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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Sanderien Marieke Bosshardt entitled "Being Authentic in Life and on Stage: A Phenomenological Investigation of the Actor as Character." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.

Mark A. Hector, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
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BEING AUTHENTIC IN LIFE AND ON STAGE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE ACTOR AS CHARACTER

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Sanderien Marieke Bosshardt
May 2006

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to two very special people: My grandmother Ariska (oma) Bosshardt-Pennings, born on May 1, 1914 in Qalyub, Egypt and my grandfather Arthur (opa) Luxembourg, born on May 17, 1914 in Venlo, The Netherlands. My grandfather passed down his musical and artistic genes, and my grandmother the love and compassion for humanity and human service work. I feel very grateful that both were able to see me graduate.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to describe the process of character development as experienced by the actor. Twelve professional actors participated in 60 to 90 minute phenomenological interviews in which they were asked to talk about their experiences of character development. Each participant was asked to respond to the following statement, "Take a moment to think about a specific character you played. Please describe for me in as much detail as you can what stood out for you during the development of that character."

Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The transcripts were analyzed individually and in a group format using an existential/phenomenological method. Data analysis revealed a thematic structure comprised of five themes: (a) Preparation, (b) Use of Self, (c) Connection, (d) Being in the Moment, and (e) Personal Gain. Analysis also revealed that the five figural themes were contextualized within the frame of one experiential ground: Authenticity. In other words, this ground provides the primary context through which the themes of the experience of character development become figural. Participants' descriptions of their experiences were always situated within the context of being authentic to all aspects of character development.

The first theme Preparation was comprised of three sub-themes: The Script, Research, and Meaning of the Text. The theme Use of Self was comprised of six sub-themes: Association of Self with Character/Past Experiences, Own Emotions, Body/Embodiment, Intuition, Availability of Self, and Reciprocity of Two Worlds. The theme Connection was comprised of three sub-themes: Relating to the Character,

Connection with Scene Partners, and Connection with the Director. The theme of Being in the Moment was comprised of two sub-themes: Being in the Zone and The Ultimate Goal. The last theme, Personal Gain was comprised of the following three sub-themes: Catharsis, Security, and Personal Transformation. Results are discussed in relation to existing literature. This was followed by implications for the fields of psychology and theatre and suggestions for further research.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Shakespeare's time, the Elizabethan discourse was based on the view that plays provided representations of imagined persons and it was generally understood that these representations moved the audience in some way (Barroll, 1974; Goldman, 1975; Hamilton, 1997). Additionally, the audience would only be moved if the actors were moved so they would express the emotions of the characters with authenticity. This idea was derived from the traditional theory of oratory, in which the actor's work is regarded as having most of the same effects as the orator's (Murray, 1996). Actors were often praised for appearing to *be* the characters they played and for moving the audience. Since the theory held that this depended on the actor feeling the character's emotion, the praise often suggested that an assimilation of the actor to the character occurred. Theatre in Elizabethan times offered opportunities for independence, fame, and fortune, and even for those who were the spectators, the stage made fantasies come to life, providing vicarious release for the audience (Murray, 1996).

We are now several centuries past the heyday of Elizabethan theatre, and in that time, many different theatre movements could have had an impact on American theatre. However, acting, unlike any other artistic undertaking, has not undergone frequent aesthetic renewal in America (Murray, 1996). In particular, one style of acting, built around emotional truth, has dominated American stages since the 1950s. One of its promoters, Lee Strasberg (1960) once said:

> The creative process tries to stimulate the entire human being who is involved in the craft—that is, who is to act. Not only the external means of the actor, not only the voice, the speech, the gesture, but essentially the thinking, the thought, the sensitivity, the sensation, the emotion of the actor, the experience of the actor, so that he fuses completely with the kind of life that will have to be created on the stage. When we say "fuse completely," we don't mean that he experiences literally what the character is to experience. That would mean that an actor who had to kill would have to really want to kill. That's not at all the idea of experiencing. What it does mean is that whenever something is happening to the character, something real is happening to the actor. (p. 84)

If psychology is the science of behavior and experience, and theatre is a 'mirror to life,' each should have something to offer the other; psychologists can profit from investigating what theatre tells about human nature. The importance of actors' views on acting has long been recognized (Cole, 1970; Vened, 2000; Zucker, 2002), but there seems to be little available by actors on their art. According to Piirto (1992) biographies studied included those of many actors, but many biographies do not reveal much of the "inner substance of their subjects, with little introspection about the art of the performances" (p. 256). Theatrical performance is fascinating in that it seems almost incomprehensible that some actors can bring such powerful feeling, beautiful voices, fascinating physical behavior, and spontaneity to their performances on demand.

An actor's creativity is often rewarded in the emotional and nonverbal responses of audiences to the skills the actor has been able to use in order to portray human behavior, gestures, and personalities. However, as Piirto said: "the actor's body, observational powers, memory of emotions, and prior experiences all enter into the creativity that is expressed when the actor acts" (p. 256).

According to Cole (1970) there was an idea that actors, like magicians, like to keep secret the intricacies of their craft, or that actors are intuitive creatures without recollection. Cole suggests that to some extent, it is hard for actors to take themselves seriously as artists, because an art that cannot be separated from its artists and examined independently cannot elicit discussion from the artist her- or himself. In other words, the actor's unique relationship to her or his medium, which is the self, undermines the ideal of artistic objectivity. However, working always with their personal medium, actors are circumscribed by their humanity. No matter how rigorous their training or how pliable their talents, they can never be mere clay to be molded or manipulated by the playwright's imagination or the director's touch. "Through the creation of his idea in acting form, the actor achieves a work of art, complete in itself and free of its material" (Cole, 1970, p. xiv). As a result, despite the artistic limitations, actors are the best source of insight and analysis of their craft.

Acting is largely an art of self-portraiture, and actors are universally required to draw on their personal resources – emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual – to develop and enact an interpretation. The end product "is the emergence of a living, breathing, truthful creation, forged from the melding of technique, imagination, and instinct" (Zucker, 2002, p. xi). The route taken to formulate and express that interpretation has not been studied from the perspective of the actor. The purpose of this research is to bring into focus the various facets of character development as it is experienced by the actor, and to present a psychological interpretation of its meaning. Through the analysis of phenomenological interviews, it is hoped that a better understanding of this experience will be gained. The first task in discussing the

meaning of character development as experienced by the actor will be to trace the history of the concept in the psychological and theatrical literature. A second task of this paper will be to advance an understanding of character development beyond the current literature by presenting results obtained in the present study.

In Chapter II, a review of relevant theatrical and psychological research and literature on character development will be presented. Chapter III details the methods used in the present study. This chapter discusses the limitations of a natural science methodology for psychology and alternatively proposes an existential-phenomenological approach to the phenomenon under investigation. Chapter IV presents the results of the study. This chapter discusses the themes of character development as experienced by the actor and gives supporting examples from the data which illustrate each theme. Finally, in Chapter V, results of the current study will be discussed in relation to previous research and with regard to implications for other disciplines.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The present study focuses on examining the various facets of character development as it is experienced by the actor. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a summary of knowledge relevant to this inquiry gathered from previous academic research. This review is divided into several sections: (1) existent literature on phenomenology as it relates to theatre; (2) psychosocial research regarding the value of theatre in human society; (3) a description of the two major approaches in acting with emphasis on the approach mainly used in American theatre; (4) and finally, research relating the two disciplines of theatre and psychology.

Phenomenology and Theatre

As Wilshire (1982) demonstrates, theatre offers fertile ground for phenomenology, for theatre "stages," "puts into play" variables and issues that have comprised the special realm of phenomenological inquiry from its inception: perception and the constitution of meaning, objects and their appearances, subjectivity and otherness, presence and absence, body and world. According to Garner (1994), "the phenomenological approach, with its perspective on the world as it is perceived and inhabited, and the emphasis on *embodied* subjectivity that has characterized the work of certain of its practitioners (notably Merleau-Ponty), is uniquely able to illuminate the stage's experiential duality" (p. 3). On the one hand, the field of performance is scenic space, to be processed and consumed objectively by the spectator who "aspires to the detachment inherent in the perceptual act" (p. 3). On

the other hand, this field is environmental space, "subjectified" by the physical actors who "body forth the space they inhabit" (p. 4). "From this perspective, theatrical space is phenomenal space, governed by the body and its spatial concerns" (p. 4).

Garner also suggests that "dramatic performance rewards phenomenological investigation through the complex participations of the dramatic event: as subset of theatrical performance in general, its field includes not only the spectator and the performer who offers his or her body to view, but also the character whom the performer bodies forth. With its characterological dimension, drama projects the experiential phenomena particular to performer and spectator – corporeal presence, perceptual, and linguistic operations – into figures of its represented world" (p. 7).

The actor deals with inanimate words on the pages of a script or play, and the process by which language becomes action is complex. First, actors need to be able to play their instrument – themselves – with skill and precision, an ability that requires training, practice, and discipline. Next, actors must comprehend the meaning of the words they speak, since the text will most likely communicate the character's background, attitudes, beliefs, and relationships to others. Critical as well, are the ideas and feelings that circulate below the surface of the text – the subtext – that suggests the character's emotional journey.

Sociology and Theatre

'All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players,' said Shakespeare, thus suggesting an analogy between the stage and the world. Several theorists (Barroll, 1974; Wilshire, 1982) have explored the implications of these lines. It is certainly true that everybody has acted in one point in their lives, playing various

roles such as parent, professor, student, businessman, etc., and most people are quite skillful and can switch roles smoothly as the situation demands, but when people step outside of their normal role, they are often said to be having a 'nervous breakdown.'

As all men and women are "merely" or entirely players, all human behavior and character can be thought of as being shaped within the social roles (Goffman, 1959). Sociologists and social psychologists usually define role as the socially scripted behavior for a certain identity (i.e., office manager, son, mother, teacher) and the behavior for a role is different for different situations (Brissett & Edgley, 1974). As Laing (1969) emphasized: role is a term for complementary identity (p. 3). Roles are socially scripted because people learn from others, and from sources provided by the social group, how they should think, feel, and act in their roles. Our sense of self and of self-reality are created through learning and enacting identities, and roles assigned to us as we are socialized (Murray 1996). Many elements of our basic nature then become second nature. Bertold Brecht (1957) gives a description of this process as it relates to theatre:

> One easily forgets that human education proceeds along highly theatrical lines. In a quite theatrical manner the child is taught how to behave; logical arguments only come later. When such-and-such occurs, it is told (or sees), one must laugh. It joins in when there is laughter, without knowing why; if asked why it is laughing it is wholly confused. In the same way it joins in shedding tears, not only weeping because the grown-ups do, but also feeling genuine sorrow. This can be seen at funerals, whose meaning escapes children entirely. These are theatrical events which form the character. The human being copies gestures, miming, tones of voice. And weeping arises from sorrow, but sorrow also arises from weeping. It is not different with grown-ups. Their education never finishes. Only the dead are beyond being altered by their fellowmen. Think this over, and you will realize how important the theatre is for the forming of character. (p. 152)

The role of theatre in human society is partly to give us experience of situations that we do not encounter often enough in real life: experience that is inhabited by the actor, and that is vicarious at one step removed for the audience. This explains why horror, disaster, death, and other frightening themes are so popular in films and plays. Therefore, it is not surprising that we seek means of preparing ourselves for exceptional contingencies as these, rehearsing our actions and gaining better control of them through fantasy and/or play. The theatre is one formalization of this activity. Psychodrama is a therapeutic use of this rehearsal function. By acting roles and trying out solutions to relationship problems in the safety of the therapist's office, the client can practice life situations without being punished for mistakes.

Approaches to Acting: Imaginative vs. Technical

There are two major approaches to acting, which are identified as the *imaginative* and the *technical* systems. The main distinction between the two schools is whether the actor works from the inside out, or the outside in; whether she or he concentrates on feeling the part, or projects her- or himself into the position of the audience, seeing it largely from its point of view. The imaginative approach is most commonly identified with Constantin Stanislavski, a Russian actor and director, and the Moscow Art Theatre (Wilson, 2002). Stanislavski felt that European theatre had too much concern for the outward manifestations of character, such as posture, gesture, and vocal projection, and so he tried to redirect the attention of actors to inner processes. He recommended that actors should 'feel' themselves into the part, imagining what it would be like to be in the situation dramatized: the key to imaginative projection. A second skill that Stanislavski wanted actors to develop was

that of 'emotional memory,' in which actors recall an occasion when a similar circumstance had occurred within their own lives and reconstruct the emotion.

A more recent exponent of the imaginative approach is Lee Strasberg, who established the training school for the stage in New York City called The Actor's Studio. Strasberg's approach was soon thereafter dubbed 'The Method.' Strasberg's emphasis was on psychological analysis of the character. Some proponents of The Method appear to believe that if appropriate emotion is truly felt by the performer, the correct actions and gestures will follow naturally and the performance will appear totally realistic.

However, proponents of the technical approach point out that many aspects of technique have no connection with feelings or realism. They suggest that if actors lose themselves in the part too much, their egocentrism may be disastrous to the team effort that performance is. There is also a danger that excessive feeling on the part of the actor may cut across the ability of the audience to sympathize with the emotions projected onto the character. Real crying on a stage may be paradoxically less affecting than showing great control in a situation that is clearly very emotion-provoking. Critics of method acting state that in the final analysis, it matters only that the audience feels powerful emotion, not the actors on stage. Method training may help actors feel the emotions of the character they are playing, but it does not guarantee that these emotions will be transferred to the audience. Other critics question whether art does or can create stable representation of the world, whether language as a medium is used or even can be used to create characters that seem to behave in ways that accord with human psychology (Wilshire, 1982; Murray, 1996).

Stanislavski's Acting Method.

Stanislavski, whose tenets of acting came to be known as the Stanislavski system, later changed to 'The Method' by Lee Strasberg, detailed the processes by which acting is made an art. In these processes, the influence of psychoanalysis becomes apparent. Stanislavski believed that acting is achieved 1) through the use of the subconscious; 2) through the actor's use of imagination to turn the words of the playwright into believable reality, for the playwright cannot put into directions all that the actor must do; 3) through breaking a piece to be acted into its units and its objectives, marked by buoys in a "channel" that "points the true course of creativeness" (Stanislavski, 1936, p. 129); 4) through a process of probing into the psyche; 5) through the use of emotion memory; 6) and through communion with the inner self and communion with other actors in stage. The most important aspect of the actor's art, according to Stanislavski, is the inner motive to play the instrument that the actor has developed of her- or himself, which he calls the "inner creative state." This inner creative state is a continuous striving for balance among the emotions, the will, and the intellect of the character being portrayed. He taught that acting has to arise not from externalized, premeditated behavior, but from the inner world of the character. The character is brought to life through the technical skills, invention, and immediate responsiveness of the actor. The actor creates a full, vivid, emotionally, and physically true portrayal of the character. Stanislavski's Method became the ultimate expression of the true inner self. Psychoanalysis and the belief that the actor was a true artist, not merely a skilled imitator or charming mimic, began to influence the theatre. By the 1950s, 'Method acting,' with its dictate that to be a true artist one

had to suffer and to bare one's soul, had become a great influence on many actors. Stanislavski's summary of creativity in acting was later interpreted by the New York acting studios.

A balance of strong emotion and self-awareness may lead to an imaginative mode of acting and becoming. Stanislavski (1949) writes of what happens as the actor gradually merges with a character: "Our type of creativeness is the conception and birth of a new being – the person is the part. It is a natural act similar to the birth of a human being." He says that as actors grow into their roles they "are influenced by their parts, which affect their daily lives." The actor's past "daily lives" should also affect how they play their parts, so there is a convergence of influences between role and life leading to the birth of the person in the part (p. 294-5). He describes this new being as having a "quivering, live soul, the soul of the human-being-actor-character" (p. 232).

When actors fuse with a character, they experience the character's thoughts and emotions, and their own thoughts and emotions are somehow re-shaped. According to Kjerbühl-Petersen (1935), at least as long ago as 1900, it was noticed that this state of consciousness is much like the trance that occurs in hypnosis (p.175). Marowitz (1978) writes of contemporary theatre that the actor uses "a mild form of self-hypnosis" (p. 98). He thinks that the hypnotic state is induced by repetition of the performance of text and action in rehearsals. In acting theories, this hypnosis is seen as a form of absorbed role-playing, since both the actor and the hypnotized person closely concentrate their attention on controlling stimuli which originate outside themselves (Marowitz, 1978, p. 99). For actors on the stage and for people in social

roles, absorption is one key to a sense of reality and one's belief in one's own performance.

When people read a story, they are often drawn into an imaginative or vicarious enactment of what characters do, think, or feel; they can identify with many characters. According to Stanislavski, identification depends partly on a matching of selves between actor and character, but it may depend even more on the writer's creation of a character and a script that induce identification. In social life too, how much a person identifies with a role depends partly on the initial congruity between self and role (Goffman, 1959). Stanislavski, however, believed the force of the text alone could never induce an actor to feel the emotions of the character. He believed that people respond emotionally only to what actually causes us as persons to feel emotion: to feel in a situation on stage, actors must feel as themselves. Therefore, he taught actors to use what he called the "magic if:" Actors should not ask what a character would feel, but what they would do if they were in the circumstances of the character (1936, p. 44; 1949, p. 30; 1961, p. 222). Through such techniques as Stanislavski's, there are many ways in which an actor may come to think and feel as a character does.

Acting can also have physical effects: a study by Stern and Lewis (1968) shows that method actors (based on Stanislavski's beliefs about acting) experience heightened emotionality and an increased ability to use their faces expressively. The actors generated greater galvanic skin responses than non-method actors when asked to imagine emotional situations.

Psychology and Theatre

Unlike visual artists, actors, despite all the value society attributes to them, have attracted little scientific curiosity as to the process of their art. Successful actors are among the highest paid creative people in American society, and among the least studied. One reason might be that there are those who believe that actors are performers, not creators: that actors are merely the tools of the words, and thus do not undergo a creative process as such. However, others have been more eloquent about the mental and physical artistry that comprises acting.

Actors are engaged in a relay of human emotion – their characters', their own and those of the audience – emotions that are often universal in their meaning. In that universal, shared experience lies the power of acting. Actors have the privilege of revealing profound truths to us about the human condition and, ultimately, about ourselves. Actors engage in an exploration of the self – their own individuality as artists and human beings. This knowledge and awareness will be filtered through technique, imagination, and artistry in order to inhabit and illuminate the world of the fictional character. The actor, unlike the musician, the painter, or the sculptor, is the instrument and the instrumentalist at the same time. The feelings and sensations of a character come through the actor, and he or she must be open, aware, skilled, and inspired enough to allow this process to take place. This process probes the creativity that informs an interpretation and the intimate process whereby performers draw on their personal resources to develop and enact a character.

The Actor's Personality.

There have been few empirical studies of actors' personality. Fisher and Fisher (1981) found that professional actors are inclined to be extraverted and emotional, while amateur actors are mostly impulsive and exhibitionistic. Stacey and Goldberg (1953) reported that professional actors were reflective, introverted, and depressed compared to student actors, suggesting that experience may blunt the personality to some extent. Hammond and Edelmann (1991) compared 51 working professional actors with 58 amateur actors and 52 controls using various personality, self-esteem, and social desirability scales. Actors emerged as less shy and socially anxious than controls, and more extraverted and sociable. They were also more privately self-conscious and had greater sensitivity to the expressive behavior of others. Amateur actors were between non-actors and professionals on most of these attributes. Hammond and Edelmann also found that the psychoticism and neuroticism scores of actors were slightly higher than those of the controls, but they were within normal (non-clinical) limits.

One popular theory about performers is that they have an immature need to show off in front of other people. Deprived of sufficient attention and praise by parents and others in childhood they have an undischarged need for social approval that is manifested in performance (Wilson, 1985). Jean-Paul Sartre (1976) regarded all actors as people who are inauthentic and therefore become actors, and psychoanalysts often say actors are exhibitionists compensating for inadequate selfhood (Goldman, 1975).

Several researchers (Fisher & Fisher, 1981; Hammond & Edelmann, 1991; Stacey & Goldberg, 1953) confirmed that performers are characteristically exhibitionistic in personality and found that emotional expressiveness (charisma), acting ability and exhibitionism have much in common with personality traits. Although performers do seem to be exhibitionistic, this does not prove that lack of attention and approval in early childhood is the cause. It would be equally logical to argue that the exhibitionism developed as a result of being rewarded for theatrical behavior in childhood. This social learning hypothesis is practically the reverse of the psychoanalytical compensation idea.

Summary

In the previous section existent literature on phenomenology as it relates to theatre was reviewed as well as psychosocial research regarding the value of theatre in human society. A description of the two major approaches in acting with emphasis on the approach mainly used in American theatre was presented and finally, a review was presented of research relating the two disciplines of theatre and psychology. A review of the literature revealed that the route taken to formulate and express character development has never been studied from the perspective of the actor. In order to fully understand actors' perspectives, a qualitative research method was employed. The current study represents an attempt to understand the process of character development as experienced by the actor. Professional actors described their experiences of character development. This study is qualitative and uses a phenomenological method for data collection and interpretation. In the next chapter,

the theoretical considerations providing the basis for the research procedure will be discussed, as well as the specific procedural aspects of this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

The overall purpose of this chapter is to present the methodology the researcher used in the present study to investigate character development as experienced by the actor. In searching for an understanding of this experience, and its meaning to those who experienced it, the researcher engaged in a phenomenological investigation. Before the specific steps undertaken in the process of this investigation are presented, it is important to introduce the philosophical foundations of this approach and how they relate to the study of phenomena relevant to psychology. This chapter is divided into two sections. The goals of the first section are to familiarize the reader with the basic principles guiding phenomenological investigations and to differentiate the approach from more traditional scientific research. The goal of the second section is to detail the specific procedural steps taken by the primary investigator to collect and analyze the data for the present study.

Existential-Phenomenology as a Base for Psychological Research

It has been argued that one of the problems of the traditional 'science' of psychology is that researchers try to differentiate what units they themselves find meaningful, without considering what units the person/participant might consider meaningful (Spinelli, 1989). Romanyshyn and Whalen (1989) note that traditional psychology "as the study of behavior, is a discipline that infers behavior's meaning. In other words, meaning is brought into behavior from the outside" (p. 31). This so-

called "objectivity" of science results in a psychology of the third person (Pollio et al., 1997), which essentially ignores human experience.

One of the basic tenets of natural science in Western culture is that truth can only be known in objective terms. Understanding phenomena objectively, in this view, necessitates the elimination of subjectivity. This requires stripping phenomena of their context including the experience of the observer. Historically, psychology has tried to define itself scientifically, in which experimental, quantitative methods are seen as the only valid way to study psychological phenomena. Many later theorists (Pollio et al., 1997; Romanyshyn & Whalen, 1989; Spinelli, 1989), however, have argued that the nature of scientific methods prevents them from being able to study human experience fully. Pollio et al. (1997) state that existential-phenomenology is a contextually based, holistic approach to psychology that seeks to attain a first-person description of experience. The following passage from Donald E. Polkinghorne describes the philosophy quite well:

> As a philosophy, phenomenology has been concerned with providing descriptions of the general characteristics of experience, with a particular focus by existentialists on the experience of being human. ...Phenomenological psychology is a perspective that acknowledges the reality of the realm of meaningful experience as the fundamental locus of knowledge. ... Although the structures investigated by philosophical phenomenology are universal and required for the appearance of consciousness itself, phenomenological psychology investigates structures that are typical or general for groups of people. This method of philosophical phenomenology retains the traditional philosophical use of self-reflection or "armchair philosophizing" that psychology broke away from when it became a science, but phenomenological psychology places emphasis on descriptions from research subjects ..., instead of the researchers' self-reports. (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 43)

In traditional psychology, people and their environments are seen as two separate and distinct things. The phenomenological psychologist, who believes in the interrelationship of the individual and his or her world, rejects this traditional concept. The task, then, is to reveal the structure of human experience through descriptive techniques, seeking to understand phenomena in their perceived immediacy (Pollio et al., 1997; Spinelli, 1989; Valle & Halling, 1989). It is evident that the phenomenal meaning of words, rooted as they are in human experience, are existentially significant and of the utmost importance for psychological understanding. Yet, the methods of traditional scientific psychology have restricted psychology from attaining this phenomenal understanding.

The quest for objectivity in the natural science model has required methodological principles that pre-establish and limit the content of psychological inquiry (Spinelli, 1989). In doing so, it has failed to recognize experience as a legitimate content for the science of psychology. Phenomenology seeks to correct this shortcoming in science by providing the epistemological basis for studying experience, while the hermeneutic approach provides a description of the process of understanding the meaning of human experience.

The topic of interest in this study is character development as it is experienced by the actor. An interest in the nuances and qualitative aspects of the experience of the actor is best pursued using a method that does not limit the research to an abstract conceptualization of experience, therefore the phenomenological method will be used. Phenomenological methods are rigorous, critical, and systematic and they may be more appropriate than natural science methods for questions that naturally lend to

investigation by qualitative methods (Pollio et al., 1997). Although variations on the phenomenological method exist (Polkinghorne, 1989), the particular method used in this study is one that is basically dialogical in nature – the phenomenological interview. The phenomenological method seeks to describe a thematic structure of the experience, taken from one perspective: the verbal description of the experience. This method allows "the richness and profundity of human reality as closely related to the structures of natural language" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 45). Through language, a phenomenological interview creates a shared understanding of what is significant about an experience.

Procedures in the Present Study

The purpose of existential-phenomenological research is to produce clear, precise, systematic descriptions of an individual's experienced meanings of a particular phenomenon (Kvale, 1983; Polkinghore, 1989). As in most empirical studies, there are two main sections: data collection and data analysis.

Data Collection.

Data collection in the present study was completed in a three-step process. In the first step the primary investigator participated in a bracketing interview. In the next step, the primary investigator selected the participants for the study. Finally, phenomenological interviews were conducted with the research participants.

The Bracketing Interview.

For the purposes of the present study, the primary researcher engaged in a self-reflective method known as the bracketing interview (Polkinghorne, 1989; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). The goal of a bracketing

interview is for the researcher to more fully explore his or her pre-understanding of the phenomenon to be investigated. The interview, and its subsequent analysis, helps make explicit the assumptions and presuppositions the researcher has about the research topic. Ideally, it allows the researcher to minimize his or her own biases and expectations which might limit the descriptions given by participants during subsequent interviews. Bracketing is not intended to eliminate the researcher's biases about the investigated phenomenon; this is impossible, according to Gadamer (1975, 1976). The goal is to elucidate, not eliminate, and approach the topic with an enhanced awareness of the researcher's own expectations and biases.

For the present study, the primary investigator selected an individual experienced in phenomenological research to ask the same research question that would be asked of participants in the study. The initial question the primary investigator responded to was "Take a moment to think about a specific character you played. Please describe for me in as much detail as you can what stood out for you during the development of that character." The audiotaped bracketing interview was transcribed and submitted to an interpretative group for analysis. Several different aspects of the primary investigator's interests in the process of character development were revealed. The researcher's initial interest in the topic grew out of a love for the theatre in general and a fascination with characterization in specific. The author has had the opportunity to observe many theatre productions in her life and has seen the transformation from actor to character from in her parents, as well as in several friends that are professional actors. The intensity of the process, the emotional impact

on the actor, and the physical and psychological transformation associated with portraying a character believably was intriguing.

Further thought on the subject of character development raised many interesting questions and speculation about possible answers, such as: How do actors get in touch with the character's emotions? How does one find Hamlet in one's self? What psychological and physical processes are involved in character development? What makes a character believable? The questions regarding the process of character development have implicit categories of interpretation that constitute biases. The primary investigator used this awareness to guard against the imposition of her expectations onto the analysis of the data.

Research Participant Selection.

According to Colaizzi (1978) and Polkinghorne (1989), the essential criteria for selecting participants for a phenomenological interview are that the potential participants have experienced the phenomenon and are able and willing to speak articulately about their experiences. For the present study participants were selected on the basis of being professional actors and members of the Actors' Equity Association of America. Additional criteria for inclusion were: 1) willingness to reflect upon their experiences of character development and the creative process and communicate them to the primary investigator through dialogue, and 2) sufficient interest in participation to volunteer up to 90 minutes for an interview. No effort was made to solicit or to exclude potential participants on the basis of demographic characteristics. Variation of experience among participants was viewed as an asset, because variation enhanced the opportunity for the thematic structure to reveal itself.

The number of participants interviewed was determined using the saturation criterion developed in the grounded theory methodology (Spinelli, 1989). Saturation is attained when no new information seems to emerge from the participants' accounts.

There were 12 participants in the present study, all of whom met the above-mentioned criteria for inclusion. The primary investigator identified participants by talking to several professional actors in Knoxville and New York City who knew actors that fulfilled the criteria needed to be a part of the study. These actors were contacted and invited to participate in the study and, if interested, were provided with an informed consent form (Appendix A), so that they could decide whether they were still interested in participating in the study. Additional participants were recruited using the snowball technique, where research participants informed the primary investigator of other potential participants. Seven females and 5 males participated. Four participants were in their final year of an MFA program and two participants were recent graduates. Two participants had extensive performance experience, but are now teaching, and four participants were veteran actors with several decades of national and international experience. No questions were asked regarding race or age, since the recruitment was based solely on the criteria of being a professional actor with experience in the process of character development.

Interviewing.

After potential participants volunteered to be interviewed, the primary investigator arranged a private meeting with each at an agreed upon time. The location of the meeting was decided by each participant. Upon arrival for the interview, each participant was asked to read and sign a consent form (Appendix A).

By signing this form, the participant agreed to be interviewed, gave permission to audio-tape the interview, and allowed the results of the interview to be used in descriptions of the material; i.e., in research reports. A copy of the signed informed consent form was offered to each participant for his or her records. In addition, the primary investigator described the study in more detail and explained the participant's rights as a research participant: the participants were informed that steps would be included in the analysis of the data to protect their identity (i.e., identifying information was eliminated and replaced with pseudonyms). Finally, the researcher addressed any questions or concerns that the participant had at this point.

Participants were invited to talk for as long as they chose. All the interviews took between 60 and 85 minutes. The request "Take a moment to think about a specific character you played. Please describe for me in as much detail as you can what stood out for you during the development of that character" was chosen to fully explore participants' experiences of character development. This request was developed with the intent to provide participants with the greatest possible latitude in describing their experiences; no limits were imposed upon the phenomenon studied, and participants were free to shape their descriptions based on their personal experience.

Kvale (1983) recommended that participants be encouraged to talk about whatever aspects of their experience stand out to them, so the interview format was unstructured. All subsequent questions by the primary investigator instructed the participants to elaborate, clarify, or add detail to a description of the experience. At times, the primary investigator repeated the original request, or made summary

statements using the participant's own words and phrases, in order to encourage further description (Kvale, 1983). Questions and statements such as "What was that like for you?" or "Tell me more about that experience," were often used. In this way, the focus of the interviews would be maintained on the actual descriptions of the experience while any conjectural, interpretative, or theoretical discussions were avoided. "Why" questions were avoided because they tend to invite more abstract responses which move away from the lived experience. Kvale's (1983) 12-part description of the qualitative research interview serves as a useful summary:

> It is 1) centered on the interviewee's life-world; 2) seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomena in his/her life-world; it is 3) qualitative, 4) descriptive, and 5) specific; it is 6) presuppositionless; it is 7) focused on certain themes; it is open for 8) ambiguities, and 9) changes; it depends upon the 10) sensitivity of the interviewer; it takes place in 11) an interpersonal interaction, and it may be 12) a positive experience. (p. 174)

The interview proceeded until the participant decided that nothing else about the experience stood out for her or him.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis used in this study was informed by the practices of phenomenological research described by Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1985), Polkinghorne (1989), and Pollio et al. (1997). According to Polkinghorne, "the aim of phenomenological inquiry is to reveal and unravel the structures, logic, and interrelationships that obtain in the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 50). In his phenomenological research from a psychological perspective, Giorgi (1985) focused

on describing structures of experience related to specific contexts, typical situations, or typical personalities relevant to the field of psychology. In the present study, the primary investigator chose to develop a description of an actor's creative experience of character development. The researcher analyzed the data via the following four steps (Pollio et al. 1997): transcription of the data, individual analysis of the transcripts, group analysis of the transcripts, and the development of a description of the structure of the experience.

Transcripts of Data.

The primary investigator created a verbatim transcript from the recording of each interview. Attempts were made to note pauses in speech and changes in affect (e.g. laughter, crying) parenthetically. The primary investigator scrutinized each transcript for accuracy by listening to the tape and checking the transcript against it and making any needed corrections. The transcripts were as verbatim as possible; incorrect grammatical usage, for example, was not corrected from the tape to the transcript.

Individual Analysis of the Transcripts.

The primary researcher analyzed the data with an interpretive procedure known as the hermeneutic circle. This procedure involves a continuous process of relating the separate parts of the text to the whole (Polkinghorne, 1989; and Pollio et al., 1997). Based on the work of the above mentioned researchers, the primary investigator used specific steps regarding the hermeneutic circle.

First, each interview transcript was read and re-read by the researcher in an attempt to grasp each interview as a whole. The idea of reading the text as a whole is

an extension of the phenomenological concept of figure/ground. Specific components of the phenomenon under investigation are described as standing out (figural), against other components that recede into the background (ground). According to Polkinghorne (1989), by developing a sense of the transcript as a whole, the primary investigator has a better background or context for analyzing the separate parts of the text.

Second, each transcript was read through again by the researcher and was analyzed in order to develop a list of units representing central and meaningful aspects of the experience of each participant (Colaizzi, 1978). The researcher accomplished this through a systematic and rigorous method, consisting of: a) extracting phrases or sentences from each transcript that directly pertained to the described experience of character development, b) interpreting the central meaning of these statements, and c) clustering statements with similar meanings together to form meaning units specific to each participant's experience.

In the next step, the primary investigator developed themes. A theme is an organizational term used to describe a pattern of similarity that appears across various situations in the text. In identifying themes, care was taken to use words found only in the transcripts. Using the participant's own words ensured that themes are closely related to the participant's experiences (Pollio et al., 1997).

After themes were developed from each transcript, the next step was to synthesize the themes from all the transcripts to create global themes common in the actor's experience of character development across all of the transcripts. The goal of the final result is to create an "essential structural definition" of the phenomenon

under investigation (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 53). The process of synthesis is "different from a process that adds or lists together elements; it requires an eidetic seeing of the whole. In the grasp of the whole, the elements are understood" (Polkinghorne, p. 56). Finally, the primary investigator read through each transcript again to determine if the global themes fully described the participants' experiences.

Group Analysis of the Transcripts.

As mentioned earlier in the section on bracketing, the primary investigator in a phenomenological study must take steps to draw out, and remain aware of, possible presuppositions and biases about the phenomenon under investigation. The rationale for including a group in the analysis of transcripts is similar to the rationale for using multiple research participants to describe the phenomenon. Conducting data analysis in a group setting aided the bracketing process by providing a system of checks and balances as assumptions and presuppositions are brought to light and discussed in relation to how they affect the data analysis (Pollio at al., 1997; Thompson et al., 1989). In addition, the group members offered multiple perspectives on the transcripts, which produced a more detailed and rich description of the experience.

The phenomenological research group that I used for this study met three times a week and was composed of graduate students and a professor; all had considerable experience in phenomenological analysis. In these group meetings other phenomenological research projects were discussed as well as the present project. All group members signed a confidentiality statement in which they agreed to protect the anonymity of the participants by not discussing the transcripts outside of the group (Appendix B). Within the group, data analysis followed several steps. Segments of

the text were read aloud, with one person taking the part of the interviewer and another person taking the part of the participant. Each segment was discussed with respect to the significant statements and themes that described any given segment. This process continued until the entire text was read. To conclude this phase of analysis, the primary investigator compared and contrasted the list of meaning units and themes she extracted on her own to the themes offered by the group.

All names and identifying information were deleted from all the transcripts in order to protect the identity of the participants. A copy of one of the transcripts is provided in Appendix C.

Description of the Structure of the Experience.

After the themes were identified, the primary investigator developed a structural diagram to portray each theme and its interrelationships with other themes. The group of themes and sub-themes were integrated into an interactive structure reflecting the experience as a "whole." The main goal of the interactive structure or diagram is a visual illustration that provides an additional clarity of understanding over a verbal description (Polkinghorne, 1991). The diagram is presented in a figure/ground format. The rationale for this format is that experience is usually arranged in terms of multiple figures that stand out against a background. Neither figure nor ground will be fully understood unless both are being taken into account (Valle, King, & Halle, 1989). In phenomenological research, a figure is a theme that stands out in comparison to other themes. In contrast, a ground is a theme that provides a context for other themes to emerge against (Pollio et al., 1997). Following the development of the structural diagram of the experience, the diagram was

presented to the phenomenology research group in order for the members to provide additional perspective. Group members were invited to discuss, challenge, or validate the organization of the diagram.

In the final step of the data analysis the primary investigator wrote a comprehensive phenomenological text illustrating through language the findings of the study. Examples of verbatim statements from the participants' original transcripts were provided to support each theme and sub-theme contained in the structural description of the experience. Including these examples allows "the reader to check to see if the general description is indeed supported by and derived from the data" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 57). This comprehensive description is presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide a description of the process of character development as experienced by the actor. Twelve professional actors were interviewed and asked to describe their experience of character development. Each interview was audio taped, then transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher. Excerpts from the transcripts used in this chapter include any grammatical errors made by the subjects as they spoke because the transcripts were generated, word for word, directly from the audio tapes of the interviews. After the transcripts were developed, they were analyzed using a phenomenological method.

In this section, results of the present study are presented. The results include a description of the themes, the sub-themes and the overall thematic structure obtained from the interpretive analysis of the data. In the presentation of the results, quotations from the interviews are used to illustrate themes and sub-themes. Any possible identifiers, including actors' names, have been either removed or changed in order to protect participants' confidentiality. However, participants often mentioned the name of a character or a play as relevant to parts of their experience. In these instances, the names of characters and plays are left in, as they are often an important aspect of the experience being described. For a list of the plays mentioned or alluded to by the twelve participants, see Appendix E.

When short quotations are used, they are included as part of the text. When longer quotations are needed, they are offset from the text, single spaced, and left

indented. Quotations from different participants being referenced are separated by a space. In some instances the investigator has omitted portions of a quotation if it was determined to be irrelevant to the overall meaning. Deletions made within a sentence are indicated by three ellipses. Deletions made after the end of a complete sentence are indicated by four ellipses, one signifying the period at the end of the sentence and three more referring to the omitted material. Otherwise, participant quotations are presented verbatim from the transcripts.

Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretive analysis, using a phenomenological method, revealed the following five interrelated themes of the process of character development as experienced by the actor: (a) Preparation, (b) Use of Self, (c) Connection, (d) Being in the Moment, and (e) Personal Gain. Analysis also revealed that the five figural themes were contextualized within the frame of one experiential ground: Authenticity. In other words, this ground provides the primary context through which the themes of the experience of character development become figural. Participants' descriptions of their experiences were always situated within the context of being authentic to all aspects of character development.

The ground of Authenticity represents the context of truth and believability. Participants' thoughts and beliefs about what it means to be authentic on stage and what it means to be true to the character create the foundation in which the five themes composing the figural structure of the experience of friendship emerge. The first theme, Preparation, encompasses the participants' descriptions of their use of the script and the text, and the extensive research that often goes into the preparation

stage. Participants also described the importance of understanding the meaning of the text. The second theme, Use of Self, reflects the participants' awareness of self in the process of character development. Participants described the association of their own characteristics with those of the character and the use of their own emotions in portraying someone else. They also described the importance of the use, and freeing of, their own bodies and voices, the use of their intuition, and the importance of making themselves available to the character. Furthermore, they described their experiences of the reciprocity of the two worlds: the real world and the world on stage. The third theme, Being Connected, reflects how participants related to the character they played, their scene partners and the director. The fourth theme, Being in the Moment, reflects participants' awareness of being "in the zone" and also conveys participants' descriptions of their ultimate goal in portraying a character. The fifth theme, Personal Gain, reflects participants' descriptions of how rewarding it can be to go through the process of character development. Benefits they described include catharsis, security, personal transformation, and compassion for humanity. The theme, Personal Gain, also conveys the participants' descriptions of their struggles during the process of character development.

This thematic structure is presented in Figure 1. The figure consists of the five major themes of the experience, which are arranged so that no one theme stands out as more central than the others. The lines linking the themes emphasize that each theme is interrelated with all of the others. The ground of Authenticity that contextualizes the themes is also present and represented by the outer circle. The process of character development, as experienced by the actor is more dynamic than a

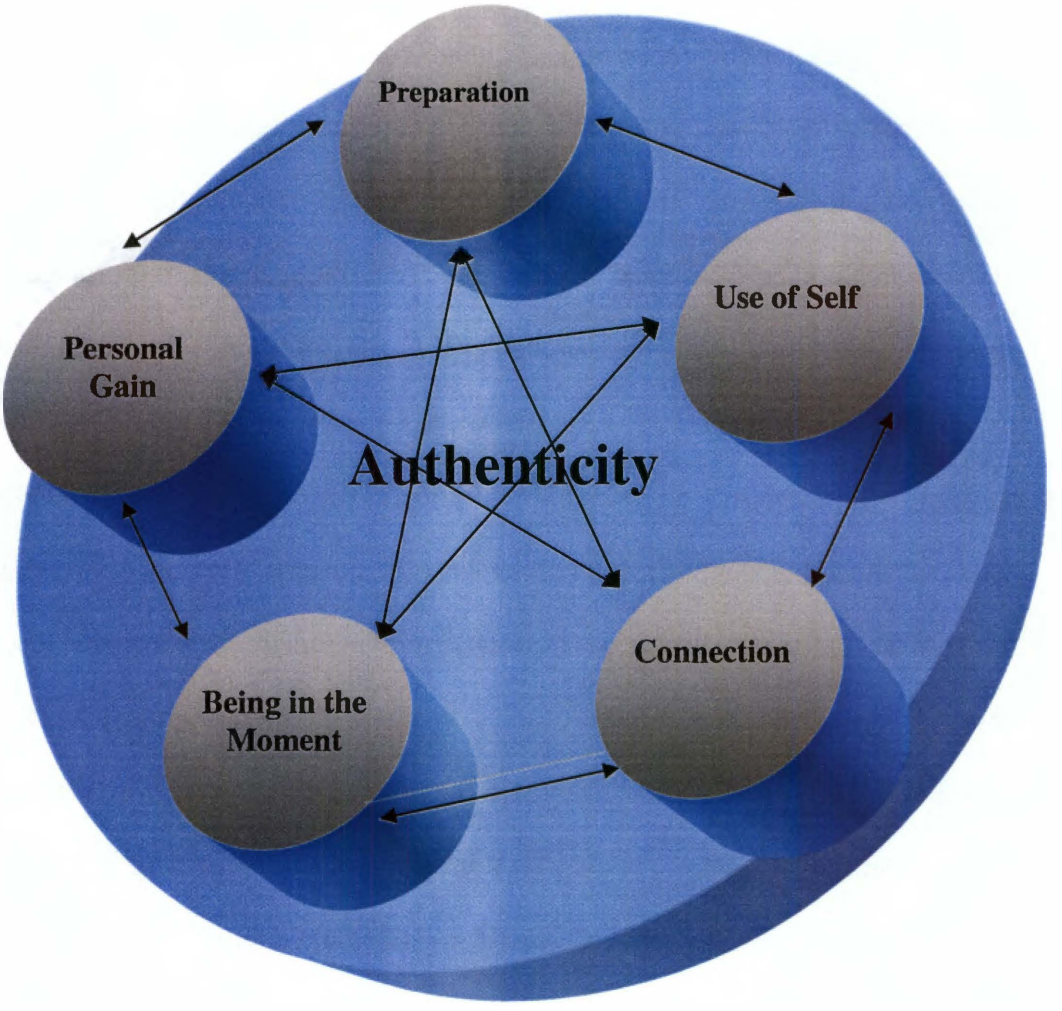


Figure 1. Thematic Structure of the Process of Character Development as Experienced by the Actor

graphic structure can depict. Aspects of each of these themes were present at various moments throughout every transcript, although the importance of each of the five themes fluctuated.

When possible, the words and phrases used to identify the ground and themes were taken directly from the transcripts in order to preserve a close link between the descriptive summary of the experience and the experience as described by the participants. Presentation of the results begins with a detailed description of the ground as it sets the foundation for understanding the themes. Next, the five themes are presented. Selected passages taken directly from the transcripts illustrate and provide evidence for all grounds and themes. The names attached to the selected passages and quotes are all pseudonyms to maintain the privacy of the participants. Gender is specified through the selection of gender-specific pseudonyms. The pseudonyms are the names of classic actors who inspired many of today's actors and who will likely inspire many more, for years to come.

In order to ensure an accurate appreciation of the elements of this experience, the ground and each theme is presented separately. It is important to note, however, that each element adds up to a whole experience, therefore, the ground and themes are interconnected and aspects of one theme may be seen in another. A summary of the overall thematic structure of the process of character development as experienced by the actor, including a description of the ways in which they interrelate, will conclude this chapter.

The Ground: Authenticity

The participants' experiences of the process of character development were set against the ground of authenticity. The ground of authenticity appeared in all protocols. It represents the essential context within which stories and dialogue unfolded for the participants. Each participant expressed awareness of wanting to be as true to the character, the text, and themselves as possible throughout the process of character development.

> ...my mom would be like, she's always like, "you know, just remember it's just a play, keep it to the stage. And I would say "I know it's a play, I know, but I have to imagine that it's real, because that's what people want to see, that's what we pay for when we go see a movie or a play. We want to know, we want to believe that the actor is believing their circumstance...(Mickey)

> It needs to be real, I need to feel it and allow myself to experience that hurt, pain, or shame. (Katharine)

> I don't know how it happens aside from, you know, allowing myself to believe that I need that, or allowing myself to believe that the person I was playing this scene with is capable of, you know, it's life or death, and he possessed my survival. And in the case of that scene, my scene partner was a very dear friend of mine, so I was able to sort of say "I can't survive without him." It's just something that I, in the rehearsal, encourage myself to believe, just as simply as one were 6 years old and we want to be the queen of England, we can be, and believe it fully, or we want to be an astronaut, we fully believe at that moment that we are capable of flying. It's about imagination, but it's also about not saying it's impossible, about allowing myself that truthful human experience and in doing that it gets into my bones, it gets into my body. (Rita)

In the following statements participants reveal their sense of responsibility towards the character; they describe the need to be real and true in their portrayal.

> All the worry that we get into about our performance isn't important, because we have a life [a character's life] in our hands, you know. (Laurence)

> Some characters are simply bigger, louder, they take up more space in the room, and you get there physically, and vocally, and emotionally. You have to

> find all the roots, find out why is this person like this as defined by the text, and what do I have that I can bring to that, because if I don't have it, I can't bring it, because then it's not going to be real and true. It has to be the truth that I can get myself to, and of course the longer you are an actor, the more your vocabulary expands, because you stretch yourself, and once you've done that it lives in you, forever. (Humphrey)

In addition, some of the participants talked about character development in reference to the audience. They conveyed that audiences want to see people on stage relating from their authentic selves; audiences do not want to see the performer or the actor, they want to see the character.

> Good theatre is when as an audience you think what's on stage is actually happening, it's happening in the present, it's happening tonight, this is happening. But that's true of all art, you know, real art really happens. (Humphrey)

> The thing that makes theatre thrilling, is when suddenly two people are doing something to each other and it's happening live in that moment in front of your very eyes, and you don't know what the outcome is going to be. (Grace)

As stated previously, the ground Authenticity provides a context for the five figural themes. Each figural theme takes on meaning as it stands out from the ground. The five main themes are Preparation, Use of Self, Connection, Being in the Moment, and Personal Gain. The first theme to be discussed is Preparation.

Theme One: Preparation

In exploring the experience of the process of character development, all of the participants talked about preparation. They expressed that in order to fully understand the character, they needed to really understand the text in the script. Giving meaning to the words in the script also means that research needs to be done. As one participant stated: "You have to know what is between the lines, so that means reading the script over and over and over again." Another subject noted: "If you're

going to do Julius Caesar, then you also have to read and know about Julius Caesar." The theme, Preparation, encompasses the actors' numerous descriptions of laying the groundwork for character development. This theme will be presented relative to the following sub-themes: The Script, Research, and Meaning of the Text.

The Script

All participants were aware of the importance of reading the script in order to get to know the character and the character's circumstances. They often started the description of their experience of character development by talking about use of the text.

> Well, the first thing of course is to read the play, and I usually read it through once to get a sense of the whole, and then I read it through again much more carefully, and then maybe three or four more times, uhm, and then the first thing I do is to begin to think about where the play takes place and when, because I think the sociological and historical impact are very important; you can't begin to construct a character now, that would be the same as somebody in the 1930's, or the same as somebody in the 1630's. (Grace)

> ...and in reading the script, time and time again, like there were things that were revealed about this character up until the final week of performance and were we still working on it, I am sure I would find more little things, just ways in which things are said, or ways in which things are avoided reveal more about who this person is and how they operate. (Spencer)

Many participants described how they use the script and believe that what is between the lines can be critical to help them bring the character to life.

> In a rehearsal room, what I am doing to get at a character is trying to, after I've read the script from the point of view of "who is this person?" the next thing I do is really look at what they want, or what they're going after, what is driving them through the story that is the script, that is the play we are telling. (Lucille)

> Use of the text, which is primarily Stanislavski-based in this country, uhm, based in a notion of given circumstances in the play, that then, that I spend a lot of time imagining and identifying with and understanding, until I begin to

> arrive at present needs or wants, or so-called objectives, and that those present needs or wants stimulate action in me, so you basically got a situation of given circumstances, objectives and actions. Research and a lot of imaginative identification work is important. (Cary)

> The first thing that hits you with Scrooge is he's a Miser, so then I had to ask, well, what is it that makes him wish to have money, and what can I find in the script that talks to me about what causes that need to be so operative in him, and, because I can't play just greed for money, that's just an external thing, a quality, you know, where does greed come from. I have to find that greed, I have to want it, I have to want wealth to the point I have excluded and cut out every other human being in my life. What causes a person to be compulsively collecting money in that way, and it's there in the script. (Greta)

Research

A second sub-theme of the Preparation theme is Research. Participants often described the importance of research in order to get as close as possible to the truth of the character needing to be portrayed.

> It is so frustrating when the only thing people care about is "how did you learn all the lines," you know, that is the least of it, that is, in terms of what goes into it, there's so much that has to be done. It's interesting now to look back and say "well, what did I do for this role, or this role, or this role." It's different for everyone and it's led by a sort of, it's led by a gut instinct, but it's also led by, well, you hit road blocks, so you also start going through the rolodex of "well, what skills do I have, what techniques have I been given to, you know, crack this nut," and given all the time in the world, you know, I could spend forever researching a character to try to understand them, but ultimately it does come down to what you need to do to get as close to this person, to your version of this person, as possible. (Marilyn)

Participants described various forms of research, including but not limited to, historical reading, interviewing people similar to the character, and looking at art or listening to music that can be associated with the overall themes of the play. Several participants described the importance of doing historical research when playing a historical character.

If you're going to do *Julius Caesar*, then you also have to read and know about Julius Caesar and Mark Antony and all of that, and what the death of Caesar meant in its time, you know, you have to understand the weight of where the story comes from, and that's sort of my first step that I take in looking at a character. So I read a play numbers of times and do all the research that I can around the play. This is long before rehearsal ever starts. (Mae)

For instance, for *Trojan Women*, we got very little about the Greek myth, but a great deal about the rape of women in Bosnia, which was interesting as a feed into that, but I went back and read Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*, which moved me to tears with the story of the Trojan War. Not very hard unfortunately in this day in time, to begin to think about "what does it mean to lose everything," but for us it's hard. We can pick up the paper and read about the people in Iraq, but it's hard for us to understand. So, a lot of that kind of research to bring you even to the brink of, not so much the character, but that world the character lives in. That's kind of always the first step for me. (Grace)

I played Akhmatova, whose a Russian poet in Stalin's time, I had to go do research, as to what it was like living in Stalinist Russia, read excerpts from her biography, because she was a real person, which is an other interesting point, playing a historical figure, it's one thing to say "what is my take on this character based on just this two-hour play written," but if it's someone who actually lived, there is more research obviously as to what her life was like and how her poetry was used as a way of, as a means of expression under a regime that didn't want her expressing. And she had immense support from the public from the time before Stalin, so she was this sort of underground hated by the public but loved by the people, and all of that factors into my understanding. Every question leads to four more. When it's a historical figure, or even if it's a fictional person, but in an actual time period, like in *The Crucible*, they are not historical characters, but the Salem witch trials actually happened. I would look up and read what it was like to live in that time period and what influenced them, and church was a big part of it and how did that affect people, how does that affect the way they think and move and view their day, their potential of life. Is there a future for them, or do they even think that. That's all the sort of things that I'll ask myself in the process and that's to give me fuel to walk into a rehearsal, that's, everything that I've said so far is preliminary, off-line stuff.(Rita)

Other participants described that listening to music or looking at art can be helpful in connecting to the themes of the play and the character's circumstances.

> Sometimes it's the script. Like, sometimes the script is just so good that it guides me and I fall in love with the story and it's all right here in the pages. Sometimes the script doesn't give me enough, so I go out and I start to find music that reminds me of the character and what he is going through and I listen to that all the time, and read other stories of characters who are going though what he is going through and look at artwork and watch the world and see people walking by on the street. (Mickey)

> ...I then fill out with looking at art or looking at newspaper articles or listening to music. If I were to play someone from a different culture, who's heavily involved in the art of another culture, I'll research it, like I did on Akhmatova, whose a Russian poet in Stalin's time. (Rita)

For some participants, talking or observing others who resemble the character is helpful, as the following research participant describes:

> If someone has a characteristic that he has, for instance, if my character were, I don't know, like, an alcoholic, and I was sitting in a bar with friends, I would probably gravitate toward the guy who seems to have a similar issue to what my guy is going through, you know. Or if I am playing someone who has trouble having a successful relationship, and I have a friend in my life who is always having that problem, I probably talk to that friend a lot more than I usually do. Like, there are things in the world that are in these plays and I look for them to bring with me to the play. (Spencer)

Meaning of the Text

The third sub-theme of the theme, Preparation, is Meaning of the Text. The actor deals with inanimate words on the pages of a script or play, and the process by which language becomes action is complex. Critical are the ideas and feelings that circulate below the surface of the text – the subtext – the implied or possible meanings of the written words.

> The text, cause it's Shakespeare, I had to seriously sit there with two big dictionaries and go through it all and be like, "Ok, what am I saying here, what does this word mean." Whereas when I read a contemporary play I know what it all means, because it's the way we speak. You know, I have to know what I'm saying. (Mickey)

> ...so we could very technically execute that all as scripted, but without knowing why we were saying what we were saying, what we wanted to accomplish by saying what we were saying, at that point it's just a memorization exercise, getting the words from the page into our brains. It's as meaningless as rattling through the pledge of allegiance or some prayer that you learned when you were 6 years old. But when we add to it what we're trying to do with those words, what we want to accomplish with those words and have THAT as our primary focus, then those lines and question marks all fall into place. (Rita)

Theme Two: Use of Self

The theme, Use of Self, reflects the participants' awareness of themselves relative to the character's characteristics and circumstances. Participants recognized that they often reflect on their own past experiences and also use their own emotions at times when playing a character on stage. Many participants stated that the process of character development often ends in an embodied experience of the character. Furthermore, several participants described the importance of the use of their own intuition and the importance of being available to the character emotionally, physically, and mentally. And finally, this theme includes the reciprocity of an actor's world and the character's world on stage: "Like I see the world the way I see it, because of being an actor, and then I can see a play the way I see it, because of my life, you know."

For the theme, Use of Self, the participants' stories can be clustered into six sub-themes, which will be presented next: Association of Self with the Character/Past experiences, Own Emotions, Body/Embodiment, Intuition, Availability of Self, and Reciprocity of Two Worlds.

Association of Self with the Character

All participants described an acute awareness of the association of their own past experiences and their own personality characteristics with those of the character during the process of character development. The similarities served to enhance their ability to identify or empathize with the character, while their differences often hampered character development. The following participants describe the importance of associating their own life with that of the character.

> What the actor needs to do and what I think is the ideal, is to be able at will, to access as full a range of that as possible and in the process of taking on a certain role, what you're endeavoring to do, is to change that pallet deeply, so that you make points of identity contact which are associative, you associate your own life and what the character's experience is. (Katharine)

> So, no matter what you try to do, your performance, if it's a good performance, is going to come out of everything you've ever lived and experienced, and your way of creating a character is going to come out of that. (Lucille)

> What I guess I would call, the availability of the actor's, the spectrum of the actor's humanity, meaning their history and experiences, their fears, their suppressions, their emotional life, as being a kind of ground-work of self that is then available to transform into the character as written. (Laurence)

Some participants conveyed that past experiences can actually stand in the way of fully understanding the character's circumstances.

> And, uhm, and when I first was assigned to work on the role, it's this guy who loves deeply, you know, Orlando loves immensely and purely, and I've just been brokenhearted for the first time, really, like, my own heart was crushed, cause I had a relationship that went really sour, so here I was in this world where I thought everybody sucked, and I thought there was no possibility of love, I didn't believe in it, you know, and yet, I am forced to play this character who's just like so in love and everything is poetry and everything is beautiful, and that was hard. And so, for the first several weeks, everything that I did was bitter, it was all, I felt like I was putting an ironic twist on everything he said, so that you didn't trust him, you know, and, uhm, or that you saw that he'd been burned, uhm, which does not serve the character well,

> you know, that's like putting in too much of myself and not enough of the text. (Mickey)

> So, the main thing in creating a character is what your life experience has been. And what you see. It was very easy for me in *Collected Stories* to play a teacher, because that's what I do now, it was very easy for me to, to understand her wanting to have a legacy, imaginatively I could jump to that. It was very difficult to me to understand her fear of losing time and her condition of cancer and dying, because I've never been there. That, I had to work on. (Grace)

> When I read a play I begin to think: what do I understand, how is this character like me, and what do I not understand, how is this character not like me, but the parts that you understand, hey, that ain't broke, don't fix it, you know. Like when I did *The Glass Menagerie*, it just sort of poured out of me, because it's my grandmother and it's my great aunt and I know that woman, I know her backwards and forwards, she lives in me, you know, and it was so easy for me to do that role, because I understand it so well. Now, the role I am playing now is a whole other matter, she's not southern, she comes from a whole different world, a whole different discipline, so I have to find the things that I do understand and then work on the ones that I don't understand imaginatively, creatively. (Grace)

One way participants described the association of themselves with the character, is through imagination. They talked about the fact that identity contact does not necessarily come from having lived through the same experiences as the character.

> The actor must identify during their preparation and research, so that they can immerse themselves in that experience and can feel it in their body, they need it, they want it, so that they want to get out on the stage to make it happen, again and again. That's the fundamental principle, is a 'want' living in your flesh, like we want as human beings. Plays are always about those days and times in life that are not like the other, when a life comes to a crisis and 'wants' are very present, to a point that you're willing to fight or kill for them. And that's, and I always say to my actors, you know, most of the time, the thing that the character is attached to in a great story is going to be life or death. It's not going to be, trivial. It's going to be life or death. In some form that's how they are going to perceive it or feel it. Whether it's actual life or death, that's how their psyche will perceive it. And so you have to find a point of identity that's that deep. (Greta)

> You associate with your own experience, but you can do that through imagining, you don't have to have had a particular experience of the thing that is in the play. We all have a kind of imaginative, as you will, a pool of archetypes and a pool of experiences, and we can draw on it, and I find that to be true, and however the individual actor does it, when you do take on a role, what you're seeking to do, is to absorb the story of the script deeply enough that, to take in the circumstances, the context, etc., that you begin to arrive at the many layers that inform the present of any person's life, and that you are motivated, then, by certain present needs to do something to the others in the story to get what you need, and that by taking that action upon them, you will in fact be deeply affected by doing that. (Laurence)

> You have to get there imaginatively, you have to imagine what it means to you, and if you can't do that, you shouldn't be acting. But in fact, they're talking about the same thing. Imagination. Where does your imagination come from. It comes from the events in your life. Even though you're not zeroing in on a particular event in order to create a particular emotional response, that's where it's coming from. We can only play what we understand. (Marilyn)

Own Emotions

A second aspect of the theme, Use of Self, described by the participants was the use of their Own Emotions.

> I think that the sense of deep personal transformation, or of identity with a character that is so deep, the actor's own internal life history and emotions become involved to a degree that they're not simply representing a character, but actively responding inside the fiction of a play to the story. (Mae)

Several participants described how the use of their own emotions makes the character more believable. They also described how the use of their own emotions can create an energy that is very powerful and authentic.

> My character did it for love of this other character, so..., and I say luckily, because I know what love is, and love to me can justify a lot of different actions, so I just had to find my, sort of, source of love, and push it to the extreme, where it would make me feasibly, believably do something like this. (Cary)

> And having to ask for help is a hard thing for me to do. I am a ridiculously, fiercely independent person, but if I play a character who has a strong need for help and assistance, and to ask that, that triggers in me a huge feeling of

> vulnerability, because it makes me feel, it triggers my own stuff. Even if my response isn't appropriate, even if the character that I play wouldn't react in that way, it's important that I honor that, truthfully, and say "this is what I am feeling," because ultimately it's just energy moving and even if the emotional response is inappropriate, it's better that what is happening to me is what's being expressed than I'm stifling it down. (Rita)

> There's a certain point at which I could stop worrying about myself and where I just felt deeply motivated by his desire to uhm, to proof himself through this and to go out, and so I went on stage really wanting to, in that particular moment, hurt [name], because he's taking the day off, and all these things sort of fall into place. And then I just have the experience of it moving easily out of me, because it's expressing something that is present in me. (Mickey)

Body/Embodiment

All participants expressed the importance of the use of their body and the awareness of their body as a vessel for the character. Many participants described how characters live in their body before, during, and sometimes even after the closing of the show. The following participant describes her view on imagination in reference to the body.

> Something we do in class is, you know, teachers keep saying "imagine it, imagine it," and we all immediately go to our head and say "O, yeah," but that's not where we need to imagine it, we need to imagine it in our body. We need to imagine it in our flesh, feel what it's like. (Katharine)

In the following two descriptions it becomes clear that the participants tried to make their own bodies available to the character.

> Character development for that play wasn't necessarily all conscious, it wasn't like I said "OK, who is she and how do I find her." Basically, I start with myself and start with myself from a psychological place, but then what I do too is, the physical and technical work to try to get my own self out of the way, so that my human understanding of this person is able to live but my own physicality and filters that I use to express that are hopefully as out of the way as possible, so that the physicality that inevitably becomes the character is more chosen and not just my default way of operating. (Mae)

> Now, before every show, I will physically stretch every joint and muscle and bone that I have to get all of my own kinks and stresses of the day out of the way. I have a stretching routine that I do, a relaxation routine, a vocally targeted process that I go through, all those things to ask myself to get out of my own way and allow the knowledge of this person to come out with less obstruction, so you know when I was playing Andromache, and I would go through what I would need to sort of shed myself, and then I'd get ready for the show and I had a book of photos of 911 that I would look through, because for me that's the closest thing that I have experienced to living in a war affected place, a place where there was burning and suffering and what have you. (Rita)

Some participants described that they focused best if the character, the text, and the character's circumstances were second nature and a part of their body.

> I have someone's story that I feel is very important to tell and telling their story is far more important than whether or not the audience likes me. And that is where I have to keep my focus and for me that means keeping it in my body as much as possible. (Humphrey)

> To act the way I want to act, lines have to be so second nature, it has to be in your bones. (Lucille)

> If you ask me, what any character I played in recent years, or ever, if you ask me "what is the objective?" I could tell you immediately, and I could tell what specific actions are at specific scenes, but I don't write them down. They have to kind of live in my body. (Grace)

Several participants described the use of the Laban System, which is a universal system of movement notations used mainly by dancers and actors. Participants believed that the use of animal improvisations, as part of the Laban's exercises, helped them get in touch with the core of the character.

> I trained as a dancer all my life, until the past 10 years I guess, uhm, to be physically involved. I have worked a lot with animal improvisations, I was taught that in school in London: you pick an animal that seems to have movement qualities very different from your own, I mean I can define my movement, this is all based on Laban, Rudolph Laban was a dancer who created dance notation, called Labanotation, and then took his work and in connection with the studies of Jung, the four psychological types, created a system of defining movement and characterizing movement for actors. So, I

look at characters very much that way. For instance, when I played Martha, no, so, we would go to zoo, we would pick an animal and go to the zoo and study it for months in London, and what you do is, you get over all the ideas of Disney, you know, forget all that, you really look at the animal and you really try to get into the animal, we don't know what animals see, but we know they see differently than we do, and you really study the animal, and you really, as far as you can, take that animal into your body and create that animal and then you turn that animal into a character. So when I played Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, I worked on a bear, and before every performance I would be in the wings, I would dance and I would box, and I got a much larger range of movement and a lot cruder sort of thing going on in my body than is me. And I created it and then I had to do it in preparation every night to get that going in my body before going on stage, because she kind of bursts on stage coming home from a party. You can't warm up on stage. When I did Helen in *Road to Mecca*, I worked on a ferret, because I figured she has very quick time and very direct space, very curious, and very light weight. Deeply sensual, but very light weight. And her arthritic hands. I worked very hard to get my own inner tempo much quicker, there's nothing languid about her. To get my own flexible space much more direct, and know that she can't see very well, because she has glass in her eyes, and so she looks very carefully, so all of that. (Grace)

If I am going to create a character who is physically different from myself, then I will go from the animal, I will always use an animal improvisation, because you get it in your body and it's not put on like a suit or clothes, you know. It's easier to get a different thing going in your body working on an animal than, if you get it in your body in the animal then you don't have to think about the human being, it's just there, And it changes the rhythm of your speech and sometimes pitch. It changes everything about the way you face the world. (Mae)

Intuition

The fourth sub-theme of Use of Self is Intuition, which was brought up by several participants as an essential component of character development. Participants described how working from their intuition often brought them closer to the character than if they had only used their intellectual knowledge and understanding of the text.

I realized there's a lot that can be conveyed without sculpted intellectual knowledge and over time in doing that, I let my head get out of the way, it was almost like I was doing too much work. I had a teacher who said "you are trying to make it an academic exercise, you're trying to make acting into

something academic and you can't." You can't with any art, I don't think. And, uhm, by simply saying "stop it, it doesn't serve you," you know, "stop thinking so much and cramming down and trying so hard," but trusting more my own intuitive sense, it was a much stronger response anyway, once I gave it any value, and I think maybe at some point when I stopped doing all the cramming head work, I started to get cast more, so then I was like, so I am getting more work in doing less work. Even though it's a much more vulnerable place, you have the beauty of the character to hide behind. (Rita)

That sort of jumping off point of my instinctive understanding of them...(Cary)

Once you discover, and I don't, a lot of actors are much more intellectual about this than I am, you know, they write a lot of things down, I don't write much down, I work more from my intuition, I don't decide ahead of time. I kind of feel it out in rehearsal. (Grace)

Availability of Self

A fifth aspect of the theme, Use of Self, described by the participants was Availability of Self. Several participants referred to themselves as being available to the character, emotionally and physically.

And in order to serve a character, then I am a pretty idealistic person, and then I think about serving a character, I think about, and it's hard to say this in like a modern context, but like a shaman. Someone who can like summon the spirit of something, and I feel like, whether or not I am not successful at that all the time, that's the goal, is that I wanna be as much of an open vessel for this character. So, I want to sort of like summon all of the things that he is and then, in order for me to be able to do that I have to find them in myself, you know. (Mickey)

The body essentially, is a kind of road-map of the way a person has socialized themselves and when we are in front of others is typically a time in which we are most engaged in controlling our behavior and so you can kind of systematically begin to perceive and address the ways that individuals go underground to themselves and others when they are in front of others. And by causing them to see it, and, or helping them to see it, you begin to be able to have them stop doing the suppressing behavior, or stop manifesting their fear-response, and when they stop that, they're able to stand in a very raw, a very possible place, where they can choose other things. And when they stop doing the thing that they're used to doing to control their behaviors, physically

> or psychologically, both together, an enormous energy is made, enormous expressive energies, which are theirs, and which are then available to the character. It's my fundamental belief, and I've watched it for many years now, that the actor cannot expect to have those resources of expression available to them unless they address them in their life. (Laurence)

Reciprocity of Two World

In the final sub-theme, Reciprocity of Two Worlds, participants described their awareness of the affect the world of the character and the main themes of the play have on their own world off stage. In addition, participants described the ways in which they bring their own world into the process of character development.

> Really listening to the words that he is saying, really thinking about the actions that he is, you know, what he wants in the play, uhm, I have totally fallen in love with him, and I think that, like, and this is the weird thing about being an actor too is, I find when I work on a play, the philosophies that are present in the play, or the themes take over my world for a while and I look to my life to explore those themes, like, a theme of familial love in the play, which may be dark and horrible, you know, I sort of take the questions that are presented in the play, just because I am thinking about them all the time, and sort of, serve them to my family, and see if those things are actually still true in today's society, or in our lives, or whatever. That's just part, I think, of being an actor. (Mickey)

> For a while, actually for a ling time, I tried to separate the two things, like, over here I am an actor, and over here is my life. But you can't, if you want to be a good actor I think you have to constantly bring both, you know, bring each world to each play. (Humphrey)

> But, it's totally fucked up and weird and hard, because sometimes, I mean, just something that the person has is a problem I have, and then it gets sort of scary, because that forces me to really look at my life and ask questions about everything. Like, how I was raised, the people I was raised by, uhm, what are my values, what are my morals, what do I want, like secretly, that I never express, you know. How do present myself to the world, and yet, what do I hide from the world, like all of these things come up. (Spencer)

In the sub-theme, Reciprocity of Two Worlds, the issue of Authenticity is present. Authenticity, which is a ground for the whole experience of creating a role,

can be perceived in two existentially different ways. The actors are attempting to be authentic on stage and also to be authentic off stage in their real lives. Reciprocity of Two Worlds pertains to being authentic in both situations and how authentic experiences in these two situations affect each other.

Theme Three: Connection

This theme, Connection, includes the participants' descriptions of the ways in which they related to the character they were portraying, or as one participant put it: "who is she and how is she me." It also contains the participants' awareness of the importance of connecting fully with scene partners and fellow cast members. And finally, this theme covers the descriptions participants gave about the importance of relating well to the director and the struggles some had with putting the director's needs first. The three sub-themes of Connection, which will be described in the following section, are Relating to the Character, Connection with Scene Partners, and Connection with the Director.

Relating to the Character

Participants described their experiences of relating to the character in many different ways. One participant spoke more in general terms about relating to different characters.

> ...characterization, the crux of it is, who is this human being, if I were to sit down and interview them over coffee, what would I walk away from the experience knowing, how would I be changed. (Rita)

Another participants described how he tried to identify with the character on a deeper level.

> I played a murderer once and I remember driving home from rehearsals during that play and I would be thinking about like, OK, what would be the best way, the fastest way, the safest way, to kill this person, and if could I hide the evidence, you know, how could I leave no stone unturned. I started to really consider these things, you know, because you have to. And I remember calling up my mom and talking to her about it and being like, you know, if I want to kill this kid, I want to take him to this area, because nobody ever goes there, and I would make sure that I had this and this with me... (Mickey)

One participant described how his connection to the character grew stronger over the course of the entire run of the production.

> So, now I am trying to get more of a sense of where his center of gravity is and uhm, and then when there is like a general framework, when he's kind of this skeleton with maybe a little bit of flesh on him, we'll probably open. And then I have three weeks, where for me it really begins, because the director is gone, and I can really flesh out. The things I couldn't worry about because I had to get everything right for the production, once those things are in place, I can forget all about all of the shit, and just play with someone on stage over and over every night, and find out, ok, and what happens with that is that your heart just gets bigger and bigger and bigger into the character's needs, and the stakes get higher and the need gets deeper and I used to be someone who loved rehearsal more than I loved performance, and now I am starting to really like the performance time, because I feel like, it's not just about putting on a play for a bunch of other people. It's about how deep I can get before this thing is over. (Spencer)

Several participants talked about specific characteristics they could relate to in reference to the character they portrayed.

> He has a birthright that he is an honorable man, yet his brother has stripped him away of that and has trained and treated him like a peasant for several years, so I think he is looking to break free and sort of, to be welcomed somewhere and find his place in the world. Uhm, which I can relate to. I think in a lot of ways it's why I began acting, you know, 'cause I wanted people to see me, and I wanted not to be invisible, and I wanted to do something that could change the world, like make it better, you know, and also be recognized for that, so in that way I feel like I really relate to him. (Cary)

> He wants to go home and be redeemed in his father's eyes through success, and that I could get hold of. Sounds very abstract as I talk about it, but I could really get hold, you know, my own father, the redemption he took from his errors in our family personally, by being able to provide for us, the way that

> many men take hold of material success as a compensation for their inability to be emotionally present. There are many sort of ways that that could affect me personally and that I then could hook up and start to feel his need and then why Christmas particularly, hurts him. (Laurence)

> And in addition to saying, ok, how do I relate, you know, with that particular play there were a lot of things that I would do to connect to it, like just looking at photos of war torn cultures and looking at the women in those pictures and imagining myself living like that, how difficult that must be, and you know, knowing a handful of moms who have lost a child and how completely debilitating that is. If it isn't something I can relate to I will seek out someone to interview who may have had a more, who could give me a more tangible experience of something. (Rita)

One participant described how connecting to a character is like meeting someone for the first time.

> It's just this sort of, imaginative dreaming that happens about and around what makes these people who they are. Much like when I'm getting to know a friend, meeting someone and getting to know them. The things about who they are, the things that make them tick and operate the way that they do, or think the way that they do, or view the world the way that they do, or what I am most intrigued about, or what I find most interesting in a human being, so that's what I find most interesting in a character too. (Lucille)

Several participants described how relating to a character is often a more embodied feeling than a connection on a pure intellectual level.

> I have to be an advocate for my character, and I have to relate to him in the way that I know how, which unfortunately isn't always, you know, a mental thing. It's something that connects in my heart, or in my gut, or in my loins, you know. (Cary)

> Yeah, because I think that's where ultimately I feel a connection. I try not to think "so, she's x, y and z," it's more about how it hits me and how physically, on a visceral, human, primal level, how I respond to those circumstances [in the script]. I mean I am by nature a sensitive, intuitive person, so for me to avoid naming it and categorizing it, making it into something intellectual, has been very important. Like, in my earlier years of acting, when I was an undergrad, uhm, everything was very cerebral and thought-out and I could tell you, I mean, you could ask me any question about my character, and I could tell you everything about them, but it was all just stuck up in my head, and what I found over time is that it's far less important

> to me that she was born in March in Nebraska, than the fact that she suffered, you know, whatever hardship. You know, how, the things that shape them on a visceral primal level are the things that I end up connecting to. (Marilyn)

> Well, I think, uhm, the first thing I do, which sounds really simple is read the script and the main thing that, it's not even what I really look for, it's just what sort of hits me, is where I identify with the character's experience, where I can relate or if something hits me on, or with which I can empathize, or feel that I understand that struggle or that reaction or that whatever the script sort of informs me of what that particular person is living through and if I don't, I mean I have a direct experience. I have never had a child and I played several characters who do, uhm, but my own experience of a loved one, you know, things will hit me on a level of empathy that, it's that sort of initial, my connection to them that I work from, I guess, and it's not really that conscious, it's more based in my body, on a gut level. I don't really map it out, but those are the things that draw me into them. (Rita)

Connection with Scene Partners

In the second sub-theme of Connection the participants describe the importance of being connected to their scene partner. The context of authenticity becomes very clear in this sub-theme, because participants explain that the more connected they are on stage, the more authentic their performance will be, as the following excerpts clearly illustrate:

> And ultimately in the process of rehearsal, what I'm trying to do every single time, is believe fully that what I am experiencing is what the character is experiencing and I am experiencing it with my scene partner as 100% truthfully, so in that, I am not imagining that my scene-partner is someone else, I am talking to [name scene-partner] and I want this from her and I need this from her, and this room is as real as you and I are today. I have to believe that as fully as my character believes it of Ruth. In order to sort of make her me and me her and have that transformation. Ideally over time, if I am doing work at the same time to get my own physical habits out of the way and work from a free and open body and a free and open voice, in working to neutralize my own habits, I am just talking to [name scene-partner], I am finding that need fulfillable by her and believing fully that what Lisa needs from Ruth I need from [name scene-partner]. And by doing that and by believing that and by actively trying to get that from her, more happens in me to respond to and she's actively trying to get from me, me, not Lisa. (Rita)

> It got to a point where we ran lines so much that you start to hear the same patterns of speech and line-readings come out of your mouth and you just hear yourself say it the same way, you hear your partner saying it the same way, you know that neither one of you are really connected to it at that point, we're as actively involved as sitting at home running the lines, so we try to give ourselves a little pep-talk by saying, "OK, we know this, all we can do is focus on what we want and talk and listen to each other," instead of thinking "shit, shit, what does the script say," say "what is coming here." Ultimately what is more important is talking and listening and having a real conversation with each other and worrying less about where we were on the page at any given moment. (Mae)

> We weren't taught to be intellectual about it, we were taught to have it in our heads and go with that, and build off each other. And that's still the way that I work. A lot of it depends on the other actor, what the other actor comes at me with, I am going to have to choose my actions depending on what I am getting from him in the moment. (Spencer)

Connection with the Director

In this last sub-theme of Connection, participants are very aware of the effect their relationship with the director has on the process of character development and authenticity. The participants that described their relationship with the director, suggested a rather negative connection, which in many cases hampered the process of character development. Several participants struggled to stay true to their own character choices in reference to the director's needs. These next four excerpts clearly indicate that struggle:

> I have been working on this character since, uhm, last February…Uhm, and I had very different notions of who he is than what I have now. Because everything then was just research. I mean, it was exploration and it was creative and it was fun, but it was sort of like making the character very much our own. And now, putting it in a production, we have a director, who doesn't necessarily agree with the choices that we wanted to make, you know, uhm, and so I have to fit this character, who I have really come to love, into a production, and so in that way it's actually really hard, 'cause I feel like I'm sort of stripping pieces of him that I have taken care of for a long time, and, and, manipulating him, you know, to serve the production, as supposed to like, well, the way I see it is, well, so that's been a hard struggle. (Mickey)

...that's what I proposed to the director and he said: "No." In doing that, he thinks it will make [female] character a little weaker, psychologically. So, you know, I tried to justify to him that I could find ways of playing it that wouldn't really detract from that, uhm, but he wasn't willing, really, to go that way, so I am having to, or now I am doing, this is sort of terrible, but I am still playing it the way I want to play it, but when I talk about it with him, I'm sort of lying. Like, I'm saying, because I can justify the things he is asking me to do with my own choices anyway. (Humphrey)

Actors are losing a piece of the pie in terms of putting in, putting together a play and that everything is falling to the director, to make decisions. And therefore actors are losing creative input. Because the director says "No, I want A, B, and C," and you say "Well, I want to do A, B, and D." And they say, "No, A, B, and C or you're fired." You know, that's the commerce world. So, I am sort of learning how to negotiate giving him what he wants, and yet how do I play what I connect to and change the shape. I still play what he wants, but I change the shape of how it goes out, I guess, a little bit, so that the director has what he needs, I have what I need, and the rest of the characters get from me what they need. (Cary)

Well, a lot of the directing was "straight forward to the audience now," or "no emotion, cut emotion there." There was this moment where I talk about the death of my child and the director's like, "no just straight forward, like a CNN reporter, that's all I want from you here," and having to factor those two things in, give the director what she wanted as well as keep my life experience alive, was hard. Her way wasn't necessarily articulated to me, you know, sometimes if I don't see eye to eye with the director, but they're able to clearly explain to me their point of view and what they're trying to convey, then I can get behind it even though I wouldn't have made that choice and see what you're trying to do. I didn't really have that with [name director], she was working more instinctively as well, saying "I don't know, I just want it this way here." So that was kind of frustrating too, cause it wasn't about a meeting of two concepts, it was about two instinctive, intuitive ways of working bumping against each other and ultimately what came out of it was sort of a collage of the two as opposed to a blended together stew. (Rita)

Other participants described how wanting to please the director and the need for the director's approval stood in the way of developing the character to the fullest extent possible.

What ends up happening a lot of the times is that you want the director's approval, and so you play it safe, in this gray, 50%, half-ass place, where they can't really tell what you're doing and it's not really clear to you. I find half

the time when I do that, I am not clear on what I am doing, and just trying to tip-toe around the idea of what I think this scene is. And it doesn't serve anyone and ends up being a big waste of time, but it's a huge reality, when you're in a cast and you have 4 weeks together and you have a new director that you try to please the whole time, because you want to work with him again and all these variables come into play, then the next thing you know is you're not serving the character, you're not taking the risk. (Marilyn)

First week of *As You Like It* was hell, because we wanted so hard to, not even so much as impress the director, because I worked with him before, and because he'd cast us, it was this feeling of wanting to not disappoint him if he had cast us the way that he had, so there was this proving like "O God, does he think I'm good enough," so even though I'm much better than I used to be, certain instances and certain situations will trigger it dramatically. And that made rehearsal hell. The first few weeks I kept thinking "What am I doing," and I found I wasn't even able to make choices, because I just got so under this umbrella of doubt that it will be any good that everything, every idea that I even have, if I even have the idea, every idea gets immediately negated as to why it won't work as opposed to just trying it out on your feet and discover what value it might hold. I end up getting in my head about it and saying "no, it's not that, it's not that, it's not that," before trying anything, and that is my Achilles heel, that habit, that's the thing that gets in my way every single time. A new director, who I don't really care about, I have much more freedom, that is something that as I go on in life and as I go on trying to call myself an actress is my cross to bear that I need to keep those, that neurosis at bay, because otherwise it becomes crippling and then I can't do what I know I am capable of doing. (Greta)

Theme Four: Being in the Moment

This theme, Being in the Moment, represents the participants' awareness of a different state of being. As participants discussed the concept of Being in the Moment they expressed words such as "flow," "magic," and being "on." One participant described the experience as "What happens then is sort of the mystery or the magic of acting." The ground, Authenticity, is clearly a context for Being in the Moment and it is evident in the participants' descriptions of this theme.

For *Collected Stories*, because I would basically come in from outside, I would remind myself: "I am late for an appointment with someone who I revere more than life itself," and sort of sitting in that feeling for a minute,

> relating to it, knowing it, and instantly if I have done all the work to get myself out of my own way, I will feel it in my body. (Rita)
>
> I was doing a scene once, where I had to enter a bar, knowing that I was pregnant for the third time, and the father had just broken up with me, so that was the knowledge I was entering with, and I could sit there and go "Wow, what must that be like, to have three kids already and being pregnant again." But that wasn't it, it was about standing outside the door of a bar, trying to go somewhere for solace and having your hand on the doorknob and feeling what that must be like and if you can believe it on that level, it's a different feeling, you can feel it viscerally as opposed to just in your head. (Lucille)

Two main concepts or sub-themes emerged from the theme Being in the Moment, as participants described their experiences: Being in the Zone and The Ultimate Goal.

Being in the Zone

The participants conveyed the significance of those moments in which they forget that they are actors on stage, portraying a character in a play. As participants talked about their experiences of being in the zone, they often made reference to spirituality.

> It's that they hit a heightened state in which you're completely at home with the simultaneity of the theatrical world, the theatre, the stage and the artifice, and you're completely motivated by the character's story. You just sort of forget, you don't care that there are people there, but you are completely aware that they're there. It's not, it's that you forget any concern about how you are doing, and you only become engaged in what the character's doing, and that's being "in the zone." (Laurence)
>
> You try through your discipline, through your long-term training, through your self-preparation, and then through your immersion in that particular character's perspective, you, you try to set up the circumstances by which that may occur, and then why it occurs is a little above our grasp, almost something spiritual. Just like Michael Jordan doesn't win every game, can't win every shot, but there are games when he's really on. Same thing with a performer's experience, so you set up the circumstances. You know the Greeks have a wonderful way of saying it, you know, you don't summon the muse, the muse decides to come to you, and so you work really hard to

> condition yourself so that more and more consistently the muse will come to you. And that happens. The muse descends. You don't force it. (Spencer)

One participant described an instance in which being in the zone became a scary experience, because he felt he had lost himself in the moment.

> For instance in this play there is a huge wrestling match, which is pretty savage, and the first night that I did it, at the end of five days of rehearsing it, we did three hours rehearsals of stage combat in the daytime and then three hours of rehearsals of wrestling matches at night, so that's like six hours of fighting, of combat a day, and I'm not a person who fights, you know, I'm like [participant's name], I don't know what that is [laughs], really to fight, but yet somehow I found the way into that moment and the final night when I rehearsed it and I felt like for the first time it was for real and I went to the guy fucking thinking like "I want to kill this person" and then attempting to do that through the combat that we have staged, you know, is intense, and I walked off stage and went into the dressing room and I just, I don't even know what happened, but something came over me and I just started crying, I was, uhm, I lost control of myself. I lost myself in the play, in the combat. And when I came out of it I was lost, because I was thinking "what did I just do, who am I, where am I." That was intense, that was huge, and my emotions just started to take shape on their own... (Mickey)

<u>The Ultimate Goal</u>

In this sub-theme participants describe what they believe to be the ultimate goal in order to be authentic on stage. In some form, all the actors that participated shared their beliefs on what it means to be as true to a character as possible.

> The greatest single stage performance I have ever seen was by the actress Janet McTeer who played Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, on Broadway six years ago, and I am actually meeting with her in London in a week. If you watch her in the films she's in, you will see, she sort of represents the aesthetic I care about, which is such a degree of transformation that you don't recognize her. In *Tumbleweed* she plays an Alabama housewife in the 60's and she's British. You couldn't know, there's no way you could know, and there's no way you can see the technique, she just "is." And she immerses herself profoundly, travels to the place, spends time, learns the dialect, takes in the life, takes in the geography, huge preparation. And she is also incredibly gifted in her body and her whole self, but she works really hard and she is deeply trained, but when I saw *A Doll's House*, I felt that night, that the story actually happened to her, and that she was subject to it, and that she went

through it, and although it is the aesthetic I knew before I went in there that I liked and that I wanted and that I was striving for in my own life, I didn't know how she could do that eight times a week, but she was. (Laurence)

If I want to do it the way I want to do it – which I am worlds away from doing it the way I want to do it – but I want to be able to do is to really assume another soul. But not completely, I want to match mine with it, like sort of 50/50. What happened on stage in the combat scene, I aspire to that in a way, because I was completely in control of what I was doing, in that I knew that I wasn't going to hurt him, because we had these planned moves, but emotionally, the desire became so great, that it wasn't acting, you know. (Mickey)

Uhm, if one is the type to not be able to let their guard down or to have to be perceived a certain way, I would imagine it would be pretty hard to allow yourself to walk in somebody else's shoes. But it's ultimately I think the goal. (Rita)

Several participants described the struggle to reach that goal on a continual basis. They talked about distractions that kept them from reaching that ultimate goal.

The life always stays active between the two of us. The goal, and it is, I don't know if I've ever been successful about it, the goal is to serve the character's need more than the concern about our own performance or how it's going, and where the actor's head always ends up going is, you're watching yourself and you're hearing yourself and listening to audience response and you're judging it as you go, the minute, the second you start doing that, you've lost what you're trying to get for your character, uhm, and it's not always a 100%, you know frequently in performance, I hear my voice, I hear it strain and I'll technically go through the experience of opening myself up, allowing myself to relax a little bit, actively reconnecting to my scene partner. We're on a thin thread, falling off and grabbing back on and falling off and grabbing back on. (Grace)

I don't think that what I am trying to do is completely lose myself, you know, I mean, if in the middle of a brilliant performance in which I am a 100% connected, a light falls from the ceiling, I am still going to have the wherewithal to step back and get out of its way. In that way it's a very, well, I think it's more like this: we're always multi-tasking in our heads when we're on stage. We're serving the character's needs and at the same time we're aware of our surroundings "I hear the audience," and "O, that light-cue is weird," and "I am not zipped up fully," and "O, god, are they late for their entrance," and all these other things are happening, but the goal is to have all those other voices as quiet as possible, and not derail you as much as they can

> and you know, we have the script and the actions we've set up as a roadmap, but even in nailing the lines, hitting all the cues, playing all the actions fully, if we're thinking about how we're doing or anything, it's pulling us away from it at any given moment. So, it's a constant battle to try to get you on and the moments where it really drops in, are the moments when you're so connected to what you want, that nothing else matters at all, because all you care about getting what you need from your partner at the moment. (Lucille)

> It's pretty much just, you know, it's like when you're meditating in a way, you notice when your thoughts wander and you go back to the task at hand, you just keep returning to the task at hand and with my scene partner, I would try very much to...I would reconnect to her and I would take her in, but because I was half of that show it being a two-character play and I was speaking so much, I focused more on trying to get back to what I was doing to her, what action I was playing at any given beat, which in some ways sounds a bit contradictory, because it is more focused on my performance again, but for me it was more a focus on going after what I wanted as opposed to taking in from her, which is another tricky bound, because it is a two-way street, we have to be affected by what's happening, but ideally, the goal is to be more active than reactive and if we're reacting 90% of the time, we're indicating a response based to what we were given as opposed to still going after what we need. (Rita)

Theme Five: Personal Gain

The last theme emerging as figural from the experience of character development for these actors is Personal Gain. When considering their discussion of the overall experience of character development, personal gain seems to be what drives a lot of these actors. Despite the challenges the truthful creation of a character can bring, all of the participants reported that acting is at the core of their existence. The theme, Personal Gain, consists of participants' descriptions of various aspects, including Catharsis, Security, and Personal Transformation.

Catharsis

With the first sub-theme of Personal Gain, the participants described the experience of catharsis. They described an experience or feeling of release brought

about by the intensity of the emotions associated with performance. Several participants described the ways in which acting can be therapeutic.

> I guess there's something about creating for an audience and hoping that they get something really good from what we've done, you know, and just working toward that is just, when I am acting, even when it makes me question everything in my life, and even when it's really hard for whatever reason, I'm pretty much always happier than when I'm not acting. It's totally cathartic, it's amazingly cathartic. It's magical, you know. And it doesn't happen every time you do it, but like, the sort of quest for that, higher feeling, feeling of release, like it's just, it's like, it's just really, no it's, well I was going to say it's like really amazing sex, that when you've had it you want to have it again and again and again, but that's not even what it's like...it's like hope, yeah, that's what it's like, or that's what it feels like to me. (Mickey)

> It's tremendously healing and therapeutic and I often undergo fundamental, profound physical and psychological change. (Laurence)

> OK, that what we're doing is taking a very sophisticated cultural artifice and enabling the actor to stand in all the various forms of their humanity, be that violent aggression, be that lust, be that desire, be that hatred, be that fear, be that, you know, fundamental things, need for love, passion, their rejection, their sense of abandonment, all these various things, giving them roles or forms that touch or relate to those things, and enable them to express it publicly, to see it and learn about it in themselves, so that they can then, in some sense uhm, they are as in therapy often healed by that process, significantly, but then they also understand that about humans and about themselves in a way that enables them to use it in other material. (Spencer)

The freeing of the self by expressing emotions through the character also becomes apparent in the description of several participants.

> What they're doing to control themselves in the fear and the 'stop doing that' and the 'let the fear be there,' and then they can direct that energy towards the character's life. And what happens is the artifice of the character gives them a new mask, which enables them to express very large, personal things through the character's life. (Laurence)

> Well, so, so to describe what happens, uh, is, uh, I mean, a psychologist, I don't know the language you would use, but to describe the way that I, that the expression or the expression of a fear, or an anger, it's usually a fear, maybe a fear of anger, a fear of rage, a fear of whatever, a primal thing, is blocking me. To describe the way that, to express that then causes not only a

> greater wholeness psychologically in me, but a tremendous immediate freeing of the expressive instrument, of the voice, of the breath, an absolute immediate change in my tissue. You can feel it, you can see it, my face will change, my face will lift, my breath will move differently, my ribs will open, from going through these psychic barriers, personally, in front of others, toward the role. (Spencer)

> To describe that, what that process is, is very difficult, because it is so profoundly organically psychological and physical. I have certain ways that I talk about it, which are very much layman's terms, but which are also very much effective, and uhm, fundamentally, I believe that an actor uh, cannot freely express vocally or in breath, or in movement, or in gesture, or in the spontaneity of the moment, unless they have, not to their full potential, unless they have deeply and profoundly addressed uh, the history of their self-division and holdings in their body, and that is a thing that is profoundly about their psychological history. (Cary)

One participant clearly stated that the benefits outweigh the costs.

> Most of my colleagues would agree with me when I say that even going through months of uhm, extraordinary emotional uncertainty and instability, while I'm in the midst of it, that it is much better living discomfort than dead comfort. (Humphrey)

Security

As the participants talked about character development in specific and acting in general, many participants used terms like "home," "refuge," and "safety." They talked about acting as their purpose in life.

> For me it is my, it's honestly, it is my life. The combination of sort of reality and fantasy. Because I can't really feel, I can't really, well, what happens in the real world, I can see great beauty in it and I can see great joy, at times, but for me, it's not enough to keep me happy, it's not enough to keep me going, you know. But this sort of world where you can be anything you want, anything is possible, characters fight for what they want and they win, or characters fight for what they want and they lose and they learn, and there are so many stories to be explored and I just feel like, because I have these plays, which are essentially just other people's thoughts on life, as reference, it gives me a pair of glasses and go out and look at the real world with, a pair that I am happy with because it's not just rose-colored and it's not just dismal, it's an artist's reaction to the world. I just need that, you know. Every time I do something that is not acting, like I am working in an office and I haven't been

> in a play for a while, I just want to die, I just want to die. I get depressed when I am not working. (Mickey)

> I mean, my life was transformed and my health and my well-being and my energy-levels and my knowledge of myself, and my psychic health, through actor training and I remember distinctly going to NYU as a 28 year old, and I remember in the first year, entering it, because I was sort of new to the field, I mean I was 28, I had a background in literature and I remember being in these studios and three or four months in going, two or three days in I went "I'm home, this is what I think about, what I care about, how I read stories and these people are talking about things that I care about and want to understand." (Laurence)

Personal Transformation

The final sub-theme of Personal Gain is Personal Transformation. It reflects participants' descriptions of deep psychological change through their experience of playing different characters. Several participants refer to transformation as a concept that is often associated with therapy, and they conveyed that experiences on stage can have the same therapeutic effect.

> Frankly, I think it's much more powerful therapeutically, because it gives me something I'm doing outwardly that doesn't cause me, it motivates me forward and it doesn't take me into that sort of endless recessionary movement that much talk therapy does. I am not opposed to talk-therapy, I am a fan of good therapy, very much, I think it's very valuable, but, so it is, it involves, in my work, it deeply involves psychological change, it deeply involves perceiving psycho-physical forms of self-suppression, addressing those systematically, repeatedly, it deeply involves, uhm, uh, the expression of large historic emotion, huge... (Spencer)

> I underwent much greater therapeutic healing and transformation than I ever did in therapy, although I used therapy as a, a buttressing and complementary experience, while I was undergoing and facing these very large things that were coming up. (Mae)

Several participants described how their experiences on stage have made them more understanding of humanity as a whole, because they have played many different characters.

> I talk to people that I grew up with here, and I am so different from them, because I have been so many different people. And you also, I think, I think actors are brilliant and also wonderful people, because they have to consider so many things. (Grace)

> By fully allowing myself to experience it, I feel that I give voice to many thousands of women throughout history who have suffered like that as a result of war, and I understand it better as well. (Rita)

> I really try to make identity contact, deeply and internally, and that causes types of transformation in my external life. (Marilyn)

One participant described internal transformation as developing more colors for your painter's pallet, which is all your life's experiences combined, and usable to make the creation of future characters that much easier.

> An artistic aesthetic in which the actor actually undergoes a kind of internal transformation that changes the way, even changes the way they appear from the change in the way they manifest their internal life, and one way you might want to talk about it, in a metaphor is, to think about us all carrying around a full painter's pallet of human experiences, but that in our personality, which interestingly comes from the Greek word for 'mask,' that our personality or our socialized self, uhm, is uhm, a certain psycho-physically narrowly defined use of a certain range of colors on that pallet, which are acceptable to us and make us comfortable and enable us to move forward successfully. And we can change the combination slightly, et cetera, and we do quite spontaneously in all the realms in which we move, habitually, meaning in our family it immediately starts to shift, in our professional world... (Laurence)

Thematic Structure of the Experience of Character Development

An outline for the overall thematic structure of the actor's experience of creating a role for a play is presented in Appendix D. The thematic structure of the process of character development as experienced by the twelve actors includes five interrelated themes: (a) Preparation, (b) Use of Self, (c) Connection, (d) Being in the Moment, and (e) Personal Gain. In addition, these five figural themes were contextualized within the frame of one experiential ground: Authenticity. All of these

elements in the thematic structure are present throughout the experience of character development; however, the relative significance of each theme varies depending on which aspect of the experience the participants are describing. As an actor focused on a specific part of her or his experience, one or more themes emerged as more relevant while the other themes faded out of focus, but never entirely disappeared. For example, when an actor described a perfect performance in terms of being "on," in which she or he connected as fully as possible with her or his scene partner, the themes Connection and Being in the Moment were most figural, but when she or he described getting to know the character and relating to the character by emotional recall, the themes of Preparation and Use of Self were most figural. The ground and five themes have been presented in detail in the previous sections of this chapter. The following is a summary of the main features of the thematic structure of the experience of character development as described by the participants.

The ground of Authenticity provided the experiential context for the participants' experience of character development. Authenticity reflects the participants' sense of being true to the character, the script, their scene partners, and themselves, and included various statements regarding the believability of the portrayal of the character. In addition, it encompasses the participants' statements about imagining the character's circumstances to be real and to allow themselves to fully experience the character's emotions. Upon closer examination of these statements, it was clear that the participants' conceptions of a truthful and believable performance permeated every aspect of their experience of character development they described and in effect, created the context from which the experience directly

emerged. In other words, the meaning of the experience of character development for these participants had a close relationship with their thoughts about being authentic or being true to the character.

The first theme, Preparation, reflects the participants' descriptions of preparation. Many participants expressed that in order to fully understand the character, it was pertinent that they understand the text in the script. In other words, giving meaning to the words in the script is essential in order to develop the character as well as the playwright would have meant. All participants stated that some form of research needs to be done in order to get to know the character. The theme, Preparation, seems to encompass the groundwork for character development. The ground of Authenticity was clearly evident in the actors' description of this theme; participants emphasized the importance of preparation in light of getting as close to the character, or to their version of the character, as possible.

The second theme, Use of Self, reflects the participants' awareness of themselves relative to the character's characteristics and circumstances. All participants described an acute awareness of the association of their own past experiences and their own personality characteristics with those of the character during the process of character development. The similarities served to enhance their ability to identify or empathize with the character, while their differences often hampered character development. Several participants described how the use of their own emotions made the character more believable. They also described how the use of their own emotions can create an energy that is very powerful and authentic. All participants expressed the importance of the use of their body and the awareness of

their body as a vessel for the character. Many participants described how characters live in their body before, during, and even sometimes after the closing of the show. Intuition was brought up by several participants as an essential component of character development. Participants described how working from their intuition often brought them closer to the character than if they had only used their intellectual knowledge and understanding of the text. The context of Authenticity becomes evident in this theme by the participants' descriptions of using their past experiences and their own emotions in order to fully understand a character's point of view. Also freeing the body of personal and emotional blocks in order for the character to emerge to its full extent clearly relates to authenticity.

The third theme, Connection, reflects the participants' descriptions of relating to the character. Integral to their stories was the level of commitment the participants described in getting to know a character. It also contains the participants' awareness of the importance of connecting fully with scene partners and fellow cast members, in order to make their characters' relationship as believable as possible. The context of authenticity stands out in this theme, because participants explain that the more connected they are to the character and their scene partners, the more authentic their performance will be. This theme also encompasses the participants' relationship with the director, which was often described as rather problematic. The participants revealed that the director's point of view often clashed with their own choices for a character.

The fourth theme, Being in the Moment, encompasses key elements the participants identified as the mystery and the magic of acting. The ground,

Authenticity, is clearly evident in the participants' descriptions of this theme, because the participants described an ideal way of portraying a character in a play, which in essence is coming as close to the character's core emotions as possible. The participants conveyed the significance of those moments in which they forget that they are actors on stage. As they talked about their experiences of being in the zone, they often made reference to spirituality. The ideal aesthetic involves such a degree of transformation that the actor's self disappears in the moment, so that the audience sees neither the actor nor any technique. What's happening on stage is real, because the actors immerse themselves profoundly.

The fifth and final theme is Personal Gain. Despite the challenges the truthful creation of a character can bring, all of the participants reported that acting is at the core of their existence. As the participants talked about character development in specific and acting in general, many participants used terms like "home," "refuge," and "safety." They talked about acting as their purpose in life. Many participants referred to acting as a substitute to therapy, because it often creates an experience or feeling of release brought about by the intensity of the emotions associated with a performance. Deep psychological change was one of the most welcomed benefits of being able to portray many different characters in many different plays.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Because "all the world's a stage," the stage is a way to understand the world. Particular historical moments and human conditions provide special focus for the stage's revelatory powers. Theatre must show itself within and through the human body, and actors on stage have to speak and be heard, sustain long and complex sentences, capture the audience's attention and hold it for two hours or more. On the stage they have to stand and deliver, with no excuses, no breaks, from moment to moment, for the entire performance. Bringing a character to life includes physical choices, vocal choices, the range and depth of one's emotions, rhythm and tempos, the deliverance of lines, and an actor's overall interpretation of a character.

The primary purpose of this study was to obtain a description of the process of character development as experienced by the actor. Twelve professional actors described their experience of character development in individual audio-taped in-depth interviews. In was interesting to note that after the interview, most participants stated that talking about their experiences had given them a better understanding of the process of character development. Several participants reported to experience "light-bulbs going off" during the interview. Others became aware of the emotional intensity of their experiences and subsequently felt intense, often cathartic, emotions during the interview.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, creating 12 separate transcripts. These transcripts, serving as the primary data source, were analyzed using a

phenomenological method. Analysis revealed five interrelated themes that together comprised the thematic structure: (a) Preparation, (b) Use of Self, (c) Connection, (d) Being in the Moment, and (e) Personal Gain. In addition, analysis revealed one experiential ground, Authenticity, which served as the context for the whole experience. Thorough descriptions of the ground and the themes were presented in the previous chapter along with supportive evidence taken directly from the interview transcripts.

The following discussion of the results consists of reviews of several elements of the experience that stood out in terms of their relationships with previous research. In addition, an attempt will be made to link some of the results to the discipline of psychology and finally this section will end with the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

The Ultimate Goal

While all of the themes are essential to the overall experience of character development described by the participants, the elements of 'Body,' 'Meaning of the Text,' and 'Being in the Moment,' were especially intriguing with regard to what the descriptions of those experiences can teach us, and how they relate to many of the actors' ultimate goal in character development.

Many participants stated that the process of character development often ends in an embodied experience of the character: "We need to imagine it in our body. We need to imagine it in our flesh, feel what it's like." All participants expressed the importance of the use of their body and the awareness of their body as a vessel for the character. Many participants described how characters live in their body before,

during, and even sometimes after the closing of the show. Some participants described that during the process of character development they would be able to focus best if the character, the text, and the character's circumstances were second nature and a part of their body, as one participant stated: "...For me that means keeping it in my body as much as possible."

These descriptions are similar to the philosophy on the concept of embodiment by Merleau-Ponty (1962). In his description of the concept he included three ways in which the body opens up a world. He posited that at the most basic level, our body is "our general medium for having a world" (p. 146). In other words, we need a body in order to survive and conserve life. He then elaborated on the literal, biological meaning of the body by hypothesizing a more figural meaning in which movements can be described (i.e., dancing) that are more significant than just being purely biological. Lastly, he described the body as it relates to the cultural world, or as one experiences the body in the social world. Here, Merleau-Ponty makes a shift from the objective to the phenomenal body, in which an additional shift from the 'body' as physical object to 'embodiment' is made. In this regard, embodiment signifies an opening to bodily being-in-the-world (1962). One lives or inhabits his circumstances through one's body, much like what the actors described about living the character's circumstances by using their body as a vessel for the character.

Merleau-Ponty later incorporated 'involvement,' stating that if one is learning a physical or partly physical skill, the more involved one is bodily, the more often intuitive behavior replaces intellectual or reasoned responses. He went on to say that

the more experienced a performer (in the general sense of the word) is, the more he or she will allow an immediate intuitive response to each situation, which is characteristic of expertise. This relates to the many descriptions of intuition by participants. As one participant stated so eloquently: "I realized there's a lot that can be conveyed without sculpted intellectual knowledge and over time in doing that, I let my head get out of the way, and started trusting more my own intuitive sense, it was a much stronger response..."

In addition Merleau-Ponty theorized that at that level, one experiences something close to what is called 'flow' in the athletic world, wherein one's actions are completely absorbed by the demands of the situation, an experience also described by several participants as "being in the zone." Gurwitsch (1966) also described this phenomenon:

> "What is imposed on us to do is not determined by us as someone standing outside the situation simply looking on at it; what occurs and is imposed are rather prescribed by the situation and its own structure; and we do more and greater justice to it the more we let ourselves be guided by it, i.e., the less reserved we are in immersing ourselves in it and subordinating ourselves to it. We find ourselves in a situation and are interwoven with it, encompassed by it, indeed just "absorbed" into it." (p. 397)

The body basically takes over and does the rest outside the range of consciousness. To Merleau-Ponty and many other theorists (Dreyfus, 1997; Gurwitsch, 1964; Jones, 1997) the duality between mind and body does not exist. Mind and body are a unity; intellectual interpretation and physical perception of the

world go hand in hand. According to Merleau-Ponty, embodiment is inseparable from understanding. For actors to truly understand the characters they are portraying, is to experience harmony between the character's objectives and intentions and the performance, and "the body is [their] anchorage" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 144).

The way to truly understand and give meaning to a character and/or the text in the script is through language. Gadamer (1975) held that human experience is situated in language, and language creates understanding between people. The ideal way of understanding that Gadamer described is that of conversation. He suggested that conversation always takes place in language, and is our medium by which we are able to engage in the world. In regard to the theatrical experience, Gadamer asserted that theatre is different from any other form of art in that both reveal truth, but theatre involves the expressiveness of gestures, and thus the body. Theatre also creates a unity among the actors, in which conversation is important (1986). Gadamer's 'conversation' can be paralleled to Merleau-Ponty's 'embodied dialogue,' and relating both concepts to character development suggests that actors co-exist in a common world on stage and are collaborators for each other in reciprocity, in the experience of dialogue, which by many participants was described as the ultimate goal: being connected as authentically as possible to the character, the scene partner (i.e., in genuine conversation), and the text (i.e. understanding the meaning of the text and the circumstances of the character to the fullest extent possible).

In regard to participants' descriptions of the universality of their work and the political, historical and social significance of much of the plays, Gadamer (1986) holds similar views. He was attracted to the theatre, because theatre thrives on

metaphor; plays tend to be about how we live and why we live. Gadamer also suggested that plays needed to be written as a challenge for the audience to undergo a transformative experience that involves moral awareness. He believed that every genuine play requires timelessness, so that the play's themes can be universal and can invoke archetypes of character, action, and feeling (1986).

The Psychology of Acting

To gain insight into the process of immersing oneself into a character, a connection can be made to the psychological terms 'empathy' and 'identification,' which in most acting theories and practice are called 'involvement' or 'projecting into.' "Empathy and identification are not emotions in themselves, but processes by which individuals experience similar emotions" (Konijn, 2000, p.85). A common feature of both empathy and identification is that the observed emotion in the other, somehow becomes part of the emotional experience of the observer. The main distinction between empathy and identification is found in the separation or in the lack of separation between self and other. Identification assumes similar experiences of self and other. This process was described by many participants as being in the moment, because they lost the sense that events were taking place outside of themselves. They described a process that can feel like 'being one' with the character and the world on stage. Most participants believed that by placing themselves in the role of the character, they were able to have stronger emotions on stage.

Empathy was found in participants' descriptions of their relationship with the character, especially in the initial stages of preparation in which they were trying to get to know their character. Several participants expressed concern for their character

or expressed feeling pity for a specific character, which indicates there is not a fusion of the two. In cases of empathy, actors imagine how it feels to be the character and what it would be like to live the character's experiences.

Another interesting parallel between the results of this study and previous research is that the feeling of having intense emotions as a character and simultaneously being in control is what Watson (1988) called double consciousness. A double consciousness of sincere conviction as well as control can be associated with the style of acting mostly associated with Stanislavski and Strasberg. The dualism of not being yourself, but rather seeming to be another can be associated with a more detached style of acting.

The Experience of 'Flow.'

According to Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi (1975) the right balance between risk and control results in the sensation as if the performance is happening in one fluid movement, called 'flow,' or the optimal experience. Flow is an experience often described by top athletes where a high level of performance is expected. The theme, Being in the Moment, captured this experience for actors, in which many participants described the experience of acting in terms of 'being in the moment,' or 'being in the zone.' Like Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, participants believed that a high level of flow affords one the freedom to deal with unexpected turns or events while performing (i.e., reacting in the moment to a scene partner that just uttered the wrong line). Creativity and inspiration seem to be at their peak in these moments, which is why many participants described this experience as their ultimate goal in acting.

Acting as a Form of Therapy

Participants described that "wonderful pain," that "joyful vulnerability" which comes with imagining a character's circumstances. They expressed a gratitude, since they don't have to pay the human price for this in their actual lives, but they can visit the experience fully and vulnerably and still know somewhere in the back of their minds that they are safe to be absolutely vulnerable and raw because in real life they don't have to deal with the consequences. Participants stated that emotionality is part of their instrument, and that they have to open up in order to be human in their work, which can be emotionally intense at times, but it makes them have the capability of playing several different characters, even at their most painful moments, and still experience the joy of creation by expressing humanity and vicariously experiencing their own emotions.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The responses on the part of the actors in this study were highly personalized. Some actors wanted to discuss their process, others focused on training as well. Still others discussed even larger ideas such as the humanity dimension of theatre. Since the descriptions of the actor's experiences are so personally invested, this research does not attempt to develop an acting theory. This research attempts to establish a point of departure for further research using the actor's own artistic knowledge. Discussions and conflicting statements about the relationship of the emotions of the actor with those of the character go to the heart of the art of acting and are worth examining on deeper levels.

This research has predominantly focused on American born and trained professional actors. The American method places emphasis on the actor's behavior on stage: on an actor's ability to reach into an emotional well, so to speak. European acting styles are more classical in nature and focus is more on the text. It would be interesting to see what the experience of character development would be from the point of view of European actors who are mostly trained classically.

Furthermore, this research is mostly concerned with professional actors who perform in front of a live theatre audience. The ways in which the participants of this study work on acting aspects other than character development is barely touched on. The primary investigator limited the research to stage acting and left film and television acting out of the picture. Nonetheless, some participants mentioned experiences related to film and television acting, but those examples were too few in number to draw conclusion from. When speaking of characters, the primary investigator considered only the most important or leading characters in a performance or text and not the minor roles, because the process of character development is normally less involved in minor roles.

The nature of this study is mainly to understand character development from the point of view of the actors involved in the study. Consequently, the aim is not an exhaustive check-list of the best steps to take towards character development. This research might be used as groundwork for more extensive studies on the concept. The analysis of creative processes does not detract from their artistic nature, but can make a meaningful contribution to the nature of the arts.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT

The interview in which I have asked you to participate today will serve as the data for a research paper that will be prepared as partial fulfillment of degree requirements in a doctoral psychology program. The importance of actors' views on acting has long been recognized, but there seems to be little available by actors on their art. Acting is largely an art of self-portraiture, and actors are universally required to draw on their personal resources – emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual – to develop and enact an interpretation. The route taken to formulate and express that interpretation has not been studied from the perspective of the actor. Since the actor is the best source of insight and analysis of his craft, the purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of character development as it is experienced by the actor. A better sense of what you and other artists actually experience during that creative process will add to the current understanding of creativity and acting theories.

It is your option to terminate your participation at any time without penalty or prejudice to you. The investigation involves two parts:
1) Explanation of the study and gaining of your informed consent, and
2) A discussion of your experience of character development
The length of the interview is anticipated to be approximately one hour, however, you may take any amount of time you would like, up to 90 minutes. The interview questions will be open-ended, informal and conversational in nature.

While I am interested in any and all aspects of your experience, you are free to discuss only those aspects you want to discuss; you need not speak of things you do not wish to share. While I do not anticipate that the interview will cause significant discomfort, it is possible that participating in this study will lead you to recall uneasy memories. You are free to stop the interview at any time and are encouraged to do so if you feel that continuing will cause you distress. I am a therapist at The Counseling Center at UT and am available to help you if the need should arise. I will also be able to refer you to a counselor or therapist if you should need additional help.

Another potential risk is your identification, however, confidentiality will be maintained, as self-selected pseudonyms will be used in the interview. The interview process requires audiotaping of the interview and preparation of a transcript of the interview (this is where the tape of the interview is listened to and typed). The audiotapes will be retained in a secure location in a locked file cabinet in the office of the principal investigator, Sandrine M. Bosshardt, in the Student Counseling Services Center; 900 Volunteer Boulevard, Knoxville, TN 37996. After the transcripts are completed, the tapes will be erased. The transcripts will also be retained in the aforementioned locked file cabinet for three years. It is your prerogative to review your audiotapes upon request at a mutually agreed upon time and place, between the interview and when the tapes are erased. After that point, if you so request, a copy of the transcript of your interview can be provided to you until the end of the three-year

period, after which all records will be destroyed. Every precaution will be made to insure confidentiality of records. The transcripts will be used as the basis for a thematic analysis. It is possible that I will analyze your interview in the research group of which I am a member. Basically, this means that your transcript (with identifying information deleted) may be analyzed in a group setting. All the members of the research group will sign a confidentiality statement in which they agree to protect your confidentiality and not discuss the interview outside the confines of the research group setting.

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE STATEMENT AND AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH. IN ADDITION, I AM AWARE THAT:

1. My name and audiotapes will remain confidential and the tapes will be erased after transcripts of them are prepared.
2. I am entitled to have any further inquiries answered regarding the procedures.
3. Participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time and for any reason without penalty. For further information about this study or your role in it, contact:

   Sandrine M. Bosshardt
   The University of Tennessee
   The Counseling Center
   Knoxville, TN 37996
   (865) 974-2196

4. No royalties are due the participant for any subsequent publication.
5. The primary researcher and other researchers who are graduate students or faculty at the University of Tennessee will review the transcripts for significance.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

APPENDIX B

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER'S PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

As a member of this project's research team, I understand that I the interview transcriptions that I will help to analyze may contain information of a sensitive nature. I also understand the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of the information given in the interviews.

With this in mind, I agree not to discuss these interviews outside of the research group. I also agree to excuse myself from group participation if I believe that I can identify the research participant whose interview is being analyzed.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

I: Take a moment to think about a specific character you played. Please describe for me in as much detail as you can what stood out for you during the development of that character.

P: Well, I think, uhm, the first thing I do, which sounds really simple is read the script and the main thing that, it's not even what I really look for, it's just what sort of hits me, is where I identify with the character's experience, where I can relate or if something hits me on, or with which I can empathize, or feel that I understand that struggle or that reaction or that whatever the script sort of informs me of what that particular person is living through and if I don't, I mean I have a direct experience, I have never had a child and I played several characters who do, uhm, but my own experience of a loved on, you know, things will hit me on a level of empathy that, it's that sort of initial, my connection to them that I work from, I guess, and it's not really that conscious, I don't really map it out, but those are the things that draw me into them, and uhm,

I: so, initially it comes from the script

P: Yes, from the first read of the script and each and every subsequent read after that, like there were things with "Collected Stories," it's a very dense script, very layered, it's not all on the surface, it's not all spelled out who these women are and who these women are to each other. Character development for that play wasn't necessarily all conscious, it wasn't like I said "OK, who is she and how do I find her." Basically, I start with myself and start with myself from a psychological place, but then what I do too is, the physical and technical work to try to get my own self out of the way, so that my human understanding of this person is able to live but my own physicality and filters that I use to express that are hopefully as out of the way as possible, so that the physicality that inevitably becomes the character is more chosen and not just my default way of operating. And in reading the script, time and time again, like there were things that were revealed about this character up until the final week of performance and were we still working on it, I am sure I would find more little things, just ways in which things are said, or ways in which things are avoided reveal more about who this person is and how they operate. Not a big deal at all to the character of Lisa in Collected Stories, but she mentions when she is talking about the stories she has written coming from her experience, that she shared a kiss with a sorority sister at a party, which says to me, so she was in a sorority, which is not something I thought about at all and literally realized the week before we opened, and I thought, "OK, what does that mean?" She was in a sorority at an Ivy League school, how is that different from being at a sorority at a state school. You know, all of those sorts of details that might inform who this woman is. I basically try to create a sort of pallet of information to pull from, you know, she was the youngest child, she had an eating disorder her whole life, things like that help her create fuel for her writing, all those things factor into...and it's not like from that information I then make decisions "OK,

she must be...neurotic or she must be whatever," I try to play that sort of result, but how I relate to those things comes into play. What that makes me feel, knowing or having struggled with eating disorders or you know, trying to fit in as a teenager, you know, maybe I didn't have an eating disorder or it might not have manifested that way in me, but I have friends who have and I have seen their struggles and I empathize with that from my own level of understanding, and so it all, it's juts this sort of, imaginative dreaming that happens about and around what makes these people who they are. Much like when I'm getting to know a friend, meeting someone and getting to know them. The things about who they are, the things that make them tick and operate the way that they do, or think the way that they do, or view the world the way that they do, or what I am most intrigued about, or what I find most interesting in a human being, so that's what I find most interesting in a character too.

I: You keep grabbing your gut...

P: Yeah, because I think that's where ultimately I feel a connection. I try not to think "so, she's x, y and z," it's more about how it hits me and how physically, on a visceral, human, primal level, how I respond to those circumstances [in the script]. I mean I am by nature a sensitive, intuitive person, so for me to avoid naming it and categorizing it, making it into something intellectual, has been very important. Like, in my earlier years of acting, when I was an undergrad, uhm, everything was very cerebral and thought-out and I could tell you, I mean, you could ask me any question about my character, and I could tell you everything about them, but it was all just stuck up in my head, and what I found over time is that it's far less important to me that she was born in March in Nebraska, than the fact that she suffered, you know, whatever hardship. You know, how, the things that shape them on a visceral primal level are the things that I end up connecting to.

I: Tell me more about going there (point to head) to there (point to gut)

P: Well, in between, well, basically I did a lot more physical theatre in between, where I just wasn't really asked to think at all, but just using my body to make shapes in space and I realized there's a lot that can be conveyed without sculpted intellectual knowledge and over time in doing that, I let my head get out of the way, it was almost like I was doing too much work, I had a teacher who said "you are trying to make it an academic exercise, you're trying to make acting into something academic and you can't." You can't with any art, I don't think. And, uhm, by simply saying "stop it, it doesn't serve you," you know, "stop thinking so much and cramping down and trying so hard," but trusting more my own intuitive sense, it was a much stronger response anyway, once I gave it any value, and I think maybe at some point when I stopped doing all the cramping head work, I started to get cast more, so then I was like, so I am getting more work in doing less work. Even though it's a much more vulnerable place, you have the beauty of the character to hide behind. For the most part I am able to walk away from it at the end of rehearsal. When we were working on Trojan Women, that was hard, although I could walk away from it, I mean I wasn't at the

grocery store bemoaning my life, but juggling a heavy schedule and working on that character, whose, for all intent of purposes, life is ending, you know, she's been separated from her husband, he's been killed, her son is now being taking away from her, to be killed, she is promised in an enslavement to an enemy, all of those things render one somewhat back up against the wall, and rehearsals were grueling and draining and impossible to get through and I slept a lot, but I'm able to know, uhm...I feel like it's, it doesn't ever affect me to the point that I can't recognize the separation, but by fully allowing myself to experience it, I feel that I give voice to many thousands of women throughout history who have suffered like that as a result of war, say. And in addition to saying, ok, how do I relate, you know, with that particular play there were a lot of things that I would do to connect to it, like just looking at photos of war torn cultures and looking at the women in those pictures and imagining myself living like that, how difficult that must be, and you know, knowing a handful of moms who have lost a child and how completely debilitating that is. If it isn't something I can relate to I will seek out someone to interview who may have had a more, who could give me a more tangible experience of something. Time, being as it is, in our schedule doesn't allow that often, but I felt that I understood it enough for my perspective to give me material to work with, because it also wasn't straight forward naturalistic play solely about my personal, you know, that play had a separation of style, it was less about conveying a naturalistic...well, a lot of the directing was "straight forward to the audience now", or "no emotion, cut emotion there." There was this moment where I talk about the death of my child and the director's like, "no just straight forward, like a CNN reported that's all I want from you here," and having to factor those two things in, give the director what they wanted as well as keep my life experience alive, was hard. Her way wasn't necessarily articulated to me, you know, sometimes if I don't see eye to eye with the director, but they're able to clearly explain to me their point of view and what they're trying to convey, then I can get behind it even though I wouldn't have made that choice and see what you're trying to do. I didn't really have that with Veronica, she was working more instinctively as well, saying "I don't know, I just want it this way here." And ultimately creating something that would be watched and people could take from it what they were going to take from it. So that was kind of frustrating too, cause it wasn't about a meeting of two concepts, it was about two instinctive, intuitive ways of working bumping against each other and ultimately what came out of it was sort of a collage of the two as opposed to a blended together stew, which for my purposes was fine, but for me that's the, in general, characterization, the crux of it is, "who is this human being, if I were to sit down and interview them over coffee, what would I walk away from the experience knowing, how would I be changed." That sort of jumping off point of my instinctive understanding of them I then fill out with looking at art or looking at newspaper articles or listening to music. If I were to play someone from a different culture, whose heavily involved in the art of another culture, I'll research it, like I did on Akhmatova, whose a Russian poet in Stalin's time, I had to go do research, as to what it was like living in Stalinist Russia, read excerpts from her biography, because she was real person, which is an other interesting point, playing a historical figure, it's one thing to say "what is my take on

this character based on just this two-hour play written,", but if it's someone who actually there is more research obviously as to what her life was like and how her poetry was used as a way of, as a means of expression under a regime that didn't want her expressing. And she had immense support from the public from the time before Stalin, so she was this sort of underground hated by the public but loved by the people, and all of that factors into my understanding. Every question leads to four more. When it's a historical figure, or even if it's a fictional person, but in an actual time period, like in The Crucible, their not historical characters, but the Salem Witch Trials actually happened. I would look up and read what it was like to live in that time period and what influenced them and church was a big part of it and how did that affect people, how does that affect the way they think and move and view their day, their potential of life. Is there a future for them, or do they even think that. That's all the sort of things that I'll ask myself in the process and that's to give me fuel to walk into a rehearsal, that's, everything that I've said so far is preliminary, off-line stuff. In a rehearsal room, what I am doing to get at a character is trying to, after I've read the script from the point of view of "who is this person?" the next thing I do is really look at what they want, or what they're going after, what is driving them through the story that is the script, that is the play we are telling. In Collected Stories for example, her goal is to become a successful writer and she had to ally herself to this mentor to get everything from her possible, she had to work to be let in and not just be a teacher student, but to have a more personal relationship, she had to fight to get guidance as to what the next step should be, once her collection was published. Everything built in the previous scene, so while we look at what they want overall, we then have to look at what they want within each scene along the way and there are building blocks that make it hard for them to get what they want. And ultimately in the process of rehearsal, what I'm trying to do every single time, is believe fully that what I am experiencing is what they are experiencing and I am experiencing it with my scene partner Carol as 100% truthfully as Lisa would be to Ruth, so in that, I am not imagining that my scene-partner is someone else, I am talking to Carol and I want this from Carol and I need this from Carol, and this room is as real as you and I are today. I have to believe that as fully as Lisa believes it of Ruth. In order to sort of make her me and me her and have that transformation. Ideally over time, if I am doing work at the same time to get my own physical habits out of the way and work from a free and open body and a free and open voice, in working to neutralize my own habits, I am just talking to Carol, I am finding that need fulfillable by Carol and believing fully that what Lisa needs from Ruth I need from Carol. And by doing that and by believing that and by actively trying to get that from her, more happens in me to respond to and she's actively trying to get from me, me, not Lisa. I need to feel it and allow myself to experience that hurt, pain, or shame. Rather and sit there and cling to or wallow in that emotion, which then becomes about my performance again, take that and turn it back to what I want with Carol. The life always stays active between the two of us. The goal, and it is, I don't know if I've ever been successful about it, the goal is to serve the character's need more than the concern about our own performance or how it's going, and where the actor's head always ends up going is, you're watching yourself and you're hearing yourself and listening to audience

response and you're judging it as you go, the minute, the second you start doing that, you've lost what you're trying to get for your character, uhm, and it's not always a 100%, you know frequently in performance, I hear my voice, I hear it strain and I'll technically go through the experience of opening myself up, allowing myself to relax a little bit, actively reconnecting to my scene partner. We on a thin thread, falling off and grabbing back on and falling off and grabbing back on.

I: The ideal would be to connect fully 100% of the time?

P: Right, but it's never going to happen, because I am never going to loose myself in that room, ever. I don't think that what I am trying to do is completely loose myself, you know, I mean, if in the middle of a brilliant performance in which I am a 100% connected, a light falls from the ceiling, I am still going to have the wherewithal to step back and get out of its way. In that way it's a very, well, I think it's more like this: we're always multi-tasking in our heads when we're on stage. We're serving the character's needs and at the same time we're aware of our surroundings "I hear the audience," and "O, that light-cue is weird," and "I am not zipped up fully," and "O, god, are they late for their entrance," and all these other things are happening, but the goal is to have all those other voices as quiet as possible, and not derail you as much as they can and you know, we have the script and the actions we've set up as a roadmap, but even in nailing the lines, hitting all the cues, playing all the actions fully, if we're thinking about how we're doing or anything, it's pulling us away from it at any given moment. So, it's a constant battle to try to get you on and the moments where it really drops in, are the moments when you're so connected to what you want, that nothing else matters at all, because all you care about getting what you need from your partner at the moment.

I: Can you tell me more about re-connecting?

P: It's pretty much just, you know, it's like when you're meditating in a way, you notice when your thoughts wander and you go back to the task at hand, you just keep returning to the task at hand and with Carol, I would try very much to...I would reconnect to her and I would take her in, but because I was half of that show it being a two-character play and I was speaking so much, I focused more on trying to get back to what I was doing to her, what action I was playing at any given beat, which in some ways sounds a bit contradictory, because it is more focused on my performance again, but for me it was more a focus on going after what I wanted as opposed to taking in from her, which is another tricky bound, because it is a two-way street, we have to be affected by what's happening, but ideally, the goal is to be more active than reactive and if we're reacting 90% of the time, we're indicating a response based to what we were given as opposed to still going after what we need.

I: I wonder how in the world you remember all those lines.

P: Because we rehearsed the fuck out of it [laughs]. We rehearsed it for months. Collected Stories didn't have a set aside block of rehearsal time, we rehearsed twice a week, from September to February. To act the way I want to act, lines have to be so second nature, it has to be in your bones. Because of the choppy nature of our rehearsal schedule, Carol and I would get together on a daily basis. We ran through the entire show a couple of times and then we noted all the key points that would unravel a little bit, which was about a half an hour worth of text of the entire two hours. Little chunks from different scenes. We were 85 to 90% text accurate at any of the performances, because it got to a point where, this is another interesting thing, it got to a point where we ran lines so much that you start to hear the same patterns of speech and line-readings come out of your mouth and you just hear yourself say it the same way, you hear your partner saying it the same way, you know that neither one of you are really connected to it at that point, we're as actively involved as sitting at home running the lines, so we try to give ourselves a little pep-talk by saying, "OK, we know this, all we can do is focus on what we want and talk and listen to each other," instead of thinking "shit, shit, what does the script say," say "what is coming here." It got to a point where even if we would sort of, there'd be occasional paraphrasing, there wasn't a lot of stuff missed, there might be things that were sort of like jumped around a little bit on occasion. We were pretty solid, but when not, we were able to follow each other, because we were having conversation. As soon as we gave ourselves the freedom of saying "we know this, we've worked on it, we got it, things are going to happen, but we just need to stay with each other," the minute we gave ourselves that freedom we were probably a lot closer than it looks like in our own retrospective eye, but ultimately what is more important is talking and listening and having a real conversation with each other and worrying less about where we were on the page at any given moment. That's another whole thing between getting it from your brain to your gut, because you spend so much time looking at the paper and knowing, especially at the beginning of Collected Stories, I had all those, well, everything was a question, everything lilted up at the end, they were all written like that, so it was very specific which phrases were questions and which questions were statements and stuff, where there were pauses, where there were beats, so we could very technically execute that all as scripted, but without knowing why we were saying what we were saying, what we wanted to accomplish by saying what we were saying, at that point it's just a memorization exercise, getting the words from the page into our brains. It's as meaningless as rattling through the pledge of allegiance or some prayer that you learned when you were 6 years old. But when we add to it what we're trying to do with those words, what we want to accomplish with those words and have THAT as our primary focus, then those lines and question marks all fall into place, because in the rehearsal process we have chosen various actions to play. So, if I want to make her feel 'slapped' with this chunk of text, I want to make her feel 'soothed' with this chunk of text, I am going to say it in different ways depending on what I am trying to get from her, so it's in interesting balance just on what you are thinking, and if you're thinking "what's the line" you're not connected to your partner.

I: Earlier you said something to the effect of "when something's in your bones." Can you say more about that?

P: I think, I mean it's the difference between sympathy and empathy, the difference between logically knowing and understanding someone and actually viscerally relating to them, and when I work on a character, playing Maggie in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," I have an idea about who that woman is, with the play I have that idea in mind, I see Elizabeth Taylor, you know, and everything is this abstracted "who is she and how is she me," and over the course of working on it, and feeling more and more from my scene partner, from my reading the script and working on it and knowing more and more she's trapped in a loveless marriage with an alcoholic who refuses to touch her and she was raised with no money, to get to survive at this point she needs to continue on, she needs to get pregnant to keep the bloodline going in order to keep her inheritage coming and these things factor into this human desperate survival need that the more, I don't know how it happens aside from, you know, allowing myself to believe that I need that, or allowing myself to believe that the person I was playing this scene with is capable of, you know, it's life or death, and he possessed my survival. And in the case of that scene, my scene partner was a very dear friend of mine, so I was able to sort of say "I can't survive without him." It's just something that I, in the rehearsal, encourage myself to believe, just as simply as one were 6 years old and we want to be the queen of England, we can be, and believe it fully, or we want to be an astronaut, we fully believe at that moment that we are capable of flying. It's about imagination, but it's also about not saying it's impossible, about allowing myself that truthful human experience and in doing that it gets into my bones, it gets into my body. It used to just stay up in my head and I did more physical theatre. Now, before every show, I will physically stretch every joint and muscle and bone that I have to get all of my own kinks and stresses of the day out of the way. I have a stretching routine that I do, a relaxation routine, a vocally targeted process that I go through, all those things to ask myself to get out of my own way and allow the knowledge of this person to come out with less obstruction, so you know when I was playing Andromache, and I would go through what I would need to sort of shed myself, and then I'd get ready for the show and I had a book of photos of 911 that I would look through, because for me that's the closest thing that I have experienced to living in a war affected place, a place where there was burning and suffering and what have you. And looking through that book, I would do that before every performance, and in some way it becomes a superstitious routine, I don't know if I would do that if the show had lasted three months, and for every show there was something different I would do. For Collected Stories, because I would basically come in from outside, I would remind myself: "I am late for an appointment with someone who I revere more than life itself," and sort of sitting in that feeling for a minute, relating to it, knowing it, and instantly if I have done all the work to get myself out of my own way, I will feel it in my body. Something we do in class is, you know, teachers keep saying "imagine it, imagine it," and we all immediately go to our head and say "O, yeah," but that's not where we need to imagine it, we need to imagine it in our body. We need to imagine it in our flesh, feel what it's like. I was doing a scene once, where I

had to enter a bar, knowing that I was pregnant for the third time, and the father had just broken up with me, so that was the knowledge I was entering with, and I could sit there and go "Wow, what must that be like, to have three kids already and being pregnant again," but that wasn't it, it was about standing outside the door of a bar, trying to go somewhere for solace and having your hand on the doorknob and feeling what that must be like and if you can believe it on that level, it's a different feeling, you can feel it viscerally as opposed to just in your head. So, that's what you try to bring into the rehearsal room to try to make contact with and the minute you add all the technical elements and you bring in an audience, all these other variables come into play and all we can try to do is let go to what that character's life is for the next two hours. One of my friends who is an actor, he used to say "all the worry that we get into about our performance isn't important, because we have a life in our hands," you know, I have someone story that I feel is very important to tell and telling their story is far more important than whether or not the audience likes me. And that is where I have to keep my focus and for me that means keeping it in my body as much as possible.

I: You're depending on your body and your scene partners doing...

P: Yes, there's a lot of trust and risk involved, and the two sort of go hand in hand. Uhm, if one is the type to not be able to let their guard down or to have to be perceived a certain way, I would imagine it would be pretty hard to allow yourself to walk in somebody else's shoes. But it's ultimately I think the goal. And it's not to say that you should walk into, that anyone can walk into any rehearsal completely open and vulnerable. But working with an ensemble helps that. If I can risk and be open with them in a rehearsal then trust comes. With trust comes vulnerability, the ability to be more vulnerable. And luckily no-one has ever misused my vulnerability. I do feel that I have been able to trust my fellow actors, I don't know that I take as many risks as I would like to, I think that I do tend to play it pretty safe, given the choices that I make, that's something that I am still working on, because that's sort of hard. What does it mean to risk on stage, what does it really mean? Sometimes it means risk making a mistake, risk looking foolish, risk making the wrong choice, because, like, committing to a choice fully, a 100%, at least it's clear and a director can say "I don't like that choice, let's do it this way." What ends up happening a lot of the times is that you want to director's approval, and so you play it safe, in this gray, 50%, half-ass place, where they can't really tell what you're doing and it's not really clear to you. I find half the time when I do that, I am not clear on what I am doing, and just trying tip-toe around the idea of what I think this scene is. And it doesn't serve anyone and ends up being a big waste of time, bit it's a huge reality, when you're in a cast and you have 4 weeks together and you have a new director that you try to please the whole time, because you want to work with him again and all these variables come into play, then the next thing you know is you're not serving the character, you're not taking the risk. And having to ask for help is a hard thing for me to do, I am a ridiculously, fiercely independent person, but if I play a character who has a strong need for help and assistance, and to ask that, that triggers in me a huge feeling

of vulnerability, because it makes me feel, you it triggers my own stuff. Even if my response isn't appropriate, even if the character that I play wouldn't react in that way, it's important that I honor that, truthfully, and say "this is what I am feeling," because ultimately it's just energy moving and even if the emotional response is inappropriate, it's better that what is happening to me is what's being expressed than I'm stifling it down.

You know, for some people, nudity on a stage, isn't a issue at all, but for some people unbuttoning two buttons is nerve-wracking and devastating, but that sort of knowledge of how far are you pushing your own limits of comfort. I notice it now in my students, because I teach beginning level actors and just the level...and it's the age of late teens/ early twenties, so "everyone's looking at me," it's total hell, and I see them and their discomfort and there's no way, there's so much undoing that has to happen before they can...and it's that wall, that impenetrable wall, that is the comfort zone that they've erected around themselves that we try to bust through and say "in this room, you're fine to create and express and no-one is judging you, but that's the thing, they're all judging each other at all times!![laughs] It's interesting to see, because I do feel very far away from that, even though I trust myself more in the process and I have much more confidence in myself as a performer, first week of As You Like It was hell, because we wanted so hard to, not even so much as impress the director, because I worked with him before, and because he'd cast us, it was this feeling of wanting to not disappoint him if he had cast us the way that he had, so there was this proving like "O God, does he think I'm good enough," so even though I'm much better than I used to be, certain instances and certain situations will trigger it dramatically. And that made rehearsal hell. The first few weeks I kept thinking "What am I doing," and I found I wasn't even able to make choices, because I just got so under this umbrella of doubt that it will be any good that everything, every idea that I even have, if I even have the idea, every idea gets immediately negated as to why it won't work as opposed to just trying it out on your feet and discover what value it might hold. I end up getting in my head about it and saying "no, it's not that, it's not that, it's not that," before trying anything, and that is my Achilles heel, that habit, that's the thing that gets in my way every single time. A new director, who I don't really care about, I have much more freedom, that is something that as I go on in life and as I go on trying to call myself an actress is my crossed bare that I need to keep those, that neurosis at bay, because otherwise it becomes crippling and then I can't do what I know I am capable of doing. Luckily eventually the feeling started to dissipate, choices eventually started to emerge that became more clear, talking to my classmates whom I had worked with many, many times, knowing that they'd been experiencing the same thing, sort of put us at ease and go like "alright, this is just part of it," it was also that the nature of rehearsals at that point, like Joe is very, very focused on staging the scenes, getting them into a traffic pattern, and after we got the entire show staged, which we did pretty quickly, we went back and worked within that framework to fill out what was happening. So when we were focusing on staging, instead of acting, we weren't able to really bring stuff to the table yet, we didn't really know what we were doing, so we had time to beat ourselves up, and say "if I were a better actor I would

have been able to come in with a billion choices that I could be trying out while we were staging," and all that started was a vicious spiral. But the other thing is, is that we're old enough now, and experienced enough to know that that isn't really helping us, to know that that's part of the process, and simply by recognizing it and saying "you're psyching yourself out, you're making it worse, shut up, and do your work instead of self sabotaging," and knowing that it will happen again, again, and again. I still happens to [name actress] who has been doing this FOREVER, and I mean, I can only hope to have the kind of career that she had, to be the kind of actress that she is, so to hear that still coming from her is, you know, it's part of it, and I think any, every artist in any medium, has doubt and there's a way to sort of work with it and get past it. It's like quitting any vice, it's a habit, a permeating habit that gets into our psyche.

I: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

P: I think that in terms of how I find a character, that's pretty much it. You know, I am glad you're doing this project, it's really interesting to have to put into words and think about and talk about what it is that we do, because it is very detailed, and it is so frustrating when the only thing people care about is "how did you learn all the lines," you know, that is the LEAST of it, that is, in terms of what goes into it, there's so much that has to be done. It's interesting now to look back and say "well, what DID I do for this role, this role, this role," it's different for every one and it's led by a sort of, it's led by a gut instinct, but it's also led by, well, you hit road blocks, so you also start going through the rolodex of "well, what skills do I have, what techniques have I been given to, you know, crack this nut," and given all the time in the world, you know, I could spend forever researching a character to try to understand them, but ultimately it does come down to what you need to do to get as close to this person, to your version of this person, as possible. Who I came up with as Lisa in Collected Stories, is probably very different than who another actress would come up with, and THAT is what makes it unique and interesting to the individual performer, as opposed to saying "I have my idea of who Maggie in a Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is, and I will play it the way Liz Taylor did," you know, BOY, it's not about imitating somebody else's idea of it. [long pause]

You know, it always comes back to what is the truth of what they want, what they're going after, what is motivating this character to wake up each day, what do they need today, you know, and the humanity in that is huge, you know, and that was the thing about Metamorphoses, you know, the tales were ancient, but what the characters were feeling was timeless and you know, sort of weaving in and out of ancient and modern, and realizing that I am no different than people who walked on this planet 3000 years ago. It's heartening, you know, that my suffering is the same as people who've come before me, and my joy is as big as people who will live a thousand years from now, and that puts me in a place of universal empathy that makes you love your fellow men. Well, mm, thank you, this was great.

I: Thank you so much, I enjoyed it!

APPENDIX D

OUTLINE OF THEMATIC STRUCTURE

I. Ground: Authenticity

II. Theme One: Preparation

- *A. The Script*
- *B. Research*
- *C. Meaning of the Text*

III. Theme Two: Use of Self

- *A. Association of Self with the Character/Past Experiences*
- *B. Own Emotions*
- *C. Body/Embodiment*
- *D. Intuition*
- *E. Availability of Self*
- *F. Reciprocity of Two Worlds*

IV. Theme Three: Connection

- *A. Relating to the Character*
- *B. Connection with Scene Partners*
- *C. Connection with the Director*

V. Theme Four: Being in the Moment

- *A. Being in the Zone*
- *B. The Ultimate Goal*

VI. Theme Five: Personal Gain

A. Catharsis

B. Security

C. Personal Transformation

APPENDIX E

LIST OF PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS

Collected Stories by Donald Margulies

As You Like It by Shakespeare

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf by Edward Albee

Julius Ceasar by Shakespeare

Doubt by John Patrick Shanley

Trojan Women by Euripides

The Crucible by Arthur Miller

Arsenic and Old Lace by Joseph Kesselring

Metamorphoses by Mary Zimmerman

Anna Karenina by Helen Edmundson

The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams

Buried Child by Sam Shepard

The Road to Mecca by Athol Fugard

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens, adapted by David McCann

The Cherry Orchard by Chekhov

Hamlet by Shakespeare

Twelfth Night by Shakespeare

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof by Tennessee Williams

A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams

Medea by Euripides

A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen

Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw

The Diary of Anne Frank by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett

To Kill a Mockingbird by Jay Broad

The Seagull by Anton Chekhov

The Three Sisters by Anton Chekhov

Savage in Limbo by John Patrick Shanley

Much Ado About Nothing by Shakespeare

VITA

Sandrine M. Bosshardt was born in Eindhoven, The Netherlands on February 20, 1973. She grew up in Oirschot, a small, charming and quaint village in the country's south, and graduated in Liberal Arts and Languages from the Athenaeum at the Puttlyceum in Eindhoven in 1992. She went on to The University of Utrecht and completed master level coursework in Theatre-, Film- and Television Studies with specializations in Media Psychology and Dramaturgy. In 1996 she came to Knoxville, Tennessee as an international exchange student and studied psychology. After her return to Europe, she worked as an assistant director for a broadcasting company in The Netherlands. In January 1998, she returned to the United States and entered the master's program in Mental Health Counseling at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She transferred to the doctoral program in Counseling Psychology in August 2000 and received her Doctor of Philosophy degree in May, 2006. She completed her predoctoral internship in Psychology at the Student Counseling Services Center at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

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