eyes she lifts her tea and drinks slowly.

Fade Out.

Literature Review

2.2 Examining Augusto Boal's Potential of Theatre for Social Change and Justice

"If there is to be drama, conflict is necessary" and with conflict, can come the

opportunity for change (Boal, 1985, p. 74). In Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal (1985)

discusses that there needs to be an antithesis to address imbalances within society. Boal (1985)

describes how the characters in the performance that portray those who are currently existing in

society need to instil attributes and values that are against another character. Through this

dramatic action, the embodiment of social struggle is realized. It is intriguing to reflect on Boal's

(1985) discussion of how conflict needs to end with a harmonious conclusion, and how this idea

of peaceful resolution is also idealistic. Therefore, the question is how a harmonious conclusion

can be achieved through peaceful resolution – not by destroying the antagonist but through

creative constructive confrontation (Boal, 1985).

Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (1985) has been taken up by academics such as

Adi Barak (2016), Nuria Cordero Ramos and Manuel Muñoz Bellerin (2017) and M. Candace

Christensen (2014) who explore the uses of theatre for social change as a tool for justice. Barak

(2016) explains the idea of having 'critical perspectives' in social work is an umbrella term and

said umbrella term appears to include all perspectives. However, the author suggests the focus

should be on ways to address social injustice witnessed by social workers throughout their

practice (Barak, 2016). The inclusive nature of the term 'critical perspectives' used in social

work could leave out important critical perspectives in social work that might need individual

attention. In theory, the idea of having an inclusive approach could inadvertently leave crucial

ideas out of the social work equation. Can social workers using an art-based approach bring folks

back into the community who have felt left out? A historical example of artistic usage within

social work that helped redevelopment and promote societal inclusion was demonstrated during

the Jane Addams' Hull House era and is discussed by Cordero Ramos and Muñoz Bellerin

(2017). The previous authors revealed that Jane Addams considered creative skills training an

important value and integrated art into educational programs at the Hull House. Relating the

works from Hull House to the works of Boal (1985), and to the potential for theatre being used

within social work, Ramos and Bellerin (2017) noted how Jane Addams and social workers used

the art form for relational care and through creative expression, it had encouraged folks to

connect on a social level. Using creativity to promote education and uplift social skills and was

reported to help to promote collective values by using art to help connect community members

(Ramos & Bellerin, 2017). Consequently, Jane Addams may resonate well with Boal's (1985)

work because art, as a social work tool, may assist individuals during difficult processes when

connecting with communities. For example, folks may benefit from alternative modes of justice

seeking, such as using imagination and improv exercises to help promote critical discourse

(Christensen, 2014). Barak (2016) communicates the importance of having a political lens and,

like Boal (1985), thrives on using techniques such as newspaper theatre (that uses images and

words to promote political discourse), image theatre (that uses tableau – a living photo – to

provoke politically driven conversations), and forum theatre (that encourages collective

discussions with the Participants and audiences through confronting the oppressor on stage).

Cordero Ramos and Muñoz Bellerin (2017) drew on Addams' work to advocate for more arts-based community theatre to be used within social work. In Seville, Spain, they used an arts-based approach to help promote diversity and address societally created exclusion of precariously housed folks. The authors advocate that theatre can call out such exclusion through theatrical performances on a public platform and promote alternative models of relations and audience-oriented reflection (guided by Boal's (1985) teachings), by enacting scenes that connect to Participants' lives and supporting an open critical dialogue with audiences. Critical dialogue that connects audiences with each other and with Participants' lives is a potent tool when empathy is involved (Boal, 1985). Indeed, critical dialogue can build empathy and help achieve accountability and reflection on how actions impact not just individually, but socially.

The value of empathy and critical dialogue building through theatre, as a tool to support community, is echoed by M. Candace Christensen (2014) in work using a theatre approach and two models of theatre for social change – theory and practice – to promote social awareness for sexual violence prevention in colleges. Christensen used Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and Michael Rohd's (a theatre artist and educator) Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue (2014). Techniques used in the study that were considered supportive for the student demographic were: using theatre as a collaborative tool for leadership, establishing a process to subvert social norms, challenging the desensitization of campus and off campus sexual abuse, and helping to promote an attitudinal shift toward an ethic of care through collectively building co-knowledge (Christensen, 2014). This work shared similar aims to that of Cordero Ramos and Muñoz Bellerin (2017) who also used Boal's (1985) Theatre of the Oppressed to encourage leadership and critical reflection with two contrasting groups. In this work, audiences – as spect-actors (Boal, 1985) are encouraged to be a part of the onstage discussions. These onstage

confrontations are turned into discussions that are the pinnacle of how critical reflection can be enhanced within a community. If the audience is not involved in the performance, there is less chance for a community to shift.

Ramos and Bellerin (2017) and Christensen (2014) focus on achieving social justice with their uses of Boal's work (1985). The studies show how folks can address injustices using theatre as their vehicle to bring together folks to discuss difficult topics in an inclusive and creative way. Thus, having a theatrical process to develop critical consciousness helped to bring forth an opportunity to intervene for possibilities for a social shift within the community. Barak (2016) explains how critical social work can be supported with the development of critical consciousness and become enhanced with alternative modes of practice to address oppressive systematic failures that are ongoing within society. Development of critical consciousness can also fuel a passion for critically analysing social work care (Barak, 2016). Therefore, one can consider using a critical approach to focus on how these alternative community-led projects can be tailor made to the community and its particular concern, with creative interventions that provide a space for therapeutic reflection and an open door to lasting change within community members' lives.

Going deeper into the theatre projects and techniques, Boal (1985) uses for critical consciousness within communities is exemplified in the use of forum theatre to achieve social goals with audiences. Goals such as social inclusion, accountability, desire for social change after a performance and striving for community justice were commonalities in these studies. Christensen (2014) uncovered three themes on how forum theatre affects the audience and participating students: "…To engage in an ethic of care with one another, collaboratively construct solutions to a community problem, and deconstruct social norms that contribute to the

problem" (Christensen, 2014, p. 1462). Ramos and Bellerin (2017) found that, for Participants, performing in public encouraged social visibility and more integration within their community, and that the theatrical process helped community members to reclaim their rights toward regaining active social citizenship. Performing also helped to reinforce new identities, lift self-esteem, enhance interactions, and build collective trust and respect. Community groups can grow with said theatre activities through play as critical consciousness (Barak, 2016) and capacity and self-confidence can be facilitated through play (Ramos & Bellerin, 2017). Christensen (2014) reports that co-constructing knowledge with community members through forum theatre was imperative in gaining the youth's engagement at the college. Using forum theatre, the focus was involving the audience during the performance, pushing the spect-actor(s) to be a part of the solution process (Boal, 1985). Christensen (2014) demonstrates how forum theatre aids audience reflection and post-performance data revealed shifts in youth Participants' lives. Documented shifts in the youth's lives included, taking ethical accountability for their actions and calling out red flags of potential abusive behaviour at parties (Christensen, 2014). Traumatic re-enactments on stage can trigger difficult discussions, but also realism around the critical need to bring forth new and diverse ideas to challenge socially accepted oppressive practices.

To reiterate, theatre can provide an alternative outlet for social services to connect with communities, rehearse models of relations and reflect on interactions folks have experienced, as well as reinforcing Participants' passion in becoming active citizens (Ramos & Bellerin, 2017). Grounding these points in critical theory, Melissa Freeman and Erika França S. Vasconcelos (2010) dive deeper into the notion of passion, suggesting that passion is at the centre of critical theory and social justice, and art can be a part of critical discussions as a potential tool for fuelling community led conversations on injustice. Approaches such as those developed by Boal

(1985), can break ritual, and spark a community discussion to unpack complex social issues with

critical reflection and collaborative imagination building through performance (Boal, 1985).

Having an artistic performance process can help move communities and professionals toward

alternative ways of thinking, being and engaging in the world, pushing compelling call and

response approaches toward social and interpersonal change (Mitchell, Dupuis, & Jonas-

Simpson, 2011).

Barak (2016) suggests that the groundwork developed by Augusto Boal's <u>Theatre of the</u>

<u>Oppressed</u> (1985) can also support social work practice through utilizing arts-based performance

methods to connect service users to values engaged with critical social work (Barak, 2016).

Having critical reflection poses benefits to breaking down judgements, such as stigma, through

societal critical discourse to challenge barriers and promote community reunification and well-

being. All of which have been especially prevalent during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3 Utilizing Theatre to Challenge Stigma.

It has been suggested by academics that theatre has the potential to bring together

marginalized folks who have felt excluded by a capitalist, neoliberal driven society. For example,

marginalized folks may include those who have been needing mental health support but could

not afford or access sustainable care. Using the following studies, I will build on how theatre can

be a vehicle to enhance community involvement, push forward knowledge collected by said

community toward social justice, influence stakeholders, and change public perspectives that

shape their community, thus challenging stigmas that are oppressive. Mitchell, Dupuis, and

Jonas-Simpson (2011) hypothesize that arts and theatre can be a helpful tool to expose hidden,

oppressive practices. Through a community based participatory approach, they can be used

toward ending stigma.

Deirdre Heenan (2006) looked at how art therapies, such as fine art, dance, music, and drama were integrated into social service programming with a community of people with trauma-related stigma participating in a mental health organization in Northern Ireland. Here, recovery programs worked on providing a safe(r) space to be artistically reflective. Providing an alternative space to be reflective through art was found to assist mental health struggles among folks living with stigma (Heenan, 2006). From the qualitative interviews conducted with Participants, the findings highlighted the fact that a major issue affecting their mental health was stigma stemming from intergenerational trauma resulting in social exclusion, which, in turn, exacerbated mental health struggles (Heenan, 2006). Reflective art spaces were reported to be a prospective modality for healing and by challenging stigma, as a group, the Participants felt a connection. This connection led to folks feeling more comfortable to express their challenges, as a collective, on their generational trauma through their shared performance art (Heenan ,2006). This idea of performance being used for healing and to challenge stigma was also demonstrated through a study by Emma Lundenmark (2020), in which performance was seen as a space for self-expression and a chance to take back the facility's environment with the creation of a "positive breathing space" through artistic reflection (Lundenmark, 2020, p.72). This 'positive breathing space', as described by Lundenmark's (2020) research, connects well with Heenan's (2006) idea of providing mental health services alongside an artistic space for reflection. Lundenmark (2020) discusses further ideas of performance creating possibilities for potential persuasion with audiences through provision of a space for them to reflect on destructive mentalities that stigmatize those who live with mental health disabilities.

Lundenmark (2020) is a theatre practitioner working in a psychiatric ward, facilitating a storytelling program at a hospital in Stockholm, Sweden, and is part of a program called

Totalnormal (in English, Totally Normal), who works with folks living with mental illness to share their stories on their terms. Having control over the development of their stories was key: Participants took their stories and produced a play with a post-show discussion with medical staff, which supported critical discourse to confront societal stigma (Lundenmark, 2020). This endeavour was undertaken with the collaboration of an organization called MIND, a suicide prevention helpline in Sweden (Lundenmark, 2020). Having the group's focus be on collaborative intent, the performance provided an opportunity for folks to take part in creative activities that provided a critical lens to question mental health stigma. Mental health stigma was discussed at length by the Participants, and it was described as having a negative impact on their self-perception (Lundenmark, 2020). Performance provided a space for folks to discover creative freedom, to build up new self-perceptions through creative expression, and show audiences/medical staff, how negative stigma has hurt them by confronting these negative views within their stories.

Having control over a personal narrative through storytelling was demonstrated in another study of how theatre can challenge stigma by providing a creative outlet for reinvention. In a study by Bridget Keehan (2015), theatre and drama had a positive effect on folks who were incarcerated. The study explains how theatre facilitated a space for reflection and an opportunity to reinvent via performance, with a reimagination of new futures through "Forging of a non-criminal identity" (Keehan, 2015, p. 392). According to the author, theatre with incarcerated folks brought 'soul and humanising' to the system, but the focus must not be just on the inmates, but also be on transforming the system (Keehan, 2015, p.391). Therefore, Keehan (2015) brings up the concern of how drama practices within the incarceration system(s) may be just serving institutional needs, and stresses theatre must not be utilized this way but be used for folks to

critically reflect on system flaws (Keehan, 2015). Whilst these examples demonstrate how theatre aids to reframe the perspective of folks fighting the stigma and living with mental health challenges, a critical perspective provides a deeper insight into the possibilities that performance provides at both an interpersonal and structural levels.

Performance can work with audiences to challenge negative connotations of mental health that are continually being promoted in mainstream society – there is opportunity for performance to challenge those notions by building a collective social justice discourse (Lundenmark, 2020). The process of storytelling, which includes playing with ideas through drama games, is one means of doing so. Barak (2016) believes that the power of playfulness facilitated by tools used in Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (1985) is an imperative aspect that connects well with Lundenmark's (2020) findings of a 'positive breathing space' (p. 72). For example, experimenting with theatre games in a supportive space helps one to express their imagination and re-approach life with heightened creativity (Barak, 2016). Building a positive environment brings solidarity, knowledge, sympathy, and playfulness to think in new ways and discover a greater understanding by connecting body and minds through the artistic experience (Lundenmark, 2020). Participants shared with Lundenmark (2020) how the co-construction of knowledge, developed into theatre, and performed in scenes with 14 psychiatric service users, nurses, and the project facilitator, opened a door to conversations about health injustice they encountered and provided medical staff with insight they would not otherwise have had (Lundenmark, 2020). This new insight was provided through sharing stories of unity, which were demonstrated via performativity by switching roles of doctor and patient. During the performance switching roles helped to visually re-enact the patient's experiences with stigma in the hospital setting. This social action was done by showing audiences the patient's personal

perspectives, by reframing humanity. Therefore, by using performance to convey humankind as being a part of the same bloodstream, a critical creative expression helped the goal; of those in authority to reconsider prejudices about folks who live with psychosis (Lundenmark, 2020). Having options for folks to participate in something that is independently created, with no institutional influence, can support reconnections with an individual's community and build up resources for hospitals to learn alongside service users, providing a ripple effect within a larger pond where society is still seeping in stigmatic ideologies.

Returning to Keehan (2015), institutional influence can hinder theatre's usefulness if critical perceptions are controlled; theatre cannot simply be used to meet institutional directives but must be a tool for critical reflectiveness. Technique wise, Keehan (2015) suggests practitioners discover the most appropriate method for Participants by considering the group's demographic needs, and not those of the institution. For example, for theatre to become an effective rehabilitation method, activities conducted through performance should acknowledge the fragility of many people's mental health within the prison system – for some, participating within an alternative modality may cause reluctance (Keehan, 2015). Reluctance was also experienced by the Participants in Northern Ireland, who experienced difficulties of trauma and isolation caused by stigma associated with mental illness (Heenan, 2006). Stigmatizing judgement resulted in Participants expressing hesitancy in participating in an artistic social service, but folks agreed to engage because Participants felt traditional services were inaccessible and not user friendly (Heenan, 2006). Through creative expression, Heenan (2006) reports that creative arts were an outlet for those affected by stigma. Study outcomes describe how critical reflectiveness with art helps to confront how stigma was preventing folks from fully participating in society and that community judgement controlled their actions (Heenan, 2006). Other

outcomes indicated how use of the arts help to uplift community capacity, promoted social

inclusion amongst diverse populations and provided a platform for self-expression, which led to

self-esteem growth within a safe(r) space (Heenan, 2006). For example, self-esteem is a major

component of how performance can address mental health identities, with techniques such as 're-

scripting', which was documented to challenge stigma within an individual's personal narrative

resulting from incarceration (Keehan, 2015, p.392). Keehan (2015) shows how including diverse

perspectives with constructive methods can help to consider how theatre can be both an outlet for

personal growth and a challenge to a systemically flawed and judgemental system, noting too

that theatre and art practices needs to be sustained and to address critically problematic potential

as much as positive outcomes.

Returning to Lundenmark (2020), taking a community led approach when discovering 'a

positive breathing space' added that not everyone wanted to be a part of the performance (p. 72).

What was agreed upon was having the feeling of a 'positive spirit' after the performance and

how theatre brought medical staff and service users together to have a critical discourse on

mental health treatments was the most significant (Lundenmark, 2020, p. 72). Heenan's (2006)

research also demonstrates the therapeutic effects of art benefiting community through inclusion

and social recognition. For example, positive impacts of critical performance happened by

questioning ways societal judgement fuelled stigma and by confronting that, they were no longer

suffering in silence and grew a stronger confidence as a community (Heenan, 2006). Keehan

(2015) supports Heenan (2006) by echoing this sentiment of art bringing forth an alternative

approach to addressing change in identity with social transformation. When individuals have

creative control, performance enhances personal freedoms and transforms oppressive spaces by

unpacking systemic and historical trauma. Furthermore, Heenan (2006) suggests how the

performance processes could influence policy makers, so they can become more aware of the

constructive effectiveness of art based social services within communities (Heenan, 2006). Thus,

critical theatre discourse can open a possible pathway for discussion on how stigma can affect

individuals. Performance can provide a platform to challenge societal judgements, confront

larger systemic issues, and demonstrate ways to handle oppressive practices. As well, it was

strongly suggested, for performance for social justice to be effective, communities must have the

creative freedom to critically acknowledge barriers and injustices through their storytelling.

Therefore, one can argue that the performances must be owned by said community (Thornton,

2012) and be independent from any institutional influence on its social justice message.

2.4 How can Theatre Support Community Reunification and Well-Being?

When examining how critical theory can encourage social change within a community,

Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010) talk about how democratic ideals do not have predetermined

solutions for oppressive situations. However, critical theory and critical evaluation can provide a

pedagogical process that encourages a more just society, strengthening social capital through

citizen deliberation and having social discourse about equitable practices (Freeman &

Vasconcelos, 2010). An example that supports an equitable artistic approach can be found from

Wenche Torrissen and Theo Stickley (2017). Researchers looked at a community theatre group

working with folks living with mental health challenges and examined the relationships formed

while participating within an equitable approach. It was discovered that the theatre group had

one goal in mind: to bring community together (Torrissen & Stickley, 2017). Torrissen and

Stickley (2017) studied a community group called the Teater Vildenvei theatre company, who

have used participatory theatre in over 30 productions to support a creative collective toward

having a social deliberation on mental health. A critical narrative perspective was used, and this

group-led storytelling process was found to help bring forth recovery and a sense of belonging within an artistic democratic process (Torrissen & Stickley, 2017). Keeping social impacts in mind, Twardzicki (2008) also found that stigma surrounding mental health had ecological effects. Stigma vastly impacts folks within all social circles, including family and friends, and can filter into an entire community (Twardzicki (2008). The arts – in this case, storytelling – were used to encourage equitable inclusion by integrating the entire community into a project for a common goal - to create a performance to challenge stigma and ill-informed, discriminatory attitudes about mental health (Twardzicki, 2008).

The power of bringing community together through storytelling is connected to Boal's (1985) work. Twardzicki (2008) expresses Boal's (1985) ways of community-led theatre for addressing injustice and disconnect by facilitating social inclusion toward potentially restoring community harmony through the discussion of social justice through creative modalities. Thus, community creations can result in "connectedness and belonging" (Twardzicki, 2008, p. 53), who understood this to be vital for recovery, which links to the importance of health and wellbeing (Torrissen & Stickley, 2017). For example, by bringing together folks living with mental health challenges with students and health professionals, social capital and community engagement were promoted, which resulted in community unification and well-being (Twardzicki, 2008). A community led project that includes all members encourages a vast range of critical views to be evaluated; views that may not coincide with those who have social dominance As Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010) explain, critical theorists have a goal to engage with stakeholders who may not have the same values, views, practice, or community, so "transformation of individual understanding" and everyday beliefs of oneself and others can evolve through knowledge shared through community engagement (Freeman & Vasconcelos,

2010, p. 11). Therefore, this idea of transforming social understanding can potentially bring an opportunity for community members to reach out, as a team, to stakeholders and share collective information gathered. This transformative social process will not only help to bring back supports for folks but fuel a stronger demand for inclusive communities and solidarity. However, systematic failure can impact solidarity. For example, when social services have overly high costs and/or do not provide options for alternative supports, it can result in a lack of access. A lack of access to social services can also include folks who do not feel comfortable with traditional therapies. Another example that lends to this social issue is found in an article written by Elanor Stannage (2017) who advocates for equitable artistic modalities for well-being and as a catalyst for community connection. Next in Stannage's (2017) study, they found ways performance can help folks living with mental health struggles by using dance as an outlet for collective therapeutic connection with artistic collaboration.

Dance as a modality for social discourse was promoted with an equitable approach. It was seen to be supported by shared risk-taking, collective resilience and connecting during a time where folks experienced social and economic uncertainty (Stannage, 2017). Stannage (2017), addressed these said obstacles by exploring how arts can encourage sustainable ways of engaging in therapy by studying this alternative dance group. Stannage (2017) reached their findings through qualitative interviews and by photographing dancers on their mental health journey at their sessions. Dance demonstrated how emotionally charged a performance can be and can be used as an inspiration for solidarity toward a critical discussion on mental health. Movement documented from these performances conveyed an emotional chaos while simultaneously promoting peaceful forms of "precariousness and groundedness" in a duality that also helped to build familial bonds and trust (Stannage, 2017, p. 155). This links back to Boal

(1985) who speaks about how creativity has an important role in folks' wellbeing. Connection to the creative process can challenge an individual's perception, by developing an enhanced sense of value through community performances, which highlights marginalized views and counteract stigma (Torrissen & Stickley, 2017). In this instance, dance built a space for group discourse for artists to reflect on their well-being, play with collaborative art, rehearse as a team, and perform. At the same time, the dance space also provided an environment to call out injustices and challenge a neoliberal agenda, which included unaffordable therapies that negatively impacted community healing (Stannage, 2017). In this way, the artistic experience brings forth "love and social belonging" and the opportunity to "find hope and belonging", all of which shape an individual's wellbeing and connection to their community (Torrissen & Stickley, 2017, p.51-52). For example, when students and service users discussed working together on a theatre production, they spoke highly of learning from one another, stated they gained a better understanding of their community which resulted in an openness to continue working alongside diverse populations (Twardzicki, 2008). Therefore, it is implied that communities do not have to be a metaphorical island when it comes to healing and addressing social injustices.

A common thread that emerges from this discussion is how critical thinking during the artistic process helps to push Participants out of their comfort zone by focusing on positive qualities and breaks habits (Stannage, 2017). Critical processes that push folks out of their comfort zone, "...Interrupts neoliberalism's negative, fear-mongering mode of precarity that imposes insecurity for the many in the interests of enormous wealth of the few" (Stannage, 2017, p. 155). This interruption indicates how in the neoliberal environment there are high costs to mental health aid, which puts pressure on the individual. Choice is taken away (Stannage, 2017). Having a community space where familial bonds can be developed and arts can be used as a

modality for critical discourse on social issues to build collaborative community, can then

challenge neoliberal agendas by offering affordable, drug free therapies that promote community

inclusion (Stannage, 2017). Therefore, one can theorize that autonomy can lead to individualized

approaches to therapies that may both challenge neoliberalism and promote self acceptance.

      Moreover, when discussing the positive qualities in using creativity critically in

Twardzicki's (2008) study, they documented folks having feelings of positivity, well-being, and

the accomplishment of having challenged stigma with a community-based theatre project.

Participants stated feelings of inclusion and "integration within the local community", felt more

confident and listened to, and reported feeling their health was enhanced, as well as positive

feelings when being a part of a community project (Twardzicki, 2008, p. 70-71). In Stannage's

study (2017), group dance was reported to support the development of resilience with performers

growing relationships through creativity, group goals and social reliance, feeling needed and

having accountability to their peers. Sharing an artistic experience of "precariousness and

groundedness", this quote paraphrased the Participants dance experience as feeling present, yet

unsteady, which merged into a collective voyage toward mental health recovery (Stannage, 2017,

p. 155). Returning to how stigma can affect recovery, Torrissen and Stickley (2017) explore

Erving Goffman's theory of "spoiled identities", and how stigma is understood to ruin folks'

self-perception. Performance in theatre can recreate a new identity as an "actor" can evolve from

negative identities and stigma with a newfound self-perception through performance (Torrissen

& Stickley, 2017, p.52). This process is echoed by Bridget Keehan (2015) who talks about how

re-scripting the self through theatre process can bring forth newfound identities with folks who

are incarcerated (understood by many as a spoiled identity). Additionally, positive self-narration

and feeling heard, thus receiving social validation, can help a person to feel accepted with a

group, transitioning into gaining acceptance from greater society. This idea of self-narrative can also be explored through community led theatre initiatives. To explain further, when a person can share their lived experiences and be accepted, this can help an individual heal from their previous negative self-narration and this impact can help bring forth greater community unification. By challenging insecurities through a performance or, storytelling and group arts can challenge damaging self-narratives and bring communities together that can challenge audiences' perception. Moreover, performing groups can also discover a sense of belonging, enhance folks' skillsets, and provide a newfound network of friends (Torrissen & Stickley, 2017). When reflecting on the data with a critical lens, critical social theory can ground theatre as an educational tool for social change: "...Society can be 'improved or altered through education and intervention" (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010, p. 8). Therefore, with theatre as a tool for education and for reunifying community bonds, communities can change, grow, heal, and reconnect for a path to justice, making and finding newfound well-being with the achievement of the final product.

  When folks feel they belong and are a part of an inclusive space, it has an ecological effect. Members who may have felt previously excluded, who now feel included can give back to greater society by sharing their newfound skills with community and promote further well-being for others. Thus, arts-based initiatives within local community spaces may be beneficial for societal healing. Therefore, social work practitioners could produce similar artistic projects that would result in constructive social change within micro, mezzo, and macro settings (Twardzicki, 2008). The power of a community is discovered through theatre, working on personal issues with a non-overt "therapeutic paradigm" to achieve psychological change, with attention on bringing positive change in the community to increase social awareness and encourage an

emotional release (Torrissen & Stickley, 2017, p.47). The idea of challenging inaccessible social services, by using alternative therapies to help achieve an emotional release resulting in building social awareness toward community unification is shown with Stannage (2017). Dance performance was an emotional release and provided an alternative healing modality that went against neoliberal pressures found with traditional talk-based therapies (Stannage, 2017). From these articles, it is insinuated social services may encourage conformity. Thus, the idea of using a creative release to achieve individual, interpersonal and social change, can be supported by using community arts to help push against this tension. Therefore, by providing creative growth for one's autonomy, may help folks to use performance for personal and social justice, resulting in building toward community unification and inclusion.

At this point I ask; how can collective theatre productions and performance operate when congregating becomes illegal and dangerous to your health? Social distancing during 2020 and for the majority of 2021 has affected how theatre and performances operate. How can the move from in-person to virtual contexts accomplish social justice? How will we work to support community well-being and reunification post-pandemic, and help to heal those broken and lost connections stemming from quarantine? Some developing information is emerging as to how live performance has changed and how the roots of community theatre need to be a part of the ongoing conversation for future healing. The above review of the literature represents only a fraction of existing ideas on theatre for social change and social justice. It has however unpacked themes that were the building blocks of my thesis research. Finally, social awareness of the positive and negative attributes of performance for social change must be continually examined. Examining the potential of theatre for justice must come with a critical lens. This critical lens will be further explored within the project's theoretical framework chapter which follows.

Chapter 3 – Theoretical Framework

3.1 Theoretical & Epistemological Frame Paper: Performance and Social Justice

Fade Into:

ACT IV - INTERIOR (INT.) LISA'S APARTMENT – DAYTIME – LATE SPRING – YEAR 2021

Lisa is watching YOUTUBE and is looking up examples of performances on Image Theatre and Forum theatre. The stories told in the videos found are emotionally driven, powerful, and enlightening. Lisa begins to write.

LISA (VOICE OVER, READING)

Diverse stories are told to help aid folks in overcoming societal injustice by coming together as a community to fight unjust systemic elements (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). On a stage, lived experiences can be expressed through storytelling, language, and movement. Barbara Trainin Blank (2010) discussed how creative expression and performance can provide a social analysis. Blank (2010) suggested the theatre process can be an active and experimental modality that provide Participants a space to share stories, set goals, problem solve, express feelings and experience catharsis. Theatre is therefore implied to be a possible method to enhance cognitive and communicational skills, build community, and build an individual's self-esteem (Blank, 2010). Artistic expression supporting a healing modality is also conveyed by Blank (2010) where folks can act out through games, improvisation, storytelling, and re-enactments. This process of performance helps to process negative and difficult behaviours and unpack social issues on a public platform, without consequence, because of the actions being sheltered by the performance on stage. Having a stage to reflect on emotions, brings an opportunity to discover socialized truths with a dramaturgical analysis (Blank, 2010). Blank's (2010) explanations are examples of the potential that theatre and performance can have to help fuel societal action toward active change.

Lisa takes a pause as she thinks a little bit about this previous implication.

However, further reflection brings more questioning on how deeply can stories be produced on stage to promote advocacy and enhance social work relations with a community? How can creativity enhance an analytical framework while being informed by critical theory? Can a study of theatre for social justice be utilized by communities alongside critical theory? Can the arts be used for alternative means to elicit social justice? Can arts in communities grow its capacity with stakeholders toward collective action? Critically exploring injustices

and the above inquiries about social workers using theatre arts for
justice, can ignite one's impassioned intellectual curiosity.

Lisa turns back to YOUTUBE and looks for performance videos on Newspaper Theatre next.

Fade Out.

3.2 Applying Critical Theory's Theoretical Assumptions to a Thesis Inquiry

In this chapter I will describe the basic theoretical assumptions behind critical theory, which will be explored with evidence from theatre art researchers as it applies to this thesis inquiry, in particular, how performance – as a political statement – can be used by social workers for community justice. Next, I will discuss how critical theory is a compelling framework for a theatre arts approach to social change and how this framework is affected during the uncertain and tumultuous times created by the pandemic. Afterward, consideration will be given to implications for data analysis and the limitations of critical theory in conjunction with theatre arts for social change.

Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010) describe how language is carefully curated and crafted with unique perspectives on folks' lived experiences. Critical theory focuses on questioning and challenging uses of language and social discourse. Having a critical focus within community practice can arguably be utilized within theatre, because the aims of social justice can be integrated into performance within a public setting and shown to an active audience. Critical social theorists use various modernist perspectives alongside critical methods to expose truths and are aware of, "…What they [theorists] see as pervasive inequalities and injustices" (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010, p. 7). Consequently, in this chapter I will analyze how critical theory can be instrumental when researching ways social work might use theatre to expose truths of social inequalities and injustices. Theatre and performance are primary vehicles for capacity building within communities for social justice. As well, one must consider how the current global

pandemic has changed community social work and performance, more importantly impacted the lives of everyone. With its merging of two modalities, social justice and art, the uses of theatre performance hold the potential for more creativity within the field of social work. Critical theory can provide further insight on how to bring these two techniques closer together within a qualitative research framework. Research can facilitate an inquiry with a critical lens to discover how theatre may be used to address barriers, structural and systemic flaws. During a global pandemic it is especially evident that many injustices have been exposed and must be immediately addressed in a critical manner. Therefore, the queries that develop via critical theory's theoretical assumptions intertwine well with how previous researchers have engaged with performance for justice.

When it comes to critical social theory's basic theoretical assumptions, Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010) explain how both theory and evaluation share similarities during investigation, with common goals of justice being developed during analysis. Ergo, when investigating how social change can arise from critical theory, alternative artistic modes of practice are revealed to be motivated by critical reflection. Therefore, this section will demonstrate why assumptions of critical theory and inquiry are inexplicably connected within this analysis.

To start, I inquired how can data from analysed artistry be used to fuel societal action toward change? In Richmond, Virginia, a research group developed an art-based research project called REECH (Research Engagement and Education for Community Health) where local community context and knowledge were supported. REECH used theatre techniques such as playback theatre where community members shared stories with actors who then performed their concerns onstage, advocating for the community's needs. The data collected informed what

social issues needed to be addressed which in turn fuelled change in how research questions are

developed. Critical perspectives shared by Participants in this research offer opportunities to use

theatre for critical reflection and help to build trust with professionals, such as social workers and

community leaders. It has been reported there is a mistrust with professionals by community

members. Having supportive research relations amongst community members and a

communicational and critical process can potentially promote trust, build relations, and move

action toward social change and justice (Mosavel & Thomas, 2009). Critical theory articulates

how the inclusion of diverse perspectives and interests are key for developing a critical lens for a

community theatre project (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). REECH had used a critical lens with

their participating members, by having facilitators direct community members to communicate

their concerns through an arts-based approach, including having the community partake in

activities with a group of artists to engage with playback performance and graphic image-making

and researchers providing social research training to support community autonomy (Mosavel &

Thomas, 2009). Therefore, this example can inform how critical uses of the arts can influence

stakeholders to invest in communities toward social inclusion within field research.

     Recognizing then the potential for participatory theatre for social change, one needs to

ask the next question: how do stories promote advocacy and enhance relations in community

work? Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010) discuss a critical assumption highlighting how the

process of engagement is just as important as the final product. Political theatre researcher Sarah

Thornton (2012) notes how critical storytelling deconstructs oppressive structures and that this

reflective process is considered more vital than the final product. Thornton (2012) explains how

there are benefits to having quality art, but the main purpose of political theatre is connecting

Participants to the critical process, keeping in mind which power structures are at play and how this impacts the ethics of the performance (Thornton, 2012).

Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010) state that developing critical analysis via democratic values is aided by the promotion of collective decision making. In response, theatre can support community led decision making in a critical manner and promote yet another tenet from critical theory: critical reflection and self-reflection (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). Critical reflection fuels an individual's comprehension of an issue to discover truths that expose inequalities and injustices. Sarah Thornton (2012) discusses how, during political theatre groups, facilitators must exercise critical awareness during their production, including how power dynamics are formed. For example, critical reflection helps facilitators partake in a "participatory democracy", such as maintain ownership of the art to be by the community; not using inaccessible theatrical language (as is often used by educated elites); and using active participatory methods instead of passive ones (Thornton, 2012, p. 27). Nondemocratic facilitation results in tremendous disempowerment, which goes against the purpose of participatory theatre and basic assumptions of critical theory, thus reinforcing oppressive social structures (Thornton, 2012).

A more detailed example comes from a research study from Susanne E. Dutton (2001), who observed a theatre-based group entirely run in a critical and democratic matter. 'NC Playa'z', a hip-hop drama group, was developed and directed by the youth Participants; even the name was discussed and voted upon as a group (Dutton, 2001). The youths decided to study Shakespeare and reimagined Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. All project activities, from drama-based activities to production planning, fund-raising, casting and how the performance was run, were conducted with reflexivity, accountability and using a democratic process. The result was that the participating youth developed their growing capacity, honed interpersonal and problem-

solving skills, and took matters into their own hands. This example shows how theatre groups

provide more than just an artistic outlet; it demonstrates how youth development can be

supported without controlling interference from facilitators, thus reducing, or eliminating any

power imbalances that might have otherwise occurred (Dutton, 2001).

When critical reflection leads toward democratic values and the sharing of space in an

equitable manner, another assumption of critical theory is tackled. This assumption of critical

theory can address oppressive relationships by placing social inequities underneath a microscope

by producing an analysis toward exposing and questioning injustice and demanding social

change through the process experienced with critical reflection (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010).

Therefore, through a thesis inquiry, there is much potential within theatre practice for engaging

in a comprehensive, critical reflection to help expose power imbalances. This evidence brings a

compelling argument for how critical theory and theatre can educate, address false perceptions,

challenge barriers, behaviours, and injustices.

3.3 Compelling Critical Theory Frameworks & Theatre for Social Justice

Earlier the question was asked: how can creativity enhance an analytical framework

while being informed by critical theory? I found the answer to this inquiry quite compelling as

literature from and about Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire provided me in-depth analyses from

such a framework. Nichole Lariscy (2016) notes that Augusto Boal was inspired by Freire's

Pedagogy of the Oppressed and used Freire's theories to combine critical theory and theatre for

justice, and that the work of both can be integrated to support an innovative approach to

teaching, engaging, and providing learning (Lariscy, 2016). John Sullivan et al. (2008) also

discussed Boal's teachings from Theatre of the Oppressed and explained how a space for critical

reflection on behaviour and social injustices helps to reveal oppressions. The artistic process of

sharing stories depends on the innate habit of humans' desire to 'act', 'observe', and to be

transfixed within their drama of a transformative society (Lariscy, 2016).

What ways can performance within community work provide to a transformative society?

Theatre arts in social work can provide a unique setting for folks to participate and witness

stories to explore within, play with, share dialogue, and critically reflect, and even use

performance as an educational tool. Through performance, social justice-driven dialogue can be

conducted anywhere and in any formal and informal social setting (Freeman & Vasconcelos,

2010). Freire supports this ideology of dialogue providing potential for positive change toward

togetherness for humanity: "…True dialogue is infused with love for the world and for people,

humility, faith in humankind, and hope for positive change. Love is commitment to others and to

the cause of liberation" (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010, p.15). This sentiment exudes how

theatre and performance for social justice together elicit hope for positive change through

creative expression - perhaps especially important during the pandemic, as I discuss later.

Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010) stand by the conviction that society can be improved,

whether that be enhanced through education or with intervention, and that all social practices can

assist interventions through advocacy (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). This joins well with an

approach called 'Edutainment' which combines performance and education to teach people

about community social issues. This approach also has a long history in engaging community

with health concerns (Mosavel & Thomas, 2009). Jennifer McKenna (2014), a teacher from

Long Island, New York wanted to use drama to teach about fighting against homophobia by

performing scenes from <u>The Laramie Project</u>. In response to homophobic reactions from the

community, the project was cancelled by the principal. McKenna (2014) critically reflected on

this detrimental event, named the injustice and, with the class guiding the theatrical process,

supported the students to perform despite the school's institutional barriers. The class engaged in acting exercises, journaled, undertook research and wrote a performance, sharing stories on inequality, sparking discussions for community change (McKenna, 2014).

The idea of advocacy with and through drama education (like the Edutainment model) influenced McKenna (2014) and their students. The class believed in the possibility of improving society and by utilizing drama games, honed their performance technique and even changed their behaviour by becoming conscious of their own hurtful ableist language (McKenna, 2014), showing how the process was as vital as the final product (Thornton, 2012). At the end of the semester the class produced a performance called "Project Acceptance" where tolerance was the star and brought to the school a critical discourse on tolerance, which trickled into the community's mindset (McKenna, 2014, p. 86). Critical reflection through theatre games is, according to Boal (1985), a healing modality that can assist in bringing truths to stage and audiences, supporting the uncovering, and changing of Participants' own behavioural constrictions, and development of new ways of thinking to bring lasting change with direction for social justice (Österlind, 2008).

3.4 Implications for Data Collection and Analysis.

The implications for data collection and analysis through research on theatre for social justice can be understood through how one engages with the research process and dissemination. Joan M. Eakin and Brenda Gladstone (2020) explain how having a creative presence can aid a person in staying present within the research process, engaging both critically and creatively during analysis. This idea of staying present, to make something happen, can be explored through the process of acting. Actors are described as being, "…So wrapped up in the creation of behaviour that they frequently overlook what happens in the scene", that if actors are not aware

of what is happening and what changes are occurring, they must make something happen and ultimately some change must be effected within the scene (Shurtleff, 1978, p. 106). The process of making something happen in the moment of the scene could metaphorically be linked to the creative process by being aware of what is happening within the moment of said research process. The idea of effecting change with performance by finding your creative presence, along with having a critical inquiry, may also help to sustain an awareness of power structures while researching, which is especially important for research for social justice (Eakin & Gladstone, 2020). Therefore, the analytic devices that I used during data analysis, I believe, encouraged both critical and creative attributes to be at the forefront when analyzing qualitative data, including coding, identifying themes, memo writing and using a constant comparison method – all of which are techniques from grounded theory (Eakin & Gladstone, 2020).

When one is thinking creatively and qualitatively, Jennifer Mason (2017) encourages being critical and unconventional when selecting methods of interviewing and to understand one's own logic of seeking out an enquiry. However, Mason (2017) also suggests not curbing creativity, but asking questions and considering methods that will not constrain your Participants. With this inspiration to think openly and creatively, critical reflexivity steered development and conduct of the qualitative interviews and my analysis of semi-structured interview data, media, art, films, live performances, scholarly articles, photography, poetry, online written works; all to help me discover key themes and begin to uncover the intellectual puzzle on how performance can serve social justice (Mason, 2017).

3.5 Limitations of Critical Theory for Theatre for Social Change. To begin, there are limitations to how deeply theatre for social justice can engage with a critical social worker's lens during a global pandemic. Karen Healy (2001) describes the importance of critical social

workers engaging with practice theories that focus on being critically aware of social structures –

such as theatre arts. For example, power imbalances caused by funding and logistical challenges

occur frequently in the theatre arts, with some stakeholders (e.g., funders) controlling the social

justice agenda of the performance (Sloman, 2011). According to Healy (2001) combining critical

theory and an art-based approach (like theatre for social justice) can hone a community's skills in

being critically responsive to challenges. However, use of the arts may be deemed to be outside a

social worker's immediate professional scope, especially so with the changing climate of social

work in today's pandemic crisis. Social workers are confronted with ongoing injustices; violence

and genocide against Indigenous and BIPOC populations, the impacts of socio-political

challenges, battling populations with opposing views, protesting with marginalized individuals'

rights, seeking supports within a failing health system, and managing COVID-19's current

economic fallout, all the while taking the necessary steps to critically address numerous

structural flaws (Healy, 2001). Any analysis of how the arts may influence social justice must be

met with a critical recognition of how systemic issues and the pandemic affect theatre practice,

social work practice and global cooperation.

     In 2001, Karen Healy wrote about growing injustices and 20 years later those unjust

atrocities are amplified. This thesis is a call to action to address a widespread growing injustice

of therapeutic inaccessibility and how, whether in 2001 or 2021, critical social work practice

needs to grow toward alternative forms of engagement with individual, communities and social

issues. Healy (2001) calls for social work to attend to capacity building in critical social science

theories and concepts. Drawing on the research literature, I am arguing for capacity building in

social work in the critical use of the arts for social justice, recognizing too that, in a pandemic,

both art and social work must continually adapt. Nevertheless, both may be forces for change.

Chapter 4 – Research Design and Methods

Fade Into:

ACT V - INTERIOR (INT.) LISA'S APARTMENT – DAYTIME – EARLY SUMMER – YEAR 2021

Lisa brushes her hair away from her ears. She looks at a textbook written by Jennifer Mason (2017). She nods contemplatively at it.

<div align="center">LISA (VOICE OVER, READING)</div>

Lisa takes the textbook and flips through it; understanding what she needs to write, she begins.

> I want this research to explore both the barriers and the potential of the use of theatre arts for social work and community practice toward social change. However, under the current conditions such as those posed by the COVID-19 there are implications going forward into a post-pandemic world. Critical Theory has lent itself to be an anchor in my research. Throughout my research, using a critical theory lens has been a complement to methods that have assisted me through the progression of development of my research, data collection and analysis. Therefore, the research happened in three parts, and was built similarly to a theatre production process. The pre-production stage included numerous reflections, preparations, ethical considerations, and planning the research structure – theoretical and methodological frameworks, research methods, and data analysis strategies. In the production stage, I conducted the research with an ongoing critical reflection, using qualitative semi-structured interviews, background research, literature reviews and social work and performance ideas. Production also included data analysis. In the post-production stage, I considered how best to represent the data, in a way that felt true and useful to me – in an artistic, performance-based way.

Lisa poignantly looks upward; the warm sunshine gently touches her eyes.

> These three stages positioned critical theory as a metaphorical 'lead director' with, figuratively speaking, a cast and crew performing a story about an arts-based approach, which starred qualitative interviewing, journaling, a constant comparative method (to code data), thematic analysis (to unpack the research), and Ethno-Screenplay and Creative Analytic Practice (CAP) (to present and discuss the findings and to tell a story that might encourage critical discourse). All these steps are informed by my previous experiences in the film and theatre industry where the production process is carefully conducted and, in the case of my research, was heightened by a critical and creative process to engage with the perspectives shared from the data. This chapter will go through each of the production steps

> outlined above and discuss how research was conducted. Lastly, to
> introduce the thesis' research statement: theatre community work has
> been impacted since COVID-19 with social distancing and other
> public health and safety measures. The significance of this shift
> occurring within community work has sparked an investigation of the
> implications of COVID-19 safety protocols for theatre. Exploring how
> theatre and performance-based facilitators, social workers and
> community leaders are implementing these creative efforts will
> provide examples that may prove beneficial for social work practice.

Lisa takes out her textbook, she reads it for a moment, smiles and then keeps on writing.

Fade Out.

4.1 Reflecting on Ethical Considerations & the Ethics Approval Process

Pre-production work included securing approval for the study from the McMaster

Research Ethics Board. As part of this pre-production work, I considered ethical considerations

that might arise in my research, and I took direction from Patricia Leavy (2017) while doing so.

This work included journaling with a critical lens as to who might benefit from this research and

how this research topic might promote new learning and guidance toward using performance for

social justice and change (Leavy, 2017). I dove deeply into how I would engage in the research

project, which included morally reflecting on who and how I would seek out Participants in an

uncertain social climate such as had been created by COVID-19, while ensuring that I did not

fall into a conflict-of-interest situation because the kind of networks I would be exploring for

recruitment would be familiar to me and interconnected (Leavy, 2017). My main goal was to

protect the Participants as per Leavy (2017) who believes it is imperative to do no harm. The

MREB was supportive, providing vital direction about conducting qualitative student research in

a pandemic, and there were many additional requirements designed to support Participants'

comfort and protect their privacy when conducting research online. Approval for the study was

granted on May 17, 2021.

4.3 Process of Participant Recruitment and Using the Internet for Networking/Selection

Pre-production planning, i.e., planning in advance, was key to being able to recruit

participants in an ethical and efficient manner. This attitude was directly influenced by my years

as a producer where planning was crucial for a successful production. To recruit Participants, I

took the necessary time to search for folks on social media or through personal contacts in both

social work and personal theatre networks and thus used purposeful sampling and snowball

sampling which proved successful in securing an appropriate number of Participants for the

study (Neuman & Robson, 2012). There was a conscious effort to work with a small sample size

in order to allow for in-depth interviews and enable Participants' stories and voices to be the

primary focus of the thesis' data collection. To ensure there was no conflict of interest, I did not

reach out to faculty members at McMaster University who were teaching me, including neither

my thesis supervisor, my second reader nor the graduate chair in the project. I defined my

Participant criteria by narrowing down my search to particular qualities. Those qualities included

that the individual was someone who was a community leader, facilitator, teacher and/or social

worker. Said individual would also have had participated in performance with groups and

individuals prior to the pandemic and have continued working during COVID-19 in performance

arts with groups and individuals. In speaking to potential Participants, I explained the research

study as an exploration into how performance was used for social justice within their

communities prior to COVID-19 and how that endeavour was affected by the ongoing pandemic.

In addition, I shared that the research was also interested in what Participants thought might be

possibilities created by online performance work for community-based performance work post-

pandemic. With these criteria, I was fortunate to find 4 social workers and community

leaders/teachers who were working within community theatre and performance during the

pandemic. I recognize that a lot of folks have not been working during the pandemic, therefore, it

was a gift to find individuals who were still active within their respective communities, still

practicing performance for social justice.

The Participants who supported this research were drawn from various social work and

community leader groups and organizations. They described their roles in a range of ways; two

as artists primarily, one as "a social worker who is also an applied theatre facilitator and also an

artist" and one as a social worker using arts. The Participants brought a range of work

experiences including academic research and engagement with community-based and arts

organizations. The Participants were all adults and identified as social workers, teachers and/or

facilitators. They all use performance techniques within their research, teaching and/or practice

with communities with a focus on using performance for social justice and community growing

purposes. They chose their pseudonyms, and I use gender-inclusive pronouns to describe them

(as I forgot to ask their preferred pronouns). Consent processes, like recruitment and qualitative

interviews, were done virtually as a result of pandemic restrictions.

4.4   Data Collection: Semi-Structured Qualitative Interview Guide

Jonathan Gross (2021) talks about the "Political Imagination" – taking the past to inform

and "Create the scripts for the future". This process would include taking ideas that occur when a

crisis has or is happening that may, in fact, be hidden away, and that through this process, new

ideas can be discovered (Gross, 2021, p. 7). Inspired by Gross (2021) in pre-production I

developed the questions I would use in qualitative interviews with participants. First, Participants

were asked to share their pre-pandemic experiences with theatre for social justice, followed by

their views on what theatre looks like during a global pandemic – the impacts of social-

distancing and other restrictions on their practice and on the communities, they work with, as

well as how they have continued their work in the pandemic. The second focus was designed to

identify both challenges and creative problem-solving. I then asked Participants about imagined

consequences of the pandemic on theatre and the use of performance going forward. This

discussion included attending to which attributes or changes to practice brought on by the

pandemic they wished to see continued and which they would like to see stopped. Moving the

interview through this progression of time was useful in facilitating discussions as to what can be

learned from pandemic experiences that might shape Participants' practice post-pandemic.

The production phase begins with data collection. Each of the 4 Participants spoke with

me in a one-on-one setting, online in a Zoom interview that took between 45 minutes to a little

over an hour to complete. The timing conveniently fit well into the Participants' schedules.

Consent to participate was given orally, with permission also given to audio and video record the

interviews. I used a detailed production process that included setting up a space that would

provide a comfortable and inviting environment. I presented myself in a way that would invite an

openness as an important goal of providing a space that would put the Participant in control and

bring forth a safe(r) space for reflection.

4.5 Data Analysis

As noted earlier, data collection was directed by critical theory so, when speaking with

the Participants in our semi-structured interviews, a critical lens guided each conversation. I

typed up journal notes I had made immediately following each interview, saving these on my

password protected computer and in my secure McMaster drive account. While reflecting on the

data in the processes of transcribing interview recordings and transforming each of the

interviews into a screenplay format (which is explained shortly), I used a critical lens to guide

my reading of the data and my analysis of it. Taking into account ethical considerations, and

being informed by a critical theory lens, I had to consider carefully how I would utilize the data

collection and therefore how I would work to take a critical world view with the qualitative data when analyzing through an arts-based practice. Thus, I was "actively acknowledging and accounting for one's biases, values and attitudes" (Leavy, 2017, p. 100). Utilizing a critical theory lens, I used thematic analysis and constant comparison methods during data analysis, along with ethnographic screenplay (Berbary, 2011) to analyze and present my findings.

My analytical strategy involved identifying the common themes across the interviews. Beginning with the first interview and associated journal notes, my focus was uncovering through the data the main themes for the creation of a final screenplay that would consolidate data from the 4 transcripts. I used a thematic process and focused on becoming acquainted with the gathered data. To do so, I used journaling with an "analytical element", as well as a critical lens in my reflections on the data (Alhojailan, 2012, p.42). I made sure that I took time to reflect and journal after each interview, to write down any immediate ideas and enlightenments, any emerging themes, and to draw relevant literature into the process. Everything flowed into the analysis where I took time to look over all the interview materials again (the interview transcript and video recording), to discover common themes and messages that the Participants were communicating. I coded those themes with different colours to help obtain an understanding of the data collected (Alhojailan, 2012). Whenever I was reading over data in my critical journal reflections, I had to think about why participants' answers, reactions, and thoughts (including non-verbal behavior) fit into a particular theme (Alhojailan, 2012). After doing so, I would go back and write a critical analysis on my thoughts and ideas, questioning everything I discovered, which further helped to put the data into themes.

I utilized Glaser and Strauss' constant comparison method to code the data, moving through each interview to search for similarities and differences within and across the

Participants' data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Finding similarities and differences came from reading the transcript from each interview more than once, and then alongside the interview(s) that preceded and followed it, as well as journaling my critical reflections throughout the process. Similarities and differences were colour-coded, a method that helped me to keep an eye on the nuances in the findings (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Through coding and categorizing, thematic analysis helped me to break the data down and find the patterns, the relationship between concepts and the data, and thus to organize my findings into key themes (Alhojailan, 2012). This process was further supported by using ethnographic screenplay writing, an arts-based approach which allowed me to present my thematic analysis in, what I felt to be, an engaging and presentable format to support my discussion of the research findings (Berbary, 2011). Presenting my thematic analysis as a screenplay supports my intellectual curiosity, because in this work I want to explore how to integrate performance and performance-making into social work research.

Nathaniel Kohn (2000) showcases examples of filmmaking/screenplays to demonstrate how text-making practices might help academics learn new ways of writing and making meaning. Kohn (2000) said, "Such ways of writing can create spaces for many and varied voices to rub up against each other in interaction and juxtaposition as they whiz around, by and through each other. These texts then become living and moving, changeable, experimental creatures" (Kohn, 2000, p. 187). When reflecting on this quote, it was clear to me that, what I was trying to do with my screenplay was to create living, breathing characters using the Participants' engagement with the research question, so the data could have a 'face' to complement the analysis. Lisbeth A. Berbary (2011) writes about ethnographic screenplays as an alternative form of data representation, a way to push the expectations of traditional research and represent data

differently (Berbary, 2011), and defines it as a creative analytic practice (CAP). Creative analytic

practices, such as ethnographic screenplays, do not have to follow specific rules and can break

down conventions when data sharing (Kohn, 2000). They are understood to be

"…epistemologically diverse, unanchored, free flowing, floating, and authorless", which

enhances their ability to showcase the nuances and complexities of someone's data in different

yet efficient ways (Berbary, 2011, p. 187).

Given my history of involvement in film and theatre, being able to showcase the data

from my research project in the artistic form of a screenplay, is familiar and comfortable for me.

It provides me with the confidence to have a grounded perspective of the data. I feel better

knowing I can share my data in a format that is comprehensible in a way that makes sense to me,

to (I hope) my Participants, and that might challenge readers to look at academic data differently.

Berbary's (2011) work provided a guide map against which to check my own work as I decided

how to put together my own screenplay. I made sure to obtain the Participants' consent, as well

as explore their feelings regarding turning their transcripts into screenplays and presenting their

data using a CAP approach. All 4 Participants agreed to the idea, and it was my perception that

they were enthused with transforming our discussions into a text-based performance piece as a

means of unpacking how performance might be utilized for social justice purposes. Each

interview transcript had, prior to coding, been transformed into a screenplay format. Thematic

analysis, coding, and constant comparative coding to determine key themes (as outlined earlier)

was done with the screenplay version of each Participant's transcript. Following this, all 4

transcribed screenplays were reviewed, and the text and non-verbal cues (which had been written

into the screenplay transcripts) were taken into consideration to narrow down the discovered

themes into scenes. This reduced approximately 200 pages of screenplay material to

approximately 50 pages which was then refined to create an approximate 30 minute screenplay
to represent the consolidated data from the 4 participants as the research findings, which were
then further unpacked (in the discussion section) using a critical lens.

4.6   Limitations

Since there was (at the time of writing this) an ongoing global pandemic, various
limitations emerged throughout the research process. This included the recognition that there are
additional research challenges and data limitations due to the scope of the project that would be
supported with further research to provide a stronger recommendation for using performance in
Social Work. The main limitation that I recognize is that this entire research project is a non-
exhaustive collection of examples, data, and literature that promotes and questions the potential
of performance for social justice. Even with the scope and size of the research study, I uncovered
so many more examples of literature that could not be included. As well, the sample size was
very focused and thus small. As previously mentioned, the purpose was to keep the focus on the
Participants' stories and voices, yet I found it extremely challenging to edit down the information
that was shared. I felt that a lot of themes had to be condensed and that proved to be difficult. I
also felt that many of the stories had to be left out and I felt challenged by that factor.

Another challenge was conducting interviews online. In a researcher-researched
relationship, Leavy (2017) discusses the importance of having a professional connection, which
is delicate. Creating a connection within an artificial online Zoom environment proved
potentially challenging (Leavy, 2017). I innately have a tremendous passion for performance and
went into social work to learn how performance can be used for social justice. The tensions that
occurred within my research came from my worry as to how I would conduct an interview that
would show, "…An ethic of honesty, integrity and caring" within an online platform (Leavy,

2017, p. 101). I worked to be mindful and not provide an altered mask of who I am as a person, which includes being non-judgmental, using my skills within active listening and, most of all, being grateful for another person's time (Leavy, 2017). I was validated by the ways my skills from the arts industries were transferable to an interview setting. However, I feel the barriers caused by COVID-19 restrictions limited my engagement with the Participants and I wonder about how in-person interview experiences, within the Participant's community, would have changed my data. On the other hand, I was able to engage with Participants that were not geographically close to me. That said, I could not have asked for better Participants; each person went above and beyond to paint a picture of how theatre was and is used within their respective community groups.

Chapter 5 – Findings & Discussions

5. 1 Introducing the Research Findings

Fade Into:

INT. (INTERIOR) LISA'S APARTMENT – DAYTIME – MAY – YEAR 2021

Lisa is sitting at her desk, typing away on her laptop. On the left side of Lisa's desk lie a few books; these include acting books, some on research methodology, and notebooks. On the top of the pile sits the book Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal. Lisa is wearing a light sweater and behind her a flowery dress is hanging. Above the dress she has stuck a post-it-note that reads: "3 pm meet everyone for coffee". Lisa turns on a desk lamp that illuminates her eyes which are focused with quiet determination. As she writes:

>   LISA (VOICEOVER, READING)
>
> Since I was a child, I have adored acting. Now, as an adult, I want to learn how to use an art-based approach for social justice purposes. I know storytelling and playmaking can bring people together for a common goal, but I am eager to learn from professionals on how to make that happen. My research has led me to seek out community leaders, social workers and teachers who use theatre for justice and use performance to challenge, while uplifting their community.

Lisa gets up and heads to the kitchen to get a cup of tea.

> Transition into:

INT. (INTERIOR) KITCHEN – DAYTIME – MAY - CONTINUOUS

Lisa takes the kettle and turns on the faucet. She fills the kettle up with water and plugs it into the wall. The kettle switch hisses as she clicks it on. She opens a cupboard, grabs a cup and a bag from a box of peppermint tea. Lisa sparks up with an idea and grabs a notebook that is conveniently sitting on the countertop. She writes with furious scribbles, and as she bites her lip, Lisa becomes immersed in thought.

>   LISA (VOICEOVER, READING)
>
> I also want to learn more about the impacts of COVID-19 on performance work with communities. Understanding these impacts will help inform my future practice moving forward. Along with my passion for performance for social justice, I hope this knowledge shared by the Participants will be supportive and therefore benefit art-based community workers and social workers

The phone begins to ring. Lisa answers it.

On the phone: It is a Participant asking a question about the project[1].

Lisa's eyes brighten with joy, when she hears it is one of the Participants on the phone.

> LISA
>
> Hi, yes, this research is going to explore a variety of elements of theatre for social justice. I have already critically explored many aspects of this in a review of some of the existing research. In that, I looked at things like the potential for using stories on stage to challenge stigma, break down barriers, and bring forth opportunities for healing in the community through creative connections.

Lisa tilts her head to the right and with a concentrated look on her face, she listens.

> Yes, I will be landing on the main issue at hand which is the pandemic. You are right, the pandemic has been all encompassing. I want to learn how the ways of working with community have changed through COVID-19 conditions and how theatre can potentially help folks to move forward in a post-pandemic society.

Lisa listens some more; she becomes elated as she speaks.

> I really do believe that using a screenplay format to present the findings will challenge readers. Using an art-based approach is not traditional for a thesis, but scholars like Lisbeth A. Berbary (2011) and Craig Batty (2018) have spoken about their experience of using ethnographic screenplay to present their qualitative findings as a way of engaging readers by pushing qualitative research in non-conventional, and more creative ways. I found that to be fascinating because I was trained to be a screenplay writer in college. I was hoping to ask for your consent for your interview be shared in this artistic format.

Lisa slowly smiles, she listens and is soon beaming with delight.

> That is great! Thank you! I am thrilled you are finding this format intriguing too. I appreciate your consent on this.

Lisa hangs up the phone, and quietly squeals with glee. She composes herself just as her kettle boils. Lisa clicks it off, takes the tea bag from the counter and places it inside her cup.

---

[1] In this re-imagining (Gross, 2021), for the purposes of the ethnographic screenplay (Berbary, 2011) the presenting of the findings shows the character (and researcher) Lisa answering the phone to speak to a Participant. Please note, as per the ethical requirements, at no point did any Participant speak to Lisa on the phone about the research. This scene was to creatively demonstrate permission given (by the Participants) to present the data using CAP (Berbary, 2011). Oral consent was given, to use data in an ethnographic screenplay format, at the Zoom interview.

As Lisa pours the kettle, the water sizzles over the fresh minty leaves. Lisa grabs the notebook and writes down one more thought.

LISA (VOICEOVER)

When reimagining a post pandemic society, one needs to understand the nuances, including how previous ways of doing performance for social justice may need to evolve to better support communities. When creating this thesis and developing the findings into an ethnographic screenplay the goal was to channel the key findings into a thematic analysis. As detailed in the methodology chapter, intricate processing took place that included continual critical reflection.

Lisa takes a sip of tea. It is hot, she makes a face. Lisa closes her notebook and places her tea on the counter. Moving to the adjacent desk where her dress is hung, she gingerly touches the fabric and breathes out with a soft sigh. Then Lisa looks pensively to the window beside her. The sun shines in with a bright brilliance of hope and inspiration.

Fade Out.

Cut To: *One Month Later*

INT. (INTERIOR) LISA'S APARTMENT – DOOR – DAYTIME – JUNE – YEAR 2021

Lisa, wearing the flowery dress, grabs a couple of notebooks and walks out the door with a skip in her step, she's quite excited to have coffee and interview 4 Participants for her research.

Fade Out.

Pre-pandemic, theatre productions brought people together for a common goal powered by passion and humanity. During this pandemic people had to stay physically distant, thus, artistic connection within the community had to drastically shift, and these necessary accommodations may have changed the landscape of theatre indefinitely. Going forward, combining a desire to express through dialogue with critical analysis, using an arts-based approach for emancipatory education could champion change post-pandemic toward healing (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). During the height of the lockdowns, I was extremely fortunate to be able to speak with passionate and experienced folks from the arts and be educated by their knowledge for my research. I was in a state of continual awe and admiration for their dedication for using performance for social change on micro, mezzo, and macro levels, with an array of

diverse communities. What I learned was the many ways their use of the arts, determination and genuine care can also support community growth and resilience. The vast amount of detailed and nuanced data I collected however proved to be a dilemma. I wanted to honour what they had shared with me, but I knew I would also need to make decisions as to how much I could include in my thesis.

I had conducted a thematic analysis of the interviews with Participants and a number of themes had emerged. Refining my analysis, I selected the key themes that best addressed the research questions guiding my work. I was already committed to sharing the findings using a screenplay format and had the Participants' permission to do so. I made the decision to share the research findings using a combination of screenplay (with any confidential disclosure retracted) and more of a traditional academic text format – along with angle brackets for added clarification. I arrived at this decision after re-reading the work of Berbary (2011) and Batty (2018). While I had interviewed each Participant individually, I drew on the work of Berbary (2011) and Gross (2021) to re-imagine artistically some of the data as a conversation between myself and the 4 Participants together. With their permission, a more collective story is presented in the screenplay, one which remains true to their words, but permits me to present the key findings in a way that highlights similarities and differences. Using a creative format, I felt I could unpack the nuances in their understandings of how performance has been used for social change in the past, how it has been impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and what we might learn to help guide community work in the future.

My analysis of the data first made clear what it was that the Participant's value most when using theatre and performance within their practice alongside their communities. It also made clear that for Participants, social justice is strongly connected to performance. In what

follows, I begin by identifying a few of the key values regarding performance for social change

that were held by the Participants prior to the pandemic. From there, I will focus on how

COVID-19 has affected performance work for social change. For the Participants, community-

based performance work has been compromised by lockdowns and other pandemic-related

restrictions resulting in the Participants having to make changes in their ways of working with

communities. The necessary shift to working virtually has in some ways limited social justice, by

making clear those who can access community arts online and those who can not. For others,

those community members with access to technology, moving online has provided new

opportunities for connections with others, and with theatre. Critically reflecting on these

findings, I will explore ways this knowledge could help inform future performance practice with

communities, for social change, within a post-pandemic context.

5.2 Exploring Social Values Pre-Covid-19

Fade Into:

INT. (INTERIOR) – COFFEE SHOP – DAYTIME – JUNE – YEAR 2021

In this reimagining, where everyone can meet in person, Lisa waits eagerly at a small booth at a coffee shop in Toronto, Ontario. One by one the Participants come through the door; Bo, Evangeline, Sarah Green[2] and Tessa. Each of them takes a seat and greet one another. Friendly chatter ensues and everyone becomes more at ease with one another. Lisa takes out her notebook and the chatter softens. The interview is about to begin, with Lisa looking at the first question in her notes. The Participants listen with keen welcoming curiosity.

                     LISA

          It's so incredible to meet with you all and have a coffee. Thank you for
          your time today. Being able to be together is so affirming, especially
          during these collectively difficult times.

The Participants nod gently with agreement.

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[2] The Participant 'Sarah Green' is not and has no relation to McMaster University's professor Saara Greene from the School of Social Work. Even though Saara Greene also participates in art based social justice ventures, the similarity in the names is coincidental. 'Sarah Green' is the pseudonym chosen by the Participant.

To start off, I would really love to hear what your thoughts are on using performance within your community practices.

Lisa waits while the Participants think things over. Tessa opens-up the discussion.

TESSA

Well, I'm the facilitator, it's their show, it's their experience – my job is just to help them facilitate it. If they learn, if somebody believes in them, they learn to believe in themselves.

Tessa gives a smile and Evangeline adds.

EVANGELINE

Like, when you give people time, and you give people space, something can happen.

BO

I'm trying to think about how I want to give all the power to them.

EVANGELINE

How do we share the stage? How do we share power on stage?

LISA

It sounds like your members must feel empowered during your group sessions, but why do you feel it is important to share power?

BO

I want to give all the power to them, because the power was held over me and my classmates and we were made to feel powerless, and that we had to do things their way, or else they would shut us down in the real world when we got out there. Their threat was looming over us.

TESSA

All decisions, I've talked with the kids, they do have input. It has to work for me or we're not doing it, but I want it to work for them too!

EVANGELINE

[I believe that] the actual experience of performing together is already political because it's changing a worldview of how you work together with people with disabilities.

The Participants think, while Evangeline lets the room breathe for a moment.

You create something that is unique, and [with] unique voice(s)… they're [the performers] saying something on stage; that we live in a world, that we're together, and why not create something together and perform it together!

SARAH

Sarah Green thinks for a moment.

Over the years, there's been a bunch of different plays on different topics that we were passionate about and we've kind of felt that this is what we're good at. So, this is how we want to try and help communities start conversations about things that matter.

LISA

Wow, so what I'm hearing is that leading with your group's input during the production is important for your group's creative process. But what do you think is most important for your artistic process?

SARAH GREEN

Collecting thoughts.

In the prison, we really emphasize the process just as much as the product. Because the whole thing is supposed to be a learning and a growth experience for Participants [and] it's got to be a good piece of theatre for people to be proud of it, and for the learning to all stick and [in] a really memorable sort of way.

TESSA

Everybody's got a place. I don't care, everyone's got a place, everyone has to respect everybody, and everyone gets to grow and improve through the art, and just learn and feel good about themselves.

BO

Bo thinks for a moment and sparks a thought.

I think the most important thing for me when I work with my students is that it's a comfortable and lighthearted safe space. Especially for singing, piano too. Especially for singing because, [the process] literally [is] a part of your body. It's vulnerable and personal no matter what.

SARAH GREEN

Safety allows us to be more creative because it's hard to share your vulnerable creative idea if you're worried about being judged. And we can judge each other a little bit, like, we've got to be able to say, "ah-

They say 'ah' in a high pitch sound, showing a thought of disagreement.

-I don't like that idea, it's not very good, actually". And then we talk about it, which can still feel…vulnerable, but the safety and relationships is important, and it's hard to build in some places, like, I'm thinking more of the prison, or if there's people that haven't worked with us before.

EVANGELINE

I've been working with people with intellectual disabilities. I lived in a home, creating home together so that was also, you know, a passion there, so there was this play that was put on and I hated it. I struggled through the whole play because it was written by a-

Evangeline uses air quotes to describe the word "professional actor".

- "Professional actor". And there was this thinking that people with intellectual disabilities couldn't really act, that they break the 'fourth wall'. They're just so open and vulnerable and yet I would see this one person constantly wanting to know, "where's my mark?" "Where am I going for this?" "What's this?" And I thought, no, [it's not that they can't do it] it's that people need time and space to develop.

TESSA

They [their students] grow autonomy, they grow confidence…They're like [for example], "Why is everyone freaked out about the oral presentation? So, you talk in front of the class, big deal!"

LISA

That's amazing! Can you tell me more about what you do to create a production that is focused on equity and empowerment, while promoting a safer space, such as inclusion for your members?

EVANGELINE

We would take as much time as we needed. When you think about, you know, accessibility. So perhaps people need a longer tech time, maybe people need a longer time to kind of understand what, [and] where we're going. But people can get there, and they can understand and, also, you create something that is unique.

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BO

I always encourage my students [to] try [a new performance/technique] when you're home alone. Try this one when you're home alone, because it is different… It's a different feeling and we're trying to find that way of learning to love your instruments, or your performance, and focusing on that and the moments that you love.

TESSA

And it's what's right for them. It doesn't matter if it's the best thing for creating the best show. Right, it's about their growth through the process. What we stage in the end, it's pretty darn good. But it's about the process and the growth of getting there.

EVANGELINE

It really has affected how I do what I do and why I work with people with intellectual disabilities. Because this is a group of people that often are not given the space [and] people are answering for [them], and if you actually give the space, and the education too, because I think people have a right to be educated.

SARAH GREEN

The communities that we find ourselves in, so whether it's a prison community or a school… or we've done lots of work in churches trying to help churches get their heads around justice issues. Wherever community is, we have a challenge to inspire people to get involved or to think differently or to care more, whatever it is. And that, links with safety and safer spaces.

BO

Well, it just comes with that idea of judgment or like, I'm going to run with a teacher or a person that's more knowledgeable than me on this topic, that I'm trying to improve on, it's intimidating. I've been in this situation a million times. I've had lessons like [previously said schooling experience] and it feels so vulnerable. A lot of the times, it feels like you have to impress, like we're always performing.

SARAH GREEN

We want to work for peace peacefully, justice justly, because if you're not nice to each other while you're making social justice art it's kind of hypocritical and not really what we want.

Sarah Green nods. A moment of silence falls on the Participants as Lisa processes.

LISA

So, do you feel that the theatre process can be a vehicle for political or community change?

EVANGELINE

I think there's also something about the theater process that people can be involved in that can create change in themselves, that is political too. And then, yeah, how something is presented on stage or how you do that can also, hopefully change people.

TESSA

It depends on how you define political. Right? But we definitely lead into a lot of conversations about important issues as they come up in the plays, because I would rather talk about something. If something's a little dicey we talked about it instead of cutting it.

EVANGELINE

Years ago, [at a performance], it was like an evening of many people who had disabilities who were performing dance – amazing dancers.

Evangeline poses with their hands outwards.

The MC was a person who had Tourette's and was just so comfortable with himself, and what was happening on stage, that for [me], even though I've been working with people [in the community], it shifted me, there was a paradigm shift that happened to me by going to this and just being involved and seeing things-

Evangeline sweeps their hands together to visually describe a shifting mindset.

-Done differently. So that I think that's kind of like, you want to create something where an audience member comes in and they leave maybe slightly, you know, thinking.

SARAH GREEN

We toured this play all across Canada, and went to several different restorative justice, conferences, as well as schools and churches and community theaters that kind of thing. And one example of a change is that we heard about two different specific women's groups that started up a visiting program where they now go to the local prison in their town, and they visit, and they have relations with people, and they help with re-integration. So, that's just one [example] and we often don't know the ripple effects of what happens after our plays. So, it's always really nice to hear when something like that happens. So yeah, that's one example I guess of social change that's come from a play.

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A wave of collective nods and quiet eyes calms the current conversation.

Fade Out:

In the above exchange, Participants reflect on the ways theatre work with communities –

before the pandemic – could provide a safe(r) space for folks to feel validated and to grow in

terms of skills, capacities, and confidence. Theatre is also a space where Participants, in

collaborating with community members, have found ways to shift power dynamics, to give and

share power through performance, and be political. As well, indicating that the creative process

should be considered equally (if not more) important, as the final product, to help support

learning (Thornton, 2012). The Participants appear to hold similar values and beliefs about the

power of performing as a pathway to learning new skills, and grow esteem, whether it be for

one's own self, or with others on a shared stage. Powerful impacts of performance are indicated

to occur within an audience and/or amongst community members. Theatre is described to help

promote critical thought and meaningful reflection on discovering a belonging through the

creative process. Stannage (2017) discusses the importance of the inclusion within a community

space and building familial bonds through the collaboration of the arts. It is also stated by Boal

(1985) that creativity is imperative to a person's well-being. It is also insinuated by the

Participants that performance for justice can be successfully supported by a facilitator who

knows how to break down power structures. Therefore, by confronting social hierarchy within a

community through creativity can help to shift unrealistic views on elitism via knowledge.

Being able to shift one's original ways of doing things shows an ability to recognize how

an unbalanced position of power impacts community engagement. When Heenan (2006)

discussed their study Participants' connection to their art-based group, they independently were

able to unpack generational trauma through sharing art as a community without elitist

intervention. Lundenmark (2020) also discussed how folks came together and created an

independent space for creative and social reflection through the common goal of sharing

performance, pushing against traditional therapies. It appears the Participants support the notion

they do not have to be in control, but instead aligning with their values for equity, for the goal of

their community to grow within their innate autonomy toward social sovereignty.

      The Participants' choice to focus on facilitating and sharing of power through the creative

process appears to break down unbalanced social structures within theatre. There is a need to be

critically aware of one's behaviour when placed in a position of power (Twardzicki, 2008). It

was strongly suggested performative social work can uplift its members, trickling back into

community, shifting ongoing unbalanced power structures. As stated by Stannage (2017) having

a space to build up familial bonds through critical social discourse can support a collaborative

community and enhance social wellbeing toward equitable justice. Therefore, it is implied folks

who engage in community groups may take their empowered experiences and share them,

potentially building others up from adjacent communities. Interpersonal relationships are crucial

to feeling accepted and included. Encountering a loss of inclusion may hinder recovery from

previous injustices. It is proposed that partaking in a community performance can support

feelings of inclusion with a support system toward individual, community and social change.

Participants appear to believe that the theatrical process can help bring people together, restoring

community harmony through exercising of power with creative justice (Twardzicki, 2008).

      An important focus of this study is the effects on community theatre of the COVID-19

pandemic. In the interviews, Participants spoke of the potential of performance: that bringing

folks together creates ways in which injustice can be confronted with arts (Twardzicki, 2008).

Thinking about the idea that community led creative efforts can promote well-being through

play, collaboration, rehearsal, and performance, can have positive impacts on communities, can

provoke justice (Stannage, 2017; Twardzicki, 2008), I asked Participants to consider how this might happen within the socially distant digital spaces that pandemic safety regulations have pushed community-based performance work into. Does the lack of direct physical interaction with community members support or muddle how power dynamics can be shifted? Does it support or limit opportunities for personal growth and development? Does it compromise connecting with communities? Can it provide a space to call out injustice? From analysis of the Participants' responses to my questions about the impact of COVID-19 safety regulations on their work, it appears that their values are also rooted in an understanding of theatre as a tool to achieve more inclusion for community members. Using theatre as a tool for social inclusion is accomplished in part by removing any notion of unbalanced power structures by including everyone, (audience member and performer/crew) to be shaped by the creative process. However, Participants talked about what happened within the context of the pandemic, and the ways that 'community' is reshaped when only those who have means to access technologies to support engagement in virtual community can participate, resulting in the rest being alienated from these opportunities and social connections due to a lack of accessibility.

The next scene will cover those community members who are further marginalized by impacts of the ongoing pandemic resulting in them not being able to connect with community and what those implications entail. Following that, I will share Participants' observations on how, at the other end of the spectrum, the move to virtual spaces has – for those with access to technologies – encouraged further community engagement and opened opportunities for greater inclusion and diversity of experience. These two impacts will be analyzed, with the Participants' stories helping to inform both sides of that dichotomy.

5.3 Impacts Of Covid-19 On Community Based Performance Groups

Fade Into:

INT. (INTERIOR) – COFFEE SHOP – DAYTIME – JUNE – YEAR 2021- CONTINUOUS

A buzz of conversation hums between Lisa and the Participants. Topics shift from what values were held prior to the pandemic, to advocacy being unpacked during COVID-19. This includes confronting how community-based performance work for social justice, by moving online, may marginalize community members even further through both relational and financial factors.

> LISA
>
> Since the pandemic, so much has changed. I am curious about how this current COVID-19 climate has affected your community-based performance work with your members?

> SARAH GREEN
>
> It's just COVID – isolation is really, really, hard for people, and people need community, and theatre helps bring people together to have a shared experience. And you can get a bit of that on Zoom but not quite the same.

Sarah Green slowly enunciates the word 'really', showing the gravity of the situation.

> BO

Bo breathes out and thinks before speaking.

> Some people, like, [have] almost fully gotten out of the online lessons. What I was giving them in person [they don't get online] and some people lost interest, they couldn't maintain interest with it, or the technical issues were too bad, and they couldn't carry on.

> SARAH GREEN

Looks off pensively.

> The thing that's tricky with our prison work is that we haven't been in [the prison] since [indicates a long time], we were about to do a show-

Claps to signify they were ready to go.

> -We had a dress rehearsal the day before everything shut down and the Participants had been working on it for months, they knew the lines, we were so ready to go and then, of course, the world shut down. So, that was pretty disappointing and pretty hard because of all of the unknowns. [Their theatre group was] Like always sending emails to the staff, who would… Send stuff on to our Participants; saying, "We're thinking of you", "We hope to get back in soon." Now it's been, over a year of potentially people feeling like we've abandoned them, potentially.

Looks off into the distance.

Yeah, just not having access to a lot of stuff, definitely not art at this time inside. So that's been hard.

TESSA

It's really hard when you've got someone who's struggling; you can't just go up to them and touch them on the shoulder to get their attention or go have a one-on-one conversation [in] the corner of the room with somebody to figure out why [someone is having a hard day]. And I'm not going to call somebody out on their behavior in front of the group, but it's very hard to call somebody out confidentially in a group, in a group call. Whereas in person, you can talk to the person for a minute off to the side, as people are moving into groups. There are ways to inconspicuously call somebody out on their behavior, without shaming them! And that you can't do that online.

EVANGELINE

While describing this, Evangeline leans forward to think.

Yeah. So, there's a part of me that does want to go back to live-

They laugh.

-Because I just think that I miss not catching, sometimes, the nuances of someone's facial expressions or their body expression, you know, I'm only seeing everybody here.

They square themselves from the head to the chest to gesture a screen.

I don't see, feet tapping. I don't. There's a lot that I'm not seeing. That kind of back and forth isn't always there.

SARAH GREEN

I'm really excited to be able to bring people together to connect over and through stories again, both the people who are actually creating at the prison and then also the audience. And that community experience is something that we need to get back.

Nods and presses hands together, looks out and thinks, sparking a thought.

[They're] Barriers to marginalized groups participating in art. I think that's one thing that we need COVID to be over for because…One of the things that I've been really excited about that got delayed due to COVID. It was a project with people who've experienced homelessness, telling their stories through theatre, and I'm really excited about that project. But it's like, there was no way we could have done it online, just in terms of access.

BO

It affects everyone really differently, but for me I feel like I've been doing the same things with the arts, but just online. And I know that's not everyone's experience but for me-

Bo nods their head.

[Digital] Doesn't feel too different, other than the intangible-

Bo pretends to touch a screen and starts waving at said imaginary screen.

TESSA

I also found that one of the things that was really hard was, you can't just focus on the one person you're talking to, right? When you try to make eye contact with one person you actually end up staring at everybody and it's weird.

BO

Bo pretends to be in disbelief when speaking to an imaginary screen.

What no? Like this screen?!

Bo laughs at this and returns to regular conversation with a pointed realization.

I'm actually alone right here.

Bo laughs softly with slight melancholy, looks down.

TESSA

I needed smaller groups to make it function well. I needed to be more authoritative than I usually am. I have ultimate say but I work with them mostly as equals. Yeah, there had to be a lot more, "not your turn, you can't talk" and calling on people, right, "Raise your hand when you want to talk", which has never been my style. We've always been more conversational. There was a lot more of going across my screen, "Okay you now, you now", you ask a question everybody answers. So, it was less of a natural conversation and more of a classroom type, "I'm calling on you now-environment". We made it work. That was, that was tough.

SARAH GREEN

One of the things in my past job in homelessness for the past four years was that the barriers to technology are just so significant. I got some of the people I was helping get into these online programs and one fellow, his fingernails were so long that [when] I finally got him a smartphone and he just couldn't use it. There are so many barriers.

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They stop themself.

> But there's always been barriers to accessing theatre. It's like quite a privileged pastime. So, what's one more barrier that now it's online. I don't know in some ways, maybe there's less barriers financially because a lot of it [is] free-

Reconsidering.

> Which is then hard for the theater companies to survive. There are some of the things that I'm ready to be over, but I know we'll never go quite back to the way it is before, and there's lots of silver linings.

> #### EVANGELINE

> It isn't easy. We're not going to be in the [name of theatre festival retracted] because of people's vulnerability, we can't… We can't even go somewhere and film properly or whatever. So, it's slowed a lot of things, it's really slowed things down.

> #### BO

> I do have hopes for the arts for the future… Maybe I'll get on that one day… Or there'll be someone else. [Focus on] Accessibility for people. It's not for the rich, "Down to [the] rich, eat the rich" – We need more plays about anti capitalism, every day.

> #### EVANGELINE

> I'd be really sad, and I think that would be sad that, [if] we become a digital world.

> #### SARAH GREEN

> Yeah. We know from research how bad social isolation is for people in terms of health outcomes, mental health outcomes, and especially for people who don't have access to technology. This year has been brutal.

Everyone grows silent as the word brutal hangs in the air.

Fade Out:

When reflecting on the impact of pandemic health and safety regulations, Participants were forced to adapt their practices to the virtual context. The Participants continually expressed their recognition that community members were going through difficulty as a result of changes to their lives resulting from these regulations. The Participants have shown that they worked to

address these challenges and adjusted their ways of working with compassion. One could argue that compassionate work and practising resilience was a means by which Participants worked to sustain hope and belonging during the pandemic. These online processes however are not the same as working in-person, yet each of the Participants has pushed on toward creating new, alternative ways of thinking about and engaging with their community.

Change for justice is not always just. The Participants expressed how the changes from health mandates shifted their ways of working, resulting in negative consequences for their members. These changes included Participants shifting their values, critically reflecting on their roles, behaviours, and ways they work with community. For example, Tessa explains how they felt pushed into taking on a more authoritative and directive role with the students she was working with, which resulted in Tessa having to be more mindful as to whether this was helpful or harmful. Tessa indicated that structure is something the students needed, something that was more difficult to achieve online. Tessa values being able to provide each student with equal attention, but this interaction was not possible online when you can't see everyone at the same time. Tessa experienced tension and was uncomfortable with being authoritative and with having to compromise their values in this way.

In advocating for social change and community building, Participants shared their belief that, prior to the pandemic, theatre and performance work with communities helped to create connections – between the facilitator and community members, between community members themselves, and with the broader society. Connecting through community is a powerful notion that underlies Boal's (1985) works of using theatre. The Participants indicate missing having community physically gather for a social cause to use theatre as a mode to confront various social issues on a public platform to help evoke audience reactions for social change (Boal, 1985;

Ramos & Bellerin, 2017). The use of creative performance methods can result in feelings of

"connectedness and belonging" (Twardzicki, 2008, p. 53), which has potential to lead to social

inclusion, community harmony and revitalization (Twardzicki, 2008). Therefore, this current

lack of physical connection caused by the pandemic is indicated to create a distressing

separation. According to Sarah Green, they stated they are unsure if their Participants feel

abandoned because of said separation, which can hinder an individual's path toward health and

well-being with their group's performance project (Torrissen & Stickley, 2017). As well, impact

possible progress that was being made toward social change (Twardzicki, 2008).

  The Participants also noted a multitude of challenges to working in a virtual space, and

the barriers they face in adapting their work to maintain and/or re-build relational connections

when using a digital platform. The use of Zoom for community work, for example, has limits in

terms of its ability to support facilitators to engage and connect with communities, or to re/build

community. When engaging with community online, Evangeline and Tessa note the difficulty to

pick up on body language and other cues because of the 'video box' that the screen puts each

person into. Engaging with and supporting people became much more challenging, less tangible

in Bo's terms. The loss of connection between community members that is possible in a physical

space is, for Participants, significant and understood to have negative impacts on the work itself

and on Participants' engagement with community members, and on community members' well-

being. For me, there is an undertone of helplessness, merged with resilience, when Participants

discuss how their practice and values are being challenged every time a project is cancelled or

pushed to an online space.

  In large part, online performance work is understood by Participants to be limited and not

always accessible. Projects were put on hold or cancelled altogether because they could not be

shifted to a virtual format. When work is on hold, in limbo, or when it is cancelled, community

members may – as Sarah Green previously stated – feel abandoned. Some community members

have found the use of technology to be difficult. Returning to Sarah Green, who mentioned the

fellow who was unable to access their smartphone – I believe this is a result of folks being

further marginalized, due to a lack of physical supports. Other Participants explained folks had to

leave their project for various inaccessibility issues. For folks already experiencing exclusion in

their lives, losing access to community for any of these reasons is indeed particularly brutal.

Talking about their pre-pandemic values, Participants stressed the importance of

encouraging social inclusion through the use of creative performance arts. Yet, the pandemic has

made plain just how inaccessible online engagement can be for members of marginalized

communities lacking access to technology – or the funds to pay for technologies and/or internet

fees (Fudge Schormans et al., 2020). Looking at community performance-based theatre through

a neoliberal lens, one can see that there are systemic failures resulting in those who lack access to

technology falling further between the cracks in so many ways (Keehan, 2015; Stannage, 2017),

including participation in arts-based work. Participants experienced this first-hand, pointing for

example to how people who are precariously housed are excluded from participation in online

work. As Sarah and Bo both notes, without access to technology, theatre and performance –

which were already inaccessible to many due to costs – is even more inaccessible, particularly to

marginalized communities.

The Participants' concerns regarding both the benefits and pitfalls of online performance

work with communities is supported by Gallagher et al., (2020), who make the point that there

must be awareness of how online platforms may both help and harm society. Their experiences

during the pandemic go against Participants' beliefs that community-based performance work

must be grounded in the philosophy of inclusion, work that is motivated to ensure anyone and

everyone in the community has access to it. Lack of access thus matters, impacting individuals,

communities, and opportunities to work toward social change. By virtue of who is and is not (or

no longer) included in this work, the community itself is reshaped.

5.4 Seeking Out Global Connections to Rebuild and Support Community Development

Fade Into:

INT. (INTERIOR) – COFFEE SHOP – EVENING – JUNE – YEAR 2021- CONTINUOUS

The day turns into dusk[3] and the Participants turn to sharing insights and new ideas on those aspects of pivoting to virtual formats during the global pandemic that have impacted their practice.

> LISA
>
> Have there been aspects of your experience with performance work during the pandemic that has helped to evolve your practice in a way that you found useful?
>
> TESSA
>
> We've been watching some videos… One of the advantages of the socially distance is that we did a lot more of things like, I've always told the kids they're not allowed to watch videos of the play we're studying. Because once you've watched a production, you see it that way, and I want them to interpret it their way. Right? If you've watched one version of Macbeth that's how you think Macbeth should be. I want them to decide how they think it [the performance] should be.
>
> BO
>
> I only see bad things online, but I fully believe that [good things] exists, and I've seen it, and that's a promising pathway, on using arts to heal people -

Bo thinks.

> By allowing them [audiences] to step their foot in someone else's shoes and experience emotions in a safe space.

---

[3] All interviews conducted, as per the ethical expectations, only took between 45 minutes to 1 hour. Again, this description is to add to the richness of the reimagining of the thesis' creative approach (Gross, 2021) of the findings.

TESSA

I expect what we're going to perform will actually be a bit of a mishmash of multiple ways, is what I'm thinking. And I can see them [The students work] watching screenings of recorded things. I found some wonderful podcasts and things. Incorporating those [digital elements] as, "Watch this YouTube video" or "Listen to this podcast", as part of homework, and I've never used resources like that ever, and that will definitely be incorporated in the future.

Nods yes, physically agreeing with their statement.

BO

We need to reflect on ourselves and be introspective and look at other people doing things, that are like us, and put ourselves in their shoes and try pretending to be other people [through performance] It's [performing arts] not going anywhere. It's just moving more to film.

TESSA

[A] benefit [was] when we were writing I saw, with the Google Docs, was that I could actually watch their process without it being as awkward. So, if I've got somebody working on editing something, I can see what they're doing, and it gives a much clearer insight into their minds. Whereas if you're sitting beside them watching them, write, it's really awkward, but when I'm in a different room staring at the computer screen, [it] actually ended up being a good thing. I had a couple of kids who actually participated more and were more comfortable online.

EVANGELINE

We're finding ways, but it takes a lot longer and things can get lost…. What we did in March [is] make an animation, for just our group, to understand what we did [during lockdown]. So, because we did all of this creative process before COVID but then COVID came, we broke up into groups [online] and we did things like, you know, writing a love letter to something you might have lost. [Another time] We had done a session on… How to take pictures-

Mimes a camera.

-And how to tell stories through digital storytelling. So, we were doing an online session about digital storytelling.

SARAH GREEN

Thinks for a long moment, looks outward.

Well, one thing that was cool about [title retracted/ online performance they produced] was that it was across the country, and we didn't have to pay for gas, like we had a [name of location retracted] show, we had an [name of location retracted] show and, just like that, people can be connected across geographical barriers, and hopefully probably also across other kinds of barriers. It's pretty easy to click on a link, a lot easier than to go to something far away where we are not comfortable.

EVANGELINE

There are some learnings to it. The other interesting thing is we do have people from [other geographical locations] that was part of our group and so, you know, it's kind of like the community builds a bit more too [with online work] It was interesting I mean, to be connected with people around the world.

SARAH GREEN

Just more collaboration between people who aren't geographically close, probably.

EVANGELINE

So, I think maybe [there is more] accessibility for people, [folks] have been able to actually go to theatre spaces and watch theatre and be part of it in a way that maybe they weren't able to before.

SARAH GREEN

When the prison project shut down and I couldn't do that anymore, I found out about all sorts of other people, mostly in the states [U.S.] who also have prison projects like theatre projects, and they have this network called [name retracted], and they met every Wednesday, which was used to be the night when I went to the prison and so then I just got to meet people and network with people from all over… Who are also doing this kind of work and I learned a ton.

Lights up when speaking.

I've met a lot of people actually in Canada who think like you and I do, and really are interested in using the arts for social justice and so we're trying to create like a Canadian network for arts and corrections. So that's something that's just kind of like an idea on the back burner but I think would be cool to just keep connecting likeminded people so that we can learn from each other and inspire each other. So that's something that would probably be a lot easier or more likely to happen virtually and now that we know that virtual connections can still be meaningful, people are probably more willing to engage, I think in an 'online network', sort of thing.

> EVANGELINE

Speaks with their hands.

> It's kind of doable. I think if we were to get back together. I would love to be together in a space with a few people connecting with someone in another country and doing something together.

> SARAH GREEN

> So, one cool thing about digital online theatre now is that you don't have to catch it live. Which kind of takes away the magic, a little bit, but [also] is a benefit.

> EVANGELINE

> I think it could open up for some people, more possibility. Including people who maybe have never been included in theatre, because they find it too much, maybe their mobility [is a barrier]. Like, [for] somebody who would be agoraphobic, [digital theatre] could be connecting to people when they wouldn't have been.

> SARAH GREEN

Ponders for a moment.

> Zoom theatre's a thing and there's another company called [name retracted] theatre, that's doing a lot of Zoom forum stuff, that's cool.…There's one other person in Canada that has programming and they're out in [location retracted] and they have podcasts that they've been able to go in [to the prisons] during COVID [with] the men who are incarcerated [and] have made an audio drama podcast together…. And so that's really cool because now anybody can enjoy their work. Whereas before you'd have to get permission to go to the prison… To see their plays, but now you can hear their plays. So, there are creative things that are happening that people are doing.

> TESSA

> I had one [person] actually tell me he likes online better because he can turn his camera off and mute when he needs a break. So, the ones who were a little shy and overwhelmed, it was easier for them. It was actually, [for] some of them, it was actually a better environment because they could sort of take a step back more easily and not be as overwhelmed by the simulation. That was a plus. And the ability to share videos and things. [It] actually started as an act of desperation but ended up being a positive.

SARAH GREEN

I had a friend say that they think that maybe forum theatre works even better on Zoom than real life, which is interesting. I don't know if I agree, but it does work well, because people can talk in the chat, which normally, when you're in person, like so many people don't say anything because they're too shy. So, yeah, it's been neat to see how well forum theatre works online.

EVANGELINE

I do get nervous when people go, "oh, you know, now we're just going to do all of this online, we've learned that we can do this, that we can work at home." And I'm like, oh no, no, no, because I still think there's something about humans-

They clap their hands, showing physical engagement.

-Being somehow [together physically]. But the learning for me is listening to someone saying, "yeah, for me, being physically connected with people is really uncomfortable for who I am."

Motions to themself.

And so now I'm like, "Yeah, okay that's great, let's find a way that we can do both".

They reach their hands out to different sides, metaphorically showing togetherness.

BO

It hasn't changed that much other than the feeling of just being in the virtual world…. Like [some] people actually practice more.

Smiles softly.

TESSA

It's very much evolving and I think that once we get out of this, we will have gained some skills, that will add to what we want. I want what we had back [pre-COVID], but I think we can make it even better by adding in some of the things we've learned by having to be online.

Everyone takes in the sparseness of the coffee shop, where a few folks are sitting glued to their phones or laptops. It has become clear the only ones talking is the group at the table. Pensively the group takes this in, understanding that folks are connecting without physical interaction.

Fade Out.

Upon analysis, the above scene saw the Participants indicate that while the online world may not be ideal for community-based performance work for social change, there are promising pathways that can promote accessibility and connection. For example, they spoke about gains for themselves as facilitators of this work who are continually striving for education and skills-building methods to enhance their own capacity to effectively support communities, acknowledging the possibilities created by using technology in their work. Modifying their community practice to a digital platform comes with compromise but has also led to the discovery of new ideas for engagement, for arts-based work, for doing things differently – ways of working they might not have considered otherwise.

The participants shared various lessons they had learned from online, one of which being the need to both recognize and advocate for the improvement of access within performance work. Participants talked about how they discovered that in-person performance work may sometimes exclude folks, may for example be inaccessible to those who may not feel comfortable when working with others in some physical spaces. Recognizing their own lack of awareness, they began to pay more attention to these issues in their online community works.

Other ideas were discussed by the Participants relating to the freedoms and possible benefits for community inclusion created by working in a virtual space. For some, technology-based communities may better support folks, especially during a pandemic where those who are at physical risk cannot engage in an in-person environment. If we are to challenge what can be considered a public space for performance work to include digital platforms, we might better support community members who do not feel comfortable speaking in in-person groups to be more active members of the group. For example, Zoom offers a chat feature which can be

supportive for folks who want to be a part of the conversation but would prefer not to engage verbally.

A digital space can also address the physical inaccessibility some theatre spaces have, including theatre spaces with stairs, those that are not accessible by buses, or that are just not physically comfortable because of how the space was built. Digital spaces were found to better support community members who needed to take frequent breaks, to listen with cameras turned off - a feat that could not be accomplished in a physical space. These features may in some ways support them to take control of the performance space and reclaim what might otherwise have been lost autonomy (Stannage, 2017). In these ways, it may be a form of social justice in and of itself. Virtual performance in theatre may also be more accessible for folks who cannot afford the strenuously high prices that it costs to attend in-person theatre. There are, however, larger implications related to this issue because, if the theatre companies are not financially supported, they may close, resulting in the community having less accessibility overall.

Working virtually was also understood to further increase accessibility by breaking down geographical barriers thus making the world more accessible to community members, which is something the Participants all leaned toward. Participants shared a strong desire to sustain those connections with communities that they already had. The ongoing pandemic, however, has pushed them to seek outside resources and to build new connections to inform their own learning and practice, and as a means of engaging others in the work they are doing. They have been able to reach out to diverse communities outside of their own established connections, whether it be outside of their city, province, or country as online connections have no barriers. Lundenmark (2020) suggests that performance should provide a space for folks to explore freely their creativity and to build new perspectives and connections through artistic expression. Arguably,

Participants seem to have concluded that performance work online can both build useful connections and collaborations, create opportunities for learning, as well as support a greater presence for a group's work.

Community members can attend more digital performances, can watch more performances online, and watch them over and over again if they choose. They can become included in a broader, global community which is understood by Twardzicki (2008) to be of value. Overall, performances are created by communities striving to become more accessible to a larger and broader audience – digitally, the participants' work has a potential to be seen by many folks outside of their immediate communities because of the global reach that is possible.

During the global pandemic, alienation has skyrocketed. Connecting with others to share values and goals for community-based performance work has been an anchor in sustaining community connection. For Participants, sustaining their values of inclusion, equitable relations, and individual and community growth are imperative. The relational and social justice-oriented work of performance (Ramos & Bellerin, 2017) can, in some ways, be bolstered by moving to a virtual platform, supporting healing, well-being and advocacy work.

Chapter 6 – Implications and Concluding Thoughts

6.1 Sharing Wisdom and Hopeful Thoughts for a Post-Pandemic Society

Fade Into:

INT. (INTERIOR) – COFFEE SHOP – EVENING – JUNE – YEAR 2021- CONTINUOUS

The Participants are calm within the quite coffee shop and enjoy a moment of sharing thoughts.

> EVANGELINE
>
> Don't lose contact with those that you've connected with during this time.

> BO
>
> I still long for, coming back to in person… And having two people in a room, and also being able to, like, seeing a person's body and be like; "Okay, let's go down like this –

Bo moves their body downward.

> -Like this, we're going to run around the room and loosen up".

Bo makes a running gesture with their arms and loosens their body in a wiggle.

> You know, and that kind of freedom.

> TESSA
>
> Overall, I really just want to get back to working in person and letting the kids take the lead. They show me what they need and then I can give it to them, and I just want that back.

> SARAH GREEN
>
> I've been very fortunate to have friends who had similar dreams as me and [to] have the opportunity to write plays. We toured the [festival name retracted] circuit for a couple summers, went across Canada, eating only peanut butter and jam sandwiches and sleeping on the floor of whoever would have us, and it was a lot of adventure. I think it's neat looking back at how it all kind of lined up and led me to this path to where I am today.

Smiles.

> TESSA
>
> Plays are meant to be played with. I mean you can read them, but they're not designed to be read, novels are designed to be read.

85

Nods affirmingly.

> Plays aren't actually designed for reading; they're designed for performing and acting and playing with.

> ### SARAH GREEN

> Ideally, creating art with community is what the art is for, [and] can be really meaningful. I'm lucky in that [group name retracted] started because my friend had an idea 10 years ago and I was like, "Yeah, sure, how hard can it be?" My innocence and being so naive is what made us try, because I didn't know how hard it was going to be and that we were only going to eat peanut butter sandwiches for two years.

Short laugh.

> Had I known; I probably wouldn't have tried. "Just go for it and figure it out as you go. You don't need to know everything before you start", is probably what I would tell my younger me.

They shrug and nod with a smile.

> ### BO

> I'm not going to pull the plug on the theatre industry you know, it's gonna' come [back]. I'll be shocked if the theatre dies. Okay, I'll be shocked.

> ### EVANGELINE

> People bring things, you know, we try to create the stories together. Which again, it's the politics of inclusion.

Everyone grows quiet as coffee cups clink with emptiness. The Interview has concluded. One by one everyone gets up to gather their things. Words of "good luck" and kind wishes are exchanged by the group. After Evangeline, Tessa, Sarah Green and Bo leave, Lisa sits alone. She looks at her notebook with a satisfied smile, grateful to have had their company and compassionate conversation.

End of Findings.

6.2 Implications and Tensions

What Participants have made clear is that engaging in community-based performance

during the pandemic has been very difficult, and each is anxious to return to in-person work.

When reflecting on Participants' data more broadly, there are two emerging tensions that

demonstrate the complexity of their experiences of working with communities using

performance for social change, community connections, and the growth and well-being of

community members. These tensions also provide potential insights that may be useful in

shaping future social work with an arts-based approach, such as performance, for social justice.

The first tension relates to the need for Participants to adapt the ways they are working

during the pandemic, the need to be as flexible as necessary, which sometimes proved to be

valuable for the community members and at other times problematic. Researchers, social

workers and/or community-based artists using performance alongside marginalized communities

for social change, deeply recognize the importance of being creative and flexible within their

work to meet their members' needs. Creativity and flexibility are reported to support personal

and community healing, growth, and development (Heenan, 2006; Torrissen & Stickley, 2017)

and it can support public and political inclusion (Ramos and Bellerin 2017; Thornton, 2012).

When combined with critical reflection and critical consciousness, it can also facilitate the

sharing of power (Boal, 1985; Thornton, 2012), group decision-making and autonomy (Dutton,

2001). In these ways, creativity and flexibility are further linked to advocacy (Keehan, 2015) and

social change (Boal, 1985; Ramos & Bellerin, 2017).

When considering the pandemic's restrictions, Participants have found it necessary to

make significant adaptations within their work. These adaptations include being even more

flexible and creative. Adapting during a global crisis has encouraged the Participants to learn and

grow in unexpected ways. At times, they have found this difference to be positive, for example,

when discovering new ways of interacting with community members that worked out well, and

how they felt when these new approaches resulted in unanticipated benefits for themselves and

their community. In other instances, Participants came to recognize that some of the things that

they once understood to be problematic had turned out to work better within virtual settings.

While the Participants did admit to finding working during the pandemic to have been a struggle,

these lessons have supported Participants not to give up on this work as they see the benefits that

carrying on holds for their community members. By not giving up, discoveries were found. One

example that comes to mind for me here was shared by Tessa. Tessa initially opposed having

their students watch videos of performances because they did not want the students to be unduly

influenced and/or have student's autonomies be dictated by these other performances. Instead,

Tessa wanted them to have the courage to think for themselves, to understand and interpret the

play from their own perspective and experience and, in this way, create their own voice. Tessa

was pleasantly surprised to discover that the use of videos actively engaged the students, helped

them to discover new knowledge, find and make use of new resources, deepening their critical

social discourse during their time together.

　　While the above examples are only a sample of discoveries made during community

online performance groups, they demonstrate the ways that Participants had to make peace with

the need to shift their pre-pandemic values and ways of working. Their previous ideologies,

values and ways of working had to be shifted in order to accommodate this new way of

community engagement and, at times, additional benefits were the result. At other times,

however, there was such high demand for adaptation and shifting, for compromise, that the result

was Participants' experience of significant tension and discomfort. This difficulty has made it

challenging, if not impossible, to make peace with some of the changes that they felt were forced

upon them. Returning to another of Tessa's experiences as an example, Tessa made clear their

struggle with taking on a more authoritarian role when they were engaging with their students in

a virtual context. Managing the group, attending to each individual and the dynamics taking

place between them – while relatively easy to manage in an in-person setting – was very

difficult. It was however imperative that Tessa take on an authoritative role to keep the group

organized and focused which served best for completing the work and for the members' well-

being. The larger impacts on creating, building, rebuilding, and connecting with and supporting

community were difficult to determine, but there needs to be a recognition that such changes

may not always be in the best interests of the facilitator, or the group. Participants expressed their

worry that, ultimately, neither community connection nor individual well-being is being

appropriately supported during the pandemic. For Participants, nothing has been ideal when it

comes to community engagement in the virtual space. Consequently, their discomfort persists as

an influence on Participants' strong desire to return to in-person work.

A second tension resulting from moving online, one which points to how working in a

virtual space has proven both to be helpful and harmful, concerns the question of access which

Participants understand as something needing to be confronted. The Participants discussed the

ways that shifting performance-based community groups online has made involvement and

engagement more accessible for some people. For community members with access to

technology, moving online has meant that they could continue to be involved in the work and

had access to even more groups and more communities. Moving online meant that both

facilitators and community members had more opportunities to build global connections. And

there was excitement about this. However, a significant tension was created by simultaneously

recognizing that numerous people from marginalized communities could not access technology

the same way as other folks who had the means to use and obtain technology. This lack of access

was acknowledged by the Participants, and troubled the Participants, in that they most often

work with marginalized populations. They stressed that access to technology cannot and should

not be assumed. They noted that 'access' as an issue is about more than just access to a computer

or other device. It includes financial limitations such as paying for technology and internet costs,

as well as access to educational and other supports that would enable them to use technology.

During the pandemic many people did not have access to or, due to visitation bans, the support

needed to learn to use technologies. The Participants all highly valued creating an inclusive

space to practice their work. They believed that inclusion was achieved by working toward

making sure all people were included in these spaces and that the spaces were supportive,

accessible, and because they recognized and respected community members as unique

individuals, spaces and approaches needed to be tailor made to address different needs.

A vital tension arises for the Participants in terms of the exclusions that have occurred

when access is not addressed during this ongoing pandemic. They believe these exclusions have

social justice implications, as well as emotional impacts for community members. The

Participants place a high value on inclusion, sharing power and using performance for social

justice. The numbers of community members excluded due to lack of access appears to be

something they have real difficulty making peace with. Participants felt they needed to remain

anchored to these values, which then directs them to think about how to confront these barriers to

access. How does one move forward amidst these tensions and how does one manage them?

What is involved in moving forward in a post-pandemic society?

There is a lot to consider when figuring out how to move forward within a post-pandemic

society. Such as, in what ways can lessons learned be used to strengthen performance work with

communities for social change? What role can Participants and others play when addressing both

the benefits to online work and, importantly, the social exclusions that have occurred?

Evangeline suggests a hybrid model may provide possible answers to this question: the use of

both in-person and digital spaces might be a way to support local community groups, while also continuing to include international and other diverse communities. However, are hybrid communities the best possible format in addressing these tensions? Gallagher and colleagues (2020) speak to the need for supporting a critical discussion on the impacts of the pandemic. Gallagher et al. (2020) bring up that there must be an awareness of how online platforms may both help and harm society and that continual critical reflection on said technologies must be had when engaging in creativity, especially online. This caution and concern fall in line with the Participants' perspectives. What emerges as a key learning from this project is the necessity of an ongoing critical lens in understanding the impact of this global crisis.

6.3 Where Do We Go From Here?

Participants in this study shared the belief that employing alternative ways of communicating community experience – such as performance – and doing so using different forums (such as online or in-person), is a way to increase knowledge and awareness of the experiences of marginalized communities. For me, there are two possibilities for moving forward. The first is to consider (as Gallagher et al., 2020, suggest) how research about the impacts of the pandemic on performance for social justice could be used to support advocacy and activism for change. In this case, how it can be used to address the impacts and hardships experienced by marginalized communities during this time. My research project may be one small piece of this work and so, I hope to find a way to share more of the results of this project in a future article, or in another creative format that can bring together creative and diverse voices.

The second is the potential for community-based performance work to be part of this advocacy work as well. Taking lessons that Participants have learned from engaging in community-based performance work during the pandemic, how might one consider performance

itself be used as a method to increase knowledge and awareness and to advocate for change? Stannage (2017) argues that performance allows a continual exchange of ideas that may provide fresh opportunities for inclusion, diversity, and creative knowledge to be shared toward social change. Stannage (2017), like the Participants, claims that performance can potentially make strong impacts on both audiences and on the people, who are creating them. The Participants have shared insightful discoveries on how arts can engage, support problem solving, hone critical analytical skills, promote confidence and promote action toward change. No matter how the future pandemic progresses, Participants and the research literature have demonstrated to me the potential for theatre for justice to evoke critical wisdom, compassion, and an endless tenacity for using community-based performances for change within a shifting society.

6.4 Concluding Thoughts

Fade Into:

ACT VII – INTERIOR (INT.) LISA'S APARTMENT – NIGHT – OCTOBER – YEAR 2021

Lisa yawns slightly and looks outside as the weather has changed from warm winds to brisk air. Lisa feels this as she gets up and turns on her heater fireplace. Lisa sits at her computer, stares at her screen, and gives a small nod. Lisa begins to write, but this time it is slower, reflective.

          LISA

        I recognize that within my data creation, it may not be plausible to represent entirely multifaceted characters, but the conversations shared can lend themselves to researchers and academics, as well as to readers, allowing them to engulf themselves in the qualitative materials gathered. A powerful aspect of the arts is that a person can potentially imagine themselves within the performance. A piece of writing can lend itself to become a creative avenue for folks to engage with art and therefore able to move within artistic spaces within the text in the safety of their homes.

Lisa thinks, as her eyes grow serious.

        While dealing with my own quarantine and social alienation, I was validated by how the analysis was informed by the sheer joy of the

   Participants' passion for performing. As well, I was humbled by how today's performance-based communities are confronted by the lack of access and tensions between the growing divide of those who can successfully engage within digital platforms and those who can not. Discovering the key findings through a critical exchange provides a perspective on the impacts of the pandemic on community performance social justice work.

Lisa slowly scratches her head in pensive reflection.

   Within my own performance practice, I follow similar ideologies to the Participants. Each approach includes a strong implication for the need of calling out injustice through creative critical social discourse. Whether this analysis is shared within and through a creative space, such as a performance, or within a critically driven dialogue, such as in an academic paper, I have found that within performance there are options to be open and flexible. To conclude, I hope this thesis will provide critical input on institutions and injustices and, through community-led arts, bring forth constructive insights that are meaningful for social change that include diverse voices and opinions, on a public stage that is accessible for all, and not just for a select few.

The bright computer screen's light illuminates Lisa's smiling face. Until… The screen shuts off.

                    Fade Out. The End.

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