

Speak: Questioning Ethics, Feminism, and Representation
in Verbatim Theatre

By Heather Dawn Baglole

A Thesis Submitted To
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Master of Arts in Women and Gender Studies

February, 2017, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Copyright Heather Baglole, 2017

Approved: Dr. Michele Byers,
Supervisor

Approved: Dr. Susan Brigham
Examiner

Approved: Dr. Marnina Gonick
Reader

Date: February, 2017

Acknowledgements

It is with warmth and gratitude that I thank the following people for their guidance as I completed my Master's thesis. First, to Michele Byers, for providing continued enthusiasm and support for a topic which was complicated and challenging. Marnina Gonick and Susan Brigham, for imparting their wisdom and expertise so that I might grow as an academic and a theatre practitioner. Special thanks to Glen Nichols for his contributions in all things theatre.

This process would not have been possible without the help of my team, my loving family and friends. I thank my parents, my partner Connor Higgins, and my dear friend and colleague Cate May Burton, for providing the foundation I needed to approach such an exciting topic.

This thesis would be nothing without the cast. Thank you to: Aja, Emily, Faith, Katerina, Sansom, and Sophie. You put your trust in me, and I will be forever grateful.

Speak: Questioning Ethics, Feminism, and Representation
In Verbatim Theatre

By Heather Dawn Baglole

Abstract

This project involves reflecting on the creative processes that questioned the ethical, feminist, and representative potential of verbatim theatre. The goal is to determine methods which enabled participants of the study to feel heard and respected during the length of the experiment, while questioning the distinction between art versus aesthetic. A commitment to an ethic of caring, a bottom-up model of theatre-making, and use of engaged theatre practices were vital to the project's possible success. Analysis of field notes, focus group notes and recordings, confidential questionnaires and the final script yielded tentatively positive results which indicated that participants enjoyed the democratic processes that enabled them to feel immersed in the project from story-sharing through to performance. This study is part of a growing body of work dedicated to investigating the practice of creating theatre based on people's lived experiences.

Date: February, 2017

Introduction

Storytelling, particularly sharing personal histories, has long been an important method of community-building and establishing trust. Weaving tales of personal triumphs and tribulations is a foundation of fostering relationships, and a creative way to inspire connections among speakers and listeners. Sometimes listeners become speakers as people's stories are retold, interpreted, and molded for audience enjoyment. The act of rewriting another person's story, of reinterpreting their identity, though it has a long tradition in research and theatre, is rife with ethical and moral implications.

As a Women's and Gender Studies student, I first questioned the ethics¹ of reinterpreting lived experiences for personal benefit in a paper for my Feminist Methodologies course. There, I described the methods used by two different playwrights—both of whom interviewed subjects, then retold those stories without consultation or contribution from the interviewees— as perhaps unethical. I have since built my thesis project from this smaller, initial paper, which confirmed my belief in the ethical quandary of locating one's authorship in the narratives of others. I expanded my research from two plays to four, considered the ethical, feminist, and representative

¹ "Ethics," is a term with multiple and varied definitions, depending on the context. This term, as I use it, is defined more clearly at the beginning of the "Ethics" chapter.

questions I asked as I explored their methods, and built a project founded on practicing a new method of creating verbatim theatre.

My thesis was initially inspired by the questions I had about the ethics of playwrights who divine inspiration from living subjects (but whose subjects are, in the end, absented from the authorial project). I began by researching plays that are founded on personal experience, plays which are usually described as verbatim theatre, performed research, or ethnodramas.² Verbatim theatre, born out of interviews, focus groups, or collaboration with people either within or outside of the theatre world, is known for its interest in social engagement and emotional connectivity. Verbatim theatre has many forms: as a teaching tool, as a social justice forum, or as a source of healing. In the article “Delineating a Spectrum of Research-Based Theatre”, a team of researchers, led by Jaime L. Beck, discuss their insights on how social research and theatre relate. They write, “not that all social science researchers write and produce plays but that many of the stories and insights gained through this kind of research have the potential to become rich and compelling pieces of theatre” (Beck et al., 2011, p.688). The human element of social research influenced theatre is one which Beck and his team believe lends verbatim theatre its personal touch. There is an inherent humanity in verbatim theatre because the subject(s)’ own voice is used in playwriting. In “Verbatim Theatre and Social Research: Turning towards the Stories of Others”, verbatim theatre is defined as using, “the actual words of people, often in direct first-person address or testimonial style, to raise issues relevant to a particular community and to activate broader social engagement” (Gallagher et al., 2012,

² These terms are defined more clearly in the “Methods” chapter.

p.28). Knowing that the show is based on real events, and inspired by real people, provides a level of connection that is on a potentially deeper level emotionally for the audience than a completely fictionalized play.

However, there are disadvantages to combining social research in theatre, including “theatre’s potential for re-traumatization” (Gallagher et al., 2012, p.27), which influences my definition of ethical practice in verbatim theatre. This “always shifting relationship between the aesthetic and the social” means that there is a delicate balance that the playwright must walk, a tightrope which is very, very thin indeed (p.36). For playwrights who deal with intense subjects, such as rape, genocide, or mental health, this task becomes far harder. Sullivan (2006) explains that, “perceptions about artistic practice are therefore shaped as much by what others say as artists themselves readily mythologize it. This makes it easier for artists to pass on the job of defining and defending what they do to aestheticians and historians” (p.27). There must be a balanced combination of artistic expression and acknowledgement of the issues for greater accurate representation. If an artistic piece does not do the interview subject justice, there is therefore an artistic/research disjunction. The art-researcher needs to be aware that, as artistic pieces are often made public, “the outcomes of research should have institutional currency and relevance within disciplines and domains located within communities and cultures” (Sullivan, 2006, p.26), and verbatim theatre is not exempt from this relevance. This relates to the issue of audience, for the community the show is written for will likely see themselves represented in the piece. Sullivan (2006) insists that “there is an acknowledgment that art practice is not only a personal pursuit but also a public process that can change the way we understand things” (p.31). Artists must

be careful—art is often left open to interpretation, and artists have some, if only a minor, hand in how that interpretation happens.

It is also important to consider how verbatim theatre is used both within and outside of academics; Ackroyd & O’Toole (2010) explain that “nowadays no research project in human social behaviour in a university gets ethics clearance without the most rigorous scrutiny. The same tight scrutiny is not applied to kindred forms like commercial docu-drama or verbatim theatre” (p.34). While I reviewed four plays to consider their methods, I did so through my academic, critical lens, as part of my thesis research and not for aesthetic sake. These playwrights’ projects were not subjected to Research Ethics Board approval; that does not devalue them. Art is not always a research project; the standards I have applied to my own project are strict, and would certainly greatly limit the artistic freedoms of the playwrights that I reviewed for this project. On a personal level, I fiercely believe in grounding verbatim theatre in democratic, people-centered practices, but I acknowledge the artistic value of work which strays from such methods.

I chose four verbatim theatre plays to explore further, hoping to clarify my original feelings that some of their practices were, by personal definition, unethical, considering the tricky negotiations described above. Those plays were *A Chorus Line* by Michael Bennett, *The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler, *The Laramie Project* by Moises Kaufman and the Tectonic Theatre Project, and *Body and Soul* by Judith Thompson and fifteen women. These plays do not necessarily define themselves as “verbatim theatre;” I have attributed them that distinction due to the methods used in their creation. I reviewed literature that discussed the ethical implications of these plays and of

similar research, the impact of this type of work on participants, and considered the efficacy of arts-based research practices. This research has been outlined at the end of my Literature Review.

As I sifted through this research, I was struck by several unanswered questions. The literature I examined did not describe any plays where the subjects sharing their life stories had full control over the way their stories were shared. Few researchers and playwrights contributed to the storytelling process. There was very little feminist inquiry in these practices, despite evidence of women's stories being manipulated and misinterpreted by the playwrights. I began to conceive of a project that not only considered the ethical, feminist, and representative practices of playwrights, but also put new methods and theories into practice to create verbatim theatre that was empowering for the subjects involved. I decided to create a research study in which I would audition, cast, and create an original play with the participants; this play, titled *speak!*, was performed for the public after a period of collaboration involving storytelling and scriptwriting. This study was done under the new method of Feminist Performance Ethnography, which I created by incorporating or rejecting various methods of theatre-making I encountered during my literature review. I then reflected on the process through my written thesis project, detailing how I strove to discover methods that were more ethical, more feminist, and more representative than those I had come upon previously.

Each play that I reviewed for my thesis was created from a different method of information gathering, and began with a different purpose. Some information was gathered from intimate interviews, some from storytelling among friends, and still more

from sharing within a collective group of chosen actors. I have considered the potential of each method undertaken by these playwrights, as well as the various scholars, to ensure—as much as possible—that my own undertaking was conducted within ethical bounds I was comfortable with. Issues of ownership come from the question of who “owns,” or has a stake in, the final products: the finished script and performance. The playwrights and scholars I read in preparation for this work have had varied opinions on this conundrum—my own belief is that, ultimately, whomever provides their story *must* have a say in how their story is shared, how it is distributed, and where and when it can be so.

Speak!, the original play that I created with the participants of my study, was based on our personal lived experiences. The people I cast, and to whom I will refer throughout these chapters, are: Aja, Emily, Faith, Katerina, Sansom, and Sophie. I have written these names in alphabetical order, and should note that some participants asked that I use pseudonyms in the thesis, and some did not.³ Together we developed *Speak!* through storytelling sessions, editing workshops and rehearsals. We wrote a physical script based on the stories we shared in rehearsals. *Speak!* was divided into four sections, titled “Body,” “Traditions,” “Religion,” and “Sex.” All seven of us contributed stories to each section; sometimes a person would have only one story in a section, sometimes multiple stories, depending on the relevance to their lives and the stories they wished to tell. The play was structured as a collection of monologues, which were stand-alone or woven together, and usually grouped by theme and thus shared a range of beliefs and attitudes. We gave the play a “thesis statement” which essentially worked to help us

³ Appendix F includes short biographies written by the participants themselves.

ground the stories we wished to tell, and was based on the idea that theatre is “immediate” and our selves can only be shared in the moment as we were then. This statement is discussed more fully in the Ethics chapter, and the entire script for the play can be found in appendix D. We performed the play April 28-30, 2016, at the Living Room Theatre in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

As I finished writing this thesis, I had a surprising and somewhat disheartening discovery: my commitment to the participants, that they would have control and authorship, was limited to the play. I never considered whether they should have a stake in how I write about the process in the thesis. I separated the academics from the creative project, and while I consulted them on their mini-biographies and occasionally asked for clarification on particular events, I left them out of the academic writing and analyzing stages. Certainly, time constraints would have significantly hindered me from consulting all six participants from reading a full thesis draft and including time for subsequent edits. Yet perhaps that would have been the more ethical, feminist, and representative choice?

My enrolment in a Women’s and Gender Studies program certainly influenced my desire for a feminist theatre-making experience. In the initial stages of my project, I wanted to uplift women’s voices and share women’s stories. I later modified my approach to make it more inclusive of all genders. I employed feminist theories within my work, which helped solidify my project as one which values an intersectional and inclusive approach. I used feminist standpoint theory as the backbone of my theoretical approach, especially the work of black feminist and disability feminist theorists Patricia Hill Collins (1996), bell hooks (1990), Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), and Nancy Mairs

(1996). Their work helped me craft my project in such a way as to provide platforms for people to share their voices. I also looked at feminist theoretical work in theatre studies, which helped me reflect on feminist theatre produced over the past few decades, including the importance of agentic and creative control of women in and over the creative process. These sources helped me to critically reflect on the gendered, racial, sexual, abled, and cultural intersections and influences that arose in our play.

Several scholars and theatre practitioners have asked whether the aesthetic value of a play is more important than the “truth” of the story being told (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010; Cohen-Cruz, 2010; Saldana, 2007). This is fundamentally tied to the question of whether the participants feel represented in the world of the play to which they have contributed their voices and experiences. When I raise the question of representation, I mean with regard to how the subjects—whose stories are used in the development of theatre—feel about the depiction of their “character,” or the way their “self” has been translated for the stage. With regards to the play developed as part of this thesis, I wanted to know whether the actors saw “themselves” in the finished script and performance. I worked to inspire the feeling of being “represented” by using call-and-response models of storytelling, encouraging self-editing and agency, and creating compassionate trust relationships both among cast members and between cast members and myself.

The three key analytic terms that form the backbone of my thesis research—ethics, feminism, representation—are intricately linked and bound by their influence over and connection to one another. Together, they represent the major problems I encountered in my research. I believe an ethical theatre-making enterprise requires

feminist principles and representative practices. Any show that calls itself “feminist” must be wary of the ethical questions that come from working with people of different backgrounds and strive to represent these people fairly and accurately. In order to support the storytellers and help them to feel represented, one must consider both ethical methods of sharing personal memories and employ a feminist understanding of intersectional identities and issues. After extensive research into verbatim theatre-making methods, as well as standpoint theory and feminist theatre studies, I have come to ask this question: Can I create a method for devising verbatim theatre which is ethical, feminist, and representative of the experiences of the actors I cast?

The next chapter of my thesis is the literature review, where I discuss the plays I have read, scholarship on the plays, and scholarship on arts-based research. First, I share a quick summary and production information about each play. In the next section, I share research which provides reasons each play has been critiqued in relation to, for example, problems of representation, ethics, and feminism. The scholarship on the plays includes interviews with the playwrights and critiques of the plays themselves. Finally, the section on arts-based research gathers work by scholars in theatre studies specifically focusing on performed research, verbatim theatre, and socially activist theatre. These discuss how an investigator’s research can be translated for the stage, and includes inquiries into the tricky balance between aesthetics and representation.

In the Theory chapter, I discuss the key theorists whose work informs my own. This chapter is broken into three sections: Standpoint Theorists, Theorists in Feminist Theatre Studies, and Connections. I begin by sharing a brief history of standpoint theory, followed

by extensive descriptions of the four theorists whose work I utilize. In the next section, I share feminist theorists who discuss verbatim theatre and storytelling within a feminist context. Finally, I use the Connections section to explain the various terms and concepts which are used by multiple theorists, and how each variation influences my analysis.

The subsequent chapter of my thesis addresses my method and methodology. For my thesis project, I have created my own method for producing ethnodrama: Feminist Performance Ethnography (FPE). In this section of the proposal I detail the specifics of this method and its creation, how I implemented my research study, and the various theatre-making methods I used to inspire storytelling. I explain how aspects of the methods of oral history, focus groups, and ethnography are all included in FPE. I include a more detailed breakdown of my audition and rehearsal processes, which inspired numerous methodological questions. I describe the specific storytelling methods I used during rehearsals, which were intended not only to gather material for the play, but also to create trust bonds among the cast. I end the chapter with a short introduction to the upcoming analytical chapters.

My data analysis is broken into three chapters, titled: Ethics, Feminism, and Representation. I chose to organize my data this way because I believe that these three concepts function both separately and in unity as components of FPE and my research question. I began with ethics because I first wish to address the ethical implications behind working with people, particularly in a setting that could inspire complicated emotions. The second chapter, Feminism, discusses whether the project actively worked toward an inclusive, egalitarian model. Finally, the chapter on Representation details how the actors

felt about their depiction within the play, as they question their choices and their self-advocacy.

I conclude my thesis by returning to my research question. I consider the three tenets of FPE: ethics, feminism, and representation, and how they influenced and intertwined with one another. These divisions are false; I cannot truly separate these concepts. However, to ease the task of the reader, I have divided them into thematic chapters. I discuss the temporal nature of theatre, and how my project is subject to the immediacy of who the cast was, when we performed it, and which stories we chose in that moment. As I finish my analysis, I conclude that the method of Feminist Performance Ethnography enabled us (myself and the cast) to create a show that was both aesthetically pleasing and felt somewhat representative. However, further practitioners of FPE must consider the potential of such forms of theatre to produce certain anxieties, particularly about the self. I end my thesis with suggestions and considerations for future theatre practitioners wishing to practice verbatim theatre.

Literature Review

i. Scholarship on Arts-Based Research

In the first part of my literature review, I share some studies which explore the same, or similar, areas about which I have written in the chapters that follow. Many of these studies reference the same plays, discussed in my introduction, as examples of the kinds of work the authors of these studies may (or may not) hope to emulate or improve upon.

In her text, *Engaging Performances: Theatre as Call and Response*, Jan Cohen-Cruz (2010) discusses theatre with activist intentions. In the introduction to her book, Cohen-Cruz explains that devised performances⁴ are often intended for community engagement, and are (or should be) created using a “bottom-up model” whereby the stories of the subject-performers influence how the “higher-ups,” such as directors and producers, mould and guide the production (p.5). She also discusses the unfortunate reality of theatre being polarized as “use-driven on the one end, aesthetically-driven on the other” (p.8). This creates a false sense for theatregoers and new practitioners, that

⁴ Cohen-Cruz (2010) defines “devised theatre” as “work emerging directly from an individual or group of people rather than beginning with a written script” (p.5). This is the definition I will be following when using this term.

what they watch will either be driven by a message or purely artistic concerns. Cohen-Cruz challenges this notion, insisting that engaging performances can balance both.

In her first chapter, “Playwriting,” the author discusses Bertolt Brecht, the influential playwright and theorist whose “epic theatre” challenged preconceived norms of traditional theatre and contained deeply political, anti-Nazi messages. An important notion from Brecht’s work includes his belief that “epic theatre...needs to show that outcomes could be different from what they are; that people can make history, rather than be passively made by it” (p.21). The author acknowledges Brecht as an important influence of activist theatre in the 20th-century. Later in the chapter, Cohen-Cruz explains that powerful political plays can have the advantage of being read for many generations; that despite their initial emergence at a particular historical moment in time, their message may read as poignant decades later because the language and drive can be interpreted in multiple ways (p.37). Finally, at the end of each chapter, the author provides a workbook of tasks that the reader can choose to complete for their own research projects. As there was a playwriting component in my research project, I returned to this resource often to develop the research process.

In her third chapter, “Self-Representing: Testimonial Performance,” Cohen-Cruz discusses plays which use the tradition of “first-voice” to create the script. This method, she explains, has the initial speaker perform their own words, as opposed to casting an actor to recreate the part; in this way, “people with stakes in a topic respond publicly for themselves” (p.68). She shares Marty Pottenger’s (2005) view that first-voice plays should include multiple and varied perspectives, and that the interviewer/playwright, and

then the audience, must be willing to engage fully in listening to the multiple stories that are being told (p.71). This hearkens to Cohen-Cruz's title and theory of "theatre as call and response." The participants in the play "call" to the audience, and indeed to the playwright, and both must be willing to listen, or "respond," in order for the play to have its intended impact. This call and response is imperative for Cohen-Cruz's (2010) concept of "cultural democracy," which she defines as "collective expression of the people, by the people, and for the people" (p.74). She challenges playwrights interested in this form of theatre to practice cultural democracy, setting the tone in rehearsals and information-gathering sessions for collective sharing, listening, and engagement. At the end of the chapter, there is another workbook of tasks that I used as a guide for creating the method of my project.

Judith Ackroyd and John O'Toole (2010), authors of *Performing Research: Tensions, Triumphs, and Trade-Offs of Ethnodrama*, provide an intensive study of the history of the intersection of ethnography and performance. Their exhaustive text covers the entire breadth of this type of play-making, beginning with the question "who performs research and why?". Their first chapter, "The Human Contexts," outlines the tasks, objectives and desired responses of each kind of verbatim theatre participant, from researcher to interviewee/actor to audience members. Chapter Two, "Charting the Territory," outlines and discusses the wide variety of terms used to define theatre that is created from stories shared by active participants. It includes:

ethnodrama, ethno-drama, performance ethnography, ethnographic performance, performative research, performed research, performance and reflexive

anthropology, ethno-performance, ethnographic based performance art, docu-drama, documentary theatre, community theatre, theatre of fact, verbatim theatre, and reader's theatre. The authors also acknowledge that they could have provided more (p.22).⁵

Chapter Three, "Responsibilities," explains how verbatim theatre techniques are generally used as activist approaches through which to share the voices of an oppressed community. Ackroyd and O'Toole insist that by engaging with ethnodrama, the researcher becomes entangled in a web of social responsibilities, ethics, and representations (p.28). The playwright must have, at all times, a keen interest in the well-being of the play's subjects, the message that is being relayed to the audience, and the intended aesthetic that will influence how the play is perceived. Chapter Four, "Ownership and Power," asks tricky methodological questions surrounding the ownership of the play itself, as all those who shared their words have a potential stake in how it is presented and/or distributed. The chapter also discusses the politics of power in playwright-researcher/subject relationships, and expresses the hope that playwrights will represent their subjects "truthfully." The authors conclude the chapter by asking "what is a true, authentic, honest, and honoring representation?" (p.39). Chapter Five, "Aesthetic and Other Tensions," ends the section of the book which details the bones of a verbatim theatre piece. The authors question, again and in depth, the balance of entertainment and

⁵ For my own purposes, and for the ease of the reader, I will use only three terms, and they will be interchangeable. These will be: ethnodrama, performed research, and verbatim theatre. Ackroyd and O'Toole discuss the slight differences between most of these terms, and while there are also minute differences between the three I have chosen, I have decided to use them interchangeably for the comfort of myself and the reader. These terms will be defined more specifically in the Methods chapter.

education in this type of work. They wonder whether, in performed research, if it is more important to educate or to entertain (or try to do both). They never answer this question, instead leaving it open-ended. The next section of their book is made up entirely of case studies of ethnodramas.

Dani Snyder-Young's (2010) article "Beyond 'An Aesthetic of Objectivity': Performance Ethnography, Performance Texts, and Theatricality," discusses the development of the style of theatre practiced in both *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Laramie Project*. With a variety of names—docu-drama, documentary interview, and interview-based performance—this style of theatre became popular in the mid-to-late 1990s when these plays, among others, became popular on the American stage. Drawing from filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha's (1991) concept of the "aesthetic of objectivity," the authors define this work as theatre where "characters are presented speaking in a naturalistic manner to an audience as if that audience were physically present in a live interview" (p.885). Snyder-Young (2010) shares the list from Denzin's (2003) work which lists the concept's central elements:

The relentless pursuit of naturalism, which requires a connection between the moving image and the spoken word; authenticity—the use of people who appear to be real, and locating these people in 'real' situations; the filmmaker/interviewer presented as an observer, not as a person who creates what is seen, heard, and read; the capture only of events unaffected by the recording eye; the capture of objective reality; the dramatization of truth; the presentation of actual facts in a credible way, with people telling them (p.884).

Snyder-Young argues that plays like *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Laramie Project*, which practice an “aesthetic of objectivity,” have phenomenal appeal due to their ability to make audiences feel as though they are being charitable by watching an admirable piece of socially conscious theatre. While not technically a bad thing, this also means that these plays can be read as “utopian,” trying to make the subject matter seem ultimately hopeful by creating conversations between people who, under normal circumstances, never would have spoken (p.885). This causes the audience to view these plays positively because, since personal stories are being shared, a social or political “awareness” has been raised that perhaps was not present before. Snyder-Young (2010) cautions that by adhering to the “aesthetic of objectivity,” ethnodramas will become stagnant in their creative potential for always following the same techniques; she offers some alternative practices, such as to “focus on audiences, create participatory performances, collaborate across disciplinary lines, take aesthetic cues from participants, and look to a wider range of professional performances for aesthetic inspiration” (p.889). This will enable practitioners to move beyond the utopian versions that the aesthetic creates and to develop newer, more progressive, and perhaps interactive forms of theatre.

In *Theatre of Good Intentions: Challenges and Hopes for Theatre and Social Change*, Snyder-Young (2013) discusses the utopian visions of theatre practitioners who attempt to use theatre to better the world. Snyder-Young explains that, while this approach is admirable, “achieving such goals is hard” and she examines “what theatre can and can’t do” (p.2. *emphasis in the original*). She shares that the purpose of her book is to “critique the *limitations* of theatre in the creation of social change, in order to engage

in a productive discussion of theatre's strengths" (p.2, *emphasis in the original*). The author discusses several different theatrical methods for this type of social justice work. One particularly important chapter, titled "Theatre of Good Intentions," highlights how issues of power and privilege can negatively impact participants. Snyder-Young notes that some theatre practitioners attempt to produce theatre for social change to fulfill a personal goal and without a full understanding or awareness of the impact this could have on their participants. This might include, for example, going into communities without an engaged understanding of a community's varied history, social rules, and cultural values (p.26). She insists that practitioners must have a strong grasp of the power they wield in heading a project that could mentally and physically alter a participant, while also having an awareness that their project could yield small, relatively unimportant results in the grand scheme of the world.

Graeme Sullivan's (2006) article "Research Acts in Arts Practice" posits that, as an arts-researcher, one can take many disciplinary avenues to achieve a research objective. He explains that rather than following "a linear procedure or an enclosing process," a researcher can instead practice being "imaginative and reflexive, whereby imaginative insight is constructed from a creative and critical practice" (p.20). Sullivan argues that art can be conceptualized as a form of research, and encourages artists to explore how research can influence their craft. Whether for personal or public/political ends, the point of arts-based research is to create from the intellect, to be inventive in knowledge-building and create new ways of solving problems and forming ideas. He discusses a variety of different terms for these kinds of researchers, and the wide range of

work that they do, but for my purposes the definition and task of the a/r/tographer is the most relevant. Drawing on Rita Irwin's (2004) work, Sullivan explains these three roles: "Artist as someone who en-acts and embodies creative and critical inquiry; the Researcher acts in relation to the culture of the research community; and the Teacher re-acts in ways that involve others in artistic inquiry and educational outcomes" (p.25). Sullivan defines a/r/tographers as researchers who have an interest in education, community, and culture, but whose focus is on "developing the practitioner-researcher who is capable of imaginative and insightful inquiry" (p.20-21). The researcher as a/r/tographer can be broken down as **artist**, **researcher**, and **teacher**. Sullivan acknowledges that it is difficult to balance these three roles, and cautions that one can easily outweigh the others without proper consideration for how the three work together as a cohesive unit, but in balance can be incredibly dynamic (p.28). He also warns of the dangers of leaning too heavily toward the aesthetic, as opposed to balancing along with the representative, for "the quest to embrace more artistic forms of representation results in decorative research rather than critical inquiry" (Fox, 2001, cited by Sullivan, 2006, p. 24). He is insisting here that an artographer must remain aware of the critical potential of their work. Ultimately, like verbatim theatre and the other forms of arts-based research which Sullivan outlines in his study, artography "is an educational act, for the intent is to provoke dialogue and to initiate change" (p.33).

ii. Scholarship practicing Arts-Based Research

In their article "Staging Ethics: The Promise and Perils of Research-based Performance," Christina Sinding, Lisa Schwartz, and Matthew Hunt (2011), three social

scientists, reflect on the experience of attempting to create a theatre piece as an addition to their research project. Rather than sharing how the actual theatre piece was received critically after it was produced, the authors discuss the fears and anxieties that arose when they were *considering* using a theatre production to share their research findings. The trio conducted interviews with Canadian medical professionals, mostly nurses and doctors, working in the global South. The interviews were intense and detailed, exposing the anxieties and triumphs of the interviewees: the struggle of working in an unfamiliar culture, the trauma of dealing with disease and death in a foreign country, and facing catastrophe every day as disaster relief workers (p.32). For the interviewees, the goal of the project was to share their stories with other Canadian health professionals as well as non-health sector Canadian citizens, and for the audience, to “activate empathy, engage activism, and raise questions about Canada’s role on the world stage” (p.33). The authors discuss the difficulty they faced trying to organize such an endeavour, particularly the act of choosing which quotes to share from their lengthy interviews. In the paper, the authors share their fear of misrepresenting either the interviewees or the people from the Global South whom the interviewees discussed in their interviews. The authors explain that, “it is one thing to struggle with how our representation, in concert with so many representations, renders ill and injured people living in the Global South present but speechless. It is another thing to consider ways that respondents’ narratives replace theirs” (p. 35). While the authors end their article by claiming that they believe their choice to move forward with a theatre piece is a noble and good one, they do not share the details of the production.⁶

⁶ At this time, it is unclear whether the researchers have mounted a dramatized production of their research.

Karen Mitchell and Jennifer Freitag (2011) discuss their process of combining forum theatre approaches with tactics of bystander intervention in their article “Forum Theatre for Bystanders: A New Model for Gender Violence Prevention.”⁷ They explain that they “developed a bystander approach to gender violence prevention using peer theatre as [their] method of delivery” (p.991). As their theatrical framework, they decided to use Augusto Boal’s method of Forum Theatre, based on his work “Theatre of the Oppressed” (1995). The authors explain that Forum Theatre is a method of “problem posing... to generate collaborative dialogue between actors and audience members” (p.992). Calling their new theatrical model “Forum Theatre for Bystanders” or FTB, the authors describe their process of gathering actors trained in these techniques to act out scenes in which bystander intervention would have prevented a violent act from occurring. Then, audience members are invited onto the stage to change the scene and stop the violence. Mitchell and Freitag assure the reader that their method builds such skills as community responsibility, decreasing victim blaming, increasing awareness, and intervention techniques (p.999-1004). Students were able to interact with one another in scenes that provided a chance to practice bystander intervention techniques and communication skills.

Kathleen Gallagher, Anne Wessels, and Burcu Yaman Ntelioglou, in their article “Verbatim Theatre and Social Research: Turning towards the Stories of Others,” document Project Humanity, a not-for-profit theatre organization, as it shares a verbatim

⁷ Bystander intervention education “emphasizes community responsibility for changing the societal norms” that allow crimes that occur between a victim and one or more perpetrators, such as violence, assault, or robbery, to happen without intervention from those persons who witnessed the crime occur (Mitchell & Freitag, 2011, p. 991). This puts responsibility on the witness to intervene on behalf of the victim and promotes shared protection among community members.

theatre⁸ piece its members created with youth from a homeless shelter, titled *The Middle Place*. The authors followed this play in three stages: from its first performances, during which they analyzed a data set that documented reactions from youth who watched the play; when Project Humanity took the play to two professional theatre companies in Toronto, Theatre Passe Muraille and Canadian Stage, as the authors interviewed both adult and youth audience members for their reactions; and student reactions to the piece back in the classroom at their own research site (p.24). Their article discusses the “ethics of representing trauma,” and possibilities for “fearless speech” (p.24). They share their concerns about the practice of verbatim theatre, particularly when used in a high-risk situation (such as about/for homeless youth) for fear of re-traumatizing audience members or participants from the sharing and repetition of personal and volatile subject matter. However, they also share their collective vision of verbatim theatre as an important part of community activism and outreach.

Gallagher, Wessels, and Ntelioglou (2012) describe verbatim theatre as an act of “turning towards,” theorized from Jan Cohen-Cruz’s notion of “social call, cultural response,” discussed above (p.28). Both of these phrases are meant to signify a process whereby a need is recognized in a community, and the community then “turns toward” the need to work on fixing the problem. The authors divulge that, by allowing their research to follow creative means, the homeless youth involved in their project were much more inclined to share private stories, ones that they were particularly interested in

⁸ The authors define verbatim theatre as a method which: “uses the actual words of people, often in direct first-person address or testimonial style, to raise issues relevant to a particular community and to activate broader social engagement” (Gallagher, Wessels, & Ntelioglou, 2012, p.28).

telling. They claim that, “qualitative research, at its collaborative best, greatly profits from the ambiguities and uncertainties of theatre-making processes,” and they agreed that, ultimately, the project was successful in its objective to engage audiences in an important, socially-conscious story, one that would have the audience thinking about the ramifications in their community long past the curtain call (p.39). This article is part of a larger ethnographic study titled *Urban School Performances: The interplay, through live and digital drama, of local-global knowledge about student engagement (USP)*. However, only this article is relevant to my area of study.

In their article, “The Experience of Engaging with Research-Based Drama: Evaluation and Explication of Synergy and Transformation,” a team of researchers discuss audience reactions to a research-based drama titled *I’m Still Here*, a play about persons living with dementia. Researchers on this team included Gail J. Mitchell, Sherry Dupuis, Christine Jonas-Simpson, Colleen Whyte, Jennifer Carson, and Jennifer Gillis, from York University and the University of Waterloo. The team gathered 15 focus groups of persons who had watched the play to discuss how they were affected by the themes, issues, and feelings evoked by the show. With help from local Alzheimer’s societies, participants were chosen from family members and health care professionals of persons with dementia who had purchased tickets for the show. The focus groups met before and after performances, during which the participants were part of a larger number of audience members. One researcher also stayed behind to survey the non-participants of the audience after the performance (p.381-382).

From these focus groups the authors pinpointed seven important themes, which they called “patterns of synergy”: seeing anew, connecting with reverberating truths, placing and relating self, sensing embodied impact, discerning meaningful learning, expanding understanding of perspective, and affirming personal knowing (emphasis in the original, p.383). The focus group participants acknowledged how deeply they were affected by the subject matter of the play, noting that they were able to see themselves in the characters. The play caused some health care professionals to question their diagnostic practices, such as the effectiveness of cognitive tests. Other participants, particularly family members, were struck by how the play dealt with the familiar struggle of having a mother, father, or sibling living with dementia. The authors share that, from the reactions of the participants in the focus groups, they felt that participants “saw themselves *in the play*” (p.385). The researchers made a particularly important point about the power of research-based drama when they pointed out how many of their patterns of synergy were “sense” based, and acknowledged how many participants used terms such as seeing, hearing, feeling, and sensing to describe their experience of watching the play. The authors explain that “descriptions of the embodied impact show the potential power of the drama and how deeply some participants felt about the messages and meanings being portrayed in the drama. Seeing, feeling, sensing are clearly linked to how the arts can be experienced” (p. 386). In the discussion of their findings, the authors expound on the importance of multidisciplinary work, particularly on how theatre and social research can merge to create new modes of understanding and recognition. In the final paragraph of their research paper, the authors agree that their findings:

Support the actual and potential power of the arts to enhance visibility, truths, perspective, passion, learning, and insight. Our interpretation of the synergies highlights the interrelated ideas and contributes to the emergent knowledge that drama is an effective way to translate research, to engage and connect audiences with diverse backgrounds and perspectives, and to provoke change in understanding (p.390).

The final part of my literature review examines scholarship that critically interrogates several theatrical works which, like my project, share the voices of “real” people: *A Chorus Line* by Michael Bennett, *The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler, *The Laramie Project* by Moises Kaufman, and *Body and Soul* by Judith Thompson.

iii. The Plays & Scholarship on the Plays

In order to understand how these plays influenced my own method for creating ethnodrama, I will first share summaries and the production background of each. I will work through the plays chronologically, from oldest to most recent. Following a description of each play are brief discussions of scholars who critique this work.

Created by Michael Bennett in the 1970s, *A Chorus Line* details the trials and tribulations of the community of actors among whom Bennett lived. His inspiration for the show was born out of his discussions with friends about the hard life of theatre: auditions, call-backs, injuries, and competition. He gathered a group of racially, economically, and sexually diverse theatre practitioners together one evening to discuss their experiences in the New York theatre scene. The stories recounted and taped that

evening formed the backbone of a show that became an international musical sensation, and one of the longest running musicals on Broadway. The documentary *Every Little Step*, produced and directed by Adam Del Deo and James Stern, chronicles the audition process of the 2006 revival of *A Chorus Line*, but also offers some insight into the original production—including the interview process—and contains interviews with some original cast members. Michael Bennett’s method, though called interviewing by both himself and the directors of the 2008 documentary, was more like a focus group, since the actors were all together, and could build on one another’s ideas and conversations. In the opening sequence of the documentary, these words appear on the screen: “at midnight on January 26, 1974, director/choreographer Michael Bennett gathered 22 dancers to talk about their lives. He taped the twelve-hour session” (Stern & Del Deo, 2008). In an interview, Donna McKechnie, one of the original cast members, describes the interview process. She explains that Bennett said, “I’m getting a group together and we’re gonna talk about what it’s like to be in show business. Then we go into this other room, and we just sit down with a reel-to-reel track... and um we sat in this big circle and Michael...” (Stern & Del Deo, 2008). The session is described here as very informal, a group of friends chatting about their lives rather than a “proper” interview process. There appear to have been no specific guidelines or ethics involved or considered; Bennett’s tape recordings have him saying, “what I want to do is really like an interview,” but the conversation was open-ended (Stern & Del Deo, 2008). On the website for *Every Little Step*, Del Deo and Stern explain Bennett’s process, how it unfolded and how the outcome became the seed for the hit Broadway musical:

For the next 12 hours on that early winter morning in 1974, Bennett and his fellow dancers talked about their lives, revealing an incredible amount of information about their personal histories, their motivations to perform and their dreams. The process of discovery revealed that the faceless chorus was composed of individuals with wit and abundant humanity, each with a special story to tell (Stern & Del Deo, 2008).

A Chorus Line centers on the audition call for a new Broadway play, and the entire show takes place within the audition process. The play individuates each performer; each takes their turn to step out of the line and tell their story. Some are comedic, some tragic; each character represents a particular race, gender, and class, with multiple intersecting identities, highlighted differently for different characters. Additionally, Bennett included appendices at the end of the script which provided line changes if the actor cast did not fit the original description of the character. For example, the script says that “if the girl playing Connie is *not* oriental her name speech should be...” effectively working to erase any chance of racist depictions (Bennett, 1985, p.110). Of the 17 auditioning, only eight will be chosen for the chorus. The fear of being cut, the hope of being cast, and the competitive spirit of the theatre world are themes which run through the show.

By documenting the audition process of a show about auditioning, *Every Little Step* (2008) provides a look into the theatre world that mirrors *A Chorus Line* itself. The viewer sees the production team saying “yes” or “no” to hopeful auditioners; these are not characters, but rather *flesh and blood people* whose futures hang in the balance of each choice. *Every Little Step* is important not only for the historical information it offers

about the development of the original production, but also its quiet critique of the cutthroat world of theatre. For example, the directors interview Baayork Lee, the woman who originally played and inspired the character of Connie Wong, and who was hired to choreograph and help cast the revival. During the audition process for the revival, Baayork's opinion on all the actors was considered, but of course she had particular interest in who would represent her own story. Lee was born and raised in New York City, and believed that her American upbringing was important for the character, saying "there's something about being born in America and fighting...for a seat on the F-train, at five" (Ibid.). Yet the favourite to play Connie eventually became Yuka, who was born in Okinawa, Japan. When the other members of the audition team decided on Yuka, Lee retorted, "I'm glad you think I'm cute, because I don't, of course I don't see myself that way, I'm a survivor" (Ibid.). Should the audition team have decided on the Connie that Lee preferred, since the role was based on her life? This story is just one of many that the director's share to question representation, the audition process, and the emotional and physical strain on actors desperate for a part.

The Vagina Monologues was written by Eve Ensler in the mid-1990s, and first performed in 1996. A new edition of the play is released each year, with an updated selection of monologues. For the sake of continuity, I will be referencing a printed 10th anniversary edition of *TVM*, published in 2008, which includes a new introduction by Ensler, a foreword by Gloria Steinem, and a set collection of monologues. I did this because of the benefits of working from a particular text rather than from the vast array of

TVM scripts that have been anthologized over the past twenty years, and the addition of the introduction and foreword were a welcome bonus.

To gather inspiration for her play, Ensler conducted interviews with over 200 women about their many experiences of womanhood, race, class, and sexuality; she was interested in asking women about their thoughts and feelings regarding their, and other women's, vaginas. She interviewed elderly women, women of color, refugees, sex workers, and children, among many others (p.xxxiii). Some monologues that emerged from these interviews are based on stories told by specific people; some are amalgams of stories told by a group of women who (in Ensler's view) shared a common problem or experience. The monologues have been performed by actors in a variety of contexts, from community to professional theatre. The show, since its introduction, has become an international sensation; thousands of performances have been mounted worldwide for vastly different audiences. In her introduction, Ensler (2008) explains that, "revealing the very personal stories of women and their private parts gave birth to a public, global movement" (p.xii). The *TVM* script is constantly changing; Ensler makes edits as she pleases, and in order to perform the play, interested parties must acquire the most up-to-date script, and follow it as precisely as possible.⁹ Many monologues have remained untouched within each script, while others are removed and re-added by Ensler as she deems fit ("Introduction," p.xi-xxvi).

⁹ On Ensler's website, there are extensive instructions detailing when, where, and how *The Vagina Monologues* can be performed. For more information, see: <http://www.eveensler.org/plays/the-vagina-monologues/>

Despite its vast global reach, *The Vagina Monologues* has come under fire by scholars and activists, particularly queer women and women of color, for misrepresenting and reinterpreting the stories of minority women. Though Ensler claims that “saying the word I was not supposed to say is the thing that gave me a voice in the world,” research by academics suggests that coming to/being given “voice” has and continues to elude some of the women Ensler interviewed, as well as many women who attend productions of this show (Cooper, 2007; Basu, 2010). Like these scholars, I have become increasingly uncomfortable with Ensler’s representation (or lack thereof) of queer women, identifying as queer myself. As I viewed multiple productions of this play over the years, my feelings have grown more and more complicated and critical.

Christine Cooper (2007), in “Worrying about Vaginas: Feminism and Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*,” questions the ethics of Ensler’s interviewing and interpretation practices. As she describes, sometimes Ensler directly translated one individual’s narrative into a monologue; other times, Ensler crafted monologues from a variety of different stories she had heard, Cooper is troubled by this disparity. Cooper (2007) explains that, “the monologue form, as it takes shape in this play and as it, in turn, shapes how audiences experience women’s perceptions of their vaginas, has grave consequences for the feminist politics that the show popularizes” (p.729), because monologue lacks conversation between characters, the ability to call one another out on their problematic behavior. Cooper also expresses frustration with Ensler’s treatment of racial and sexual minorities in *The Vagina Monologues*, and discusses two important examples of monologues which essentialize the women they purport to represent. First,

Cooper reports that the lesbian sex worker that Ensler interviewed for “The Moaner” monologue did not feel the monologue was true to her own experiences as she had described them to Ensler.¹⁰ Though the monologue was based on her story, the interviewee did not see herself in Ensler’s translation of her words into script (p.750). Second, Cooper criticizes Ensler’s American perspective on womanhood, citing the “My Vagina is a Village”¹¹ monologue as proof. Cooper (2007) insists that, “the piece raises crucial questions about the relationship of woman to nation and feminism to globalization, questions just barely contained by the homogenizing trope of the vagina-self,” and criticizes the fact that this profoundly emotional and heart-wrenching character has no name or individual ownership of her vagina, but rather that her selfhood, or personality, is “shared” among the village. Cooper questions whether Ensler is conscious of her representation of this character as less agentic and autonomous than the (presumed) Western characters who dominate the play (p.745). Finally, Cooper expresses her disappointment in Ensler’s “othering” of characters who are not white, American, cisgender, middle-class, and Anglo-Saxon. She describes how Ensler punctuates some of her monologues with stage directions that explain how the actor should speak, including as a “Southern woman of color,” or with a “Jewish, Queens accent” (p.744). Other monologues, however, have no such performance directions regarding speech, and are

¹⁰ “The Moaner,” in most scripts of *The Vagina Monologues*, is the last or close to the last monologue to be performed. Cooper explains that, “the monologue ends with her imitating the kinds of moans she has inspired, a full multicultural spectrum from the Grace Slick moan to the WASP moan to that of a militant bisexual, climaxing (pun intended) in the moan of all moans, the ‘surprise triple orgasm moan’” (p.110–11).

¹¹ “My Vagina is a Village” is a monologue performed as though the character has split in two: an earlier version who is carefree and happy, and a recent, traumatized shell of a woman who has suffered through the Bosnian war. One version celebrates the vagina; the other describes the torment of sexual violence at the hands of enemy soldiers.

thus assumed to be voiced by women who are white, middle class, and Christian.

Ultimately, Cooper is critical of the way Ensler's reinterpretation of her interviewees assert white, heterosexual, American, and middle-class femininity as the norm.

In her article "V is for Veil, V is for Ventriloquism: Global Feminisms in the Vagina Monologues," Srimati Basu (2010) criticizes Ensler's play by discussing the trouble with representation and voice in Ensler's depiction of non-Western women. Specifically referencing the "My Vagina is a Village" monologue,¹² Basu examines how violence in *TVM* is limited to the experiences of women of color and non-American women, while pleasure and enjoyment of the body is saved for the women in the Western monologues. She explains that:

Violence is the primary register through which 'the global' is evoked, the main lens for looking outside the United States. These global locations serve to signify the terror that is used to hold the laughter in balance, to validate the seriousness of the enterprise, while the 'vagina' pieces are more directly associated with pleasure and sexuality and set in the United States (p.32).

Basu, like Cooper (2007), also references how the monologues for non-Western women are not based on one individual's narrative, but rather derived from a series of interviews that Ensler conducted. Basu questions Ensler's commitment to honest representation in this play based on her disregard for non-Western women's experiences, and thus their ultimate silencing by a privileged white Western woman.

¹² See above

Moises Kaufman's (2001) award-winning play *The Laramie Project* was first performed on February 19, 2000, at the Ricketson Theatre by the Denver Center Theatre Company (p.ix). Written as a collaborative venture by the Tectonic Theatre Project, a company headed by Kaufman, the play was inspired by the tragic 1998 murder of Mathew Shepard, a gay university student who was born and raised in Laramie, Wyoming (p.vi). Kaufman and nine other members of the Tectonic Theatre Project traveled to Laramie and conducted interviews that would serve as material for the play. These interviewers would also act in the play. They returned six times over the course of two years to continue interviewing and learning about how the crime had affected the citizens of the town; in the end they conducted over two hundred interviews (p.vii). In his "Author's Note," Kaufman explains that while data collection for the play was a team effort, the writing team for the dramatic text was narrowed down to himself, Leigh Fondakowski, Stephen Belber, and Greg Pierotti; the latter two eventually left the writing team to focus on their work as actors in the initial production. All of the interviewers/actors play numerous characters based on real people from Laramie and/or people who knew Shepard, as well as playing themselves, reflecting on the project. In the initial production, actor John McAdams played the part of Moises Kaufman in addition to other characters.

The Laramie Project has since been performed around the world by actors who were not part of the interviewing team—their connection to the script is minimal, the degrees of separation between them and the townspeople who were studied ever growing. Additionally, with a cast of 8 actors who play 65 characters, I have considered the

amount of depth that can be afforded to each character. These actors portray themselves, various townspeople, and are also part of several ensemble moments. Though the original actors were also interviewers in Laramie, and met the persons they then portrayed, Kaufman is not part of the cast, and is played by a different actor. This happens several times with other writers and behind-the-scenes persons. The TTP also had full control over the editing and script writing process, allowing them to frame the characters/townspeople in such a way as to fit their narrative, however “authentic” that narrative may have been.

In an interview with Caridad Svich (2003), entitled “Moises Kaufman: ‘Reconstructing History through Theatre’,” the prolific playwright of *The Laramie Project* discusses his experiences working on his two most famous plays: *Laramie* (2000) and *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1997). Kaufman shares personal stories about his theatre group, the Tectonic Theatre Project. He also explains that one of his biggest influences is Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright, and states that he shares Brecht’s ideology that:

An actor playing a role is three things: the character he is playing, the actor, and a member of a socio-political community in which he lives. I think this applies to theatre artists in general. As a writer/director I am a craftsman, I am a human being and I am a member of a socio-political context (p.69).

Kaufman explains that his art is focused on communities and creating theatre that can express the essence of a particular socio-political time and/or region. As a homosexual man, Kaufman pays particular interest to historical and contemporary figures that

struggle/have struggled with similar discrimination to his own, and both *Laramie* and *Gross Indecency* center on figures who suffered discrimination, and ultimately, persecution for being gay. At the crux of his work, as he discusses in the interview, is his understanding that personal narratives have the power to hone in on the hopes and fears of the audience, a power which can hopefully incite important social change. He asks, rhetorically: “How do we learn stories, tell stories and use pre-existing narratives to construct and re-construct our own identities?” (p.70). In this interview Kaufman frames his work as reflecting many socio-political climates, both past and present, which were challenged by a few in order to help many.

In her article “Saying it Right: Creating Ethical Verbatim Theatre,” Janet Gibson (2011) discusses the ethical implications of interviewing and sharing people’s personal narratives. While she analyzes two plays for her study—*The Laramie Project* and *Let Me Down Easy* by Anna Deveare Smith—for the purposes of this literature review, I focus specifically on Gibson’s research on *The Laramie Project*. She explains how there is a lack of ethical consideration in theatre production and creation for a variety of reasons: for some scholars and practitioners, the abstract concepts of ethics do not translate well to theatrical work, and for others, ethics is an intrusive and unwelcome imposition on groups trying to create art (Gibson, 2011, p.1-2). Gibson (2011) explains that, “the creation of verbatim theatre has complex ethical dimensions, often overlooked by both practitioners and scholars, but with which they still need to be engaged,” and this quote aligns well with my thesis work in consideration of ethics (p.2). She questions the insistence of verbatim theatre practitioners to label their work as “true” or “truth-telling”

by claiming that it is impossible to “say it right,” particularly when actors are sharing the words of someone else (Gibson, 2011, p.2). Responsibility and accountability to the original storytellers is paramount when reinterpreting interviews for the stage, and Gibson (2011) explains that she wishes to trouble previous practices of disengagement with interview subjects after data collection. Paraphrasing the work of Hazou (2009), Gibson (2011) says that, “most verbatim practitioners appear to speak *for*, rather than speak *with* the others who are the subjects of their projects” (p.5, emphasis in the original). This critique is evident in her analysis of *The Laramie Project*.

Taking a closer look at two specific plays, Gibson (2011) explains how *The Laramie Project* exhibits troubling methods of data-collection and communication with the community of Laramie, Wyoming. She questions the motives of the Tectonic Theatre Project, whom she claims wished to forward their “grand narrative” rather than remaining “true” to the subjects of the play. Gibson (2011) shares an example of strategic omission that is perhaps unconsciously deceptive:

Certain homophobic comments made by Aaron Kriefels, the person who first found Matthew Shephard tied to the fence and dying, were left out of the play because he would have sounded out of character if they had been included (Tigner, 2002: 152). In addition, hundreds of hours of tapes were gathered, but only the most relevant or important were used (Shewey, 2000: 18) without apparent negotiation with the subjects (p.5).

Thus Gibson questions whether the Tectonic Theatre Project, consciously or unconsciously, edited the text to further the message they were hoping to get across to

their audience. She also troubles the notion that the TTP, and others who practice verbatim theatre, might be harbingers of social justice, by asserting that they might instead be appropriators and silencers in a new way. Gibson (2011) argues that:

When the silenced and traumatised are silenced and traumatised again, by the excision of their characters after interviews and/or by other lack of consultation and/or discussion on the script, the rhetoric of the social and political efficacy of verbatim theatre becomes empty (p.13).

Gibson (2011) is not necessarily claiming that all verbatim theatre work is appropriative, unethical, and manipulative; rather, she is putting a call out to theatre practitioners, asking them to consider more fully the implications of their work. By remaining focused on the collaborative nature of verbatim theatre and providing the space for input by those whose stories are told, Gibson believes verbatim theatre can be practiced more ethically.

Marsha R. Pincus (2005) details her experience working on *The Laramie Project* with high-school students in her article “Learning from Laramie: Urban High School Students Read, Research, and Reenact *The Laramie Project*.” Pincus’ (2005) article begins with a reflexive admission of her subject position as a high school English teacher in urban Philadelphia. She shares her passion for theatre and social engagement, and explains her frustrations with the public school system and its lack of flexibility in formulating new and innovative pedagogical approaches to teaching (Pincus, 2005, p.148). As part of her curriculum and also as a personal experiment, Pincus conducted a study in her class of 43 students,

asking them to keep a journal during three stages of their semester's work: right after reading *The Laramie Project* for the first time; after an extensive look into the background of the play, the characters, the Tectonic Theatre Project, and the incident; and after a period of creative work re-enacting the play (p.151).

Throughout the article she shares excerpts from her student's journals, showing their rich and varied reactions to the script, which are often highly emotional. She explains that her "original goal in selecting *The Laramie Project* was to teach a play that would challenge my students to think differently about the world and to show them the transformative power of drama" (p.152). Pincus (2005) combines her reflection on the experiences in the classroom with her theoretical investigations into verbatim theatre and Brecht's epic theatre, showing her rich background in the concepts necessary for this kind of work. Her work on *the Laramie Project* helps me consider the actions of the Tectonic Theatre Project more carefully.

Body and Soul (2011), credited as "created by Judith Thompson with fifteen women," was first performed on May 10, 2008, at the Young Centre in Toronto (p.xi). The play was commissioned by Brenda Surminski of Ogilvy & Mather, advertisers for Dove. In her preface, Thompson (2011) explains how she was approached by Dove to create a show about "ordinary, post-fertile women. Women who generally are invisible, and unheard" (p.vi). She asked for, and received, complete creative control over the play, and embarked on the journey of casting fifteen diverse women. She explains that she "wanted to hear from women of different backgrounds", and worked to thoughtfully cast

with diverse representation in mind (Thompson, 2011, p.vii). Thompson was not included in the cast, despite being a woman of the appropriate age range (she was 52 at the time the play was commissioned). Instead, she is credited as playwright/director (p.xi). The women who were cast ranged in age from early fifties to early eighties, and represented a variety of races, ethnicities, and cultures, including Cree and Saulteaux First Nations, French, Indian, Jewish, Trinidadian, and Jamaican. The play has these 15 women reflecting on their lives from childhood to middle age, and share their experiences as mothers, wives, lovers, workers, and selves. The play is divided into themes, and follows a linear path from childhood to death.

Thompson's method for creating the play involved a series of two-week workshops in which she provided her actors with prompts, such as "earliest childhood memories" (Thompson, 2011, p.vii). She would then ask for personal stories from her actors, whether improvised or after allowing them time to reflect and write down their memories. She explains that some stories were perfect from the beginning, while others were heavily edited and ended up being quite different from the original version. Other stories, still, were "too private to ever be told in public"—we will never know what these stories were. She describes how she pushed her actors to provide more detail, to think of better, more interesting stories, and more honesty (p.vii). Thompson's method was not interviewing, where the actor's words might have been taken right from transcript to stage, but perhaps it was like Michael Bennett's discussions with his friends in *A Chorus Line*—a workshop, a group discussion, a safe, sharing circle where women could build upon and be influenced by one another's stories. As a feminist researcher and theatre

practitioner I have considered the ethics of Thompson's insider-outsider position. Though she is involved creatively as playwright and director, her ability to cut and paste these women's words into a script of, ultimately, her own creation, makes me wonder how these women felt about their own stories being molded into Thompson's vision of a play that is "stage-worthy". She claims herself in the Preface that "most of the women are very powerful writers, though they are not playwrights," a qualification that Thompson reserves for herself as creative lead on this project (p.viii).

In her article about her experience working on *Body and Soul*, titled "Tactics of Theatre in the Corporate Strategy," Sorouja Moll (2011) discusses how Judith Thompson and her cast resisted the pressures of Dove/Unilever (their media sponsor) to influence the project. The article exists mainly as a space in which Moll can reflect on her experience with the project and her analysis of tensions between creative space and media influence. Moll (2011) explains that she asked Thompson if she could join the project, as it fit well with her work in gender, theatre, and media (p.43). Moll became an assistant playwright, and was involved with rehearsals as a recorder, writing down the actors' words as they were spoken. She compares her role to that of Donna Haraway's cyborg,¹³ calling herself "a hybrid of machine [corporation] and organism [theatre]" (p.43). Moll describes the people in each of the two factions—company and collective—as having their own strategies and desired outcomes for this play. The company hopes that, by sharing their vision of "real beauty," their message will gain favour and they will be able

¹³ Donna Haraway's "cyborg theory," as Moll (2011) describes and utilizes it, comes from the "conflation of the words 'cybernetic' and 'organism.' The etymology of 'cybernetic' is from Greek 'to steer,' or 'to govern' and is the field of study concerned with communications and control systems in living organisms and machines" (p.43, as cited from Haraway, p.149).

to sell more products. However, Moll explains that their vision of “real beauty” is not altogether “real”; despite gathering an economically, ethnically, and nationally diverse cast to represent real women with real beauty:

The ensemble was professionally photographed, stylists applied their makeup, styled their hair, and outfitted them in specific wardrobes—all at corporate expense. The surface images of *Real Beauty* and *Real Woman*, as mediated and disseminated through a corporate lens, thereby continued to reinforce the association of ‘real’ and ‘beauty’ with a high price tag (p.45).

Countering with her own strategies, Thompson refused to bend to the will of the corporation that demanded a set script, a team of publishers, or a creative hand in making the play. Moll (2011) shares that Thompson “was unrelenting. She prompts the ensemble to ‘tell it like you have to tell it’” (p.46). Drawing from cyborg theory once more, Moll (2011) explains that the corporation—the machine—attempted to place Thompson and the other members of the company—the theatre—into a tight, scheduled, routine box, but the theatre was defiant against the machine (p.46). Though Moll’s involvement with the creative process of *Body and Soul* ended in 2008, long before the show was finished and produced, she acknowledges that she has been changed, for the better, by the empowering stories shared among the cast.

These scholars raise many important questions about representation, ownership, and identity which have been important as I considered the creative processes of these four playwrights. These articles provided me a way to understand how each play was received by critics as well as to measure their cultural impact.

In reviewing these sources, I have come to more fully understand the wealth of research done on the connections between theatre and academics. However, I also noticed that while plenty of research has been done on the implications of theatre based on the lives, words, and experiences of living people, there is little dedicated to exploring the next step: revising and improving methods to create theatre that is more ethical and representative. My literature review has examined scholarship in relation to existing works of verbatim theatre and critical analysis of these works, as well as scholarship on verbatim theatre techniques and arts-based research. Next, I discuss my theoretical and methodological approaches, before turning toward my own research, in which I attempt to create theatre that improves upon the methods of those practitioners who have come before me.

Theory

In my thesis, I ask whether it is possible to create a method for devising verbatim theatre which is feminist, ethical, and representative of the experiences of the actors I cast. I chose standpoint theory because I feel that standpoint, particularly the work of certain black feminist theorists, gave me the conceptual and methodological tools I needed to explore who I am, who my actors are, and how we are located in the world as persons with complex identities and experiences. These theorists influenced how I created Feminist Performance Ethnography, and contributed invaluable conceptual frameworks for my analysis. I have separated this chapter into three sections: one, important standpoint theorists and particular concepts I have used; two, important feminist theatre studies theorists and concepts that I will use related to activist theatre; and three, an explanation of the links between these which has been important in the development of my own work.

i. Standpoint Theory

When I discuss “Standpoint Theory,” I come from a personal understanding of the theory, and my interpretation draws from various scholars. My version of standpoint theory acknowledges the vast differences among individuals, and how each person has a particular viewpoint of the world that is influenced by their identity, as related to gender,

race, sexuality, ability, age, and culture, to name a few examples. These individual standpoints are, in a general sense, afforded different levels of value based on the identity markers I just mentioned, as some identities (male, white, straight, neurotypical, able-bodied, middle-aged, and from the West) are attributed more value. My project considers standpoint theory in connection with my project by providing a platform for people of multiple experiences and voices, or standpoints, to tell their stories. There are variations within this school of thought, and while I share multiple scholars' views for a brief history, my project's theoretical viewpoint is most closely related to theories developed by Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Nancy Mairs.

Standpoint theory originated with the work of three feminist theorists: Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hartsock, and Hilary Rose. I have compiled a short history of early standpoint theory. Writing in different fields of study in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Smith, Hartsock, and Rose discussed the problem of the devaluation of women's knowledge, particularly in the sciences. As sociologists and philosophers, these women each worked with Marxist feminist theory, which "applies Marx's concept of class consciousness to men and women." Their works argued that women have a unique, unitary perspective that differs from that of men due to their social reality as "physical and social producers of children" (Lorber, 2012, p.184). Rose's hand in the formation of this theory comes from her work as a sociological critic of hierarchical dualisms: men/women, mind/body, and reason/emotion. In a similar vein, Hartsock (1983) uses her skills as a political theorist to share her own version of Marxism; insisting that "like the lives of proletarians according to Marxian theory, women's lives make available a particular and privileged vantage

point on male supremacy, a vantage point which can ground a powerful critique of phallogocentric institutions and ideology” (p.284). She was also the first to conceive of the concept of “social location,” which claims that women’s subjugated position allows them an epistemic advantage over men, for they can more clearly “see” the injustices of the world. Finally, Dorothy Smith shares valuable perspectives as a sociologist who conducts studies from the “standpoint of women.” Smith (2005) explains that her vision of standpoint theory is “not as a given and finalized form of knowledge but as a ground in experience from which discoveries are to be made,” and this idea of using standpoint as a means of making discoveries reflects my desires for my project.

Feminist historian Joan Kelly documented the development of feminist theory from the Renaissance period until the 1980s. In her paper “The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory,” Kelly is one of many early theorists discussing the racial, sexual, and class differences among women, claiming that “the women’s movement encompasses all these positions” (Kelly, 1984, p.55-56). Her concept of “simultaneous operation” acknowledges that certain social positions are “systematically bound to each other—and always have been so bound,” and she asserts that this is true for race and class (p.58).

Sandra Harding (1986) developed a more fully articulated standpoint theory as a feminist epistemological perspective; epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge, and she describes feminist standpoint epistemologies as those which “simultaneously privilege women or feminists... epistemically and yet also claim to overcome the dichotomizing that is characteristic of the Enlightenment/bourgeois world view and its science” (p.142-143). Harding’s contributions come from her critique of androcentric,

Enlightenment-based scientific practice. In her book *The Science Question in Feminism*, Harding (1986) explains that standpoint epistemology is “grounded in those shared characteristics of *women as a social group* and of *men as a social group*,” a binary which devalues women’s experience politically, socially, and economically (p.162, *emphasis in the original*). She furthers these arguments in her article, “Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques” (1996). One particularly important aspect of standpoint epistemology developed in this article involves Harding’s concept of “strong objectivity.” Harding argues that standpoint epistemology can result in better science, due to its practice of locating the subject within the research. She insists that science’s regular practice of refusing to locate the researcher, seen to be objective, can weaken research, as the reader does not know where, when, and how the research was conceived. Harding (1996) explains that “a unitary consciousness is an obstacle to understanding,” and that by locating oneself, and one’s subjects, within the research project, better science can occur (p.312).

Harding’s conceptualization of strong objectivity is similar to Donna Haraway’s (1988) concept of “situated knowledges.” In her article “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” Haraway acknowledges the slippery slope that occurs when one wants to appear objective and yet also employ a feminist critique. She calls for scholars to refuse the “view from nowhere,” which disembodies the knower. Instead, she suggests “situated knowledges” in which “objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment” (p.582). By recognising that all perspectives are partial, that every view is from “somewhere,”

situated knowledge “allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (p.583). In this vein, both Harding and Haraway develop new possibilities for locating the subject within research, and for broadening the scope of women’s experience(s) to include pluralities.

Harding proposes that feminist researchers should adhere to pluralities, whereby they recognize and prioritize multiple knowledges and epistemologies. Working alongside Harding and Haraway at this time were feminist scholars who were not part of the privileged academic majority of researchers and thinkers, and these women critiqued their work heavily. They felt that their feminist needs and identities did not align with the white, middle-class, heterocentric project of which Harding and Haraway, as well as the researchers mentioned above, were a part, which they believed essentialized women’s identities (p.163). Lorber (2012) explains that “there may be a common core to women’s experiences, perhaps because they share similar bodies, but standpoint feminism cannot ignore the input from social statuses that are as important as gender” (p.198).¹⁴ Dorothy Smith (2005) acknowledges this divide in her text *Institutional Ethnography: Sociology for the People*, when she states that “the notion of women’s standpoint...has also been challenged by feminist theorists. It fails to take into account diversities of class and race as well as the various forms and modulations of gender” (p.8). Though standpoint has been critiqued by lesbian-feminists and working class-feminists, my theoretical and methodical approach most closely aligns with what is known as Black-feminist thought,

¹⁴ It is important here that I note that in more recent inclusive language, some women do not necessarily share similar bodies; for example, a transgender person who is male-to-female may not have biologically female reproductive organs.

particularly the work of Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Kimberle Crenshaw, and disability-feminist researcher Nancy Mairs. My research draws most often on the theoretical work developed by these feminist scholars.

Patricia Hill Collins (1996) discusses how Black women's standpoint differs from that of white women in her article "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought." Collins reasserts the important point made by Kelly that, despite their common ground as "women," vast differences exist between women: class, race, culture, and sexual orientation, to name a few. As Collins explains, "since Black women have access to both the Afrocentric and the feminist standpoints, an alternative epistemology used to rearticulate a Black women's standpoint reflects elements of both traditions," (p.228).¹⁵ The dual identity of black women influences the "both/or" orientation of many Black women, a concept that Collins (1996) credits to Black feminist sociologist Deborah K. King.¹⁶ "Both/or" orientation is "the act of being simultaneously a member of a group and yet standing apart from it." Since "black" defaults to men/man, and "woman" defaults to white, Black women disappear in both categories, as well as within the (even radical) politics which aims to create equality for Blackness and for women. This means that, for example, Black women are members of the black community as well as a community of women, and yet their identity as both means that they cannot fully integrate into either group (p.228). Collins insists that Black women have different ways of knowing that differ from that of black men and white women. She claims that "living

¹⁵ Patricia Hill Collins' work on ethics of caring, call and response models, and both/or orientation are founded in Afrocentric epistemologies. It is important that I acknowledge the origins of this kind of work.

¹⁶ Not including sexual orientation, nationality, age, or ability, Collins' (1996) work here deals strictly with the struggle of black women to inhabit spaces for white women and black men.

life as Black women requires wisdom since knowledge about the dynamics of race, gender, and class subordination has been essential to Black women's survival" (p.229). Collins also shares an important concept within Black feminist scholarship which aligns closely with my performance theory; "call and response" will be discussed more closely in the performance theory section.

In her article titled "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," bell hooks (1990) shares her personal story of struggle as a Black female academic who grew up poor in the segregated southern United States. She explains her theory that, by living a life on the margins, she has had the ability to live a life of radical openness. hooks claims that the "politics of location" ensures that those who live outside the center—which I identify as a space inhabited by those who can claim to be male, white, Western, middle-class, able-bodied, and educated—are continuously disenfranchised by their position. People who do not belong to the center are policed for their difference, including for their language (i.e. vocabulary, manner of speaking, or dialect). hooks insists, though, that by choosing to live on the margin, one can live a life of radical openness. She identifies the margin as a "site of radical possibility, a space for resistance" and, while acknowledging that the margin can also be a site of repression, it has the ability to provide an oppositional worldview (p.52). This worldview from the margins is much like Haraway's situated knowledge—the knower, situated on the margin, has a clearer view of the center and the injustices which emanate from there. hooks (1990) explains that there are two margins: "that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance" (p.55). She appeals to the reader to take on this second

marginality, which opens a “radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity,” and her appeal is one which resonates deeply with the theoretical nature of my research project. How hooks’ work aligns with my research in feminist theatre studies will be elaborated on in the “Connections” section (below).

Finally, the work of law professor Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) has been integral to the development of a more inclusive feminist standpoint theory. From her article “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” Crenshaw (1991) shares the concept of “intersectionality.” Her article, which examines many examples of the violence that women of color have endured under patriarchal, white supremacist power structures in the United States, is a passionate plea for a feminism which is more inclusive to “othered” women. Crenshaw (1991) explains that “this process of recognizing as social and systemic what was formerly perceived as isolated and individual has also characterized the identity politics of African Americans, other people of color, and gays and lesbians, among others” (p.1241-1242). For Crenshaw, identity politics often fails to recognize intra-group difference. She refuses to see issues of gender, race, class, and sexuality as mutually exclusive, and shares that her experience in law has shown her that these overlapping axes of identity contribute heavily to the many violences that women suffer (p.1242).

In this paper, Crenshaw coins a new concept, one which has since become central to much feminist scholarship and provided a much needed term to the feminist lexicon: intersectionality. Though, in this essay, her use of the term is used to critique structural, political, and cultural representations and treatments of women of color, the term has

subsequently taken on a much broader scope. Rather than viewing race, gender, sexuality, age, class, ability, and nationality as separate silos of identity, Crenshaw sees these identities as intersecting. A useful image here is that of a crossroads, where categories such as “woman” and “black” intersect. Crenshaw’s (1991) assertion that intersectional analyses are vital for feminist scholarship “highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (p.1245). This concept is extremely important for subsequent feminist scholarship as well as my own understanding and use of standpoint theory. In my own work, I hope that the people I cast will occupy different intersectional spaces, thereby bringing diverse and unique standpoints to this project.

Feminist disability theorist Nancy Mairs discusses how her own experiences with MS have rendered her contributions to feminist scholarship marginal. In her text *Waist-High in the World*, Mairs (1996) explains how disability, particularly physical disabilities (whereby bodily difference is visible) influences people’s perceptions of her. She shares how the term “disabled” was another way in which white, middle-class feminists generalized about women’s experiences. Mairs (1996) says that this label “masks a diversity of even more incomparable lives” (p.43). Her experience as a woman living with MS would be vastly different than that of a blind woman, a deaf woman, perhaps a woman who was born with a disability versus one whose disability developed over time, like Mairs’. She reflects on the habit of the nondisabled to lump all abnormalities together, and Mairs uses her text to insist that “I can only represent my own experience as authentically as the tricks and vagaries of language will permit” (p.43-44). Her discussion

of marginality and embodiment is particularly relevant to my thesis project. She criticizes feminists who discuss the “margins” as merely a concept of metaphorical space as opposed to physical space. As a woman who is disabled and relies on a wheelchair for mobility, she is waist-high, shoved to the side, and thus she must “embody the metaphors” (p.59). Her marginality is both physical and metaphorical, and her navigation of feminist and scholarly institutions is bound by both her physical and intellectual ability to enter them. Mairs refuses to allow women with disabilities to be forgotten, and Lorber (2012) posits that Mairs embodies a feminist “sitpoint,” which accounts for feminist ableist language and explains Mairs’ unique perspective (p.198).

From my research in standpoint theory, I have found feminist theorists who use concepts which are particularly relevant to my project. I will focus on standpoint theory that recognizes Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality and Harding’s concept of pluralities, and consider how they relate to my data analysis. I also refer to hooks’ concept of “creative space” in relation to the process, and like Hill Collins’ concept of “call and response,” both will be discussed methodologically and theoretically, as I consider how they influenced the creation of my method as well as how they support my data analysis. Many of the theorists I have discussed share conceptual connections with the feminist theatre artists that I discuss below; these will be sussed out in the “Connections” section.

ii. Feminist Studies in Theatre

For this discussion of feminist studies in theatre, I researched work in feminist theatre and verbatim theatre that would help me develop my worldview for this project.

Below, I discuss the critical feminist theatre texts that helped me construct my data analysis.

In Johnny Saldaña's text, *Ethnodrama: An Anthology of Reality Theatre* (2005), Saldaña shares his and others' visions for ethnotheatre as a site blooming with possibilities for social change. One thing Saldaña stresses early on in his introduction involves his opinion that ethnotheatre is a site of social activism. More specifically, he shares a quote from Carver (2003), who claims that "the act of women speaking their own stories publicly...radically challenges traditional notions of agency, spectacle, and spectatorship as female performers move their voice and bodies from the background to the foreground" (p.16, in Saldaña, 2005, p.3). This quote speaks to my research project, as I attempted to create just such a "creative space" for people to tell their stories. The quote suggests how powerful verbatim theatre can be in opening up spaces for those who have been silenced. These "creative spaces" will be discussed more fully in the "Connections" section, which is the last section of the Theory chapter. Saldana's work also helps me conceptualize the problem of aesthetic vs representational work, and I consider his viewpoint in my analysis.

Jan Cohen-Cruz's (2010) book *Engaging Performance: Theatre as Call and Response* discusses theatre as a means of social engagement. As I discussed in my literature review, Cohen-Cruz shares two concepts of theatre-making which I used for my project: the "bottom-up model" and "call and response." A method that I considered theoretically feminist, the "bottom-up model" is practiced by ensuring that the subject-performers' stories and experiences are considered by the director, producers, and writers

when creating the production. Great care is taken in this model to support the actors; the work is understood to have been created *because* of their valuable input (p.5). To Cohen-Cruz, the participants in the play are making a “call” to the audience, and indeed to the playwright, and both must be willing to listen, or “respond”, in kind in order for the play to have its intended impact (p.74). Call and response is bound by relationships, between actors and audiences, communities and playwrights, and within the cast (p.193). In my project I worked to be sensitive to the possible calls and responses I both received and gave in order to create an engaging and engaged performance. Cohen-Cruz also describes how, in order to ensure that a theatre practitioner is committed to engaged performance, “listening is a prerequisite for speaking” (p.71-72). This helps ensure that not only are broad perspectives are being shared, but are also being *heard*. These concepts not only influenced the creation of my method, but also my analysis, as I consider the way they affected the ethical, feminist, and representative nature of my work.

In their anthology *Feminist Futures: Theatre, Performance, Theory*, Geraldine Harris and Elaine Aston (2006) have gathered a collection of essays which “debate on *if* and in what ways feminism may still be an element... of theatre and performance practice of the twenty-first century” (p.1, *emphasis in the original*). The first chapter, “Feminist Futures and the Possibilities of ‘We’?” written by the editors, discusses the tensions between feminism and theatre, and how the creation of feminist theatre changed from the 1970s to the early 2000s. They share a brief history of the formation of feminist theatre companies, discussing how the advent of second wave feminism brought women together as a united force against gender oppression. This unity “encouraged women to form their

own, often sex-segregated, [theatre] companies” which gave them a space to share their stories and have their voices heard (p.5). The plays that were developed from this movement were often “designed to ‘work on’, to persuade spectators” of a particular feminist issue (p.5). However, as the feminist movement began to undergo hyphenization, the collective “we” that was formed began to disintegrate as this “we” “failed to take account of how it might be simultaneously inscribed through discourses of class (middle), sexuality (hetero), and above all ‘race’ (white)” (p.6). The backlash against white-washed, Western, heterosexual women’s theatre spurred an outpouring of theatre companies dedicated to the hyphenized reality of women’s artistic expression. Finally, Aston and Harris (2006) describe the slippery slope to be navigated in theatre intended to represent particular groups of people. They say that utopian views of “fixing” social problems by “simply listing them, embracing them, celebrating them, or remarking their proliferation” is particularly problematic in theatre spaces, for the intersectional and complicatedness of these problems is much too intricate for theatre groups to “solve” (p.12). This work served as a cautionary note to remind me that my work is not necessarily intended to eradicate problems of sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, or ableism, but instead to tell stories and ask others to listen. I worked to respond to the call that Aston and Harris make here, by refusing to represent only a utopian worldview of women’s experiences. The concept of “we” is considered further in the chapter on Feminism.

In her essay “Predicting the Past: Histories and Futures in the Work of Women Directors,” Aoife Monks (2006) explains her struggle with theatre and the mapping of

history. She questions the naming of certain kinds of theatre as “feminist,” particularly when the director or actors involved refuse to label themselves as “feminists”. She also acknowledges the tension of exploring the past in the theatre. She asks “what if the past is represented on stage without offering the possibility of change in the future? Can this be classified as feminist theatre?” (p.89). Monks asks important questions, questions that pose difficulties and tensions in my own project. I asked the actors to reflect on their past experiences and to share personal stories about their histories. Should I/we have categorized these memories as good or bad? Was there room for presenting hope for the future? Should a memory have been shared if it was “un-feminist”? Monks’ essay reminded me that, while I worked to refrain from presenting the utopian worldview, there was room for optimism. Monks’ and Aston and Harris’ essays served as opposing forces which helped me consider how to structure rehearsals, the play, and my later reflections on the process, as I worked to unpack the questions of value and judgment inherent to the process.

In SuAndi’s (2006) essay “Africa Lives On in We: Histories and Futures of Black Women Artists,” the author shares compelling arguments which align closely with bell hooks’ concept of “creative space”¹⁷. SuAndi argues for the intentional creation of spaces for Black women’s voices, and explains that the importance of storytelling in the African tradition is imperative to the continued memory of cultural ancestry (p.118). She claims

¹⁷ hooks (1990) defines “creative space” in her essay “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness” as the margins, but in particular a margin which is welcomed and accepted. Creative space can be “a realm of oppositional political struggle” (p.48) and is certainly not “safe”. By choosing the margin, the creative space, “one is always at risk,” and therefore it is important to create a community to work within this creative space together (p.51).

that “we must be creative in order to live above the limitations of racism. We have to tell our stories so that globally our children will know them” (p.122). SuAndi’s essay speaks to both community and space-making, and I reflected her work in my writing, wherein the importance of safe communities and safe creative spaces is paramount.

In her article “The Politics of the Personal: Autobiography in Performance,” Dee Heddon (2006) asks the reader to “reflect on the use of the ‘personal’ in performance and its relationship to the political” (p.130). Heddon starts by outlining how autobiographical performance began with the advent of second wave feminism. She explains that “the political potential afforded by women’s performances” was a vital space of resistance in early feminism. Heddon uses hooks’ definition of resistance here. She shares a quote on autobiography from bell hooks, which explains that “oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subject, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story” (p.133). Like autobiography, the verbatim theatre piece that I created with the actors followed this definition of resistance, and I use Heddon’s discussion of the political/personal in my analysis during the Feminism chapter.

In *Embodied Performances: Sexuality, Gender, Bodies*, Beatrice Allegranti (2011) discusses the intersection of performance and gender, particularly in relation to the body. As a therapist, dancer, actor, and researcher, Allegranti devised a project which encompassed all of these aspects by gathering a group of dancers and holding focus groups, dance projects, and challenges which were filmed, watched, analyzed, and discussed in depth. Allegranti’s (2011) text is separated into four chapters which deal

with knowledge, ethics, relationships with others, and politics, respectively. Her text aims to persuade that “theory can *inform* practice” and that researchers who embody multiple roles or identities can be beneficial for performance praxis (p.13, emphasis in the original). Allegranti’s claim that her many selves afford her a unique viewpoint helped me embody my multiple roles of researcher, playwright, and director. Allegranti (2011) suggests that autobiography is a particularly powerful and performative way of “bringing yourself to language,” a statement that aligns strongly with Collins and hooks’ writings on dialogue and storytelling. This will be discussed further in the “Connections” section.

When discussing reflexivity, Allegranti asserts that the researcher must insert themselves autobiographically into their work; this notion is one which I intend to uphold (p.69). Early in the process I wondered: how can I ask my actors to share their own stories if I do not share mine? Her work in autobiography encourages individuals to claim ownership of their bodies and the terms they use to define themselves. She acknowledges that this can be a radical, and sometimes painful, act in a world in which media, medicine, and hegemonic masculinity discourses contribute to the governance of women’s bodies and speech (p.91). Allegranti insists that women interrogate their own “embodied and co-created Woman,” and she questions the notion of authenticity. What does it mean to be, or does there exist, an “authentic Woman”? Allegranti asks the reader to question when they are moving or speaking authentically and when they are mapping others speech or movements onto their own bodies (p.122-123). These questions influenced how I framed my rehearsal process, and how I asked the actors to relate to the presentation of their bodies and speech on the stage. In my analysis, I consider how my

contribution to the creative project as co-creator both positively and negatively affected the experience.

In her chapter on the political body, Allegranti (2011) discusses the phenomenon of self-editing, whereby subjects will edit their performances or personal stories depending on the audience and their level of comfort. Acknowledging that this concept comes from hooks (2000), Allegranti explains that the “feminist project needs to encourage women to believe they are self-defining agents and that they can enhance their personal power” (p.181), and that one way to achieve this is to allow women the “creative space” (hooks, 1990) to tell their stories in their own way. By exchanging who has directive power in performance, the actor may feel more relaxed and comfortable onstage, which might result in a more open and calm space for storytelling. Allegranti defines agency as a “dimension of power...to provide a sense of body ownership and power to be self-defining” (p.181). I worked to instill this sense of agency among the actors by acknowledging that they have ownership and input in their speech and movement throughout the production, and my analysis about how this unfolded is unpacked in the Representation chapter.

Finally, Allegranti’s discussion of intersectional awareness is vital to the core values I intend to instill in my research project. She promotes the act of appreciating both “sameness and difference,” a motto which helped me to frame and promote collaboration among my actors. She explains that “both difference and similarity can co-exist and the tension lies in recognizing and appreciating these differences before we can move forward and see similarities” (p.200). As mentioned before, I worked to cast actors who

embody diverse social locations, who had unique intersectional experiences that enriched and diversified the rehearsal process and the performances. I worked with the actors to consider the ways that, perhaps, we shared “sameness” or were “different,” and I discuss in further chapters how these commonalities or variances influenced our creativity. This concept of “sameness and difference” is elaborated on in the analytical chapters, as I consider the myriad ways we were both similar and different.

iii. Connections

Much of the work I have examined in both standpoint theory and feminist theatre studies share common themes. I will now discuss the various connections I have made between both sets of theorists discussed above and the concepts they employ in their work.

Patricia Hill Collins’ (1996) and Jan Cohen-Cruz’s (2010) discussions of the “call and response” model share important characteristics. Though Collins is writing from a black-feminist perspective, and Cohen-Cruz from a theatre studies perspective, both share roots within activism and community-building. Cohen-Cruz (2010) believes in the power of devised theatre, because it “reflects the belief that all of us can be expressive in ways worthy of attention, gesturing towards the democratic impulse in engaged work” (p.5). For Collins (1996), the “call and response” model comes from a deeply rooted practice of speaking and listening among African-Americans, originating in the oral tradition. Collins (1996) explains that, epistemologically, the importance of dialogue is rooted in valuing “connectedness rather than separation,” which makes it an “essential component of the knowledge-validation process” (p.233). By supporting the active participation of

all individuals in a group, the “call and response” model creates space for “spontaneous verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener” (p.233). Due to the fact that my research involves story sharing, providing my actors with a platform to speak, and an acknowledgement of their speech from myself and the other participants, these two forms of “call and response” could prove extremely useful during the rehearsal process.

Several theorists discuss the issue of creative space. hooks (1996) acknowledges a need for Black women to gain ownership of their voices and their stories. She explains that “our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance” (p.49). Black women (and within my project, each cast member) has the right, and is urgently called upon, to carve out creative spaces for themselves despite the oppressive forces which do not want these spaces to exist. hooks calls these creative spaces sites of “radical possibility” and “resistance”; these spaces are extremely important for the creation of representative theatre, and she insists that creative space “sustains and affirms our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world” (p.52; 55). SuAndi, in turn, insists that storytelling is crucial, and draws on the African tradition of seeing stories as memory to explain how sharing personal experiences with a caring, attentive group can become a well of creativity (p.118). I asked the actors to draw on their memory-stories and to share them with the group, which created a form of group history among the diverse cast. Without the physical, literal space (a room, a floor, time) as well as the metaphorical space (comfort, ease) in which to share these stories, history can be forgotten or edited beyond recognition. Drawing from

SuAndi and hooks' works, I have come to understand creative space as an expression of each individual's standpoint; creative, radical storytelling that is born from one's intersectional identity.

Mairs (1996) includes her own voice in the discussion of creative space. As a feminist theorist with a disability, Mairs shares how her own physical limitations have left her with minimal access to spaces, both physical and metaphorical. By trying to navigate spaces for women wheelchair users, Mairs' suffers marginalization from feminist spaces on two fronts. Without proper access to physical spaces in which women can become creative, Mairs and other women with disabilities cannot be included in theatre making. But even if we assume that they can enter these spaces, but precariously, and with limitations (rough floors, no accessible bathroom), how can they enter a metaphorically creative space when they are stressed or preoccupied with issues of accessibility?

Finally, Allegranti adds another guiding hand in building "creative space" by insisting that women/actors must feel agentic control over their own stories. As explained above, Allegranti (2011) discusses the phenomenon of self-editing, whereby subjects will self-edit their performances or personal stories depending on the audience and their level of comfort. I made the effort to not assume that the actors are comfortable in the physical spaces in which we rehearse, or that they desired to share all the details of their lives with me. I tried not to pressure, goad, or wrest information from the actors. By following the lead of hooks, SuAndi, Mairs, and Allegranti, I made the conscious choice to provide

accessible, inviting creative spaces, and this included inviting the cast to co-create this space with me.

Allegranti (2011), Collins (1996), and hooks (1990) all discuss storytelling and autobiography in their work. Allegranti (2011) suggests that autobiography is a particularly powerful and performative way of “bringing yourself to language,” yet also acknowledges that, within a group setting, “issues of experimentation and trust are important in the autobiographical unfolding” (p.16-17). In order to create an awareness and construction of the self, Allegranti explains that we must “pay close attention to how our bodies are shaped by language and how in turn, our bodies can influence language” (p.16). Inherent in Allegranti’s discussion of autobiography and language is a listening community built on trust and caring. This is a major theme in Collins’ (1996) work as well. She insists on the “appropriateness of emotions in dialogue. Emotion indicates that a speaker believes in the validity of an argument” (p.235). Finally, hooks (1990) discusses how language and autobiography can be extremely difficult concepts to handle for persons who have experienced trauma as a result of their particular standpoint. By practicing an ethic of caring, and reminding the actors that they are not required to share particularly traumatic information, I hope that the trusting space I worked to create helped the actors feel respected during the playwriting process. In connecting these issues in Allegranti and Collins’ work, I worked to create a trusting space in which autobiographical work could emerge. I also worked to acknowledge and validate what was shared within the group, and encouraged this respect among the actors.

The concepts of language and autobiography hit an emotional high note with hooks (1990), who shares in her article the struggle she had (and perhaps still has) navigating the world as a Black woman, particularly with language. She claims that “it informs the way we speak about these issues, the language we choose,” these issues being oppression, making culture, and colonization (p.49). Her text explains how she has come to understand oppression by personifying the dominant subject as it claims:

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk (p.54).

Through this project, I made an effort to actively work against the act of re-writing the words of others, especially those whose lives are different from my own and experience complicated matrices of oppressive forms of power and violence. I did not want to colonize the words of the actors. My balancing act as researcher, playwright, and actor was constantly checked and balanced against hooks’ words, and I returned to them again and again for inspiration and for guidance.

Method/Methodology

Informed by my literature review and theoretical framework, I will now explain how I went about creating my methodological approach, and then how I implemented that approach throughout the theatre-making process. From the outset, my particular project has highlighted several pressing methodological questions. My project involved creating theatre based on individuals' lived experiences. The plays that I have discussed in my literature review also aimed to share the stories of real people; however, I question some aspects of their creation or production as representative. As discussed in the literature review, my questions surrounding these plays include: the misrepresentation of people who are not white, queer people, and non-Western people; questions of power and authorship; and methods of data collection and presentation. My examination of criticisms of *A Chorus Line*, *The Vagina Monologues*, *The Laramie Project*, and *Body and Soul*, have contributed to the shaping of my own method for creating verbatim theatre.

My project has amalgamated several feminist research methods, including ethnography, oral history, and focus groups. Verbatim theatre employs some or all of these methods in its execution; however, it is not necessarily feminist in nature. In order to acknowledge all of the methods in my project, I named my method(s) "feminist

performance ethnography” or FPE. I chose the name FPE because I feel as though the three components of the title are vital to my study, being equally feminist, performance-based, and ethnographic. Like my theoretical approach, my method(s) were chosen deliberately and carefully, with the ultimate goal of “finding voice.” Neither oral history nor focus groups are part of the name of FPE; I believe that my study functions overall as a feminist ethnography, but oral history and focus groups are an additional part of my overarching ethnographic practice. Below I will discuss the multiple methods that were encompassed by FPE, and my reasons for using them.

As a researcher who spent time with and integrated myself into a newly formed community, my study was inherently ethnographic. In their article “The Feminist Practice of Ethnography,” Elana D. Bach and Karen M. Staller (2007) explain that defining feminist ethnography is an enormous undertaking due to the vast and varied forms of existing ethnographic research (p.187). Two particular forms of ethnography are implicit in my study. I am a native ethnographer, because I conducted research in a familiar setting (i.e. theatre spaces, among actors). I am also an auto-ethnographer, as I used “personal lived experiences as the primary source of data,” as well as those of the actors (p.189). Considering my personal involvement in the collective, the data used to create the play is “intersubjective knowledge,” which is “knowledge co-created by the researcher and those she researches” (p.190). Additionally, I was committed to practicing *feminist* ethnography, and instilled a “deep commitment to understanding the issues and concerns of women from their perspective” (p.190).

Inherent in the practice of ethnography is conducting fieldwork. The researcher's "field" encompasses "the community, institution, or setting in which the ethnographer will go to study the problem of interest"; for me, this was the rehearsal and production spaces (Bach and Staller, 2007, p.196). Rather than entering a community that is established, with its own set of complicated traditions, rules, and hierarchies, I created a community by holding auditions and casting six actors for the study. Most ethnographers take field notes, recorded in a journal to be referenced later for written research. Bach and Staller (2007) explain that "field notes must be recorded as soon after the experience as possible; events must be fresh in the ethnographer's mind" (p.210). I carried a journal with me at all times, in order to jot down reflections and ideas; I scheduled 15-20 minutes after every rehearsal to record and reflect on the rehearsal experience. I recorded 29 journal entries over a period of 2.5 months; I began journaling during the audition process and ended with the dress rehearsal. This journal serves as one example of the data I collected throughout my study.

Bach and Staller discuss some of the ethical dilemmas that accompany ethnographic research. I had to walk a careful tightrope between researcher and study participant, made all the more difficult by my use of multiple, interlaced research methods. It often felt as though there was a jumble of considerations and roadblocks that needed to be navigated. My role as participant evolved throughout the process; for example, when I auditioned actors there was an inherent power imbalance, but after casting I worked to be accepted as a member of the collective. This raised questions about my insider/outsider status throughout the process (Bach and Staller, 2007, p.203).

As a feminist ethnographer I made an effort to move among these power imbalances with grace; as Bach and Staller explain, “feminist ethnographers are likely to be very attentive to the subjective experiences of their informants as well as paying heed to power relationships and to sharing interpretive authority” (p.212). My goal, like that of most feminist ethnographers, was to “view the people [I] study as experts on their own lives and communities and thus consider the people [I] work with active collaborators in the research project rather than passive research subjects” (p.218). By practicing feminist ethnography, I adhered to verbatim theatre philosophies and retained a collaborative spirit. My practice of feminist ethnography embodied Cohen-Cruz’s (2011) “bottom-up” approach to theatre-making, discussed previously, in which the work of the actors influenced the direction of the production, as opposed to the director having creative authority. How these ethical dilemmas played out during the auditioning, rehearsing, and performing stages will be explained in the chapter on Ethics.

The next method I channelled for my FPE was oral history. In her article “The Practice of Feminist Oral History and Focus Group Interviews,” Patricia Lina Leavy (2007) discusses the particulars of oral history as a method of feminist research. She claims that “there is a performative aspect to oral history, because storytelling always involves a performance” (p.153). Rather than functioning as a structured interview process whereby a researcher asks questions and the participant answers, oral history focuses on deep, attentive listening. Leavy explains that:

The kind of listening required by this method necessitates a willingness on the part of the researcher to let go of her possible desire to control the flow of

conversation and to listen with a completion and devotion more rigorous and attentive to nuance than would be used in normal speaking situations (p.158).

This practice of attentive listening was vital for my project, and I worked to instil it in not just myself but all the study participants. Though each actor told their own stories, the goal was that, by listening to the stories of their cast mates, the actors could build upon and be inspired by one another's experiences. My practice of oral history was different from how this method is conventionally understood, in that I asked the actors to share in a group setting rather than one-on-one; my hope was that this would not affect the depth and nuance of the stories shared, nor the level of disclosure. Though the project was collaborative, I worked to instill the knowledge in each actor that they have power and authority over their own story. Leavy explains that "collaboration and authority ultimately speak to how a narrative is constructed and who has ownership over the narrative and how it is represented" (p.168). I attempted to instill this value by practicing Cohen-Cruz's (2011) and Collins' (1996) concepts of "call and response," which value attentive listening, but also considered and affective responses. The stories shared and the camaraderie felt among the cast inspired them creatively; they knew that I was working to conduct "research *with* women and not *on* women," and research *with* people and not *on* people (emphasis in the original, Leavy, 2007, p.168). How my practice of "call and response" models influenced the creative process will be discussed below in the chapter on Representation.

I have used three different, yet relevant, terms to describe my research: verbatim theatre, ethnodrama, and performed research. I have chosen these three for very specific

reasons. As Judith Ackroyd and John O'Toole (2010) explain, there are a vast number of terms used to describe this type of theatre. Calling this work performed research acknowledges that "research data is presented in the performance" (p.21). Verbatim theatre "is often oppositional to mainstream views since its principal motive is giving voice to the disenfranchised and those outside the mainstream" (p.22), a vital component of my theoretical approach. However, I take issue with the phrase "giving voice," as I believe that it assumes that the speaker has no agency over their voice prior to the researcher/theatre practitioner's involvement within the community (Allegranti, 2011). The most succinct and compelling response to this idea of "giving voice" that I have found comes from Twitter, in a tweet posted by DeRay McKesson, which reads: "I do not subscribe to the notion of 'the voiceless.' I'd argue that folks have been 'the unheard.'" (McKesson, @deray). By practicing effective sharing circles, "call and response" methods, and remaining vigilant about ensuring an open and comfortable "creative space," I worked to create a verbatim theatre production which does not give voice, but rather gives a space to the unheard (hooks, 1990).

Finally, my use of the term "ethnodrama" acknowledges the compound nature of the two terms. My study is not simply an ethnography nor a performance, but both, a combination which Ackroyd and O'Toole suggest means that "neither is complete without the other" (p.23). The occasional use of "ethno" and "research" in the terms I use is deliberate; this is because "academics and ethnographers frequently work away from the mainstream, and they are more likely to refer to their work with an 'ethno' label. This gives it its place in the academy and its credentials as a research paradigm" (p.22). As

both a feminist researcher and theatre practitioner, I feel that it is vital to acknowledge the academic purpose of my study within my chosen terminology. It also provides a reflexive component, reminding the reader that I am positioned within my research as an artist and within the theatre as an academic.

After much consideration I decided that, in order to promote the egalitarian and collaborative nature of the project, I had to be part of the cast. While I was originally going to remain solely director and co-playwright, I was confronted with the fact that by not contributing as storyteller, there would be an imbalance of power within the collective. Would I truly be part of the collective if I was not also sharing my story? Was it ethical to ask my actors to share private and personal details about themselves without sharing the same? Rather than standing outside the group as observer and commentator, I decided that the best scenario would be to place myself among the cast, and to subject myself to the same vulnerabilities inherent in sharing personal experiences. Therefore, I inhabited the dual roles of performer and researcher throughout the project.

My decision to take on this dual role caused me to extend an invitation to the stage manager to join the project as an actor. As a practitioner of theatre I have many personal connections within theatre communities. Through these connections, I found a stage manager who shares my passion for creating feminist theatre. Her name is Chelsea, and she was responsible for scheduling rehearsals, tracking blocking notes, and making sure the production ran smoothly and efficiently. Before the auditions she and I had an in-depth discussion on the nature of her involvement in the process. I asked her if she would be interested in being part of the cast, so that she could be privy to the playwriting

process. After some consideration she decided that her involvement must remain administrative, due to her lack of comfort with the stage. Therefore, she was not present for the duration of writing and creating the play, and instead helped with organizing auditions, remained absent for several weeks, and then returned when the script was completed to join us with determining blocking and navigating the physical space. She also contributed by acting as a scribe during discussion sessions for which I was absent¹⁸, so the actors had a chance to reflect on the process without my influence. These notes were meant to contribute to the data gathered for the project, but I was informed that the discussion sessions were uneventful and produced very little critical reflection, and so were left out of the data.

The first task for this project involved an audition call, with the purpose of casting for the collective. I advertised the auditions in three ways: social media, flyers, and email lists. The stage manager and I are part of several social media groups dedicated to theatre within Halifax, and this helped us share the opportunity with people who might not have otherwise seen the flyers. I also shared the audition notice with other groups, such as feminist collectives and queer groups around the city, to help me reach a broader audience. I asked permission to post flyers on the Saint Mary's University campus. I also asked departmental secretaries to share the call for actors among their email list, and I inquired if theatres in town would share the audition call on their newsletters, which many did. I approached several Facebook friends, who I knew had a background in

¹⁸ I decided to include some discussion sessions for the participants where they could air their concerns, thoughts, and feelings without the pressure of my attendance. Chelsea was to take notes during these sessions, which I would receive after the play was finished; this was a way to make sure the actors did not forget about earlier grievances during the final focus group and questionnaire.

theatre or performance, and might be interested in auditioning for the show, to encourage them to try out.

Unfortunately, my distance from many other social groups prevented me from reaching out to a broader scope of people. I found I did not have the ability nor the wherewithal to find every group or club in the city that might have interested members, and I stuck with what I knew and was comfortable with. This limited my pool of auditioners considerably; thus, mostly students from the universities in the city auditioned, as well as both amateur and professional actors.

Early in the project, I decided that I was going to try to cast as diversely as possible, so that I might blend unique perspectives and experiences. My limitations geographically (Atlantic Canada, university setting) and reflexively (my own social location as a white, able-bodied woman attending post-secondary education) affected my ability to gather an even greater pool of auditioners from which to choose. The choice to cast diversely also came with many difficult methodological questions. By attempting to cast diversely, was I promoting “tokenism,” whereby each member would stand in for their race, sexuality, ability, age, or culture? Was it okay to pass over talent for a broader field of representation? Since I was only intending to cast four people, how would I decide who was the best choice? In keeping true to my theoretical approach, I insisted that my show be intersectional and inclusive, but also worked to acknowledge the individuality of each cast member. These methodological questions, and the ethical, feminist, and representative concerns related to them, will be considered in the following chapters.

I held the auditions in February, on two weekday evenings. I decided that group auditions would be the most effective choice for casting because of their collaborative element. There were six sessions of approximately four people in each group. The prospective actors filled out a form that asked for their availability, past theatre experience, and included an optional section where they could self-identify their age, race, and sexuality. I began by introducing myself and explaining the details of my research project. We then did a warmup by playing some theatre games and running through some tongue twisters. We finished with two improvisational activities. The first was the creation of a series of tableaux as a team. The stage manager provided the group with a prompt, after which the auditioners and I would think of a scene based on the word, and then create a tableau to represent the scene. The second were individual story-telling sessions. The stage manager assigned each auditioner a word, myself included, and we took a few minutes to think of a story to tell based on that word. The story could be either personal or made-up. We would then be called back into the circle to tell our story one-by-one in front of the group. These auditions helped me determine which people I believed would work well with others, were imaginative, and were willing and comfortable sharing personal stories.

During the initial planning stages of casting the show, I had determined that a cast of four actors (plus myself) would be sufficient to provide diversity and difference among members. However, after going through the audition process, during which the stage manager and I were overwhelmed by the response, I struggled to choose between a group of six. I received REB permission to cast two extra people, and the cast was formed.

After receiving acceptance from all six actors that they would participate in the research project, we held the first focus group. Leavy (2007) discusses the process of creating and conducting a focus group. She explains that “the kind of group interaction and multivocal narrative that occurs within focus group interviews appeals to feminist researchers interested in unearthing subjugated knowledge” (p.173). During the first focus group we began by going over and signing the consent forms, so as to ensure that each participant understood what was expected from their involvement. We also discussed ideas for the questionnaire during the first focus group because I hoped to include questions such as “did I feel represented throughout the production of the play?” By thinking of and documenting these key questions early on, I hoped they would remain clear in the actors’ minds throughout the process. We also brainstormed the different themes we wanted to discuss. Between the focus group and our first rehearsal, we had a two-week period where we could not meet due to conflicting schedules. We decided that I would post a different theme each day on our Facebook group during those two weeks, and people would write stories related to each prompt. The themes we chose were: body, religion, in-between, power, borders/barriers, sex, -ism, -phobia, identity, (in)visibility, tradition/culture, fear, and relationship. I was impressed by how broad and rich these prompts were; they were to guide us for the rest of our rehearsals. After the two weeks of online story writing, we collectively narrowed our focus to five of the twelve prompts: body, religion, tradition/culture, sex, and power. We chose these prompts by discussing the way each of the original twelve had made us feel, what sorts of stories and emotions that had ignited in us, and which we felt were related and cohesive.

During the next 10 weeks, we met approximately three times a week for rehearsals. We spent the first 6 weeks sharing stories and writing the script, and the final four weeks blocking and performing the show. Throughout this process, I jotted field notes and often wrote rehearsal plans prior to our meetings. The three performances were held at the Living Room, a small black box theatre on Agricola St, on April 28-30th. The space was paid for thanks to a generous donation from the Saint Mary's University Women's Centre.

The various storytelling and theatre-making practices I implemented were key to the rehearsal process. An important aspect of devised theatre, and my thesis experiment, was collaboration. This principle was agreed upon within the collective; rather than dividing the play into seven sections, one for each actor, we wanted to consider the ways our stories were connected. Inherent in Feminist Performance Ethnography is inclusion and community-building. I wanted to create a space that fostered the value of connectedness within the collective, and I did so in a number of ways, with varying results. I felt it was important that the group function as a democracy, rather than a dictatorship. In her text, *Engaging Performances: Theatre as Call and Response*, Jan Cohen-Cruz (2010) explains that devised performances are often intended for the purpose of community engagement, and are (or should be) created using a "bottom-up model" whereby the stories of the subject-performers influence how the "higher-ups," such as directors and producers, mold and guide the production (p.5). Though there were no directors or producers, in that we *were* the directors and producers, use of the bottom-up

model was imperative to achieving a sense of democracy and collaboration. How the bottom-up model was practiced will be discussed more fully in the Ethics chapter.

Inspired by the workbook section of Cohen-Cruz's (2010) book *Engaged Performance: Theatre as Call and Response*, I used story circles as a means of storytelling and sharing. She explains that:

Story Circles typically involve from five to 25 people who choose a theme and then, one by one, tell a related tale. Participants focus on listening to the other stories and only decide what to tell in response to what they have heard. Telling personal stories in this sense is a way to have a conversation, an exchange, a relationship to others (p.96).

As a group, we would decide on a prompt word, and create brainstorm bubbles or word maps from which to divine further inspirations. I usually limited our stories to 30 seconds or one minute during these exercises, in order to have us thinking about time constraints, and sifting through the important material in our stories to decide what "matters."

One of the most important practices I followed in my research project was a call-and-response (CAR) model. CAR refers to interactions between researcher and participant, cast member to cast member, and audience to cast. This model is relevant to both standpoint theory (Collins, 1996) and feminist theatre studies (Cohen-Cruz, 2010). Patricia Hill Collins (1996) explains that:

the widespread use of the call and response discourse mode among African Americans exemplifies the importance placed on dialogue. Composed of spontaneous verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speaker's statements or 'calls' are punctuated by expressions or 'responses' from the listener" (p.233).

Responses can be visible, audible, or emotional, and are intended to reassure the caller that the responder is not only listening but is understanding and engaging with the caller. The CAR model, and how it related to our interactions as a cast and with the audience, will be discussed further in the chapter on Representation.

Another method of storytelling, called Hot Seat, was a way for us to glean details from our stories. The person in the hot seat would tell a story, and then the group members would take turns asking questions in order to build the world of the story. Questions like "what did it smell like?" or "how did you feel when they said that?" helped the storyteller live more fully in the story and helped the listeners create a better mental picture of what was happening. It also engaged us in each other because we took turns giving our full attention to one participant at a time.

Our second focus group was held two days after the final performance. I taped the discussion, during which we talked at length about the process, and the actors shared their revelations, confessions, and ambivalent feelings about the show. When we felt we had exhausted our topics for discussion, I distributed the questionnaire and left the room. The actors took their time to fill out the questionnaire, and after everyone left the room I came

back to collect them. The recording of our discussion and the questionnaires also serve as data.

Throughout the project I kept a journal in which I documented the process and my own observations of discussions and relationships within rehearsal. This occurred after every meeting we held; the actors were aware that, after they left the rehearsal space, I would sit down to reflect on what had just happened. I kept rehearsal plans, in which I jotted down the actors' ideas and suggestions for show decisions. Additionally, I wanted to learn about the opinions and feelings of the actors, and I gathered this information through several avenues. The stage manager held short meetings during which she acted as scribe while the actors shared their thoughts on the process thus far. During our second focus group I recorded our group discussion, and they filled out a questionnaire related to their individual reflections. Last, the script, the written piece which we created as a collective, and the video recording of the play, are evidence of the work we did together. The journal, the rehearsal notes, the stage manager's notes, the focus group recording, the questionnaire, the script and the video of the performance are all data which will be analyzed in the following chapters to gauge the "effectiveness" of my method of ethnodrama, effective meaning: ethical, feminist, and representative.

After concluding the play which was the central experiment of my thesis project, I analyzed my mountain of data in order to answer my research question: can I create a method for devising verbatim theatre which is feminist, ethical, and representative of the actors I cast? I practiced my method of Feminist Performance Ethnography by holding auditions for my project, attending rehearsals with the cast, writing a script together, and

performing our stories in front of live audiences. This method was intended to promote a more participant-focused, caring, and intersectional approach to creating verbatim theatre. My research into other verbatim theatre play is used in the chapters that follow, in that those plays and the research about them offer comparisons to the details I offer about various outcomes and results of my study. My project was intended to work against the notion that in theatre practice one person speaks for/as others. I have sifted through journal entries, actor information sheets, script, focus group recordings, and in the next three chapters I discuss in detail the ways my project did and did not succeed in accomplishing its stated aims.

The first chapter, Ethics, outlines the practices I undertook to create for the project a democratic, caring space. In this chapter I tackle some of the methodological questions I encountered throughout the process. I explain how I attempted to practice an ethic of caring, and the frustrations and triumphs that occurred as a result. I reflect on how I promoted proper language and empathy, and I explain that I worked to shift imbalances of power between the participants and myself as researcher. I end the chapter by reflecting on the complicated nature of caring and power, and how these two concepts were difficult to navigate, by consulting the casts' reflections in the confidential questionnaires.

The second chapter, Feminism, discusses how the project expressed feminist values, both explicitly and implicitly, through my practice of standpoint theory and intersectional casting. I discuss the way gender influenced the cast and their choices. I consider how physical, creative, geographical, and online spaces influenced our ability to

collaborate and interact. I reflect personally on the way a feminist approach provided me the space to share my voice. Lastly, I share the varied reflections of the cast members from the questionnaires, as they consider whether the project was “truly” feminist.

In the third chapter, Representation, I work through the concepts of “authenticity” and “truth,” and detail how ethics and feminism both influence this notion of “being yourself.” I discuss how my practice of “call and response” methods influenced the project, and reflect on the script writing and editing processes. I finish my analysis by consulting the questionnaires one last time, to share the participant’s feelings on being represented within the project. Finally, I conclude my thesis by considering my research question, and how the intricacies of ethics, feminism, and representation ultimately helped and hindered my project.

Ethics

One important component of my research question is the ethical nature of the method I created. I was determined to approach my project by valuing the participants' experiences and contributions over the aesthetic possibilities of the finished script and performance. Throughout the process, I continuously found myself engaged in tricky negotiations of power, both among cast members and between myself and the members of the cast. My simultaneous roles of researcher and actor caused a lot of frustration for both myself and the cast as I attempted to maneuver my way through the contested terrain of multiple lived experiences. My desire to practice an ethic of caring had mixed results; I found that adhering to caring and considered language helped build bridges of trust and collaboration, but inherent tensions related to power yielded some ethically questionable consequences. This chapter unpacks my experience of the ethical conundrums inherent in theatre-based research, particularly that which uses the lived experiences of those involved as both creative material and research data.

The time during which I had the greatest power was during auditions. As lead researcher I had the ability to cast and cut who I pleased, and while casting choices included discussions with the stage manager, I made the final call. Ackroyd and O'Toole (2010) explain that, much like theatre practitioners, "researchers all share one thing in common, which is also shared by the great majority of ethnographic performance

researchers: they all chose the community they were going to research” (p.12). This was the moment during the theatre-making in which I could not share power; I was in total control. Though during the rest of the process, I worked to be collaborative and democratic in our decision-making, but that initial casting process established me as the leader, and this never truly went away throughout the process.

I had 18 auditioners from which to choose 4 participants; after some consideration and negotiation with my thesis supervisor I decided to cast an extra two people. I ended up with a cast of seven (including myself). My casting decisions were made based on a number of factors: willingness to share, ability to collaborate, creative potential, and diverse perspectives, and I evaluated these factors by considering the live auditions as well as the information sheets the auditioners filled out and returned to me (Appendix B).

I had two primary ethical concerns during the audition process: my prior acquaintance with several auditioners, and the fear that I would tokenize certain participants in my desire to create as diverse a cast as possible. I shared the call for participants within my social circles, various theatre and feminist forums I am connected to, and even approached specific people with the hope that they would audition. I wondered if it was ethical to cast persons whom I already knew. Casting completely outside of my social, educational, and employment circles would have significantly limited my casting pool. For example, I knew Aja, Emily, and Faith because we went to the same schools, and I specifically wrote Aja a message encouraging her to audition. I hoped Aja would audition because I believed she would provide a unique perspective, and from my prior acquaintance with her I knew that she was a performer. I have repeatedly wondered if she

felt pressured to audition, or if she felt encouraged. This comes back to one of my many methodological questions: would I tokenize specific people due to their marginalized identities? Perhaps I did. Aja's "difference" caused me to believe she would have a unique and interesting perspective, as she is a second-generation Indian-Canadian from Newfoundland. However, my insistence on casting diversely may have encouraged diverse populations to audition, as I shared right on the audition sheets (Appendix B) that I wanted all types of people to try out for my project. I believe that these fears actually strengthened the audition process, because I was aware of the dangers of tokenization and personal acquaintance, which helped me be sensitive to the way I communicated with auditioners. I am confident that I chose my cast based on their willingness to learn, play, share and create rather than on our acquaintance, and I kept diversity in mind throughout the casting process.

The process began with an imbalance of power—the actors entered the project knowing who I was and that I had chosen them, and I worried that they would see themselves as obligated to me as a result. However, I also felt obligated to them, for the play (and my thesis) relied on their continued participation and commitment to the creative process. In order to mitigate this power imbalance, during our first focus group I took the cast through the consent forms (Appendix C), so that all participants would understand exactly what the project entailed as soon as possible. I also made sure to go around and do proper introductions, to ensure all cast members knew one another. Unfortunately, Sansom had to leave halfway through this meeting, so for the remainder of

the meeting the rest of the cast brainstormed various themes and prompts for use in our story circles moving forward.

Part of the ethical challenge of my position within the project was my commitment both to the research and to the creation of the play. Before the project began I decided that it was important for me to be part of the cast, because I believed that it was more ethical for me to share my stories if I was going to ask others to share theirs. However, other researchers tend to disagree about where the investigator fits into the creative team. For example, Johnny Saldaña (2005) questions the appropriateness of the researcher inserting themselves into the creative process. He asks:

Does the principal investigator have a role to play, one just as essential as the primary participants? In a fieldwork context, yes; but depending on the purpose of the research, is she a *major or minor character*? (p.18, emphasis in the original).

He is writing about plays which are created based on a specific event which the community experienced, and the researcher did not, but wished to study. My process differed in that we chose the play's themes based on discussions of issues that mattered to us as a group and as individuals. As a member of the cast, I had a hand in influencing these discussions, but I was also mindful of suggestions from the rest of the cast. Though Saldaña (2005) explains that, "sometimes the researcher's best positionality is offstage," in this particular instance of theatre-making I believe that, ethically, my best position was as a member of the cast (p.19). This is supported by Janet Gibson, a scholar who discusses the ethical dilemmas of verbatim theatre. Paraphrasing the work of Hazou

(2009), Gibson (2011) says that, “most verbatim practitioners appear to speak *for*, rather than speak *with* the others who are the subjects of their projects” (p.5, *emphasis in the original*). I made the effort to work with the actors, participating alongside them as contributor rather than as a director or guide. I believe this choice to be ethically sound. However, it is important to note that while I worked to be “one of the team” in the context of playmaking, my identity as researcher was ever-present and kept me inherently separate.

In the plays I discussed in my literature review, which influenced the creation of Feminist Performance Ethnography, the playwright’s position was different. Michael Bennett, the creator of *A Chorus Line*, was not part of the original cast. Instead, he remained in the background as playwright and choreographer. Similarly, Judith Thompson remains offstage *Body and Soul*, focusing on her roles as director and playwright. Eve Ensler has sometimes performed *The Vagina Monologues* as a one-woman show, embodying all the characters herself. Members of the Tectonic Theatre Project play a wide assortment of characters, including themselves as interviewers, in *The Laramie Project*. Originally I intended to have a role similar to that of Thompson and Bennett, functioning more as a “guide” than a director or playwright, but using my knowledge in devised and verbatim theatre to develop the project. However, I believe that by placing myself within the production I took an important step in embracing the subjectivity of the researcher, and acknowledging the significance of my vulnerability.

It is important for me to note at this time that, ethically, I do not call myself an objective researcher. The importance of my theoretical approach is that I believe in the

validation of subjectivity, for “the classic (and perhaps mythological) position of the detached and objective research observer is not available to the ethnographic practitioner,” particularly because I provided my own stories and experiences for creative material (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p.78). I was emotionally invested in this project in multiple ways. As researcher, I was emotionally invested in doing everything “right,” and practicing FPE “correctly,” in order to feel successful as a student. As an artist, I was emotionally invested in my stories, in sharing my experiences and creating trust bonds with the rest of the cast. I longed to be accepted as an equal member of the collective despite my position as researcher, because as Ackroyd & O’Toole (2010) explain, “insight does mean getting *inside* the community” (p.2, *emphasis in the original*). I needed to remind myself, and often still do, that I had a “three-way responsibility: to the research, to the witnesses, and to the play” (p.65). My practice of FPE meant that, above all, my responsibility was to the wellbeing and comfort of the actors, but I had to consistently balance this against my desire for a “good” piece of theatre and a “good” thesis. These personal criteria included positive reviews from audiences and acquaintances, and a thesis that was clear and argued a specific, objectively provable point. I do not state that these desires were reasonable, simply that they were present and fuelled certain personal anxieties about the project.

Part of the reason I chose the bottom-up model was my reading of criticisms of plays which did not use this method. For example, Eve Ensler conducted interviews, and then manipulated them to create characters she found aesthetically pleasing. As I explained earlier, in my literature review, Christine Cooper describes a conversation

between Ensler and a lesbian sex worker, subject of “the Moaner” monologue. The sex worker did not see herself represented in the monologue Ensler recreated from their interviews. Cooper shares that:

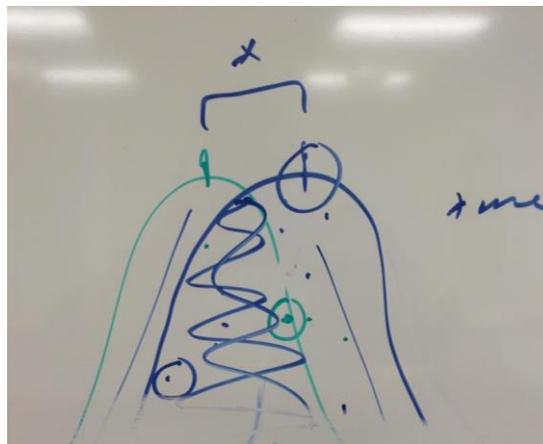
One turns the page to find the playwright explaining, ‘After I finished this piece I read it to the woman on whose interview I’d based it. She didn’t feel it really had anything to do with her. She loved the piece, mind you, but she didn’t see herself in it. She felt that I had somehow avoided talking about vaginas, that I was still somehow objectifying them (Ensler, 2001, cited in Cooper, 2007, p.750).

Ensler leaves this piece the way she wrote it, with all the objectification the sex worker found so unappealing. That the sex worker “loved” the piece despite not feeling that her story remained central is not the point—she did not see herself in the work that was *meant* to represent her. That Ensler chose her version of aesthetic over an interviewee’s is something I find deeply unethical. By practicing a bottom-up model, I was committed to being faithful to the casts’ versions of themselves, regardless of my aesthetic “tastes.” Next, I will explain the ways I negotiated self-representation with the cast.

I made occasional attempts to take unnecessary control over the project, and met resistance from the cast. Early-on in the process I attempted to discuss ways that we could structure the show, but the cast insisted that we could not know how to structure the play (where to place stories, which stories to group together and which to let stand on their own, etc.) until the story-sharing sessions had been completed. My field notes from March 13th, for example, highlight how most topics of discussion ended that day with:

“but we can’t know for certain until we decide which stories to tell” (FN). Another example of resistance occurred when Emily fought to take control of rehearsal on March 9th. My field notes explain that:

A particularly beautiful moment occurred during the prompt ‘gender roles make me feel...’. Emily, caught up in emotion, took control briefly and taught us about a frustrating phenomenon in Psychology where people question the gendered difference in experiences. She drew a graph like this:



to explain. Essentially working on debunking the argument that men and women are inherently different (FN).

Emily’s moment was during a timed story circle, when people were only allowed a minute to tell their story from beginning to end. Generally, we found this time limit helpful, as it gave us structure and encouraged us not to ramble or struggle for words. Emily, however, found the limit restrictive at this moment, and, despite my protestations, grabbed a marker and began to articulate her story further. What I learned in this instance was the merit of allowing the actors moments of control, and to remind myself that I was

not the only one with the power to break out of our rehearsal rules and guidelines. This is an example of an actor making their own “creative space” (hooks, 1988), which will be discussed further in the Feminism chapter.

This was one instance where I learned to allow for engaged performance, or engaged rehearsal. Cohen-Cruz (2010) explains that “the term ‘engaged’ foregrounds the *relationships* at the heart of making art with such aspirations, and dependence on a genuine exchange between artist and community such that one is changed by the other” (p.3, *emphasis in the original*). The cast found Emily’s educational moment enlightening and engaging, and it brought us a greater understanding of her background in psychology and gender. Here, we were the audience to Emily’s performance of her education and her personal expression, and by stepping back and allowing her the space to teach us, Emily and I participated in an exchange of validation. Emily felt validated for her resistance to my strictness, and I learned to relax my need for control. Letting go of my power over the rehearsal process here gave me an expanded view of collaboration and inspired the other members of the collective to take control over other aspects of the space. Thus, “devising reflects the belief that all of us can be expressive in ways worthy of attention, gesturing towards the democratic impulse in engaged work” (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p.5). My efforts to introduce the concept of cultural democracy to the project, defined as “collective expression of the people, by the people, and for the people,” was enthusiastically accepted and encouraged by the collective throughout the process (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p.74).

The participants not only had artistic control over rehearsals, but also over their own stories. I reiterated throughout the process that ultimately, what would be included and what would not was up to them. As rehearsals and blocking moved forward post “finished” script¹⁹, some actors felt guilty for wanting to change their stories, while others felt free to slash and add as they pleased. Katerina explained during the focus group that:

I was really impressed when Sansom decided to cut ‘Atheism’ because... I usually forget that I have the opportunity to change things or say no to things... oh yeah that’s true we signed the consent forms we can even drop out at any moment... that’s when I decided to add to ‘Islam’ that, like, I converted (Katerina, FGR).

During the second focus group, Katerina explained that she forgot just how much control she had over her own words. Having another participant take the control required to cut an entire monologue from the script inspired her to make small changes to her own words. This is an example of a community supporting and inspiring one another to take personal ownership of their experiences, and I fully encouraged both of their choices.

One of the foundational elements of my process was learning to recognize that the cast’s needs were more important than the subjective “quality” of the play— a relational approach I derive from the concept of an “ethic of caring.” Discussed at length by Patricia Hill Collins (1996) in her article “The Social Construction of Black Feminist

¹⁹ I refuse to subscribe to the belief that a script is sacred. Our script was constantly in flux—though we had a due date for a script which would be our base from which to block and rehearse, I made it clear that any stories could be subtracted or added at any time, within reason.

Thought,” the Afrocentric model of information sharing is an “epistemology of connection in which truth emerges through care” (p.236). The search for “truth” or “authenticity” is another complicated knot which requires unraveling, and will be discussed at the end of this chapter and continued in the chapter on Representation. I created Feminist Performance Ethnography with the intention that it would embody an ethic of caring, but building a space of trust and respect is no easy task. I learned this after casting. Collins (1996) explains that, “connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge-validation process,” and I was determined to try and make our group feel like a community (p.233). The ethic of caring involves the combination of three interrelated components—all must be present in order for the ethic to work to its full effect; they include: “personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy” (p.234).

Personal expressiveness, or individual uniqueness, involves the understanding that all members of the collective have their own complex sets of values and experiences from which they draw. Collins (1996) explains how, in research where an ethic of caring is not validated,

Separate knowers try to subtract the personality of an individual from his or her ideas because they see personality as biasing those ideas. In contrast, connected knowers see personality as adding to an individual’s ideas, and they feel that the personality of each group member enriches a group’s understanding (p.236).

This was one reason I wanted to cast as diversely as possible. As Cohen-Cruz (2010) states, “like-minded people mostly talk to each other” (p.100), and I felt that casting people who were like myself, which would attract an audience who was like myself, was contrary to the principles of FPE. I needed a cast that would be willing to challenge my own notions of what is regular or normal experience. As I went through the actor information sheets (Appendix B), in which people could describe their reasons for wanting to participate in the show, as well as share their race, age, or gender if they chose, I was looking for cast compilations which would reflect my requirement of “difference.” Since I am a white bisexual woman from the Atlantic provinces, I needed (or wanted) to cast people who represented other positions or identities. This caused an interesting disadvantage for women with similar identities to myself; while I recognize that people similar to myself can have highly unique experiences, I felt that the likelihood of difference would be greater if cast identities were heterogeneous. However, my geographical location of Halifax, Nova Scotia, as well a university setting, meant that I was more likely, and indeed this was the case, to have auditioners who were white, female, and college educated—much like me.

Another reason for valuing individual standpoints involves Cohen-Cruz’s (2010) concept of “social capital.” Depending on where and how communities form, there is a chance for them to create different forms of social capital. “Bonding” social capital arises from “occasions for homogenous groups to build something of collective value together;” this could involve towns or schools working to fundraise for a specific cause (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p.101). “Bridging” social capital develops from “the creation of ties among

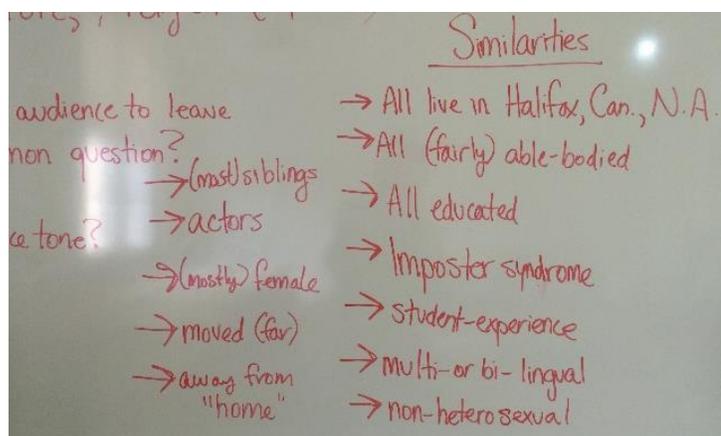
heterogeneous groups,” and is easier to find among groups that do not need to share ideology or identity, like theatre (p.101). *A Chorus Line* is essentially an example of “bonding,” for while the dancers Bennett brought together may have been intersectionally different, they were discussing their common experiences as dancers and performers. *The Vagina Monologues* was not an example of either, as Ensler did not facilitate discussion groups, but instead conducted individual interviews. However, she did create composite characters devised out of multiple interview stories, and in that sense she found bonds, or common elements, within different stories. Similar to this, *The Laramie Project* was created from individual interviews, but a bonding effect occurred among the Tectonic Theatre Project members as they collaboratively created the production out of those interviews. *Body and Soul* reflects more closely the experience of *speak!*. Thompson created a community based on two common themes: womanhood and aging. However, her participants were diverse geographically, racially, and generationally. Our collective, like Thompson’s, is an example of both bridging and bonding; we created important ties and connections amongst ourselves, while also working as a community to create a unique reflection of ourselves as a group, the play.

One way we worked on creating our bonds and bridges was by practicing story circles. The earlier example, where Emily took control of the rehearsal to have her teaching moment, occurred during a story circle. What I found fascinating about story circles was their ability to make us want to hear more. Sometimes people would have difficulty with particular prompt words, having little to no connection to them. At other times, a person’s voice would become heated with excitement and emotion, and as the

timer went off they would have difficulty restraining themselves from continuing their stories, leaving other members of the collective to cry out: “But I want to hear more! What happens next?” This process helped us learn what was important to us, and got us asking: what resonates?

What was particularly meaningful about these story circles was knowing that some of them were going to develop into pieces for performance. We were hyper-aware at all times during the process that we were not simply a group of people getting to know one another for our own amusement; instead we were going through these processes for a particular, vulnerable end. Cohen-Cruz (2010) explains how an awareness of vulnerable performance can make personal connections that much more intimate: “participating in a dialogue with people one seldom encounters otherwise is one thing; but making a play together...creates a deeper experience together” (p.103). Our sharing of memories being shared in our space was done with courage and with the recognition that we had to try and trust one another. We were not simply sharing ideas as the basis for the creation of fiction; we were sharing *ourselves*. In doing so, we built a space that promoted trust and friendship.

Practicing the ethic of caring allowed me to recognize that the cast contained both “sameness and difference,” a concept I derived from Allegranti (2011). She explains that “difference and similarity can co-exist and the tension lies in recognizing and appreciating these differences before we can move forward and see similarities” (p.200). During our rehearsal on March 13th, we discussed our struggle to come up with stories that could follow one another and give significance to the play as a whole, rather than creating a jumble of random experiences with no interconnections or links. My journal notes that, “we discussed ways in which we are *similar*, because so often we talk about how we are different. This was a wonderful bonding exercise and helped us to see our commonalities” (FN). This picture shows the list we made during rehearsal when we brainstormed the ways some, if not all of us, had similarities.



This practice of finding the ways we are similar had surprising and incredibly meaningful results. During the creation of the script we had some difficulty deciding when an actor should have the stage to themselves, and when they should share the stage. We all made suggestions about possibilities for story groups. One moment of surprising sameness came from the linking of Sansom and Katerina’s monologues into the section that became “Selling Bodies” (Appendix D, p.xv-xvi). Originally, neither actor thought

their stories really fit together; for example, Sansom thought his was too humorous to be paired with Katerina's. Yet when we cut them together and began rehearsals, both Sansom and Katerina began to feel a deep sense of connection and support by sharing their experiences of "selling bodies." Though I do not have a specific quote from either of them on the effect this of process, I remember both of them describing how much they appreciated being together during this section of the play, and that they were surprised and happy about how well their stories went together and complemented one another. Another example of sameness occurred in the "GayStuff" section, in which Katerina, Emily, and Faith describe their difficulty reconciling their queerness with their religion (Appendix D, p.xxxvii-xxxix). Though these stories were not planned as a trio, by combining them we offered the audience the ability to experience the full impact of how all three actors experienced queerness in religion, and allowed the actors to support each other on the stage. This promotes the idea of individual expressiveness as well as caring—by sharing the stage, but still giving space for each person to tell their story, the cast was able to acknowledge their unique standpoints while providing support for one another.

Sometimes, however, our differences caused us strife, or at least made me worry that strife could occur. Two of my participants embody racialized identities: Faith is South Korean and was born there, while Aja is Indian-Canadian, calls herself a "brown" person, and was born and raised in Newfoundland. After a particularly intense session of Hot Seat, I documented in my journal that:

Faith talked about Korean relations to China and Japan, inter-Asian racism and personal strife. I worried about the dynamic between Faith and Aja, as Faith discussed anti-darkness in Korean culture. I was concerned that Aja was uncomfortable or Faith was ashamed (FN).²⁰

What I remember looking back was feeling tense, my eyes flicking back and forth between them, feeling out of my depth in addressing concerns of racialized people. I was concerned that, because Aja has a “darker” skin tone than the rest of the cast, she would be offended or hurt by Faith’s story. In this instance I was unsure what my role should be: should I have intervened and stop Faith’s story? Was my fear of Aja’s discomfort worth silencing Faith? As I wrote in my field notes: “I ended the rehearsal with a reiteration of trust and sharing among the group and acknowledged that my whiteness makes me ignorant” (FN). I worried, and still worry, that sometimes my subject position left me incapable of helping with the nuances of identity, particularly race, and I sincerely hoped and hope that the participants who identify as non-white never felt unsupported or like victims of microaggressions. My thesis supervisor has since pointed out that, as I was working to be part of the collective, it would not be my place to take control in this way, but in the moment, so early in rehearsals, I was hyper-aware of the tenuous trust connections we had begun to form. During one rehearsal I shared a quote by Coker: “theatre, in a way, is based on political incorrectness. Disagreement and difference are good things” (quoted in Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p.110). This inspired our conversation on

²⁰ “Anti-darkness” refers to the aversion to darker skin tones in South Korean culture. Faith described how she was raised in a culture that reveres lighter skin, morally and aesthetically, and disdains darker skin.

differences and similarities, and I believed this acknowledgment encouraged us to remember the ethic of caring. We were allowed to be different, and certainly were. I had to remind myself that my personal hang-ups regarding difference in opinion and belief were not welcome in a space that cared about the experiences of those involved.

The ethic of caring has a second component which marks its difference from forms of inquiry that claim to be objective and detached: emotion. Hill Collins (1996) explains that “emotion indicates that the speaker believes in the validity of an argument” (p.235). Early in the process I explained to participants that much of what we discussed could be emotional in nature and might make them feel vulnerable. I asserted that while they did not need to share more than they felt comfortable sharing, they might find themselves feeling emotional or vulnerable during or after rehearsals, and I supplied them with a list of resources both within my school and in the community, should they require emotional guidance.

What I immediately noticed during rehearsals was who, in my view, was willing to be vulnerable and who wished to mask themselves with humour. Emily and Sophie were willing to laugh at themselves, but were uncomfortable approaching tough subjects with seriousness and intensity. During our final meeting, Sophie explained how her fear of vulnerability changed the way she wrote her stories, saying “the way I wrote it let me look at it more than feel it” (Sophie, FGR). This had the effect of her monologues coming across more reflective than experiential. Emily, too, shared that “when I was on stage I was most comfortable when people were laughing at me,” indicating that her more serious stories left her feeling exposed and uncomfortable (Emily, FGR). Both of these

participants seemed to have difficulty with the concept of “talking with the heart,” particularly on stage, though in rehearsals they were more open to speaking freely (Collins, 1996, p.234).

Sophie also shared that she made her story “Osheaga” less emotional because she feared coming across as someone who struggled more than she actually had during the events of the story. She explained that:

I guess I was worried about the effect my stories were going to have on other people... I really don't identify and don't have any desire to identify with any sort of survivor label... I really don't feel like my experience has, like, negatively impacted me, really (Sophie, FGR).²¹

Sophie feared that by coming across as too emotional about the events of the story, that she would not be authentically relating her experience. However, she also worried that not offering enough emotion could make her seem unfeeling or distant. She did not want survivors of trauma or abuse to think that she was not empathetic. She wanted to convey that she felt ambiguous about her own situation/story, but this desire was wrought with tension because of the pressure put on “survivors” to identify strongly with that label in particular ways. Ethnodrama, and the people who practice it, can espouse a moral expectation that puts pressure on storytellers to make their stories have “meaning.”

²¹An excerpt from Sophie's story from “Osheaga”: Then the next morning I woke up, still wrapped up in him and it happened. I don't know if it was intentional, or if he was even awake, or if he was super embarrassed by it afterwards and couldn't say anything. But a hand moved under my shirt and... rubbed? my boob. I remember after the fact thinking that I had made it up, that I should never tell anyone because I didn't want people to think he was gross or bad or weird. I remember shock - my eyes popping open, replaying it time and time again to make sure I felt what I did.

Ackroyd and O'Toole (2010) explain that “the very act of ethnodrama is a positive matter of ethical choice closely connected with social responsibility. The power and potency of ethnographic performance contains a moral imperative” (p.32). To Sophie, I countered:

There's something to be said too, for, for being honest about feeling ambiguous. Because I think you guys, really, there's a lot of pressure to feel one way or the other, it's always black and white, there's no room for grey, and I really really appreciated the grey. I feel that helps people (Heather, FGR).

Sophie allowed herself a different kind of vulnerability—rather than bowing to the pressure to conform to a “survivor” standard or ideal, she stuck by her experience of ambiguity and confusion. Her story was honest in its refusal to represent a strongly emotional experience.

Conversely, Faith and I seemed to have more ease becoming emotional onstage. I would argue that, perhaps, we had the most intensely emotional stories to tell, though of course that is subjective. Faith shared her struggles with depression, religion, and past relationships, and I recounted the story of my past abusive relationship. During some performances, our voices would break, or tears would fall. It was certainly scary to know that one might become overwhelmed emotionally when sharing a highly intense memory. Faith shared with the collective that “it is my story, and it is still haunting me, true... whenever I tell the story I feel something... I was full of emotion” (Faith, FGR). We also acknowledged that our stories felt different when we told them in front of an audience, rather than among the collective; during the second focus group, I explained that I was

completely fine sharing my experiences with the cast, but in front of an audience, the events of my past became incredibly real. I said: “there’s a difference between recounting the past, and telling the audience how you feel about the past now... it’s not fresh but it’s fresh” (Heather, FGR). Being emotive, particularly in a performance setting, can seem (and felt) frightening, but as Collins (1996) claims, “expressiveness should be reclaimed and valued” (p.235).

I sometimes felt that demanding a portrayal of intense emotion from the actors was unethical because of the performance aspect of the project. Though within rehearsals we had worked on developing a strong level of trust and intimacy, our relationship with the audience was murkier. By “placing the audience in the role of voyeurs, complicit in being entertained by the private anguish and grief, viciousness and prejudice of a real-life community,” I sometimes felt that our experiences and memories were being violated because they were being watched for entertainment (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p.38). I struggled, and still struggle, with the ethics of ethnodrama for this reason, and with Saldaña’s (2005) insistence that “theatre’s primary goal is neither to educate nor to enlighten. *Theatre’s primary goal is to entertain—to entertain ideas as it entertains its spectators*” (p.14, *emphasis in the original*). This does not sit well with an ethic of caring, for I believe that in *ethno*theatre, in theatre which hopes to share personal, lived experiences of non-fictional people, theatre’s primary goal should be to *care*, especially for those whose stories are being told.

The third, and final, component of the ethic of caring brings the actor into conversation with their community: empathy. Though emotion and personal

expressiveness come from inside the individual, empathy must be projected outward in order to continuously show respect and validation for those with whom one is interacting. As the principal investigator as well as an actor, I needed to constantly remember to practice empathy, both for myself and the cast. As cast members expressed their individual views and emotions, I encouraged other cast members to respond with kindness, enthusiasm, and attentiveness. This practice of “call-and-response” will be discussed further in the chapter on Representation.

Empathy needed to be practiced during auditions as well as rehearsals. During each audition slot I explained my project’s aims and attempted to instill in the auditioners the awareness that personal information was going to be shared, both within the audition space and in subsequent rehearsals. I cautioned that there might be moments in which they could become emotionally overwhelmed, but that they did not have to share any stories deemed too personal, and were allowed to leave the room at any moment if they became uncomfortable. I took these actions to help ensure, as much as possible, the creation of a caring and trusting space for the audition process. In an earlier draft of my thesis, I questioned the ethics of asking auditioners to share personal stories with strangers. As I described in my journal, Monica²² shared a “beautiful and moving story about eating disorders,” but I also characterized her as “nervous” (FN). Her raw emotion and feeling throughout her improvised monologue were evident; I can still remember them vividly. I worried about the effect recounting such a traumatic story could have on her, and after the auditions I called her over to ask that she was okay. She insisted she

²² Name has been changed for confidentiality and anonymity.

was and thanked me, but I still questioned whether it was wise to ask auditioners to be *so* candid. Certainly, I insisted that they did not need to tell a personal story, and could make one up, but I imagined they felt that their chances of getting cast were better if they shared their own experience.

My supervisor asked me to consider whether the auditioner's ability to *choose* was significantly more important than my desire to impose a personal sense of appropriateness on them. Though the moment might have felt too candid for me, perhaps it was not for her. This discussion has helped me rethink my approach to this question of emotion and consider the importance of agency in telling personal stories, including in the audition space. This is similar to Ackroyd and O'Toole's (2010) argument that it is important to challenge the presumptions of the project leader, that "an intense emotional response was the wrong response" (p.45). I believe it was more ethical for me to allow the auditioners the space to use their voices rather than policing appropriateness for them. I will further discuss the concept of agency in the chapter on Representation.

I struggled to fully practice empathy within my dual roles of researcher and actor. It is true that:

Bringing people together of different opinions can have negative outcomes as well, such as bitter fights or more intransigent views...exposure must occur in a context where the collective project of getting along with one another in society is primary (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p.102).

As the pressures of both performance and research layered upon one another, my patience with off-topic conversations, lack of focus, and oppositional views tended to grow thin. I also found it difficult to relinquish control of the project, as my natural tendencies toward leadership and direction had me aching to grab onto the project and mold it into a shape of my own design. My journal reflects these feelings; on the day of our very first rehearsal, February 29th, I wrote “I need to work on my urge to dictate how a choice is made” (FN). I used words such as “trapped” and “frustrated” on March 24th to indicate my impatience with a cast member, and shared in my journal that I felt anxiety because “I don’t want to make her feel silenced or scolded but we have limited time to put this play together and much of it is wasted chit-chatting. But is that really wasted time? If it helps us bond? I don’t know” (FN). This stress escalated, and I was quite harsh with this cast member during a rehearsal on April 4th. On April 6th, I wrote: “I am struggling to remind myself that this is a collaborative process, that we must make decisions together. I *want* control...if there was an outside director, perhaps that would have been helpful. I’m not sure” (FN, *emphasis in the original*). My ability to show empathy was taxed during this time, as we got closer and closer to our performance and I felt the pressure to be everything (actor, researcher, producer, counsellor) for the project. However, my constant personal reminders that empathy must come first urged me to take action outside of rehearsals. After my harsh words to my cast mate on April 4th, I wrote them a message apologizing for my behaviour and acknowledging that I was trying to practice an ethic of caring, which includes owning up to my mistakes and ensuring that I would continue to try to do better. Though in that moment I had difficulty controlling my desire to direct and make decisions, I took initiative to reassert empathy within the ethic of caring in my

attempts to reconcile. I also encouraged democratic decision-making with a voting system, which helped ease my controlling instincts. In my journal on April 6th I wrote, “tonight we voted on the poster, and I got out-voted. One example of how the democracy must work against me, and how I must accept it” (FN). As Cohen-Cruz (2010) explains, “part of the theatre piece’s contribution to organizing is its flexibility concerning where, by whom, and when to perform it,” and I learned through trial-and-error how to communicate with fairness (p.104).

There were also compelling moments of empathy and understanding during the rehearsal process. As I mentioned above, we had difficulty deciding which monologues to let stand on their own and which to group together. I had a particularly emotional monologue toward the end of the show about a past abusive relationship, titled “The Pirate,” and I negotiated a moment during that monologue when a few of the other actors come onstage to speak, and then left. We were discussing how to block the piece on April 11th and people suggested various choices, which I mostly vetoed. Emily supported my choices, and I wrote in my field notes that, “at one point Emily said that my story is very big and important and deserving of space and gravitas. That was very meaningful to me” (FN). Especially serving as both actor and researcher, I sometimes found it hard to feel like a complete member of the collective, and in this moment I was supported and encouraged by another member to take ownership of my story. Another such moment occurred on March 30th, when “Sansom asked Faith if his atheism writing was making her uncomfortable. She responded well and said it was fine with her. Great

communication and respect moment there” (FN).²³ Sansom did not need to check in with our most religious cast member, but he practiced an ethic of caring in doing so. Finally, during our second focus group, there was a beautiful moment of group love and reassurance when Faith admitted that “for me this show itself was very challenging... because you know I am not openly gay” (Faith, FGR). She then explained that this show was “the first experience to disclose my sexual orientation in public” (Faith, FGR). When she said this, we broke into applause and cheering. This, to me, was an ultimate example of the ethic of caring—we responded to her admission with love and camaraderie.

Another aspect of practicing empathy within the ethic of caring is through language. A number of language considerations came up during the process. As a cast of seven, trying to create a collective voice for the project proved difficult, for “it is no easy task to find ways to include our multiple voices within the various texts we create—in film, poetry, feminist theory” (hooks, 1988, p.49). We sometimes had tension or disagreement over key decisions. For example, we discussed the ethics of using people’s real names, particularly people we mention in the show who have harmed or hurt us in the past. Was it okay to use their real names, or to reference them so specifically that some audience members might be able to discern who they were? We could not agree on answers to these questions. We discussed the possibility of a group apology at the beginning of the show, which would act as a way for us to collectively acknowledge those we might hurt or anger should they come up in our stories. My journal entry on

²³ My impulse to place value judgments within my journal, as seen in this quote when I wrote “she responded well,” must be interrogated. I question this instinct—in an ethic of caring, I would not be judging the responses of the actors, for all responses are certainly valid. Even within this kind of practice, the tendency to value or judge certain responses is difficult to avoid.

March 13th says that “this created some tension in the group, as Aja (and Katerina) felt that it was an important addition while Sansom and Sophie weren’t so sure” (FN).

However, by April 10th I felt that we had experienced a shift in our collective relationships, becoming more like a group of friends than strangers. We also worked on ways to support one another during the show, such as singing together or grasping someone’s hand after an intense monologue. My field notes say that “these moments make us more human, I think,” and I feel that this embodies the ethic of caring, for the ethnodrama “must benefit the people whose lives inform the project, not just promote the artist” (FN; Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p.2).

These moments of non-verbal communication were vital to our practice of empathy and caring as well as our theatre-making. When Faith performed her monologue “Suicide/Catholicism,” I would come onto the stage and grasp her hand. We would exchange a smile, and she would exit so that I could start the next scene. This moment conveyed a number of things: it showed that the cast supported one another through our difficult stories, while also adding a touch of theatrical aesthetic to the show. It helped show the audience that our stories were not entirely disconnected, and that the way we wove our stories together was intentional.

I struggled to find a fit between my theatre and feminist vocabularies and the rehearsal space, but I feel that my efforts yielded positive results. As I have mentioned above, I struggled to tame my desire for control over the process. In order to combat this desire, I modified my language to come across softer and more conciliatory than I would normally in a theatre setting. On April 10th, I wrote in my journal that while “I still

struggled not to interfere too much with blocking choices...I feel that I balanced my suggestions well with phrases like ‘just a thought’ and ‘maybe this could work’” (FN). By training myself to suggest rather than direct, I gave the actors the space/opportunity to decline my suggestions. I also grappled with the need to get the actors to focus during particularly rowdy days. Sometimes, I would bark at them to be quiet, and this had a negative effect on our relationship. On April 11th I tried a different tack:

Everyone was really silly and unfocused today. To bring them back to the moment, I would say ‘everyone take a breath.’ I found that worked easier and seemed softer than trying to shush them or chastise them individually (FN).

Within language, there was also the necessity of learning how to refer to one another’s identities and preferred terms. The diversity within our cast meant that we were learning about one another and were attempting to be respectful at all times. This relates to my earlier discussion of sameness and difference, because there were many ways in which various members of the collective felt distinctly different from everyone else, and it was important to respect those differences. To share a few examples, Aja was the only cast member who identified as agender, as well as brown. Sansom was the only male-identifying cast member. Faith was the only South Korean. Their embodiment of these various identities was, “an act of being simultaneously a member of a group and yet standing apart from it,” the definition of both/or orientation (Collins, 1996, p.228). While we discussed many ways in which we had similarities, our differences caused us to occasionally feel distant from one another.

The noticeable language barrier between Faith and the rest of the cast sometimes caused me, as well as the stage manager, some moments of self-reflection. For example, Faith would often take longer to write out her stories, or tell them, because she was taking her time to find her words and figure out the syntax of an upcoming sentence. On March 20th I wrote in my journal that:

Faith spent her time working on one particular story. I think the combo of the language barrier and the complexity of the story kept her working on it. I hope that she doesn't feel stifled by language but I'm not sure how to bring it up to her without seeming judgmental or controlling of her voice. I just don't want her to have less to say because it takes her more time to share and write (FN).

Faith said numerous times in rehearsal that she welcomed people helping her with her grammar, and yet I still felt hesitant to, because I felt that I was changing or influencing her voice in doing so.

During the actual writing of our stories, Faith invited me to go through her monologues and fix sections that did not make sense grammatically. I did so with caution, trying to keep her voice while helping her more clearly evoke her intended meaning. Chelsea, the stage manager, brought this up to me after rehearsal one night. My journal entry on April 15th explains that "Chelsea discussed how she has the urge to correct Katerina and Faith's pronunciations. She then explained that she realized that instinct was anathema to the project" (FN). This moment was lovely, because it showed that Chelsea valued the project's aims: she rejected her impulse to correct or discipline

their voices. We decided not to correct their pronunciation unless they asked us to. I am not sure whether this was a valid choice—would the actors be hurt or angry if they knew we did not correct their speech? Would they feel foolish for mispronouncing words? I cannot say. Both Katerina and Faith were open about asking us to define particular words or to fix their pronunciation, and I would argue that “fixing” their words would have offered the audience a cleaned-up, less “authentic” version of them. Ultimately, both actors seemed pleased with our process, so I am comfortable saying we negotiated language well.

The ethic of caring was implemented within the project with mixed results. While I feel that, ultimately, the effort of practicing the ethic of caring had a positive effect on the project, the continuous need to remember and implement its principles was exhausting. During the final questionnaire, in which participants reflected on the process, they wrote about whether they felt part of a team, reflected on my dual role as researcher and actor, and whether they ever felt discriminated against by myself or other members of the collective. Some reflections on the team-aspect include: “it felt very team-like,” “we were all there to support each other,” “people were willing to hear my stories,” “I feel my voice may have been shared too much” (QR). On my dual roles: “I think she was more stressed out than us when the show was about to start,” “did a very good job of not overpowering other voices,” “I feel empathy on the difficulties” (QR). Finally, when asked if they felt discriminated against, most participants responded with a firm “not at all,” though one participant felt “not ‘discriminated’ but I felt pressured to not speak as much and hold back my questions and/or comments” (QR).

The frustration of feeling silenced is one which carries heavy notions of power and privilege. Despite trying to create on equal footing with the participants, this final admission by one of the actors weighs on my conscience. There is a paradox evident in my method—while I express my desire for empathy and the ethical treatment of all members, whose contributions are all worthwhile, I also insist that I cannot be objective due to my location as researcher and actor. In the questionnaires some of the participants noted that I likely seemed more tense or stressed about the project because it held more significance for me academically. However, “no matter how we try, we cannot be completely objective. The ethnodramatist chooses which are the privileged and which are the silenced voices” (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p.52). My very presence created pressure on the actors to “do a good job”, for they knew that the process was a means to an end—my research project. I also introduced myself as someone who has experience in the world of theatre, and this likely created pressure on participants who have less theatre experience, for “theatre reproduces the same hierarchies that plague the world at large, the same assumptions of who can speak, who must listen, and who is not even invited into the conversation” (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p.5). My efforts to combat this power imbalance through the practice of cultural democracy, story sharing, and an ethic of caring could not completely deconstruct the immense power of power. Ackroyd & O’Toole (2010) explain that “there is often a problem in the power dynamics between the researcher and the research participants, especially if the participants perceive themselves as less empowered and carry less cultural capital” (p.55). By participating in research as well as theatre, they encountered the dual pressure to succeed as actors and as research

subjects, and my participation as a fellow actor did not entirely assuage these differences. I was never truly “fellow” but always other—researcher, leader, organizer, judge.

As a theatre practitioner and researcher, I struggled to balance my need for authentic representation with my desire for an aesthetically pleasing show. Though the question of authenticity will be discussed more fully in the chapter on Representation, here I will discuss my ethical dilemma of “good” theatre vs. “good” research. Saldaña (2005) explains that:

There are no established or standardized criteria for what constitutes ‘good’ ethnodrama. The success of a work is jointly constructed and determined by the participants, the artistic collaborators, and their audiences (p.14).

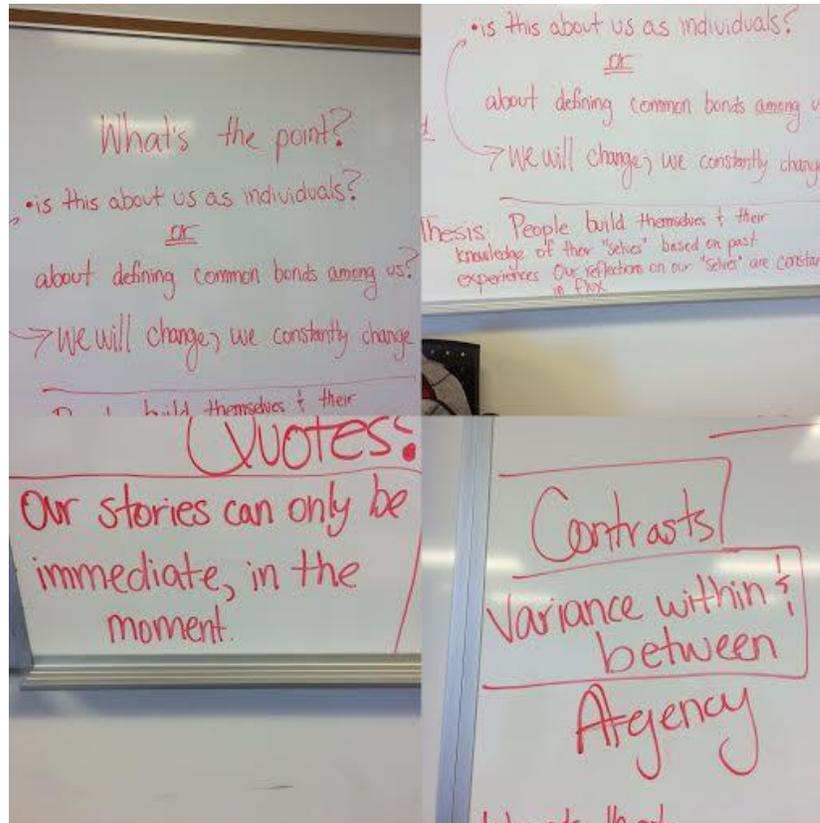
And, yet—I felt that desire nonetheless, to hear praise from my peers and my mentors rather than criticism, and this desire contributed to much tension and deliberation, both within myself and among the collective. Different researchers support different sides of this divide; some, like Saldaña, believe that ultimately the aesthetic must come first. Others, such as Cohen-Cruz and Ackroyd and O’Toole, believe that aesthetic and authenticity must be carefully blended and deliberated. Unfortunately, there is still “tension between an ethnodramatist’s ethical obligation to re-create authentic representation of reality (thus enhancing fidelity) and the license for artistic interpretation of that reality (thus enhancing the aesthetic possibilities)” (Saldaña, 2005, p.32).

The struggle with authenticity—questioning “why?” the project was even happening—was expressed by both Sophie and Sansom. My journal entry on March 20th says:

Sophie ‘interrupted’ my plans with a confession/question that got us talking for over an hour. She explained her anxiety about the show not having a ‘point,’ that it felt direction-less and without meaning...this inspired a conversation about how our play is an expression of ‘us’ at this moment in time, and cannot be the same a year from now (FN).

This discussion led us to write a “thesis statement” which would guide us throughout the rest of the process. We claimed that “people build themselves and their knowledge of their ‘selves’ based on past experiences. Our reflections on our

‘selves’ are constantly in flux.” Our brainstorming session was photographed and is shared here:



This discussion reminds me of an ethical dilemma about *The Laramie Project*, posed by researcher Janet Gibson (2011) and discussed in my literature review, about the young man who made homophobic comments that were omitted from the play to forward an intended narrative. Like Gibson, Sophie was worried that, without coming to an agreement on a principle or purpose, our play would have no meaning; however, we also did not want to put forward a particular message, and therefore have to edit our experiences to fit that message. I feel that giving the show a thesis statement, even one as vague as “we are who we are now” gave the actors control over their own stories. One

participant noted in their questionnaire that “anyone seeing the show would have a good idea of some important things about me, but they don’t *know* me,” and this recognition of the brief glimpse the play gives into the lives of the actors is particularly insightful (QR). Saldaña (2005) explains how an ethnodrama is life “with all the boring parts taken out,” and in doing so, “the results are a participant’s and/or researcher’s combination of meaningful life vignettes, significant insights, and epiphanies” (p.16). How authenticity and representation developed, in rehearsals, script, and performance, will be discussed more closely in a later chapter.

Ethics within theatre are complicated, particularly in theatre in which “real” people share their stories. For my research project, I wanted to practice a method which would be founded in cultural democracy and based on an ethic of caring. My method, Feminist Performance Ethnography, was put in practice with these ethical considerations in mind. In this chapter, I have laid out the ways in which ethics came into play during the rehearsal process, particularly with regard to power and caring. My attempt to enact an ethic of caring had mixed results. I found myself exhausted by the constant need to remember the ethic and embody it. Perhaps practicing the ethic of caring would come easier over time and with more practice, but at this stage I warn other practitioners about “caring fatigue,” or the danger that an emotionally driven project can exact a toll on the researcher’s mental wellbeing. However, the ethic of caring provided an invaluable structure for me to use in crafting FPE, and I believe I have explained through this chapter how the ethic inspired personal expressiveness, emotion, and empathy. My attempts to negotiate power showed that ultimately, power imbalances are inherent in

both theatre and research projects, even caring ones. As I move to the chapter on Feminism, I keep these ethical considerations in mind.

Feminism

There is an interesting split between the feminism of my thesis and the feminism of the play. The version of “feminism” I hoped to instil in this project might have been different from the feminisms held or understood by the rest of the cast—however, I believe we all had a common understanding that the project was being created by a feminist, within a feminist program of study, to promote feminist aims and understandings. Though I brought my own notion of feminism into the project, and feminist theory and practice structure my methodology, I did not force any notion of feminism within the cast. In this chapter I discuss how gender, and its relationship to other intersectional identifiers such as race, sexuality, age, and culture, influenced cast relationships and the play’s subject matter.²⁴ Feminism has been embraced and explored in a number of ways within my thesis, including: subject matter, which considered multiple views on bodies, sex and sexuality, religion, and culture; the personal values of the cast, which created a mosaic of shared opinions and beliefs; and discussions of the reactions of the audience, who lauded the play and its creators for their bravery in telling emotional stories on these topics. As researcher I strove to embody feminist principles, particularly a feminist standpoint epistemology and a valuing of all voices and

²⁴ Interestingly, class never came up as an identifier or marker of difference. Perhaps this is because class as an identifier is rarely discussed openly, particularly on a personal level. I was unable to discuss class analytically, and therefore I am marking its absence.

perspectives. Though some of the participants were unsure whether the project was feminist, I believe that the process of creating the play proudly displayed feminist values and actions at every stage.

Part of what made this a feminist endeavour was the effort to bring an intersectional approach to creating verbatim theatre. As evidenced by my audition call (Appendix A), I attempted to cast as diversely as I could, so that the play would offer a range of perspectives. I also gave space for auditioners to self-identity their gender, sexuality, and race, so that as I went through the actor information sheets (Appendix B) I would have a clearer memory of who auditioned and how they had identified. However, a diverse cast is only the first step; I also worked to ensure that everyone felt individually supported by recognizing that multiple and varied identities and experiences were part of the cast, which I outlined in the Ethics chapter during my discussion of the ethic of caring, language barriers, gender & sexuality & racial barriers, and how all of these factors co-existed and influenced each other during the process. Looking back, I wonder if perhaps a blind audition process²⁵ would have made some cast members feel less tokenized, as I would be unable to choose someone to be the “black person” or “queer person” of the cast. However, for me, the fear of creating a homogenous cast outweighed the benefit of a blind casting call. The responses of the cast during the second focus group were encouraging, as they generally seemed to agree that the project was very diverse and intersectional, with responses like “contained intersectionality and diversity” and “Yay

²⁵ A blind audition process could involve a number of auditioning methods. Perhaps auditioners could have submitted anonymous pieces of creative writing, or auditioned behind a curtain so that I would not know what they looked like.

intersectionality!” (QR). This intersectional approach created a number of complex conversations and outcomes and will be discussed below.

As explained in the theory chapter, the feminist framework that informs this project is standpoint epistemology. Standpoint epistemology supports “making diverse women central to research in the physical and social sciences, as researchers and as subjects” (Lorber, 2012, p.183).²⁶ By making the experiences of the cast central to the project, we shared our unique, and diverse, ways of knowing. Five of us identify as women, one as a cisgender man and another identifies as agender with female pronouns. Rather than experiencing tension related to our diverse gender identities, we found them to be a strength. Ackroyd and O’Toole (2010) explain that there is “unlikely to be homogeneity amongst the participant groups. What might appear to be an honest portrayal of a community to one participant may not be for another” (p. 40). Since my project is not about a particular community or principle, the heterogeneity of the project is more of an asset than an issue. Our “narrative” was influenced by the individual standpoints of the cast members as well as our belief in the immediacy of both theatre and memory. The multiple genders of the cast do not provide simple terminology; however, they contribute to a wealth of diverse perspectives.

Complicating my commitment to an intersectional approach is Aston & Harris’ (2006) notion of “we.” By fashioning the project as a collective endeavour, in which the group was meant to work collaboratively, I ran the risk of homogenizing the group’s experiences despite casting for difference. This brings us back to the concepts of bridging

²⁶ I should note that my project’s standpoint epistemology would exchange “women” for “people.”

and bonding addressed in the chapter on Ethics. Aston & Harris (2006) explain how a collective “we” based on a shared core of identity (e.g. womanhood) can cause a splintering effect as members of the “we” may feel misrepresented or elided within the project. This happened in *The Vagina Monologues*; though Ensler looked to create a show founded on a collective “we” of womanhood, some scholars argue that she failed to fully appreciate the complex realities of queer women and women of color within her script, thus creating a “we” which only “truly” represented white, Western, able-bodied women (Cooper, 2007; Basu, 2010). We combatted this homogeneous approach by acknowledging our intersectional differences. For example, Aja’s story “Hair” discusses her lived experience as a Sikh woman, which complicated her relationship with her hair. Aja created a bridge with both the collective and the audience by telling her story, thus inviting them a glimpse of her unique perspective. Rather than create a bonding experience like Ensler’s, in which we promoted our similarities, we acknowledged our bridges, and this enabled us to retain a heterogeneous “we.”

Standpoint theorist have also discussed the complexity of multiple perspectives and experiences. Though our collective “we” stems from our shared desire to create theatre collaboratively and share our voices, as a cast we also strove to recognize the times when the way “we” is meaningful shifts. Our multiple identities and perspectives, or our “intersections,” meant that we could not always completely accept a “we.” We had many versions of “we” within our collective: female-bodied persons, non-Western persons, and racialized perspectives, to name a few. These groups embodied Harding’s (1986) concept of hyphenization, so that we were not merely ‘actors,’ but at times,

‘female-bodied-actors’ or ‘queer-actors.’ However, this hyphenization caused other personal identifiers to disappear, as Crenshaw (1991) warned could happen. For instance, intersections exist, for Faith, in the way femininity (gender) and nation can erase sexual identity, and the way religion can erase gender and sexuality. The oppression emerges from the invisibility that the multiple strands create. Faith discussed this pointedly in the “GayStuff” section, in which several members of the collective combined their stories about queerness and religion. During this scene, Faith explains that “as a lesbian feminist, it is not easy to say ‘I’m a Catholic,’” and tells the story of her gradual acceptance of these supposed opposing identities (Appendix D, p.xxxvii). She claims at the end of the scene that “well, I could be back someday as a lesbian feminist activist nun who puts on fashionable shoes. Who knows?” (Appendix D, p.xxxix). In this way, members of the collective were able to own their individual standpoints, to express the way their unique intersections influenced their experiences.

The subject matter of the play was both implicitly and explicitly feminist. Our themes of bodies, sex, tradition/culture and religion have rich feminist histories and were broad enough to include a range of perspectives. Particular stories had more explicit feminist significance, including “Osheaga/ Roofies” and “Women in Asia.” During the second focus group, Sophie described the experience her male partner had after watching “Osheaga/ Roofies.” This piece was performed by Sophie and Emily; Sophie described her experience of sexual assault, and Emily described the night she was unknowingly slipped roofies, a date-rape drug, at a convocation party. According to Sophie, her boyfriend said, “I think that every man should have to, like, hear stories like that from the

women in our lives... I think this is the kinds of stories that need to be shared” (Sophie, FGR). As a cisgender male watching this piece, he was struck by the level of sexual violence his peers could inflict on women. Dee Heddon (2006) discusses the politics inherent when female voices are privileged in performance. She explains that “the political potential afforded by women’s performances” was a vital space of resistance in early feminist protest and theatre (p.133). I feel that both Emily and Sophie claimed ownership of their bodies and their stories by retelling them from their own perspectives and through the sieves of their own memories. They resisted the fear of sharing this story and the fear of backlash from audience members, and refused to be passive subjects of their experiences.

Faith’s “Women in Asia” monologue is another instance of a cast member using agentic control over their stories. Faith lamented the homogenization of Asian female experience, and in the monologue, she stated:

Asia is a huge continent, and even women in South Korea, North Korea, China and Japan are totally different even though these countries are located in ‘far-eastern Asia’ and very close geographically. Even in Women and Gender Studies, it is still too westernized and too white (Appendix D, p.xxx).

Faith tackled a number of issues within this short monologue. She refused to be the show’s spokesperson for Asian women, asserting the impossibility of such a venture. Furthermore, she called out the homogenous nature of the academy. She and I are both members of the same university program, and are classmates; during the last

performance, she performed this monologue in front of our professors! In her monologue, she also describes how she came to accept her experience as a South Korean lesbian woman as valid, despite the pressures of the academy and social expectations, which privilege Western experience. Saldaña (2005) shares a quote from Carver (2003), which asserts that “the act of women speaking their own stories publicly...radically challenges traditional notions of agency, spectacle, and spectatorship as female performers move their voices and bodies from the background to the foreground” (p.3). Sophie, Emily, and Faith all challenged patriarchal ideals and expectations, simply by sharing their stories. They refused to back away from sharing their explicitly female experiences, and doing so was a radical act; Faith’s intersectional experience as a woman of color politicized her words further, as she challenged her specific experience of difference among a cast that was not Asian, and certainly not South Korean. She refused to be bound by the intersections that forced her to the margins, and rather took control of the margin to assert her own “creative space” (hooks, 1990).

Implicit within these stories, as well as others, were feminist lessons that had the potential to inspire or influence the audience. Though we did not have a specific moral or principle which we hoped the audience would take away, individual stories had embedded lessons. One of the most oft-repeated phrases we heard from audience members after the show was some form of “I could never do what you did.” We were told we were brave, honest, open, courageous—many of us felt confused by these reactions, since we were just sharing our selves. Yet, Cohen-Cruz (2010) asks:

How do we uncover a story? How do individual stories of resistance hearten, and those of injustice enrage, energizing us to avoid paralysis and take action? What are the appealing ways in which stories create public awareness? Such art does not have to sacrifice aesthetics and complexity to accompany and support a social movement (p.109).

We did not implore the audience to take up a specific social cause; we did not use words like “justice” and “patriarchy.” This is not a value judgment on performances that employ these methods; our approach was simply less direct. Instead, the feminist effect was felt through the sharing, and though the lessons were accidental, we were struck by how many people left pondering them. Even though it was implicit, “if the drama had an underlying educational purpose...this actually helped the performance find a focus or structure,” and I believe these small, poignant lessons allowed the audience to feel that what they were witnessing ‘mattered’ (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p.70).

The gender differences within the cast had several compelling influences on the show and among participants. In the beginning of the casting process I was hesitant to cast any cis-men; I felt that my background in Women’s and Gender Studies as well as my desire to uplift women’s voices was more important than a completely open casting process. However, I decided not to limit my range of human experience, nor did I want to narrow the thematic possibilities of the show. I refused to cast with a binary approach, whereby I had the same number of men as women, which I felt would be exclusionary to persons who are genderqueer, transgender, or agender. I allowed for the possibility of an eclectic grouping.

Another feminist consideration in *speak!* was the creation of physical and mental spaces which promoted safety and inspired creativity. Feminist theorists such as bell hooks (1996), SuAndi (2006), Beatrice Allegranti (2011), and Nancy Mairs (1996) discuss the necessity of spaces where women can connect, share, and learn from one another. Space was a vital aspect of the project in several ways: physical, geographical, rehearsal and performance spaces; emotional, creative spaces; technological spaces; and safe spaces.

Physical space, in the sense of the tangible elements of the rehearsal and performance spaces, were necessary in order to have a place in which to enter, a place which was ours to cultivate and manipulate. I had to find a room which was clean, bright, and made the actors feel comfortable and safe. However, our limited budget meant that it was much easier for me to find a room on Saint Mary's campus to meet, rather than a more neutral rehearsal space around the city. This meant that cast members who were not Saint Mary's students had to navigate unfamiliar terrain and that some members were more familiar with the space than others. My requirements for the space included a whiteboard on which we could brainstorm, movable desks and chairs so we could clear a wide space for performance, and a somewhat secluded location far from the noise and attention of other students. The members of the cast seemed comfortable in the rehearsal space; on the questionnaires, they reflected that the space "felt private," was "spacious enough," and that they "liked the whiteboard in McNally" (QR). Establishing a solid, foundational physical space was key for the cast's comfort; privacy concerns would have hindered the next level of space-making: creative, emotional space.

Also imperative was a performance space which would carry the show well. As a cast we decided we wanted a performance space which was small and intimate, and many members also wished to perform off-campus, as they believed the show deserved to have a more universal audience, as opposed to only attracting students. After some research we decided to book a space called The Living Room, a small black-box theatre in the city which has thirty seats. The actors reflected that they were very pleased with the intimacy of the performance space, explaining that, “I felt very comfortable as I prefer that kind of small theatre,” and “it was no problem being in any of the spaces” (QR). Pincus (2005) describes the difference between mainstage and second stage types of theatre in the table shared below (p.150):

Figure 9.1. Characteristics of the main-stage and second-stage teaching and learning

Main Stage	Second Stage
Emphasis on answers	Emphasis on questions
Lecture and debate	Dialogue
Competitive	Collaborative
Knowledge transmission	Knowledge construction
Canonical texts	Non-canonical texts
Individual rewards	Group accomplishments
Individual achievement	Social justice

Our performance space was second stage because it was not under the purview of an established commercial theatre, such as the local Neptune Theatre. Verbatim theatre is more likely to embody the principles of second stage theatre, and the goals of my research project also strove to practice and achieve these objectives. Perhaps feminist theatre is more likely to be a form of second stage theatre, at least feminist theatre which

embodies values such as collaboration, dialogue, and social justice, as listed above.

Though often considered less professional or commercially viable, second stage theatre creates spaces that extend support to communities and try to start conversations.

Verbatim theatre is rarely carried out in the same geographical spaces where the events being narrated or performed took place. Especially in plays like *speak!*, *The Vagina Monologues*, and *Body and Soul*, the collage-like nature of all the stories means that it is impossible to set the scenes in the very places the events happened, for “the location is almost invariably changed, except on the rare occasions when the piece is performed on site” (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p.62). Specifically in *speak!*, the play would have had to take place in various bedrooms, on my childhood farm, in Seoul and St. Petersburg, in Quebec and Winnipeg, and at a camp in Bouctouche, New Brunswick, all simultaneously. We re-created these spaces with imagination and exposition, and in doing so claimed them anew, sometimes empowering ourselves through our articulation of spaces which were painful to revisit in our memories. For example, Emily’s story “Camp Wildwood” involved a complex staging that was embedded into her story. She explains that:

Before we went into the woods we all had to line up in our cabin groups and be silent. Then someone would start singing this psalm that went “Be still and know that I am God” and then everyone would join in until (*all join in and continue singing while Emily talks*) we were all singing together near the ocean and the forest at sunset. It was the most beautiful, unifying experience (Appendix D, p.xxxii).

As a unit, the 6 remaining actors lined up behind Emily and sang as we talked. This helped transport her, the rest of the collective, and the audience back to her beloved memory.

Geography influenced Faith's experience of the show in particular. Faith struggled with feeling that she was living multiple lives; for example, she did not want to invite some of her closest Canadian friends to the play. During the second focus group, Faith explained that because she was living in Canada, she would have fewer people supporting her in the audience than she would have had in South Korea. She shared with the cast that while she had moved to Canada in order to be more openly a lesbian, many of the friends she has made here are from her church, and do not know about her sexuality. Therefore, she felt she could not invite them to the show, unlike her many friends in South Korea, who embrace her. This conflict was felt deeply by Faith, and she shared on the Facebook group: "they are just wonderful people. But, I thought 'Can I invite them to SPEAK?' NOOOooooo, I can't... (frustrated and a little bit sad?..._-)" (FB). Despite the relationships with the people from her church being meaningful and important to her, Faith felt trapped by the tension between her religion and her sexuality. Perhaps if she had not spoken about her sexuality in the show, she could have felt comfortable inviting them, but then she would not have felt as though she was being "herself." Faith had to reconcile her happiness being in Canada with her sadness that her South Korean friends could not support her through an emotionally taxing experience.

After establishing a comfortable physical space, I needed to work with the cast on forming a creative space in which we could build trust and support one another. bell

hooks (1990) calls this type of space one of “radical openness...a margin—a profound edge...one needs a community of resistance,” (p.51). This space needed to be feminist in particular because it needed to support and respect the intersectional differences among the cast. We needed to recognize that we had significant differences and similarities, but that ultimately our common goal was the same—to share creatively with one another in the hopes of writing and performing a “good” play. This creative space was both tangible and abstract; as hooks (1990) notes, “spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice” (p.54). The ways in which we practiced creating these spaces, such as the ethic of caring and call-and-response methods, are described in the chapters on Ethics and Representation.

I never intended the process of the play to be therapeutic. However, I believe there are some transformative benefits in telling personal stories, both within a safe, collective space and, publicly, in a theatre. Speaking from personal experience, I can say that sharing my story of relationship abuse was transformative and empowering. hooks (1990) explains that “we are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world” (p.55). It was incredibly affirming to speak my experience in my own words, to feel that my story was acknowledged and heard by the audience members. I could hear people crying in the audience, and I received an outpouring of support from many spectators after performances. In her chapter on the political body, Allegranti (2011) discusses the phenomenon of self-editing,

whereby subjects will edit their stories literally during performances. Acknowledging that this concept comes from hooks (2000), Allegranti explains that the “feminist project needs to encourage women to believe they are self-defining agents and that they can enhance their personal power” (p.181), and that one way to achieve this is to allow women the “creative space” to tell their stories in their own way (hooks, 1990). By supporting the other cast members to embrace their power, to control for themselves what they told, how they told it, and who they told it to, I accidentally found myself embracing it too, and experiencing a level of personal authority and control I had not felt before.

Allegranti’s concept of “self-editing” influences my analysis of power. She describes how, by exchanging who has directive power in performance (giving the actor the agency to decide their blocking and delivery), the actor may feel more empowered to self-edit within the performance itself based on in-the-moment, spontaneous decisions. I certainly did. Though I never edited that particular story, there were some elements of the script which I was hesitant to share in front of certain audience members. For example, when my parents came to the show, I warned them out loud before certain monologues, so that they had the option to plug their ears or not pay attention. This was liberating and made that performance unique for the audience, as they felt that they were conspiring with me in my storytelling. Allegranti defines agency as a “dimension of power...to provide a sense of body ownership and power to be self-defining” (p.181). This feeling of agency, provided to me by our practice of creative space and the location of our theatre as “second-stage,” gave me the courage to share this story and move the audience, as well as myself. I was able to control how my stories were heard, and by whom, by giving

spontaneous warnings and creating dialogue with certain members of the audience; for example, after I shared my story from “Christmas,” my dad said aloud “it’s true!” which garnered laughs from the audience and supported my experience.

A marked change since the time (1990s) when hooks and Hill Collins developed their work on ethics of caring and creative space making, is the growth and radical change in technologies which provided us with an online space where we could connect 24/7. The resources I utilize from Hill Collins (1996) and hooks (1990) are from a time when the internet was less of an accessible space for sharing and discussion. I used both Facebook and Google Documents as resources for group discussion, storytelling, and collaboration. The Facebook group had its first major function as a story-sharing space during the two weeks we could not meet, and we changed its settings to “private” to ensure that no other persons could find or attempt to join the space. We never relied on Facebook as our sole way of connecting; some scholars like Saldaña (2005) fear that:

With the advent of technology, people would need more actual human touch to compensate for the electronic, distancing effects of the computer.

When we feel we have become tired of or jaded by the superficiality of mediated interaction, we seek more fulfilling social interaction, a connection to authenticity (p.8).

Instead, Facebook became a space to share things we forgot during rehearsal, my way of documenting what we accomplished in rehearsal for those who were absent, and our space to ask group questions and incite discussion.

Google Documents also provided a unique space for creativity, this time as a sharing space for our written stories. I created a master document for the script, which the actors could add comments and questions to outside of the rehearsal space. We also created a master document for the many, many stories we wrote, to have them all in one space. Some participants began using Google Documents to create their own, separate spaces, for crafting their smaller group pieces. Using Google Documents as a communication tool allowed us to create virtually (pun intended) free of the need to be together in person. Sitting on my couch at home, I could see other members of the collective editing in real time, and we could converse with one another about particular sections at any time of day. This worked particularly well during the days leading up the due date for the finalized script. Rather than spending hours in one room looking at a single computer or printed script, the actors could check in and out at times which suited them while I spent time crafting and honing the finer details. Cohen-Cruz (2010) wonders whether “the internet can provide a sense of community,” and while I am not clear this could be accomplished exclusively online, I must insist that our Facebook and Google Documents groups encouraged our growth as a collective by giving us virtual spaces to share ideas outside of rehearsal time (p.98).

Some cast members felt the need to have a space that was secluded, which I initially did not understand. As I wrote in my field notes on March 30th, “one thing I’ve been noticing is the cast’s desire to have the door closed. I often forget and when I do someone asks or just goes to shut it. I think I forget that this space is sacred as well as challenging for some. I need to remember this” (FN). As a seasoned performer and avid

sharer, I did not mind keeping the door open during rehearsals—however, I began to realize that for the cast, having the space shut off to outsiders was imperative to creating a safe space. Many feminists employ this kind of closed space to create safety for participating members—while this can have an exclusionary effect (e.g. excluding transgender voices from women’s communities), our safe space was designed for our creative community. Until we were ready to perform, no one else was invited into the conversation.

During the performances there was an instance in which a member of the collective did not feel safe. Several audience members were sitting in the front row taking pictures and video of the performance, without having asked us for consent. Aja was highly upset about this, and I had to ask them to stop recording. It turns out that they were Faith’s friends, and she had asked them to record the performance for her, so that she might have copies. However, this was a clear breach of trust for Aja, who did not want her stories documented by persons who were not cleared by the group. I was sorry that Aja was made so uncomfortable by these actions, and though I took the steps to stop any further camera or video recording, I felt that I had failed the participants by not outlining rules earlier in the process. However, perhaps the process gave Aja the space to speak her mind about the filming in the moment; the trust I worked to establish throughout rehearsing and performing may have created the space for her to follow her discomfort and voice it to the group. This incident demonstrated to Faith that she needed to confer with the group before pursuing actions that had the potential to affect all of us; the safety of the group needed to remain a priority. Fortunately, this was the only incident which I

noticed explicitly affected the safety of any of the members of the collective during the performances.

Ultimately, the question of feminism was brought to the group members during the final portion of the project. When I asked in their questionnaires if the cast felt that the project was explicitly feminist, I got a range of responses. Some people felt that “there were too many stories about things related to being a woman,” or that rather, gender hardly came into play at all, stating, “while many of the stories were female centered I felt it was about what it is like to simply be a person and our experiences with that. Gender came into play quite a bit but I feel like we were all fighting against it holding us down” (QR). The question of “feminism,” or what a “feminist” show would entail, was perhaps too broad a question for the cast, as all the responses were so varied. Some people thought that the show could only be considered feminist if it was exclusively about women; others believed it was more about expressing feminist ideals. Perhaps if we had agreed on a specific definition for “feminism” at the beginning of the process, this question would have been easier to answer. Instead, the openness of the question left the cast with only their personal definition, which garnered varied and unrelated responses. One response answered the question by explaining:

I definitely do—because of both the strong women’s voices that were given a space and volume, but because of the reimagining of the creative process and the democratic/shared responsibility. I loved that we were all able to comment and critique and have control over our own voices (QR).

This response has given me the courage to define my project as explicitly “feminist.” I believe that, because my project is centered on the experiences of the participants, their input on this question matters. I practiced feminist methods of community making and information sharing, and worked through theoretical concepts such as standpoint theory in order to promote and encourage unique perspectives. I worked to be as cast as inclusively as possible, in order to offer a range of perspectives in gender, race, sexuality, ability, and age, which allowed for the concept of “pluralities” to thrive. Though the overarching themes of the play were not “feminist” in that they were not explicitly about the advancement of women, the embedded lessons in the actor’s stories provided an opportunity for feminist conversation and embodiment. One actor responded to the question of feminism within the play by acknowledging that “I think the project can be called feminist. But there are also other core things to it. I like words ‘representation’ and ‘voice’ to describe the project” (QR). I respond to this quote by suggesting that representation and voice are inherent in feminist values, particularly the ones I worked to instill in my method. How the actors felt represented in this project, both in terms of ethics and feminism, will be discussed further in the Representation chapter.

Representation

“After all, what is a true, authentic, honest and honouring representation?” (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p.39)

In the third, and final, chapter of my analysis, I explore how my efforts to practice ethical and feminist principles influenced the representative nature of my project. As stated in my literature review, I define representation as regard for how participants feel about the depiction of themselves, or their self, as “character,” within the script and on the stage. Representation as a concept stems from the influence of both ethical and feminist practice. Inherent in the concept of representation are the complexities of the concepts “authenticity” and “truth.” Whether or not one feels completely represented within a piece of theatre is highly subjective. Representation is certainly more complicated than a simple yes or no response to the question: did I feel represented? There are key sub-questions to be asked: did I feel my voice was heard? Was I able to express myself without fear of prejudice or discrimination? Did I feel my stories were properly shared and understood? Did I feel safe enough within the rehearsal and performance spaces to share my stories? As the actors and I went through the rehearsal process, we encountered significant and varied experiences of representation, or lack thereof. Throughout this chapter I explore representation in relation to my practice of call-and-response models, the use of pluralities within experience, self-policing and editing, and my personal struggle with representing my “self.” Ultimately I have come to

the conclusion that my version of representation, in conjunction with being “authentic,” is highly entwined with the tenets of standpoint theory, in that it is subjective and reliant on individual perspective.

I felt that the task of “representing” myself during the rehearsals and performances was a complicated endeavor due to my plural roles of researcher, guide, and actor. I had much inner debate considering whether I should present myself during performances as “the researcher”, or just as another actor. I also needed to constantly remind myself of my subject position in a cast where our positions, privileges, and marginalizations were highly varied and complex. As a white, middle-class, educated, able-bodied Canadian woman, I sometimes struggled to feel that my experiences or stories were meaningful or worth listening to in relation to other cast members whose subject positions were different from my own. However, as a queer, plus-size woman who suffers from anxiety, I also believed I could contribute significantly to conversations related to those identities. I struggled not to place value judgments on my contributions, as well as those of the cast; who was I to say that someone’s experience was or was not valuable enough to share? Ackroyd and O’Toole (2010) explain that a heightened awareness of one’s social location is imperative to proper practice of verbatim theatre. They state that:

Now there is a greater awareness that identity and the notion that this is not a simple or singular noun will influence how we perceive the world and report on our findings. As researchers we must consider that it is crucial who we are when we ask questions and assess how much we can

empathise with the views of those with different identities and in different cultural contexts (p.44).

I had to repeatedly remind myself that there was no such thing as “good” or “bad” stories when practicing a method that values the experiences of the cast, over a purportedly “good” play. The ways that people spoke about themselves in relation to our themes (body, sex, religion, and tradition/culture) were directly related to their own social locations, and therefore were not open to an interpretation of value from me, or other participants. I needed to consistently remind myself that no one had the right to interpret another participant’s story for them.

For example, we had many discussions about whether we wanted to work toward a common moral or lesson within our play, but it seemed impossible to find a single “truth” that spoke to our multiplicity of experiences. It was not so much that we meant for the audience to leave having learned a single lesson, “but rather that there are a range of truths in representation,” and by acknowledging the pluralities that exist around us, we might achieve a common understanding that our social locations are personal and immediate (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p.60). We came to understand that we did not want to force a moral (by teaching a hard-hitting lesson) but instead worked to share stories that would hopefully provoke reflection in the audience members.

Below, I will discuss our practice of the call-and-response model in relation to our interactions, beginning with the CAR experience in our rehearsal processes. Closely related to the ethic of caring, CAR is intended to create dialogue and inspire creative energy among group members. By practicing CAR within an ethic of caring, the speaker

is able to feel safe knowing that they will be responded to with understanding. As explained in the Ethics chapter, story circles were an example of a CAR practice embedded into our rehearsals. Story circles required a response from the active listeners, as listeners became storytellers, telling stories inspired by the original speaker. Hill Collins (1996) explains that, “the fundamental requirement of this interactive network is active participation of all individuals” (p.233). For one participant to reject the group’s call for sharing, by responding with an off-topic discussion point or disagreeing with a topic, would throw the group into confusion, and could certainly render the session useless. There is a high level of trust required in CAR, and to participate in the storytelling is an act of vulnerability. Though the participants were informed that they were never required to share beyond their level of comfort, even by saying “no, thank you,” a member of the collective is participating by being present, by responding to calls, and by acknowledging the stories of others. I found that the CAR model helped initiate discussion among group members, as it forced everyone to think of a response during each round of storytelling. All members needed to actively listen to the speaker so that they could respond affectively. This inspired more nuanced stories and established a deeper level of trust among group members.

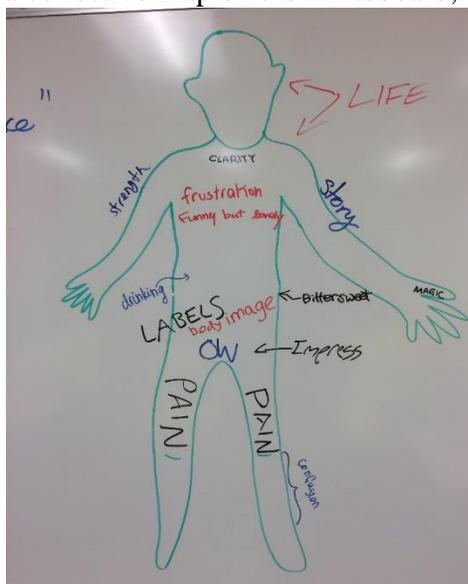
We also practiced Hot Seat, though these sessions were very low energy and sometimes felt forced, as the participants were often unsure which questions to ask. On March 3rd, the second day we practiced Hot Seat, I wrote in my field notes that, “I’m worried that just sitting and sharing gets boring and long but I’m not sure how else to glean material” (FN). In order to combat the low energy, I came up with the idea of

“mapping” ourselves, physically, onto a page. We first did this with the theme “Sex”; I gave everyone a piece of paper and coloured pens and markers, and asked them to map their experiences with “Sex” in any way they saw fit. What came out of the mapping was eye-opening, for methods of mapping were completely different for each person. Some people (such as myself) mapped chronologically, creating a linear path from birth to the present, with important dates or years highlighted and expanded upon.²⁷ Other people mapped thematically, exploring the ways various important events in their lives were related and grouped them together accordingly. Some maps were extremely specific, naming people, places and events in detail. Others were broad, and instead considered the big picture in the ways sex influences life. The colors we chose, the events we decided were important, and the links we made within our lives was a way for us to express ourselves creatively and ended up being one of the best methods for us to share our stories. The power of mapping was evident in the time it took to complete the exercise; I had originally scheduled it for an hour, but “the creation and sharing of maps ended up taking the full three hours!” (FN). Each person took their time going through their map, and we honoured their space by allowing people to go from beginning to end before responding to their call. They are also a perfect example of how my definition of representation is an individual experience; each map was entirely different from the next, as the participants chose unique ways to describe their experiences. Their maps, completely individual, were “authentic” to the cast members; each map showed a

²⁷ This could be done through larger font, inserting pictures, or bullet points to explain or give prompts for a particular life event.

different participant's "truth." To honour the privacy of the cast, I will not share pictures of the sex maps here.

We practiced mapping again with the theme "Body"; I provided everyone with an outline of a body shape on individual pieces of paper, and people mapped their experiences onto the androgynous form. We then took the process a step further by creating a cast map; after each participant stood up to tell a story from their personal body map, they added words to a collective map on the whiteboard, as shown here:



This helped us see our stories come together collectively, and provided more tactile and visual members of the cast with the chance to "see" how our stories could overlap and support one another. The body map provided a new way for us to call and respond; as we wrote our words on the board, the responses from the cast were varied and provided insight into how we felt about these words. We would gasp, or express our agreement, or laugh, as words were inscribed on the body. Like the sex maps, I kept the body maps for later inspiration during storytelling sessions and script writing, in case any cast members wished to review their maps to remember a certain story or prompt.

Again I must insist that this project was not explicitly intended to be therapeutic, and yet I found moments where it appeared to work this way. I believe that mapping and sharing our maps aloud deeply affected the group and opened us up in profound ways because we found a creative visual outlet for our stories; I believe it was the beginning of the “shift,” the moment when we began to be a collective and not merely a group of random people. Mapping ourselves individually, and then together, caused us to create something outside of ourselves as individuals and together as a group; by sharing our stories and then adding to the collective map, we began to see ourselves as a unit. Cohen-Cruz (2010) describes Marty Pottenger’s three properties of the aesthetics of engaged performance—questions, listening, and creativity—and how they influence the devising process. Listening and creativity are particularly relevant here, for she says that, “being listened to so actively...is so rare and deep as to affect us ‘physiologically’... [and] having people make art as another way of responding to the questions” is a valuable technique which helps bind them as an entity (p.73). I believe mapping encouraged our sense of togetherness, and helped us make decisions about the script and performance. My field notes from that point in the collaborative process describe most of our decisions as “unanimous” (FN). We began to create a show that represented us both as individuals and a collective.

The second level of the CAR model involves my relationships with the cast members. As their fellow actor as well as project guide and researcher, I had to constantly evaluate my relationships with the other members of the cast. I wanted to instill a sense of trust and friendship in the group as part of an ethic of caring, but at the same time I

needed to reiterate my position as researcher. This meant that while I was free to be friendly and playful with the cast, I had to work to not play favourites or to exclude anybody from my attention. This posits an “interesting question about the relationship of the researcher-playwright to his or her sources, the witnesses of the ethnographic community,” as it is not as cut-and-dried as a typical research study (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p.76). The strict boundaries between researchers and study participants usually inherent in academic studies were not as present during my project; we would joke that we knew bizarrely personal information about one another on one hand, and yet we were not strictly “friends” on the other. One particular rehearsal, March 31st, is an excellent example of my frustrating simultaneity. Sophie approached me after rehearsal to discuss her irritation with a fellow cast member, and I felt trapped in my role as researcher because I could not commiserate. I gave her the space to speak her mind, acknowledging her exasperation, while also reiterating that as the researcher, it would be unwise for me give my opinion (FN). I felt that I could not entirely engage with her for fear of playing favorites or taking sides, and this barrier discouraged a level of trust that perhaps might have been beneficial.

Barriers between project leads and participants were not only evident in my project— studies of *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Laramie Project* both describe significant problems in this regard. Cooper (2007) discusses Ensler’s conversation with the lesbian sex worker she profiles in ‘The Moaner’ monologue, and how the sex worker did not feel represented by Ensler’s interpretation of their interview. She explains that:

Ensler recorded what her interview subjects said, but audiences encounter these women only through her retrospective dramatization of their stories. The playwright speaks not simply for, but as, the women characters who come to voice in her play: their truth is the truth she projects on their behalf, though they appear there—fully embodied on stage—before the viewers’ eyes (Cooper, 2007, p.753).

Cooper also points out that, while Ensler acknowledges in a 2001 print version that the sex worker does not feel represented, her re-imagined piece leaves the sex worker feeling the same way. In the new monologue, the sex worker speaks about sex with vaginas, and the people (specifically, here, women) who have them, and the interviewer, presumably Ensler, expresses discomfort about lesbian sex and never directly converses *with* the sex worker, but rather *about* her. Cooper says that, “Ensler distances herself from the lesbian sex worker’s words at the same time that she narrates them” (p.751). There is no call-and-response here; Ensler does not use the piece as a means to engage with the sex worker in conversation to help her share her experience. It is as though the sex worker makes calls that Ensler refuses to engage with. This can only happen because Ensler thinks of herself as author and contributors as data providers, whereas I have explicitly worked to overcome that model by inviting the storytellers to collaborate and create the project with me.

The Laramie Project is another example of the way call-and-response was misused or not even implemented in attempts to draw information from willing (or unwilling) subjects. Though the members of The Tectonic Theatre Project went to

Laramie, Wyoming intending to find the “truth” of the story of the murder of Matthew Shepard, they often did not consult with the townspeople who were the subjects of the play. Gibson (2011) admits that the TTP does try to be somewhat transparent by including the researchers as characters in the play, and acknowledges that the group “does go some way towards foregrounding its assumptions, by firstly foregrounding its construction process,” but insists that the group ultimately fails at representing its subjects (p.10). Gibson explains that “hundreds of hours of tapes were gathered, but only the most relevant or important were used without apparent negotiation with the subjects,” an ethical abomination she finds hard to ignore (p.5). Additionally, though the TTP include an important quote from Father Roger Schmidt in the script, they clearly do not heed his request. She shares the quote at the beginning of her study, which reads: “and I will speak with you, I trust that if you write a play of this, that you say it right. You need to do your best to say it correct” (Kaufman, 2001, in Gibson, 2011, p.1). Though one could argue that there is no “correct” way to share such a story, I must insist that the TTP did not heed Schmidt’s call, indeed responding by leaving Laramie, Wyoming after two years of interviews and discussions with townspeople to write a play about them, not with them.

The actions of these artists significantly shaped how I constructed my method, as I worked to reject and refine their apparent values. By committing to facilitate the representation of the voices of the people who told their stories, I was engaging with and valuing the lived experiences of the participants. I worked to actively listen to their concerns (calls) and answer them with consideration (responses). Unlike Ensler, I did not

insert my reactions to the stories within the show. Unlike the TTP, I worked *with* the participants, as both guide and fellow actor, rather than designating myself as “true” creator and sculptor of the performance. Both Ensler and the TTP did research, or rather, theatre, *on* people. As quoted in the Methods chapter, I intended, and worked hard to, do “research *with* people” (Leavy, 2007, p.168, *emphasis in the original*), which I believe allowed for a more “authentic” representation of the actors than one which was channelled through a separate creator.

The audience-cast relationship is the final example of the way the CAR model can be effected. During the second focus group, there was much discussion about the audience response to the show. I described in the Feminism chapter how the audience was quick to label the actors as “brave”; however, calling us brave also had the effect of naming us as “performers” rather than as “people.” By saying “I could never do what you do,” the audience created a distancing effect.

Here I must ask: were we really playing ourselves, or rather fictionalized portraits of the “selves” we wished to share with the audience? Ackroyd & O’Toole (2010) share a quote from Brown, who “reminds us that all drama is a fiction, even verbatim theatre, where every word of the dialogue is provided by the participants” (p.64). By picking and choosing which versions of ourselves to share, were we not being somewhat dishonest about who we really were? Later in the chapter, I will discuss this complicated question in greater detail. Some of the actors, particularly Sansom and Sophie, believed we needed to share stories that showed us as bad people, to complicate our versions of our

“characters”. I then come back to this quote from Ackroyd and O’Toole as I consider the importance of the concepts of “authenticity” and “truth.”

We all found it surprising how much the audience laughed. Though we knew we had written a funny show, we had become so used to the stories and their delivery that we were taken aback by the laughter and energy coming from the crowd. Katerina shared that, “I didn’t know they were going to laugh so much... and relate so much to what we were saying” (FGR). On March 24th I wrote that “I love how much humour we’re putting into the show. It’s going to be really funny,” but I was not prepared for such a response (FN). One way we managed the show’s funny and serious parts was by rotating them; we tried to follow funny with serious, or group with monologue. This helped keep the show fresh and made it feel more dynamic and interesting. We also needed to remember that although our show’s overarching theme was “we change,” there was no “crisis, climax, or resolution to work for” (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p.77). Instead, we had “a lot of fragments [we] had somehow to connect,” and we did so by structuring the play into four “acts” (p.78). The audience was then able to understand that we were making different kinds of “calls”; sometimes they were funny, sometimes sad, sometimes a mix of the two. They responded to each call anew, aware that we were sharing pieces that were woven together through common themes. We needed to trust the audience to receive our calls, and to respond to them.

This trust, however, needed to reflect our awareness that the audience was intelligent, and able to read into the meanings and embedded lessons in our stories. Call-and-response, and verbatim theatre created using this method, “leads viewers to actively

question the meanings represented onstage and to extend that critical attitude to the values they encounter in daily political life” (Kester, 2004, cited in Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p.22). In our discussions during the second focus group, we expressed our surprise at how much the show moved the audience emotionally. We were surprised by the realization that “the spectator’s subject position shapes what they bring to the theatrical experience and, by extension, what they take from it,” and the revelations we experienced due to the audience’s reactions were surprising and cause for reflection (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p.22). Sophie shared that her partner, who she considers rather emotionally detached, was up all night “thinking about all of our stories” (FGR). Sansom shared that one of his close friends felt that “it was like going on multiple dates with everyone...awkward first interactions... I know everything about these people” (FGR). The audience responded with their joy, but also with their fear, or frustration, or anger; this was rarely directed at us, and more often directed at what we had gone through. People came up to me and told me that they strongly related to my part in the “Exer-size” scene; people approached Aja to say that they have similar feelings to the ones she shared in her monologue “Hair.” As Aja put it so eloquently, “this show is like a hook to start other conversations with people outside of us” (FGR). This is how the CAR method should work; our show was full of calls, and afterward the audience extended their responses so that we might join in conversation with them.

Personally, I most clearly remember the audience’s tears. This was the kind of response that needed no words; it was a blessing to know that I moved someone in the audience so profoundly that I could hear them sniffing as I spoke. Each night as I told

my story about “the Pirate,” one or more audience members had powerful emotive responses. This fuelled my storytelling; I could hear their responses in the moment and it imbued my speech with even more weight, and by the last night I found myself choking back tears as I spoke. This created a sort of positive feedback loop. As I became more emotional, the audience become more emotional, and we rode the wave of the story together each night.

The creation of the script was a collective effort, which I spearheaded but could not have achieved without the stories shared by the cast. Our storytelling sessions lasted approximately six weeks, and we spent many hours discussing how to format them, which monologues and dialogues to place where, and how to frame our “acts.” After brainstorming how to combine and synthesize our stories and memories into a cohesive performance piece, we ended up following Saldaña’s (2005) description:

Several newer dramas [which] feature multiple characters in multiple vignettes presenting a series of monologues and/or small group scenes that portray significant moments from their lives—*ensemble plays* or a ‘polyphonic narrative’...with a spectrum of voices and no leading roles (p.17).

Rather than giving each actor a section of the play which they could use however they chose, we sprinkled the show with shorter monologues and scenes and collaborated on ways to link our stories. This connects back to my discussion in the chapter on Ethics, when I explained that inherent in FPE is the desire to collaborate and build community. A

show founded on call-and-response requires multiple voices and support for them; by individualizing our parts in the play, we would have no way to respond to one another.

One important decision we made was to create prologue and epilogue sections, which nestled the stories in a beginning and an ending, during which we shared the show's mandate, and our final thoughts. Saldaña (2005) explains that "the addition of a prologue and epilogue provided a contextual framing and reflection, respectively, about the story," and I believe ours did this by sharing our collective vision for the play with our audiences: an acknowledgment that our memories, and our selves, are ever changing, and that the messes we create within our lives are part of being human (p.15). We also framed the acts of our show by beginning each section with a round of answers to questions related to the theme. For example, during the "Body" section, we answered the questions "How do you maintain your pubic hair? When did you first begin menstruating? What is your favourite body part on yourself?" (Appendix D, p.xii-xiii). We never stated the questions aloud, but merely began answering them while standing in a line. By the third round the audience understood that a new section was beginning, was able to deduce some of the questions by our answers, and were intrigued by the questions they could not figure out. By framing the sections of the play with questions-and-answers, the show took on a conversational tone. This also got the audience thinking about their own answers to the questions, an almost subliminal call and response.

My struggle to combine my roles as researcher, actor, and guide was particularly difficult during the creation of the script. I was a contributor to the piece while also leading the editing and formatting sessions we held during rehearsals. Additionally, I had

to learn to cautiously edit the script, for a script that was too long or too short, or that was incoherent, would be uncomfortable for the audience to witness. I had to make numerous decisions about balance between representation and aesthetic. While Saldaña (2005) posits that “lengthy sentences or extraneous passages within an extended narrative, whose absence will not affect the quality of the data or their intent, could be edited,” I have to wonder if these “extraneous passages” are actually worthwhile in their uniqueness to each cast member (p.20). Is it really right for me to place value judgments on people’s chosen words? Ackroyd & O’Toole (2010) acknowledge that researchers who create verbatim theatre might have “playwright’s instincts” which could influence the script’s dramatic potential, but that heavy editing “takes away from immediate authenticity” (p.65). If I had followed the parameters of my methodology of Feminist Performance Ethnography exactly, I would have trusted the cast to find their own voices and to write their stories well, while keeping my opinions to myself. Instead, I constantly struggled to keep my mouth shut, and often did not succeed. As I wrote in the Ethics chapter, I worked on wrangling myself into order by changing my vocabulary from “you should” to “you could,” but this minor change does not fully absolve me from my desire to control and to shape the script at my will. Saldaña (2005) insists that “many participants *can* speak on their own behalf without interpretive intervention from a fieldworker. Just as an ethnographer asks, ‘What is this research about?’ ethnodramatists must ask, ‘Whose story is it?’” (p.19, *emphasis in the original*).

One statement that has stuck with me throughout the project—something that I wanted to actively work against—is offered by Judith Thompson in her preface to the

script for *Body and Soul*. Thompson did not participate in the process as a fellow actor, despite the fact that she is a middle-aged Canadian woman, the demographic of her entire cast. Though she was involved creatively as playwright and director, her ability to cut and paste these women's words into a script of, ultimately, her own creation, makes me wonder how these women felt about their stories being molded into Thompson's vision of being "stage-worthy." She claims that "most of the women are very powerful writers, though they are not playwrights," a qualification that Thompson reserves for herself as creative lead on the project (p.viii). This statement thus solidifies Thompson as the "expert," even though the stories are derived from each of the women's own experiences. This reminds me of Saldaña's insistence that "you don't compose what your participants tell you in interviews, but you can creatively and strategically edit the transcripts" (p.20). His contradictions are numerous, but here in particular, they make my head spin. I therefore must put his words back to him: whose story is it?

While I did lead the formatting and script-creation sessions, the cast members absolutely had a say in what monologues they wanted to include, questions they wanted to answer, and parts they believed would go well together creatively. Ackroyd & O'Toole (2010) claim that "there must be a selection process about which dialogue will be used and this is inevitably dictated by the ethnodramatist," and I must firmly disagree (p.45). Though I *lead* these sessions, I never *dictated* them. Instead, I sat at the computer as we discussed and debated our way through the creation of the script. Whenever I wrote about the script-making process in my field notes, I would consistently use the word "we," such as "we've created some structure and boundaries" and "we managed to put more of the

play together” (FN). I see this as a reflection of my commitment to the script being a collaborative effort.

However, my influence could easily have swayed the actors to omit or include stories, phrases, words, or even punctuation. A researcher should consider their, “controlling power... not allowing the data to speak for itself, not trusting the reader or audience to come to the right conclusions, inserting her own rhetoric to exert control” (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p.56-57). I found it very difficult to trust the actors to make the “right” aesthetic decisions; I believe that my desire for control would have made it difficult for me to trust *any* participant, and my weakness here caused some problems. As late as April 24th, when we were opening on April 28th, I wrote some very troubling remarks in my field notes, saying that:

I’m having so much difficulty toeing the line between member of the collective and researcher/leader. I am at a point where I want them all to stop talking. I’m terrified that the show is bad, that they’re bad actors, that the stories suck, that it’s preachy and lame and obvious...about two weeks ago we were all so loving and having fun. We were joking and laughing. Now everything feels tense (FN).

Though this entry was not the norm, I was incredibly honest and direct in this record. Were my fears valid? Not particularly. I was certainly not practicing an ethic of caring in this moment, nor acknowledging the individual subjectivities of the cast, but rather projecting my fears about my own contribution’s worth onto them. I was also influenced by worries about how the way I, as researcher, might be judged by their efforts. This is

one reason it was important to include a “Researcher’s Note” in the program (Appendix E); I wanted the audience to be aware that there was a researcher, and therefore, an evaluative component to the play. As Ackroyd and O’Toole (2010) explain, “there would be something dishonest about not exposing the researcher and her explicit role,” for I did not want to be “guilty of obstructing the co-constructed nature of the data and her authorship” (p.56-57). In that moment of writing described above, I was allowing my aesthetic concerns to outweigh my desire for authenticity. As I wrote in my field notes the next day, “I really got wrapped up in the show aesthetic rather than respecting and caring for the participants. I acknowledged my stress and harsh demeanour and apologized for letting my stress take over everything” (FN). Though I worked to repair my relationships with the cast by apologizing for allowing my stress to overcome me, I have to wonder if that experience impacted them more negatively than they would say.

Our creative decisions were made based on our collective experience as artists. Some of the actors have more advanced theatre training, while others have training in dance or music, and we all contributed unique creative elements to the show. Much verbatim theatre is created once data has been collected and the ethnodramatist sorts through their material to create the show individually; our stories were told and melded with the script at the same time. I believe this follows Cohen-Cruz’s (2010) assertion that “verbatim cannot simply reproduce recorded voices without the creative act of creating performance from the lines that will engage an audience” (p.25). By stating explicitly that the stories being told in our rehearsals could eventually be included in a performance, the actors paid greater attention to the questions, “what is included and what is omitted?”

What is placed next to what and what are the implications of this placing of text?” (Ibid.). We were able to think about our experiences in music, dance, and theatre to produce different and therefore more interesting visuals, blocking styles, and combinations of stories, and we discovered that “layers of meaning in the data could be revealed through theatrical artifice, such as parallel storytelling, moments of stillness and comic timing” (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p.70). By sharing and combining our creative talents, we were better able to represent our stories and our selves, both as unique individuals and as an imaginative unit. At the same time, this is related to the question of fictionalization and character, for by aesthetically crafting the show I questioned if we were detracting from the “truthfulness” of our experiences. I was comforted by the words of Ackroyd & O’Toole (2010), who claim that “fictionalisation is not the same as a retreat from authenticity. It can enhance the truthfulness of the research as well as the experience of the audiences” (p.64). *Speak!* was ultimately a fabrication. We created the play; it did not emerge organically from our lives. There was a purposefulness to it, a desire to create and play, an impetus from myself as researcher to do this project. However, it came from our personal reflections on who we are as people, and in doing so we made art that, while fictional in its aesthetic, was authentic in its desire to be shared.

When creating ideas for set, we discussed how to meld our notion of “creating self” and “immediacy” with a background which would support us and our stories. Sophie suggested we use “a device throughout the show, like a word or object, that would help connect the stories. We discussed several options including a talking stick, a ball, or filling a jar” (FN). In the end we chose to bring in artifacts from our own lives, or

something to represent these objects, which are meaningful to us. We would bring our object onto the stage with us, and after speaking we would leave it on the stage as “evidence” or “mess.” This caused the stage to become slowly cluttered as the play progressed. This choice of props was deliberate, and “the artifacts’ presence and use by actors portraying the character-participants provide small-scale visual spectacle yet strong inferences for an audience” (Saldaña, 2005, p.29). At the end of the show, we referenced this clutter as a collective, explaining that “this is the debris of which we speak,” thus bringing the show back to the notion that our lives are messy, always changing, and ever constructed by our present selves and our memories (Appendix D, p.xlix). This unique choice was received well by the audience and was a simple way for us to communicate our collective message. It is another example of fictionalization; the act of leaving treasured items lying around in space is certainly not typical of most people (except for very messy ones), but was an aesthetic choice that bolstered our authenticity. These items represented us as individuals, and then by leaving them all together in the same space, as a collective.

Sometimes the actors were worried that what they were saying was unimportant or inauthentic, and therefore they were not representing themselves or their experiences with honesty. During the second focus group, Sansom shared that “at a certain point I sort of questioned why are we telling these stories?... nothing was surprising or new...because they were so spread out... I sat on my stories for such a long time” (FGR). This relates to Heddon’s (2006) discussion of the political potential of sharing one’s lived experiences in performance, also reviewed in the Feminism chapter. Sansom, like some other

participants, constantly questioned the value of his stories. Why would audiences want to hear what he had to say? Heddon (2006) asks the reader to “reflect on the use of the ‘personal’ in performance and its relationship to the political” (p.130). Sansom’s “Boys are Gross” piece brought his personal experiences into the realm of the political simply by speaking them aloud on the stage. The piece, which can be found in the script (Appendix D, p.xviii-xix), is a commentary on the contradictions in social expectations of masculinity. As Sansom was the only male-bodied and male-identified cast member, his experiences of gender were unique to him, and speaking openly about the pressures of masculinity in a Western, mostly white, middle class context is certainly brave. When asked why he chose the stories he did, he explained that this piece was with him from the beginning, and that “those were the stories that came to my head... so of course they mean something to me, they’re the first thing that came to my mind” (Sansom, FGR).

Central to any discussion of representation is the question of authenticity. Over and over during the process, the actors asked the same type of questions: Am I being authentic? Am I being true to myself in my stories? Do these stories really define me? I could not answer these questions for them, but merely guided the actors in finding the stories they felt represented themselves. Their stories needed to fit into the themes we had chosen (body, sex, religion, and tradition/culture), everyone needed to have roughly equal stage time, and each actor had a limited number of minutes from which they could share themselves. These parameters were the guidelines by which the actors chose their stories, and this yielded varied results. Below, I will discuss authenticity, and each actor’s

struggle to be “authentic,” foregrounding issues of voice, self-hood, agency, and truthfulness.

One question about voice came out of our discussion of telling our stories from memory. During rehearsals, I often found myself cringing as participants filled their speech with words such as “um,” “like,” or “ah,” as they worked through how to tell or explain their story. This brought up an important debate on policing one another’s speech and the classed, racial, and gendered problems that come with such an endeavour. In particular, Emily was very vocally against trying to “fix” people’s speech problems. Her background in psychology and linguistics gave her a unique perspective on this problem, and she explained that pointing out Sophie’s frequent use of the word “like,” for example, was a sexist act because women are more likely to use these filler words and is therefore an example of policing women’s speech patterns in order to bring them into line with men’s. Though there was “no clear consensus on how we [felt] about fillers, tics, and qualifying,” we agreed that people’s stories would come across much more clearly and articulately once we began writing our stories out on paper or on the computer (FN). I also insisted that all participants could change their stories at will during the performances, and encouraged them to use their voices “authentically” in this way. This brought beautiful results; during our performances, we felt comfortable engaging with the audience more naturally. Though we had a script to follow, we were not bound by strict rules, and could say “I know, right?” or “You can laugh, it’s okay,” to the audience, thus creating calls and encouraging responses.

This is very much in opposition to *The Vagina Monologues*, which imposes strict rules about following the annual script exactly, and also imposes certain vocalizations on particular monologues. As discussed in the literature review, Cooper (2007) explains how Eve Ensler often dictates how characters should speak with accent markers, but often only when the characters in question are racial, cultural, or class minorities. Thus the standard is white, middle-class, educated, and Anglo-Saxon, though this is never stated outright. My desire for a diverse cast meant that I refused to impose such strictures, as explained in the Ethics chapter. Instead, I led the cast through exercises to promote proper breathing and volume; I did not want to change their voices, but I did want the audience to be able to hear them.

Two of the cast members, Katerina and Faith, speak first languages other than English, and this created unique moments of miscommunication. During the second focus group, Faith explained that “I’m not a native speaker, so this is not my language, so I feel kind of second person if I speak in English... so I can just ‘I’m a lesbian, I’m a gay’,” meaning that she found it easier to use English terms in relation to sexuality than Korean ones (Faith, FGR). She later shared on the Facebook group that:

What I wanted to say was speaking other languages itself already made me feel like an actor. For instance, I also can speak Japanese and basic French, and I found I become a different person from a person who speaks Korean whenever I speak those languages. Especially for English, I recently realized the fact seriously while I participated in SPEAK! project. As I live in Canada now, I have to communicate with people in English everyday.

Sometimes I am very exhausted at night, because speaking English feels like acting all day long (Faith, FGR).

Faith's experience of English during *speak!* was entirely different from that of most other cast members, who speak English comfortably and fluently. Though I encouraged her many times throughout the process to speak in Korean, Faith was determined to present herself to an English-speaking audience in English, and in doing so was often exhausted by her efforts. This is an example of a cast member who felt as though she produced a fictional form of herself as opposed to one that is more "authentic"—yet, it was her choice to speak in the language she wanted, which in itself is an authentic decision.

The notion of being one's authentic self was also continuously discussed and debated during our rehearsals and performances. It was what caused much of Sophie's anxiety during our discussion of the show's underlying message. During our second focus group, Aja explained that her stories were being "being dictated by my recent self, not a past self," and explained that there were "things that I might not have talked about... my grandmother died in January... if this show had been before that, I wouldn't have had anything for [the Grandparent's section]" (FGR). This speaks to the immediacy of the show, its temporal nature and how our selves change over time. I also had a moment of feeling that I was not being true to my "self" in the show. I explained to the participants that the "Exer-size" scene did not feel authentic, saying:

After one rehearsal I felt like shit um, when we had done it, because I was like 'I don't feel authentic, like this feels way too happy' ... and here I am

being like yeah I exercise, ah, body positivity... that's why I changed that bit at the end... (Heather, FGR; Appendix D, p.xvi-xviii).

In the scene, I originally described my feelings about living in a fat body; however, my little speeches always ended with an uplifting or positive remark, and this began to feel untrue to myself as I was also struggling with body image issues at the time. A week before the show, I went ahead and changed it to feel more "real," and after that I always ended the scene feeling authentic in my presentation of my self.

Some of the participants felt that it was incredibly inauthentic of us to only portray ourselves as "good people." Sansom and Sophie both expressed their desire to present a full-facet version of personhood, good and bad, and attempted to do so through their monologues "8 Months/Asshole" and "Being Pretty Trash" (Appendix D, p.xxxix-xl; p.xxi-xxii). These monologues were brave in their admissions, and both actors felt complicated emotions about them. Sansom was taken aback by audience reactions to his monologue, particularly one from his friend. When asked what she thought about his story of manipulation and debauchery, she told him "well, I wasn't surprised" (Sansom, FGR). Sophie expressed her fear about sharing a monologue that was anxiety-provoking. She explained that:

Maybe I picked the stories I picked, because I knew they were fairly concrete... I think that made it easy to tell maybe. I wasn't worried about it transitioning, maybe, as I brought it up again and again... most excited and most scared to do [trash] monologue because it could change the most because it meant the most... the other things felt safe (FGR).

Sophie's "Being Pretty Trash" monologue expressed her guilt about her white privilege and used the lovely metaphor of garbage to express her fears of inauthenticity. Both of these monologues shared experiences of feeling like not-so-good people. Particularly for Sophie, however, expressing her fears can be considered a radical act, as explained below through a discussion of Allegranti's (2011) concept of agency.

I come back to Allegranti's (2011) work in autobiography here, which, as I explained in the Theory chapter, encourages individuals to claim ownership of their bodies and the terms they use to define themselves. She asks: what does it mean to be, or does there exist, an "authentic Woman"? Allegranti asks the reader to question when they are moving or speaking authentically and when they are mapping others speech or movements onto their own bodies (p.122-123). Sophie's monologue, which can be found in the script (Appendix D, p.xx-xxi), provided her an opportunity to reject her experience as a "pretty woman" and to express her fear that underneath she has an ugly personality. She states in her monologue that "my bag is white, and it's always been treated really nicely by all the real humans around me. The bag means a lot to most people—but I know I am tricking them. For I... am trash" (Appendix D, p.xxi). Sophie took control of her story to question her authenticity *in an authentic way*. Though she coated her monologue in metaphor and subtext, the message was clear. Sophie is doing what audience members described as "brave": she is being honest about her fears that, as a woman with privilege, she does not deserve love or respect. This is Sophie's standpoint, her in-the-moment representation of her perceived authentic self. Though other people, myself included, might wish to convince Sophie that she is a good person, that is our own

view of who Sophie is. Project guidelines dictated that it was Sophie's choice (pun intended) and therefore I would insist that this moment is incredibly authentic, and incredibly brave.

These examples of allowing ourselves the space to create our "selves" are all part of how the show encouraged agency. Allegranti defines agency as a "dimension of power...to provide a sense of body ownership and power to be self-defining" (p.181). Part of this power involved the ability to express ourselves as individuals with as much emotion and caring as we pleased, in a community that was determined to care and emote along with us. Sophie explained that "these are things I care about, so I want to tell the truth;" Katerina shared "the stories I chose they are still meaningful to me" (Sophie & Katerina, FGR). Part of the creative process was acknowledging our fear, and having the agentic power to follow or reject the fear that came from telling our stories. Cohen-Cruz (2010) explains that:

Art includes a combination of distance and intimacy: distance because in the rehearsal room or performance space one is safe from the horrific act and can mull it over, not merely react; intimate because one is among a community of people who are deeply affected and struggling to come to terms with it (p.72)

I refused to force the participants to share intimate or personal details; rather, it became their choice to divulge or to remain silent on specific topics. They had control over their own stories, their own words, their own representations. We felt both intimacy and distance with the audience and with each other; as I described above, the audience left

knowing some extremely personal things about us, while not knowing other important defining factors of our personhood.

Lack of representation, a noted anxiety of mine throughout the process, was acknowledged by some of the actors. This absence of representation was experienced due to a lack of self-advocacy and feelings of obligation. Sophie shared during the second focus group that:

a lot of the things that I think are most important to me didn't make it into the categories... I remember really wanting to have something in bodies about my own image struggles, and then we ended up picking the body and exercise thing to think about, and then I felt like mine didn't fit with other stories... but I feel like it was still important... I didn't really advocate for myself in that section (FGR).

Sophie's confession that she wished she had advocated for herself more was certainly disheartening. I had tried to promote individual control and power over our stories, and yet I wonder if Sophie's youth (she was the youngest of the cast) as well as her procrastination fed into her anxiety for self-advocacy. She was also the cast member which expressed the most anxiety and stress about story selection; on March 31st I wrote in my field notes that "Sophie also discussed her difficulty choosing which stories to tell because she doesn't feel that any of them are important enough" (FN). By the time she made her decisions, she may have felt trapped by those decisions, for the quick pace at which rehearsals moved meant that we had due dates for stories and needed to finalize a

concrete script to begin blocking. By the time the show happened, Sophie's anxiety was very high, and afterward she shared that:

After the first show, I felt really bad...like I was like, 'I suck, I'm not telling anything real about myself, I'm making all this up, all of this is fake, I'm not feeling any of these things'... I was really really concerned that I wasn't accurately representing myself... these things aren't the most important about me (FGR).

Her experience had almost a spiralling effect, for her initial fears were not expressed and therefore only got continually worse as the process moved forward. I wish I had could have quelled her fears or guided her into a better place with new stories which felt more personal and representative, but I believe that my own participation in the show meant that I was too focused on my performance and work to give the actors the attention they perhaps deserved. This experience is one in which I question my full participation as cast member as well as researcher.

Sophie and Emily shared that they felt their stories must be "bad" because they might not have met expectations of being "enough"—sad enough, scary enough, funny enough. They wondered if it was okay to tell a story that was not "enough," with Sophie explaining, "after the first night I felt really really bad... after going up there for the first night and telling the Osheaga story, what if someone in this audience has been brutally raped? I feel like a whiny little bitch right now" (FGR). Emily followed this confession with one of her own: "that's how I felt the first night too because I was up there complaining about my body problems and there was a woman in the audience in a

wheelchair and I was like ‘this feels really shitty’” (FGR). There was a disconnect between their feelings about their stories while writing the script and their stories when performed in front of an audience. Actors within ethnodrama are thus “forced to wrestle with the tensions between the biographical and the fictional, which raises questions of authenticity (is this story still true?)” (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p.64). When performed in front of an audience, Sophie and Emily felt their stories became inauthentic and unimportant, which led to them feeling less in control of their story and its possible impact. They wondered why the audience would care what they had to say, especially audience members who might be suffering or experiencing something worse than what the actor was describing in their own stories. What they needed to understand was that “an ethnography is almost invariably a snapshot” (p.77). It is impossible to culminate a person’s entire lived experience within one play, especially one that is attempting to share the experiences of six other people.

Katerina and Aja both had complicated feelings about the stories they ended up telling. Katerina explained that “I felt funny about my cultural stories... I felt obliged to give tribute to [St. Petersburg]” (FGR). It is possible that Katerina’s standpoint as the only Russian cast member caused her to feel that without explaining her background, the audience might be confused by her accent or her place within the show’s diverse structure. Aja felt that her story in the Sex section, titled “Consent,” was inconsequential. She confessed that “it felt really weird that there were important things I was talking about, and then these trivial things... and it just felt like it was really tiny” (FGR). This was an admission which we felt we could not assuage, except to state that we truly

appreciated her “tiny” monologue, and found it beautiful. I answered Katerina’s question “do these stories actually define me?” with a hearty: I do not know (FGR). I fully believe that this question can only really be answered by the actors themselves, though as for my own participation, I would say that these stories do not *define* me, but provide a snapshot of what it has been like to *be* me, while acknowledging that this experience will certainly change, and already has.

Saldaña (2005) insists that “there are no established or standardized criteria for what constitutes ‘good’ ethnodrama. The success of a work is jointly constructed and determined by the participants, the artistic collaborators, and their audiences” (p.14). I do not believe I could truly quantify the success of the project, though I will share some of the responses of the actors, to the question: “Did you feel represented in this project? Why/why not?” Three of the actors responded entirely positively; for example, one exclaimed, “Yes! I literally got to talk about myself constantly. Pretty great for a self-obsessed person” (QR). Two others felt that they were too rushed to choose their stories with consideration. One actor explained that “I did choose my stories a bit in rush (schoolwork, work, being busy...), so at some point I did question if these stories actually represent me” (QR). Finally, one actor was truly unsure how to encapsulate the experience as representative of themselves. They shared:

I am unsure if I feel represented—in some ways I definitely do and in other ways I feel the total opposite. I don’t think I understood how much I wanted to share the things I didn’t share until it was too late. But the

stories I told are definitely important and meaningful and worth sharing (QR).

At various times throughout the process we questioned how “authentic” or “truthful” we were being about our selves or our memories. In the beginning of the project I had unformed opinions about the significance of these concepts; however, over time I have begun to explore and understand the complex problems behind declaring something or someone as entirely “authentic.” Therefore, I share again a quote from Ackroyd and O’Toole (2010), who explain that:

All drama is a fiction, even verbatim theatre, where every word of dialogue is provided by the participants...however, fictionalization is not the same as a retreat from authenticity. It can enhance the truthfulness of the research as well as the experience of the audiences (p.62).

I will conclude this chapter by considering a personal debate I had with the scholarship I have on authenticity-versus-aesthetic in verbatim theatre. As I have already explained, my values within the model of Feminist Performance Ethnography dictate that the actors, and whether they felt represented, cared for, and supported within the project, were my ultimate concern. However, I cannot deny that I desired to produce an aesthetically pleasing show. A combination of the two would have certainly been ideal. The main scholars in verbatim theatre whom I have referenced throughout this thesis—Ackroyd and O’Toole (2010), Cohen-Cruz (2010), and Saldaña (2005)—express very different opinions on how “authentic” verbatim theatre really needs to be. Cohen-Cruz (2010) insists that this form of theatre “must benefit the people whose lives inform the project,

not just promote the artist,” a mantra which I repeated to myself often and with intensity, and yet which was not fully satisfying due to its lack of consideration for aesthetic outcomes (p.2). A quote from Saldaña (2005), which reflects an entirely different approach to verbatim theatre:

This may be difficult for some to accept but, to me, theatre’s primary goal is neither to educate nor to enlighten. *Theatre’s primary goal is to entertain—to entertain ideas as it entertains its spectators.* With ethnographic performance, then, comes the responsibility to create an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative (p.14, *emphasis in the original*).

How could I possibly follow a mantra such as this, when I claimed to care so ferociously for the actors and their experience throughout the process? This declaration troubles me greatly, for I cannot help but be swayed by its insistence that theatre is foremost for entertainment, and for education or healing second. Perhaps this is why the actors sometimes felt as though they were not entirely authentic or represented within the show—because it was a *show*. We wanted the audience to enjoy the stories we told, and this influenced the stories we chose. This may have caused our thesis to be inaccurate; rather than professing “we are who we are now” it could be “we are who we think you’ll enjoy.”

I believe that Ackroyd and O'Toole's (2010) notion of authenticity as an individual experience is the most congruent with my project aims and outcomes. They ask:

What is history and what makes it authentic? Does personal ownership of stories guarantee their authenticity? Recorded history often hides behind the cloak of authenticity without revealing that it is told from a given perspective (p.174).

Initially, I believed that there was an overarching narrative that could be unearthed, that would define us, as a collective, as authentic (or not). I have now become convinced that authenticity, truthfulness, and honest representation are much more complex, that these concepts are influenced and interpreted by us as individuals. We are subject to our own experience of an authentic self, and can only really speak for our own authenticity. The question of whether or not the participants were accurately represented within the show is highly subjective, ever-changing, and reliant on individual interpretation. Perhaps the actors felt they were or were not represented at the time; perhaps they feel differently now. I can confidently say that I took great pains to instil a sense of agency, of the ability to take ownership of one's work, and that I worked hard to convince the actors that they were masters of their stories. However, I cannot claim to have been perfect in this project, as my own personal desire for control was evident. I struggle to understand that "we may never get it all right" but Ackroyd and O'Toole's (2010) warning that "we can still get it wrong, and getting it wrong can mislead, distress, [and] disempower," allows me to take a breath and feel that there were more successes than failures (p.28). At no point during

the project, particularly during the second focus group and questionnaires, did any of the actors claim that they felt mistreated, distressed, or disempowered. They brought up some concerns, and possible changes for future projects, but their overall positivity and enthusiasm for the project's outcomes motivates me to claim that, at that time, during the performances, we represented ourselves as best as we knew how.

Conclusion

Creating theatre based on people's lived experiences is a uniquely complicated endeavour. A dedicated and caring practitioner of verbatim theatre must (in my opinion) consider the individual emotional labour that participants put into the show, the group dynamic insofar as the members actively care about one another, and the overall aesthetic value of the performance for the audience's enjoyment. Without one of these three elements, a play could run the risk of harming those involved, on an individual and group level, or could be considered boring, lacklustre theatre. However, it is also paramount that a practitioner consider which element is more important: the wellbeing of the cast, or the success of the play? I would argue that the human potential for harm is much greater than a play's potential to entertain.

For the thesis research, I intended to create a play that was considerate of the ways that ethnodrama can manipulate, misrepresent, and misconstrue the stories of the people it exhibits. My original intent, and the framework through which I approached the project, was to read scripts, reviews, and research to craft a method for creating theatre that was "better" than the verbatim plays I had experienced before. When I say better, I mean in the way the playwrights depicted the people for whom they purported to care. However, I since reconsidered this judgmental approach, and stopped trying to view my work in contest with other theatre. Instead, I have tried to approach the plays from a place

of inspiration and guidance, to consider how they were created and how I might pull ideas from their methods. After intense research and consideration, I crafted a method of theatre-making called Feminist Performance Ethnography, which I believed was capable of being practiced ethically, representationally, and within a feminist theoretical framework. I could not simply create this method, however; I needed to put it into practice.

For two-and-a-half months, I practiced FPE with the intent of producing a play. I auditioned for a cast, chose six diverse individuals, and began storytelling and script writing. We blocked, directed, wrote, produced, and starred in the play; we had a stage manager that helped us with scheduling and organizational tasks. We practiced theatre-making methods such as story circles, hot seating, and call-and-response models; I invented the method of “mapping” to help us work in new, creative ways. Sometimes there were disagreements among cast members; sometimes I was controlling and out of line. I worked to implement an ethic of caring, which placed the needs of the cast above the aesthetic potential of the show in terms of importance. I kept field notes, in which I documented my experience of the process. We held two focus groups, at the beginning and end of the process, to discuss our experience. The cast filled out a confidential questionnaire to answer questions about their perceived representation within the show. After months of seeing each other several times a week, sharing deep, personal information with one another, and supporting each other through difficult memories, the project ended. Once again, I functioned as the lone researcher, reflecting on and

analyzing the mountain of data that could not encapsulate the incredible experience of creating theatre with these wonderful, intelligent, creative people.

Here lies a problem between the thesis and the play that I did not consider until late in writing the thesis itself: the split between academics and theatre. One of the most surprising things about the thesis is that, in a way, I still retain control over the words and stories of the cast members. The play and the thesis are separate entities; during the process of creating the play, I worked hard to fully support and encourage collaboration. I wanted the actors to feel represented within the play, to feel that their stories were told and heard accurately. Yet, once the play was over, I was free to write about them, and their experience during the play, on my own, with no regard for how I was representing them academically.

This raises further questions about the intellectual potential of my research method. I never considered asking the cast to read my thesis and proofread my version of events, and realistically this would be an enormous endeavour. The play took focus in such a way that I never considered the methodological questions inherent in *academic* work founded on representing other people. Given more time, more resources, and more space to consider these questions, maybe I would have felt capable of inviting the cast to participate in my academic creation as well as our theatrical one. This brings me to consider the way I approached establishing ground rules and consensual sharing during our storytelling sessions. Though I professed my intention to create a safe, inviting space for people to share their stories during rehearsals, I did not necessarily endeavor to make

my thesis itself a space where the actors would feel safe. Instead, I wrote about them with some sense of detachment, analyzing their emotive calls and responses to the process.

Though I may have been an empathetic theatre practitioner, was I an empathetic researcher? Was I able to create a method of verbatim theatre-making which was ethical, feminist, and representative of the actors? Feminist Performance Ethnography, as a collection of methods for storytelling and sharing, proved to inspire and motivate myself and the actors to collaborate and care for one another. Story circles and call-and-response models allowed us to form important trust bonds and establish a group dynamic that was motivating. However, FPE is a daunting series of exercises. Commitment to an ethic of caring at all times can be exhausting emotional labour, and combining it with the expectation of a performance has the potential to generate anxieties related to authenticity and self-worth.

I struggled with what I call “caring fatigue;” I was often exhausted at the end of rehearsals because I was focusing not only on my own emotional journey but those of the cast. I was hyper-vigilant of their feelings, sometimes to the detriment of my own contribution to the piece. I felt that sometimes, I began to “show” empathy rather than “feel” it. I worked hard to adhere to the strictures of my method, but in doing so I removed the human element of the work. I performed empathy because I insisted that it was vital to the project, but the researcher is human too; how realistic was it to expect me to be “on” all the time? As I explained in the “Ethics” chapter, I sometimes broke, and the guilt I felt at lashing out or making mistakes was consuming.

I cannot say definitively that FPE in its entirety was a method which solved the ethical, feminist, and representative problems of ethnodrama. This would be a bold statement in not one, but two disciplines which are ever-changing and developing complex solutions to social and theatrical problems. In the world of theatre, FPE has the potential to be practiced among theatre groups that want to practice team-building and collaboration; in the world of gender studies, FPE could be practiced in universities to help classrooms consider and develop intersectional approaches to academia. Neither discipline need to use the methods of FPE with a performance in mind as an end goal; perhaps it would function better without the pressure of audience expectation.

That being said, the expectation of performance motivated me, as an actor and a researcher, to consider the aesthetic value of verbatim theatre. Certainly plays such as *A Chorus Line*, *The Vagina Monologues*, *The Laramie Project*, and *Body and Soul* have proven that ethnodrama can be an aesthetically pleasing and critically popular mode of theatre. Traditionally, verbatim theatre is created with the intent to share, particularly with a focus on social justice advocacy. The inspiration of working toward a common cause by sharing personal stories of triumph and tribulation has the ability to motivate verbatim theatre-makers; but who is doing the telling?

Here I consider the value of the process as separate from the outcome. Sometimes the need to write and rehearse the actual play got in the way of our creative experience. As the project's lead, I found myself focusing not on the stories being told but on the deadlines that needed to be met. I had to consider rehearsal and performance space, advertising and selling tickets, while consulting the collective in order to come to

agreements on each and every choice being made. The value of the democratic process meant that every member felt their voice was heard; the flip side was that our energies were spent taking a half hour to choose poster designs instead of telling stories and creating further trust bonds. Feminist Performance Ethnography could function as a pedagogical tool without the goal of a final performance; instead, practitioners can use these methods to build strength in their community or academic groups.

I maintain my conviction that any theatre that wishes to share the lived experiences of other people must collaborate with those people on how their stories are shared. It is vital that people have a say in how they are portrayed; if consent is freely and enthusiastically given to allow different actors to portray the stories shared, then some ethical concerns are swayed, because the choice was placed in the hands of the storytellers. A bottom-up model is key in order to support and encourage ethically sound work, as the storytellers are consistently consulted on their portrayal. This is also supported by an ethic of caring, which acknowledges the individuality of the subjects, supports their emotions, and encourages empathy.

I contend that a practitioner who wishes to create verbatim theatre should do so with a feminist view. FPE certainly encompasses feminist values, and I argue that feminist practice is both inherently more ethical, and encourages representation, particularly a feminism which acknowledges the intersectional identities of the subjects involved in creation. Uplifting marginalized voices, by giving them a platform from which to be shared, is certainly a feminist undertaking.

Finally, verbatim theatre cannot be considered legitimate without working to represent the people who shared their experiences. Bottom-up models, ethics of caring, and feminist practices all support a representative practice. Call and response models, which encourage active listening and responding, also inspire collaborative, representative work. Measuring representative practice is more ambiguous than ethical or feminist work, because of the deeply personal and individual way that people consider themselves “represented.” Once again, a bottom-up model comes into play; by continuously referring back to the storytellers, and gathering their input on their own representation, practitioners can collaborate with them to ensure they feel as represented as possible.

I have considered several recommendations for further research or practice in this area. I would encourage discussion of the therapeutic potential of FPE methods, particularly in group cases. I believe FPE could have uses in community-building strategies, in theatre, academia, or outreach. I would appreciate a study which removed the researcher from the creative process to study the potential differences from my work. If my work is replicated, I would suggest even greater commitment to consent during the storytelling process, to ensure enthusiasm among participants. I strongly caution any researchers or practitioners to consider the emotional labour necessitated by this type of work; one must provide care for the people in your study. If a researcher intends to take these methods to a community of which they are not a member, I implore them to consider whether their efforts, while noble, are necessary. Perhaps supporting a member

of that community to lead instead would be beneficial to the study and to the people of that place. Remember that you are not giving voice; you are passing the microphone.

These three factors of my research question (ethics, feminism, representation) are so closely intertwined, so deeply influential on one another, that separating and analyzing them individually proves difficult. I created my analytical chapters as separate entities for ease of organization, but the distinctions between them are superficial at best. Verbatim theatre has the potential to share powerful stories, and practicing it with an eye for caring about the contributors only increases that potential. It is important that theatre practitioners and researchers alike consider how their actions influence their storytellers, and I hope that my work will contribute to the creation of increasingly caring practices.

Bibliography

- Ackroyd, J., & O'Toole, J. (2010). *Performing Research: Tensions, Trade-Offs, and Triumphs*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- Allegranti, B. (2011). *Embodied Performances: Sexuality, Gender, Bodies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Aston, E., & Harris, G. (2006). "Feminist Futures and the Possibilities of 'We'?" In E. Aston & G. Harris. *Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory* (1-16). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Attenborough, R. (Director). (1985). *A Chorus Line* [motion picture]. United States: Columbia Pictures.
- Basu, S. (2010). "V is for Veil, V is for Ventriloquism: Global Feminisms in The Vagina Monologues." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 31(1): 31-62. DOI: 10.1353/fro.0.0075
- Beck, J., Belliveau, G., Lea, G., & Wager, A. (2011). "Delineating a Spectrum of Research-Based Theatre." *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(8), 687-700. DOI: 10.1177/1077800411415498
- Bennett, M. (1985). *A Chorus Line*. Retrieved from: http://www.lionplayerstheatrecompany.com/uploads/1/0/7/6/10768537/a_chorus_line.pdf
- Buch, E.D. & Staller K.M. (2007). "The Feminist Practice of Ethnography". In S.N. Hesse-Biber & P.L. Leavy. *Feminist Research Practice* (187-221). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Cohen-Cruz, J. (2010). *Engaging Performance: Theatre as Call and Response*. New York: Routledge.
- Collins, P.H. (1996). "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought." In A. Garry & M. Pearsall. *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy* (222-248). New York: Routledge.
- Cooper, C. (2007). "Worrying About Vaginas: Feminism and Eve Ensler's the Vagina Monologues." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 32(3), 727. DOI: 10.1086/499084
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): (1241-1299). URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039> .
- Ensler, E. (2007). *The Vagina Monologues*. New York City: Villard Books.

- Gallagher, K., Wessels, A., & Ntelioglou, B.Y. (2012). "Verbatim Theatre and Social Research: Turning Towards the Stories of Others." *Theatre Research in Canada*, 33(1), 24-43. URL: <http://www.erudit.org/revue/tric/2012/v33/n1/index.html>
- Gibson, Janet. (2011). "Saying it Right: Creating Ethical Verbatim Theatre." *NEO: Journal for Higher Degree Research Students in the Social Sciences and Humanities* (4), 1-18. URL: http://www.arts.mq.edu.au/documents/hdr_journal_neo/neoJanet2011_2.pdf
- Haraway, D. (1988). "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14(3): (575-599). DOI: 10.2307/3178066
- Harding, S. (1986). *The Science Question in Feminism*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- . (1996). "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques." In A. Garry & M. Pearsall. *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy* (298-320). New York: Routledge.
- Hartsock, N. (1983). "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism." In S. Harding & M. Hintikka. *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (283-310). Netherlands: Springer.
- Heddon, D. (2006). "The Politics of the Personal: Autobiography in Performance." In E. Aston & G. Harris. *Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory* (130-148). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- hooks, b. (1996). "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness." In A. Garry & M. Pearsall. *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy* (48-56). New York: Routledge.
- Kaufman, M. (2001). *The Laramie Project*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Kelly, J. (1984). *Women, History, and Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Leavy, P.L. (2007). "The Practice of Feminist Oral History and Focus Group Interviews". In S.N. Hesse-Biber & P.L. Leavy. *Feminist Research Practice* (149-186). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Lorber, J. (2012). "Standpoint Feminism," in *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics* (183-206). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mitchell, G.J., Dupuis, S., Jonas-Simpson, C., Whyte, C., Carson, J., & Gillis, J. (2011). "The Experience of Engaging with Research-Based Drama: Evaluation and Explication of Synergy and Transformation." *Qualitative Inquiry* 17(4), 379-392. DOI: 10.1177/1077800411401200

- Mitchell, K., & Freitag, J. (2011). "Forum Theatre for Bystanders." *Violence Against Women*. 17(8): (990-1013). DOI: 10.1177/1077801211417152
- Moll, S. (2011). "Judith Thompson's *Body and Soul*: Tactics of Theatre in the Corporate Strategy." *Canadian Theatre Review* 148, 43-48. DOI: 10.1353/ctr.2011.0076
- Monks, A. (2006). "Predicting the Past: Histories and Futures in the Work of Women Directors." In E. Aston & G. Harris. *Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory* (88-104). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Pincus, M. (2005). "Learning from Laramie: Urban High School Students Read, Research, and Reenact *The Laramie Project*." In *Going Public with Our Teaching: An Anthology of Practice*, ed. Thomas Hatch, 147-165. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Saldaña, J. (2005). "An Introduction to Ethnodrama". In J. Saldaña. *Ethnodrama: An Anthology of Reality Theatre* (1-36). Walnut Creek: AltaMira.
- Sinding, C., Schwartz, L., & Hunt, M. (2011). "Staging Ethics: The Promise and Perils of Research-based Performance." *Canadian Theatre Review* 146: (32-37). DOI: 10.1353/ctr.2011.0035
- Smith, D. E. (2005). *Institutional ethnography: A sociology for people*. Rowman Altamira.
- Snyder-Young, D. (2010). "Beyond 'an Aesthetic of Objectivity': Performance Ethnography, Performance Texts, and Theatricality." *Qualitative Inquiry* 16(10): (883-893). DOI: 10.1177/1077800410383119
- . (2013). *Theatre of Good Intentions: Challenges and Hopes for Theatre and Social Change*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stern, J.D., & Del Deo, A. (2008). "History: Every Little Step." Retrieved from: <http://www.sonyclassics.com/everylittlestep/>
- Stern, J.D., & Del Deo, A. (Producers & Directors). (2008). *Every Little Step* [motion picture]. United States: Sony Pictures Classics.
- SuAndi. (2006). "Africa Lives On in We: Histories and Futures of Black Women Artists." In E. Aston & G. Harris. *Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory* (116-124). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Sullivan, G. (2006). "Research Acts in Arts Practice." *Studies in Art Education* 48(1), 19-35. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25475803>
- Svich, C. (2003) Moises Kaufman: 'Reconstructing History Through Theatre' - An Interview, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 13:3, 67-72, DOI: 10.1080/10267160302726
- Thompson, J. (2010). *Body and Soul*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press.

Appendices

Appendix A: Audition Call

AUDITIONS

S P E A K

A student-led research project from Saint Mary's University, and an exciting volunteer opportunity!

- Are you interested in creating original theatre?
- The intent of this project is conceptualizing the complexity of gender. Where/when/how is your gender?

Dates: February 3rd & 5th Time: 5-7 p.m.

Location: McNally Main 209, Saint Mary's University

Wear comfortable, loose clothing

*We welcome all gender identities to audition for this show. We encourage sexual, racial, and abled minorities to audition. Ages 18+ only.

Email Heather Baglole at heatherbaglole@gmail.com (principal investigator) or Chelsea Dickie (stage manager) at chelsea.dickie@gmail.com to sign up for an audition time, or with any questions about the project or audition process.

REB file #16-119

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

Please fill in the chart based on your current, or expected, schedule. Color in blocks when you are NOT available.

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
12 pm							
1 pm							
2 pm							
3 pm							
4 pm							
5 pm							
6 pm							
7 pm							
8 pm							
9 pm							
10 pm							

****We understand that people's work schedules may vary. Just a general idea of afternoon/evening commitments is helpful!****

Appendix C: Consent Forms

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Speak: Questioning Representation, Ethics, and Feminism in Verbatim Theatre
SMU REB #16-119**

**Principal Investigator: Heather Baglole
Women and Gender Studies
Saint Mary's University, 923 Robie Street, Halifax, NS, B3H 3C3
Phone: 1-902-303-2749
Email address: heatherbaglole@gmail.com**

**Supervisor: Dr. Michele Byers
Women and Gender Studies
Saint Mary's University, 923 Robie Street, Halifax, NS, B3H 3C3
Phone: 1-902-420-5869
Email: byersmichele@gmail.com**

INTRODUCTION

The Principal Investigator is a Master's student with Saint Mary's University in the Women and Gender Studies program. As part of the thesis, the Principal Investigator is conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Michele Byers. This research has been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

You are being invited to take part in this research study. As a voluntary participant, you will be asked to attend rehearsals, meetings, and performances as scheduled by the stage manager. Attendance at these events is vital for the completion of the project, but allowance will be made for sickness or personal issues. Participation will not affect course work, grades, or employment as relevant to the individual.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

- The purpose of this project is to research the ethical, representative, and feminist problems present in existing verbatim theatre plays. This type of theatre is created using information gathered from interviews, group meetings, and discussions with participants. Also called performed research or ethnodrama, this genre of theatre is often practiced by activists among disadvantaged communities or with groups who share a common trait or situation. Popular examples of verbatim theatre,

which I discuss and analyze in my thesis project, include *The Vagina Monologues*, *A Chorus Line*, *Body and Soul*, and *The Laramie Project*.

- You will be asked to join in creating an original play using methods of verbatim theatre. As a member of the collective, you will be asked to participate in storytelling and brainstorming sessions. This play is intended to be a collective creative project, and each member of the collective (including the Principal Investigator) has an equal share in the final script.
- The Principal Investigator has chosen to take part in the collective as an actor in order to share in the intimacy of personal storytelling—this is a vital part of her investigation into the ethics of verbatim theatre methods. The Principal Investigator, by inhabiting dual roles as researcher and theatre-maker, is aware that her involvement is complicated. The intimacy and collaborative nature of theatre allows the Principal Investigator to inhabit these two roles, and she is acknowledging her intention to balance these roles.
- The final, collectively-agreed upon script will be performed in front of an audience after a period of rehearsals. Besides just writing a play collectively, the Principal Investigator wants to understand and study the impact of performing one's stories live.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO TAKE PART? (OR WHO IS BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?)

Who can?

- Any persons can take part in the study provided they have an interest in the purpose of the research and are over the age of 18.

Who can't?

- Persons under the age of 18 cannot participate in this study.

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATING MEAN? (OR WHAT WILL I HAVE TO DO?)

Where?

- The research project will take place in two as-yet-undetermined locations: the rehearsal space and the performance space.

What?

- You will be asked to attend an informal focus group to discuss play ideas, hesitations about and expectations of the study, and to compile a questionnaire. You will also be asked to participate in a discussion on confidentiality within the rehearsal space.
- You will be asked to attend rehearsals approximately 3-4 times per week, at 2-3 hours a rehearsal, for approximately 2.5 months. At the end of these months, there will be a performance period, and you will be asked to take part in the performance with the rest of the cast.
- Finally, you will be asked to join in another informal focus group to end the study. The group will discuss various outcomes as well as participant feelings and observations of the project. You will then be asked to complete the questionnaire confidentially, and send it to the Stage Manager, who will forward them to the Principal Investigator.

- This study is part of a newly created method called Feminist Performance Ethnography, and will combine elements of focus groups, oral history, and ethnography.

When/How long?

- The study should last no more than three months. Sessions will happen at a rate of about 3-4 per week, at 2-3 hour intervals. You must consider your involvement in this study much like actors in a play, who are expected to attend rehearsals, be punctual and present, and commit to the creative process. Consenting to this study is thus a continued process. By entering the rehearsal and performance spaces, you are re-consenting to participate in the project each time. When you participate in a particular creative conversation, you are consenting to your involvement. However, you can choose how much you wish to share at each session.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH?

- You will gain theatre experience in a number of different ways (i.e. playwriting, acting, blocking, direction, etc.).
- You will learn new techniques for creating theatre.
- You will have a greater understanding of feminist methods and theories in relation to this study.
- Participation in this study will afford you a new perspective on theatre as research.
- You will have your name as co-author on a piece of original theatre.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS FOR PARTICIPANTS?

- As part of this study, the Principal Investigator will ask you to share personal stories and memories, for the purpose of the creative process. It is possible, therefore, that you might become overwhelmed or emotional during storytelling sessions. If this happens, you are welcome to take a break at any point and leave the rehearsal, and then return when you are able. There is NO requirement to answer any particular questions or to share particular memories. The depth of your involvement is at your own discretion.
- The Principal Investigator has compiled a list of resources for you should you desire to talk to somebody about your emotional or physical health.
- The Principal Investigator will share any new information that arises during the course of the study that could potentially change time limits, schedules, and locations.
- While the possibility of physical risk is minimal, there is the possibility of injuring oneself during rehearsals where one is active. Please use personal caution to keep yourself from harm, and communicate to the Principal Investigator if you are injured.

WHAT WILL BE DONE WITH MY INFORMATION? (OR WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO IT?)

- **What type of information will be required?**
The nature of this type of study means that personally identifying information is likely to be shared, both with the Principal Investigator and an audience. As participants of this study, you are allowing your personal identifying information to be shared publicly, but at YOUR discretion. Therefore, while there may be audience members attending performances with whom you are acquainted, the depth of your disclosure will depend on how much you are willing to share. For the written thesis, it is your choice whether you want to be identified by name or remain anonymous.
- **Will the data be kept confidential?**
Access to your personally identifying information depends on how much you share. There is the possibility that you will be recognized by audience members or members of the thesis committee. If you choose to remain anonymous in the written thesis, you can communicate this to the Principal Investigator at any time; however, you must remain conscious of the fact that your participation in the performance is unable to remain anonymous due to the nature of live theatre. The Principal Investigator will have access to the data, and will provide anonymity if requested.
- **How will data be kept secure?**
The privacy of participants will depend on further conversation with the study participants. If you wish to remain anonymous within the written thesis (via pseudonym) please inform the Principal Investigator prior to the termination of the project. Confidentiality cannot be confirmed during the performance due to the nature of live theatre—however, you can ask to have your name replaced with a pseudonym in performance materials (e.g. script, programs, etc.).
- **Dissemination of research results:**
The Principal Investigator has no specific plans to share research information apart from the thesis defence. However, if the Principal Investigator is invited to participate in an event (e.g. a conference, a symposium), the research results may be shared as part of the presentation. Per further discussion with the collective, the script might be compiled and distributed as a bound document among the members, to be shared at their leisure.
- **Dissemination of research results to participant**
You are welcome to view the research results at any time, once research has been completed. The Principal Investigator is currently approximating August 2016 as the publication date for the thesis project. If you would like to view the research results, you may contact the Principal Investigator or the Supervisor for further information.

HOW CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?

- You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. Please inform the Principal Investigator or Supervisor if you wish to withdraw from the study, via email, phone call, or in person.
- Any personal data that you have shared with the collective will be discarded and will not be included in the performance or the written thesis.

- However, if you decide to withdraw AFTER the performance dates, the information you have shared within the script will still be used during the thesis. You will not be required to share in the second focus group or questionnaire.

HOW CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION? (OR HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS STUDY?)

- If you are interested in learning more about the research project from a scholarly or scientific perspective, please contact the Principal Investigator or Supervisor, whose contact information has been shared on the first page of this document.
- If you are interested in reading more on the research topic re: verbatim theatre and performed research, the Principal Investigator has compiled a list of resources that you can access on your own or through contacting her:

The Vagina Monologues – Eve Ensler

Every Little Step (documentary)

The Laramie Project – Moises Kaufman and the Tectonic Theatre Project

Body and Soul – Judith Thompson with 15 women

Performing Research: Tensions, Trade-Offs, and Triumphs – Judith Ackroyd & John O’Toole

Engaging Performance: Theatre as Call and Response – Jan Cohen-Cruz

Theatre of Good Intentions: Challenge and Hopes for Theatre and Social Change – Dani Snyder-Young

Certification:

The Saint Mary’s University Research Ethics Board has reviewed this research. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters or would like to discuss your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at ethics@smu.ca or 420-5728.

Signature of Agreement:

Speak: Investigating Ethics, Feminism, and Representation in Verbatim Theatre

I understand what this study is about, appreciate the risks and benefits, and that by consenting I agree to take part in this research study and do not waive any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end my participation at any time without penalty.

I have had adequate time to think about the research study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Participant

Signature : _____ Name (Printed) : _____
Date : _____

(Day/Month/Year)

Principal Investigator

Signature : _____ Name (Printed) : _____

Date : _____

(Day/Month/Year)

Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.

Appendix D: *speak!* Script

speak!

by the collective

What's your name?

Asmita: Asmita

Emily: Emily

Sansom: Sansom

Faustina: Faustina and Hyunjoo

Katerina: Katerina

Sophie: Sophie

Heather: Heather

Favorite color?

Asmita: Green

Emily: Maroon

Sansom: Seafoam

Faustina: Black

Katerina: Purple

Sophie: Red

Heather: Yellow

Employment?

Asmita: PhD. student

Emily: Master's student

Sansom: Too employed

Faustina: Master's student

Katerina: Recently graduated

Sophie: Undergrad

Heather: Master's student

Day of the month born?

Asmita: 14

Emily: 15

Sansom: 30

Faustina: 19

Katerina: 28

Sophie: 8

Heather: 15

Show Mandate:

Sansom:

My experiences make me who I am

Asmita:

but the person that I am also influences

Sophie:

the way that I remember my experience.

Faustina:

I'm doing my best to create myself right here, right now

Heather:

Much like theatre, my *self* is immediate;

Katerina:

I was **not** this person yesterday.

Emily:

I will **not** be this person tomorrow.

BODY

Faustina:

Body is like a chronological biography.

As I get older and older, nowadays I feel I should say “As I am aging,”
time writes various stories on my body.

Frankly speaking, to see the traces time left on my body is not that enjoyable for me.

All scars great and small,

Wrinkles which have come up since my 20s,

Pains here and there...

I do not like those traces which I cannot control.

However, I like something left on my body completely by my will such as piercings or
tattoos.

I have a small butterfly on my left shoulder.

“A butterfly out of the bus window yesterday afternoon suddenly occurred to me.

A little butterfly which was struggling dangerously to fly against the wind.

Why did I think it was flying against the wind?

Why didn't I think it was flying in its own direction?

Of course, if it had been dust, as I mistook at first, it would have just followed the wind.

Then, I would have thought it was going with the wind in the right direction,

even though both of the thoughts, against the wind and with the wind,

are just from my hit-or-miss guess,

But going in your own direction or not

makes a sharp difference between living and dead.”

- Eun, H. *A Butterfly in the Dust*

My butterfly on the left shoulder is the butterfly

which dreams its own dream,

which cherishes its own hope,

and which flies in its own direction

wherever the wind blows.

Unfortunately, I ever cannot meet her face to face in my life,

so, I sometimes see the butterfly in the mirror twisting my head, and pray.

Please be with me

to write my own stories on my body,

to write a living autobiography for myself
instead of letting a dead biography written on my body.
Fly wherever you want to go, my butterfly,
for my body, a living creature, myself.

Grooming?

Asmita: Rarely trim

Emily: Trim

Sansom: no. 2

Faustina: Trim

Katerina: Wax + sugar = pain?

Sophie: Trim

Heather: It's been a journey

Period?

Asmita: 13

Emily: 12.5

Sansom: Still waiting

Faustina: 12

Katerina: 14

Sophie: 12

Heather: 11?

Fave body part?

Asmita: Legs

Emily: Not my widow's peak

Sansom: My feet

Faustina: My hands

Katerina: All of it

Sophie: My hands

Heather: My booty

Selling Bodies (Sansom & Katerina)

S: Recently I was unemployed and in desperate need of money. A fellow unemployed friend of mine told me that NSCAD was looking for male nude models so I signed up without hesitation. I know I do not have the best body, I drink too much beer and my gym visits are far too infrequent. But ask anyone who knows me well and they will tell you that I am never afraid to show off what I've got. Before my first session my biggest fear was not showing a room full of people my fleshy body but that my poses would not be interesting enough. Having taken acting at school we learned all about mime and what makes a dynamic pose so I wanted to make sure I used that training well.

K: I don't know why I decided to sell my body. I don't know why this idea seemed so attractive. At first, I read stories about famous courtesans - no, I never was a fan of *Pretty Woman* or even *Moulin Rouge*. Instead, I was charmed by the stories about ancient hetairas who were pretty much the only women who could influence politics at that time and place. They were different from other types of prostitutes: they were high-class, very highly educated and involved in art. They also had very few clients, who were either intellectual or political figures. Power. Sex. Sex equals power? For some, yes. For me, I saw it as a beautiful picture, a figure of a woman who is charismatic, artistic and highly influential. More importantly, who is loved and whose charm is acknowledged by many. That seemed ideal.

A similar story could be told about Renaissance courtesans, who were well-educated and independent - at least compared to other women of this time. And many of them also trained in dancing, singing and poetry. Also, Japanese geishas. The more I read about these kind of women, the more I developed an idea that this is how women can get power and love - by being highly attractive to the opposite gender (hello, gender binary) and by using sexual power to get what they want. You get sex, love and power, what else to wish for? How naive I was :)

S: It was a cold day in March when I walked through the maze that is the Fountain building so I knew that I would not look the most impressive. Of course the most attractive girl in the class had to sit right in front of me but I had a job to do. For the first two sections I was asked to hold positions for 2 minutes at a time so I picked things that are more difficult. This helped distract me from the 20 eyes staring at my naked form and my sweaty armpits. It was not until I had to sit for 45 minutes that it finally hit me that I was indeed selling my body. I was surrounded by a group of people who had never met

me. None of these people were interested in knowing anything about me, in fact my attempts to discuss the Oscars were dismissed. They all knew my name since I was introduced at the beginning of the class, but I knew that I would be nothing more than a brief topic of discussion for whatever they were doing after class.

K: My research did not stop there. I went to a couple brothels, pretending that I was looking for work, and I was looking at the girls who worked there with fascination.. But they didn't seem happy. And the whole atmosphere did not feel like love. Or art. But it felt like money. And power. And illegality. Something forbidden and very low was happening there.

A: Are you 18? Sorry, we can only accept girls from 18 and older.

S: So I sat for 45 minutes staring at a wall as a group of strangers looked up and down from their sketches to try and capture my mostly still position. I never once looked down at my own body so the only idea I had to go off of was occasional glances at the 10 different sketches

I left that room without saying a word to anyone with the knowledge that somewhere someone is using my body to finish their final project on gesture in sketch. I just hope that I gave them enough to do a great job.

K: Smoking in the bathrooms. Walking around in underwear. Unhappiness. I am Disillusioned... Reality is so different from what I imagined. After these "job interviews" I never came back. But I felt better about myself, I felt better about MY BODY knowing that someone is willing to pay good price to engage with it. What was I thinking? I was definitely not able to call myself beautiful without OTHER PEOPLE CONFIRMING. That was crucial. Yeah, they only want sex, so what? Does sex not mean power?

Skinny (Asmita)

Sa: You're too skinny

Asmita: My granddad, age 5

H: Can I try lifting you?

Asmita: My peers, elementary school

So: You're 50lbs? That's physically impossible.

Asmita: A friend, age 11

All: ANOREXIC!

Asmita: My classmates, grade 7

E: You need to eat more. Here, have two paranthis

Asmita: My aunt, age 12

K: You need to gain weight

Asmita: My mother, age 15

F: We will have to fatten you up

Asmita: My aunt's Russian friend, age 20

Exer-size (Asmita and Heather)

A: These are our bodies in front of you, here for you to observe. They are very different bodies; we can't hide that.

H: I long to lose weight, to be smaller, to feel petite and feminine.

A: I want to gain weight, to become strong, to feel less feminine.

H: But these very different bodies can do very similar things.

A: Both of these bodies dance.

H: Both of these bodies do yoga.

A: I know that strength and femininity are not mutually exclusive, but trying to be physically strong is one of the ways I cope with looking like a girl. Being tiny means everyone looks at me and thinks I am weak. I don't want to be delicate and dainty. I don't want to be lifted instead of tackled, like I was in high school gym class rugby because they were afraid of breaking me. That's why I started strength training.

H: I have done Weight Watchers, Beachbody, paleo, 80/20, diet pills... and still my body and my personality are large. I feel sick when women smaller than me complain about being fat in my presence. Can you not see me in this room? If you think you're too big, then what am I? Everything about me is big. My body. My voice. My dreams. Sometimes my enthusiasm overwhelms my loved ones, and I feel that it's another way I must make myself smaller.

A: When you look at me, you don't think "she must lift weights!"... "she might be a dancer", yes -- but I don't like watching skinny people like me dance. My favourites to watch are the women with thick, strong thighs, the ones with softer curves in their bodies than my angles. Most importantly, they are the women whose passion is clear on their faces, in the way their bodies move. My body is gangly and full of straight lines. It moves

awkwardly, though I've finally grown into my arms enough that my port de bras looks nice.

H: When you look at me, you don't think, "wow, she must work out a lot!" I think about how I don't look like a "typical" athlete. I think about how runners, and yogis, and dancers, are supposed to be tall and slim, with no hips. I jiggle when I run. In yoga I can touch my toes despite my stomach. When I dance, my ass shakes. It is okay for bodies to do these things. It is okay if they don't.

A: I hide my attempts at fitness and getting strong from other people. When I started doing yoga, it was a secret. So was going to the gym. I still don't tell many people that I do strength training. I'm afraid they'll think I'm doing it to keep myself thin instead of to get strong, that I have an eating disorder. They don't know I don't like having a woman's body. I'd rather that people notice my progress themselves. So far, only one person has.

H: I'm also big and loud about working out by posting on social media. I was a Zumba instructor because it fit my love of dance and love of being the center of attention. I've had women call me inspiring, that I motivate them with my working out photos and statuses. I have mixed feelings about this. Is it because if the fat girl can do it, maybe they can too? Or is it that they see how happy and carefree I am, that I don't let my body hold me back, and they want to experience that?

A: But I can see the changes my body has been going through with doing strength training -- my thighs have stopped jiggling as I walk, I can see the muscles in my arms when I stretch, my pirouettes in ballet improved so much because now I have a core. I already liked my body, but seeing it get strong makes me really proud. I took a six-month hiatus from the gym, but recently started going back. I lost a lot of strength, but with a bit of work I know I can get it back. It might not seem like a lot, but I have been able to successfully bench press 45lbs a couple times -- not bad for a scrawny 90lb brown girl!

H: So to spite this body, I stretch. I dance. And I run. I remember in fall of last year, I was running down Inglis St. It was a beautiful day, not too hot or cold, and I felt like I was flying. I was listening to an incredible song and I was running with the biggest smile on my face. When I got home I had a post on my Facebook wall from an old classmate, which read "When I was on the bus today I saw you out running! You looked like you were having so much fun!". She didn't notice my thighs or my stomach or my arms. She noticed my happiness.

Funny things (Emily)

Funny things I believed about bodies growing up (that I came up with all on my own)

- I believed that my mother used tampons to sort of plug herself up so that her insides wouldn't come out. I believed that all women who had had children had to do this.

- I believed that I should not touch my belly button because if I did it could come untied and all my insides would fall out.

- A woman would get pregnant by laying an egg (after having sex) and then a man would

come and add sperm, at which point the woman would shove the egg back up inside her or else eat it.

Boobs and Calves (Faustina)

My mom is a mom who thinks her daughter is the prettiest in the world as many moms do, and since I was a little girl one of her hobbies is shopping for clothes and accessories for me and seeing how well they fit me. Though she is always proud of her daughter, she has a big concern about me which never seems to be solved. It is my lower body; to be exact, my calves.

“What a shame! You are just perfect except for your calves!”

Mom thinks my calves are too big. She has given diverse nicknames to my calves as they have changed: 코끼리 다리 elephant’s legs, 삼치 Spanish mackerel, and 고등어 mackerel. Actually, my calves have become just a little bit slenderer as I am getting older. So, the nicknames have changed with their size. Nowadays, she calls them mackerel instead of elephant’s legs. But, don’t get me wrong. I didn’t or don’t feel offended because I know it’s her way to express her love or caring for me. She says “Well, my daughter, your calves seem to graduate from elephant’s legs’ school and enter the mackerel’s. Good improvement!” Yay, she even celebrates!

Another lady who took pride in me was my grandma, my mom’s mom. She passed away 9 years ago. She was a very fashionable and active lady, and also very interested in her

granddaughter’s appearance. As my mom does, she thought her granddaughter was just perfect except one thing. One day, my mom called me in a serious voice, and said, “Your grandma is worried about you.”

“Um? About me? Why?”

“She said “Eunsook, – my mom’s name – you should take Hyunjoo to see a doctor.” “for what?” “I think her boobs are too flat like a TV screen!””

Oh, yes, my grandma thought my boobs were as flat as a flat screen TV. She had a sense of

humor, so even when she was in critical condition, she made a joke.

“Don’t forget! You should have your boobs enlarged.”

My mom still teases me. “Hey, you remember your grandma’s last words, right?”

“Sure, but mom, I can’t afford that at all! I think you should provide after-sales service with me as you are the producer who made me!” “Well, that’s the exact point which I feel really sorry for you. As a producer, I made two

mistakes, your calves and boobs. I am so sorry, my customer.”

Well, I love you, my ladies. Don’t worry about my calves and boobs too much. I’ll be fine as

long as I’m healthy thanks to your love.

Boys are gross (Sansom)

Why Are Boys So Gross?

The female body is a work of art, the male body is utilitarian, it’s for getting around, like a jeep.

A: Be a man
Don't you dare cry or I'll give you something to cry about

H: Boys don't cry
Why won't he open up to me?

E: Walk it off
It builds character

K: Get in touch with your feminine side
Everyone thinks you are gay

S: Boys only care about looks
How tall are you?

F: Dad bod
15 things guys need to stop wearing RIGHT NOW

A: Boys should have short hair
Man buns are so in right now

H: Hide your greys before anyone notices
Ew he's balding

E: Boys shouldn't wear makeup
Why do you have girl toes?

K: I want a man who works with his hands
Don't you ever moisturize?

S: Size doesn't matter
But it does

F: Axe will get you laid
Being picked last won't

EDS (Emily)

I have a condition called Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, or Benign Joint Hypermobility syndrome that causes my body to hurt. Always. My back, my knees, my wrists, my hips; any joint you can think of. Sometimes I am in pain to the point of crying. I often have to compromise on activities because I am in pain. Or I have to deal with being in pain so I can participate in things. This is difficult for me. I used to love to run. I can't do that anymore.

I'm also aware that it is difficult for the people around me. Last summer Asmita and I were in Toronto to see a concert. I'd never been to Toronto before and was only there for less than 48 hours. I wanted to see as much of the city as possible and for the whole day before the concert we walked around the city. I was not wearing appropriate footwear and by the end of the day I was in so much pain. We had to go on an adventure to find Tylenol because I'd forgotten to bring some with me, and we were late getting to the venue. I vaguely remember the elation of seeing my favourite artist live. I have vivid memories of the amount of pain I was in despite the extra strength Tylenol I had taken.

I try not to complain too much, but sometime I hurt so much that it's all I can think about. Sometimes I'm so tired from not sleeping because pain kept me up that I can't do things with/for people. I'm always readjusting my body while I'm sitting or standing to try and get comfortable.

I have almost no concept of where my body is in space. But I am hyper aware of my body. I used to be really mean to my body. I hated it. I overworked it. I starved it. I abused it. It was my way of disconnecting from it. I did not appreciate it. It didn't feel like me. It's hard to appreciate your body when it's the thing that causes you the most discomfort. Now we're working on patching things up. Afterall, we've been through a lot together; Xrays, MRIs, CAT scans, blood tests, scopes, physiotherapy, subluxations dislocations, bracing, taping, cognitive behavioural therapy, Sertraline, Venlafaxine, Quetiapine, acupuncture, specialist after specialist, (mis)diagnosis after (mis)diagnosis. I'm working on accepting that this is the only body I'll ever have. I'm working on being nicer to my body, in hopes that in return it'll be nicer to me.

Tampons (Asmita)

A: When I was around sixteen, I desperately wanted to be able to use tampons. Ballet classes and pads didn't mix very well, and I was just tired of them. I tried tampons that year *[two people throw tampons]*, and again the next *[two more]*, and again the next *[two more]* -- and it just wouldn't work. I couldn't fit it up there, it just... stopped, about a centimetre in. Finally at eighteen I made a really serious effort that involved a lot of failed attempts, a hand mirror, and a lot of squatting on bathroom floors. I could finally use tampons, but it was not easy to coax my body to let something foreign in, and it was near impossible to insert another one right afterwards. I started getting the mental image of Gandalf yelling at the Balrog,

All: YOU SHALL NOT PASS

[staging: maybe since this is in the middle of the sentence I shouldn't turn around.

Everyone can just imitate Gandalf looking really intense instead? Pretend that you too are brandishing a giant tampon]

A: any time I met resistance while trying to put a tampon in. When my partner and I first started interacting with one another's awkward bits, I told him about this idea of mine and he thought it was hilarious. He would even occasionally refer to my vagina as my "you shall not pass". I think he felt pretty accomplished the first time he made it past there.

Ouch (Heather)

I used to let my lovers dictate how much pubic hair I'd have. Most of them liked me hairless, like a nectarine, but I have since learned that I much prefer being a peach.

Isn't hair there for a reason? I would shave or use depilatory creams and as my hair grew back I would get itchy red bumps on my "mons pubis". Is that really more attractive than a soft happy tuft of hair?

So now I try to let it grow. However, it still needs to be trimmed. I had a hard time finding a good method for grooming. One time I was prepping to see my partner after a few weeks apart and I grabbed some children's safety scissors to trim off some length. I would pull some hair up and snip it off. I guess maybe I wasn't paying close enough attention, or maybe I was rushing, but I went to snip and I felt a sharp pain *down there*. I looked down to discover I had cut a chunk out of my outer labia. I'm lucky my partner found it funny, rather than a turn-off.

Being Pretty Trash (Sophie)

So sometimes I tell myself this story, and it goes something like this: I have a perfect life. I'm always perfectly made up and gorgeous. I get everything I want. Everyone loves me. I never make mistakes. You know? Like, everything always goes the way I want it to. Basically, I'm shitting gold.

But here's where things get a little sci-fi- I'm actually a literal pile of garbage that was stuffed into a pretty decent looking shell. Every second going by my trash brain is worried that people are going to discover what's really inside this hot bag I live in.

My trash self knows it's wrong to trick everyone in my life- but I have I have it so damn good; only a fool would give it up. My bag is white (SCORE!), and it's always been treated really nicely by all the real humans around me. The bag means a lot to most people- but I know I'm tricking them. For I... am trash.

And somehow (as I was saying) my trash self has done a really good job tricking real humans into accepting me as a human. Since this bag is pretty dope, I get jobs other people don't, strangers aren't dicks to me, I get a lot of valuable attention and somehow some people treat me better than actual humans. Somehow I get more than real humans, real humans who like work really hard and are far more valuable than bags of garbage.

Sometimes I wonder if I should come clean and tell everyone my secret, rip the bag open and let the stench hit everyone full force. But I don't. I love my human life, so I keep letting my bag define me.

I know that my bag can only compensate for so much - there's still the smell and the leaking juices all over everything I touch. I'm terrified of the day that someone gets really close to me and sees through this thin layer that means literally nothing.

~So that's a metaphor for privilege~

As well as a recipe for a serious unworthiness complex.

Once, in the middle of a mental breakdown I looked at my parents and said "nothing feels real" and they were like "no wonder", (wtf face) so that was suuuuper helpful.

And that's the worst part right? Knowing that you can't just get everyone to expose their true trash nature simultaneously and we can all just be happy garbage together.

For now, at least you guys know.

TRADITION/CULTURE

Favorite Holiday?

Asmita: Diwali

Emily: Halloween

Sansom: Bastille Day

Faustina: I don't have one

Katerina: Masleniza

Sophie: Thanksgiving

Heather: My birthday

Where ya from?

Asmita: It's complicated

Emily: Sackville, NB

Sansom: Old Chelsea, Quebec

Faustina: Seoul, South Korea

Katerina: Soviet Russia!

Sophie: Winnipeg

Heather: The island

What do you call your grandparents?

Asmita: Nanaji, Naniji, Dadima, Grandad

Emily: Nana, Nanny, Grampie

Sansom: Mimi

Faustina: 할머니, 할아버지, 외할머니, 외할아버지

Katerina: Baba Luba, Babushka Ania

Sophie: Grandma and Grandpa

Heather: Grammie and Grampie Bud, Grammy and Grampie Kay

Grandparents (Emily, Asmita, Sophie)

E: My paternal grandmother was raised by a relatively bigoted mother. She herself is not as racist as my great grandmother was, but she is still prejudice against many people. For example, she is not very fond of my mother having a French last name. It's gotten sort of worse since she's started showing signs of dementia. Recently I was talking to her about my cousin who is about to have a baby. Her husband is black. My nannie says

A: "Kate is very fair. Maybe the baby won't be so dark."

S: Edwina Ferrier, a woman whose life was so dissatisfying she married the first guy who made her laugh. A human so well read that a week before she died, her chosen delirious musings were quotes from Macbeth.

A: One of my masis was visiting India just before my naniji died. At some point during the trip, my naniji mentioned to another one of my masis that she had a few Five Star chocolate bars in a cupboard that she wanted to send for me -- they're her favourite, she said. And so the chocolate made their way to Canada with the visiting masi.

S: Miriam Boileau, a driver so bad that the road examiner who issued her license said; "while you technically passed, I urge you to stay off the roads." An explorer so adventurous, at age 71 her biggest wish is to dive with the sea turtles in the Galapagos, even if her husband doesn't want to.

John Boileau, a perfectionist who literally goes nowhere without a comb, nail clippers and chapstick. And a mind brilliant enough to beat everyone at trivia, every time, no matter what.

E: My mother's mother helped to raise me from ages 0-12. When I was a toddler my mother worked as a bartender in a bar for old people who liked to day drink. I think we call them alcoholics. Sometimes in the daytime I would go hang out there with my mum. I think I got her better tips. One time I was at my catholic grandmother's house jumping up and down on her couch saying some very unkindly things about the baby Jesus that I had apparently picked up from a patron at the bar. Something like

S: "Fuckin' Jesus Christ! Fuckin' Jesus Christ!"

I wasn't allowed to go to work with my mum after that.

S: Thor Skulason, a man so meek he made his friends call him Ted because Thor was too much pressure. An accountant who would do your tax return, and upon realizing you weren't getting anything back, would just give you twenty bucks.

A: It never ceases to amaze me how much my naniji thought of me. As the ninth of ten grandchildren and the youngest girl, I so often feel invisible and forgotten but have just become used to it. But Naniji never forgot me, and I know that only a couple weeks before she died, she was thinking of me and how much I would enjoy the chocolate that she sent for me. My naniji wanted to give the treat to me in particular, and it is that thought I will hold on to, which is so much more important to me than the chocolate. Maybe I won't even eat it at all.

Soccer (Sansom)

Segregation is alive and well in Quebec. The schools are divided whether you speak French or English, and this goes all the way to university. In order to attend a French school you must have at least one parent that speaks fluent French at home. Your child does not learn English until grade 3, but in the English schools French is mandatory from kindergarten on. Despite the fact that the two elementary schools in my town, Chelsea elementary and Grand Bose, are five kilometers apart, they do not share a bus system. Most of the English families attend the Anglican Church and the French attend the Catholic Church. The French go to one bar and the English go to the other. When I was in middle school students from the French school brought bb guns to shoot us because of some rivalry I knew nothing about.

However, the time we are all together is when we participate in Soccer Chelsea, the teams ranged from peewee all the way up to 45+. Like most kids, I started when I was 4 and played every summer after that. It was my first and only chance to interact with the kids from Grand Bose. I can still remember having coaches and refs speak in both English and French during practices and games. There were always high fives and congratulations no matter who scored. Parents who would have never had the chance to meet are talking and yelling throughout the game. As I got older the tabernaques and fucks would be used in harmony against a bad call rather than against each other. Now that I am older the camaraderie has grown even more thanks to our good friend, beer. After every game someone brings a twofour and we all joke and chat covered in dirt and sweat. There is no awkwardness; we always have common ground thanks to the game that was just played. I do not play enough soccer anymore but I will always be grateful for the bond it creates in my little village.

City of Poets (Katerina)

I grew up in a city of theatres, city of poets and musicians. The city of artists and many drunk people. "A cultural capital of Russia", they say. If you grow up in Saint Petersburg, you are forced to go to theatres and museums on a regular basis: Your parents take you, kindergarten and school teachers take you there and prohibit any talking during the show. So annoying! We complain that we have to sit and be quiet all the time.

My childhood is full of memories of artistic events. How a friend of mine and I were staring at a huge chandelier instead of watching ballet and found that it looked like a huge female body part (guess which one).

How my dad and I went to the symphony orchestra and when the principal conductor was moving his hands to lead the musicians, he was almost jumping - he was

that passionate about what he was doing! And although I was not a fan of classical music, his enthusiasm was contagious.

How my mom took me to opera on the New Year's eve, right before the family dinner. After the show, we realized that we did not have enough money to buy transit and paid with candies instead.

How I was sharing a chocolate bar in the middle of the ballet performance and got yelled at for making noise.

How I went to Hermitage art museum with more than 365 halls many, many times and will go many times more - because I still did not see all of its beauty. After watching Night at the Museum, my best friend and I were trying to find a way to stay there at night. I imagine how much fun we would have with a mummy..

How my family went to see "The Canterville Ghost" by Oscar Wilde which got cancelled and instead we had to watch the play about Marquis de Sade - a man from whose name a term "sadism" appeared. It was a 16+ play and I was 13. It was one of the most intense theatre experiences for me and my parents were freaked out which was fun for me.

I grew up but a habit of going to theatres, exhibitions, museums became a part of me. I think I did not really appreciate all cultural experiences I was pushed into. I do not remember a half (or more?) of the paintings and performances I was shown but I am sure they influenced my perception. They are somewhere in my subconscious and I treasure them.

Farmer Dean (Heather)

My memories of my dad are filled with music. He brought me up on Van Morrison, Bruce Springsteen, the Rankin Family... he's always singing or listening to music or watching documentaries on his favorite artists. He likes to sing early in the morning when my mother and I are cranky and tired. "Gooooood moooooorning goood moooooorrning". He's my favorite person to go to concerts with. We took a bus with 40 strangers to see AC/DC, we took a spontaneous road trip to see Van Morrison in Ottawa and got to the front row. One time at a Tragically Hip show, a stoned guy threw me in the air to crowd surf, then turned to my dad and said:

E: "Is that your daughter man? She's beautiful!"

H: To which he responded

So: "then why did you send her away?"

I don't know where this particular song came from, and I haven't thought to ask, but I clearly remember singing this with him constantly as a kid. It goes:

ALL: I'm a worm, I'm a worm, I'm a worm
 I wiggle and squiggle and squirm
 I'm working real hard on old Deano's old farm
 I'm a worm, I'm a worm, I'm a worm

Poutine (Sansom)

It's kind of funny to have a whole province defined so internationally by one food. Don't get me wrong, I absolutely love poutine, it is probably one of the things I miss the most about being home. There is something I need to get off my chest though, so much as I love the east coast, you guys don't know anything about poutine, especially when a place puts GODDAMNED shredded cheese on gravy and fries, that is not poutine and it never will be. Now let me set the record straight in order to make real poutine you need hand cut fries that are blanched to the extreme to get that crispy skin, thick gravy scooped from the bottom of the pot to the top and St. Albert cheese curds (best when they're still squeaky). A real poutine shouldn't need anything on top, but the biggest cardinal sin of all is ketchup, never under any circumstances should you ever put that on or anywhere near your poutine. Trust me, your taste buds will never be the same.

Christmas (Heather, Emily, Sophie)

S: For the better part of two years I was the beard for one of my best friends. He and I were basically dating, and he loves Christmas. Lights, presents, hot chocolate, the Reba McEntire Christmas album, the whole shebang.

E: When I was a kid I didn't believe in Santa Claus. When my parents told me the Santa story I apparently looked at them and said "Yeah, right."

H: When I was in eighth grade I begged my parents for a kitten for Christmas. The steadfastly refused, but still I longed for a sweet little furball to call my own. A few days before Christmas I was playing with my friend Lizzie, the girl who lived up the road. We were walking along when a neighbour lady called us over. She informed us that her cat had just given birth to Christmas kittens, and told me that my parents were planning to give me one on that upcoming morning of mornings. She swore me to secrecy, saying that she divulged the secret because she wanted to let me pick out my favorite kitten. My heart was bursting.

S: In 2012 he and I were putting up Christmas lights on his house. We had ladders, several hundred feet of lights and a wire and mesh light-up giraffe wearing a Santa hat. We precariously balanced the ladder on icy ground and jokingly shook the bottom when the other was climbing. We decided to start with the roof so we both climbed up and started securing the lights one by one, freezing in the darkness, with the glow of the lights guiding the edges of the roof. We sat on the roof for a long time, talking, sitting hip to hip. I had to drive back before we were totally finished and when Chris got to school the next day he had a straight up black eye.

E: Of course, I pretended for my little sister because although I didn't understand why grownups lied to me about this, I understood that it was important to my mum that my sister believed.

H: Christmas morning came, and I anxiously awaited my new, much anticipated pet. As I opened present after present, I kept expecting a note, a cat toy, something to indicate my great joy was to be fulfilled. The presents were opened and nothing happened. I waited ten minutes, twenty. Hesitantly, I turned to my parents.

“Where’s my kitten?” I said.

E & S: “What kitten?”

S: I was terrified and confused at first, and then seriously amused when I found out he had gotten it from trying to finish the lights by himself, throwing an extension cord over a gutter or railing or something, and then it had promptly swung back and smashed right into his face. Merry Christmas bb <3

E: One time our cousin lied to us and told us that Santa had left his sack at her house because hers was the last stop of the night. She said that’s why she got so many more presents than we did. I was so mad that I couldn’t tell her that I knew she was lying because then I’d have to admit in front of my little sister that Santa was a lie. It was a lesson in self control.

H: After much tearful relaying of the story and an angry phone call, we discovered that the neighbor lady had purposefully tricked me, thinking it would put pressure on my parents to take a hungry cat off her hands. Her plan failed, and I, the heartbroken little girl, was bereft of kittens.

I’m still pissed about it.

Hair (Asmita)

Though I am not at all religious, I come from a Sikh family. One of the Five Ks of Sikhism is kesh, or uncut hair.

I was five and a half when I started kindergarten. My hair was to my bum, it had never been cut. All the other girls in my class had short hair, and I guess I just felt left out... it was cut to shoulder length.

As I got older, I started to understand kesh. I started feeling guilty every time I considered cutting my hair. I would think to myself: this is the easiest way for you to be a good Sikh, and you can’t even manage that. But my thick hair just gets so difficult to manage when it reaches my waist, and so in high school I started cutting it with the intention of donating. I hoped that doing something nice for someone else would make me feel better, that it would make me feel less like a terrible person.

The first two times weren't so bad. But on Saturday, June 20, 2015 (I don't think I'll ever forget the date), I decided to take the plunge and cut it again. I knew if I thought too much about the decision I'd back out, so I decided to just go for it.

I went to the cheapest hairdresser I could find. They said I had to bring my own hair elastics for the top and bottom of my braid, so I brought two with me. I went alone, and when I got there a very unfriendly woman sat me in a chair, then split my hair in two bunches, complaining that I didn't bring enough hair elastics (my hair was too thick for one braid... but really, what kind of hairdresser's can't give up two hair elastics?). I was

starting to regret things so much. If the hairdresser could tell how difficult the experience was for me, she didn't care at all. She cut off twelve inches instead of the eight I was expecting, *because my ends were too messy*, she said. The only reason I managed to convince myself to cut my hair in the first place is because I felt I could part with eight inches, but nothing more.

Once she tidied up the ends, I paid and left as quickly as possible. I made it to the bus stop and was doing my best to hold back tears. As soon as I got home I shut my bedroom door and phoned my partner, crying. "Hair grows back," he said. I knew he was right, but the act of cutting it still hurt me.

My long, messy, black hair seems to define me, and parted from so much of it I felt weak. I didn't feel like I could let anyone know. For two months, until I moved to Halifax, I wore my hair in a bun every single day so no one could see I'd cut it. My roommate didn't even know. By the time September came around, about three inches or so had grown back, which was so close to being a comfortable length again I just decided to suck it up and not hide it any more.

I think about six inches have grown back since June, and now it's finally at a length I am happy with. I don't feel so weak any more, but what am I going to do the next time it gets too long? Am I going to cut it myself, just a few inches, and feel awful? Or cut off eight inches or more and try to feel less terrible by giving it to a good cause? Why do I feel so guilty when I don't even care about religion? Why is being a "good Sikh" equivalent to being a "good person" in my mind?

Gender Roles (Katerina)

The importance of gender roles in Russia can be very tricky. To explain, I will tell you two stories.

My grandma and I were on a bus one summer. It was super crowded and there were many women there. Most of them were wearing revealing, sexy clothing - mini-skirts, cleavages, some of them - no bra under already revealing shirts. Men, of course, were staring. And then my grandma said:

F: Poor men, they don't know where to look. I wish these women had more pity.

The second story is about my classmate who did not fit the standard of "toughness". It started when we were little: While other guys were fighting and "being cool", Misha preferred more civilized ways of solving arguments. He believed conflicts can be solved by conversations, rather than fists. Other guys found him funny. And weak. He also loved writing and was not as bad at studying as they were. He loved poetry and kept a diary; he could express his admiration for nature. These habits, somehow, made him look "feminine" in our eyes and we started mocking him for being girly. This mockery bloomed in grade 5, when aside from fighting, guys started expressing their interest in girls. I am not sure why they decided Misha was gay. But the fact that he wrote poetry and was more gentle than typical guys seemed ridiculous and shameful. I am ashamed to admit I was a part of it. Misha and I had the same birthday and were friends from grade 1. But I noticed how others treated him and followed the crowd... I remember how when we were saying some jokes about his sensitivity and "gayness", he said:

F: I expected it from anyone but you, Katia

He was very sad and serious. I felt bad but I was afraid to have different opinion, different from everyone else's in my grade. What if I become "uncool" with him?? And being cool, fitting in was unfortunately too important for me at that moment... Misha ended up changing schools.

A couple years ago, I found him on Russian Facebook - he has a girlfriend and writes beautiful poetry to her.

Identity (Faustina)

I've been asked several questions about 'women in Asia.' Well, I don't know! How can I answer that? Asia is a huge continent, and even women in South Korea, North Korea, China and Japan are totally different even though these countries are located in 'far-eastern Asia' and very close geographically. Even in Women and Gender Studies, it is still too westernized and too white. Moreover, there are studies on Asia, of course, but most of them are about South Asia or China. So, for my Master's thesis, I decided to focus on Korean women and me, myself. Actually, at the very beginning of my first semester, I had a kind of obsessive idea that I had to work on comparative study between Korea and Canada to make my research meaningful. However, nowadays? I'm working on Korean lesbians' life story in Korean society. I feel, indeed, I know what is 'meaningful,' meaningful, at least, to myself.

Lullabies

H: Mummy loves her little baby
Loves her precious little girl
Red and yellow, black and white,
You and I shall never fight
Mummy loves her little baby precious girl

E: I got sunshine on a cloudy day. When it's cold outside I got the month of May. I guess you'd say, what could make me feel this way? My girl. Talkin' 'bout my girl. My girl.
Oohh

F: 꿈 세 마리가 한 집에 있어, 아빠 꿈, 엄마 꿈, 애기 꿈
아빠 꿈은 똥똥해
엄마 꿈은 날씬해
애기 꿈은 너무 귀여워
으쓱으쓱 잘 한다!

Intermission - 15 mins

RELIGION

Nature (Sansom)

“Thou, nature, art my goddess”

You are the frogs and crickets that put me to sleep at night
 stars and moon that light my way when there is nothing else
 snow that keeps me inside and my reason to be on top of hills
 rain that slowly sustains life and washes it away in an instant
 trees that stand statuesque and howl uncontrollably from side to side
 dead and broken branches that provide me with heat
 people facing different sides of the same circle
 din of our voices in harmonious chatter
 meat that spins and sweats over the flames
 ripples created when a big mouth takes a little life
 mighty boulders and tiny pebbles that get stuck in my shoe
 rocks that crush the earth and allow me to climb higher
 silence that reminds me I am not alone
 endless skyline stretching from one tree top to another
 The lone tree that reminds me to pick up my garbage
 A flower in the sidewalk that reminds me what is underneath
 islands that scar the ocean
 The big blue marble that carries us all through the negative space
 what we already know and what we never will
 You are infinite and we are here
 For now

Denomination raised/Religion now?

Asmita: Sikh & indifferent

Emily: Christian & agnostic

Sansom: Indifferent & indifferent

Faustina: Presbyterian & Catholic

Katerina: Not-defined & Mixed

Sophie: Nonexistent & nonexistent

Heather: United & Undecided

Favorite Religious Figure?

Asmita: Durga

Emily: Leda

Sansom: Kronos

Faustina: Faustina

Katerina: Shakti

Sophie: Piglet

Heather: Aphrodite

Baptised?

Asmita: Not a chance

Emily: Not officially

Sansom: Not even close

Faustina: Yes, twice

Katerina: Yes, and made my parents do it too

Sophie: It never even crossed their minds

Heather: Oh yes

Camp Wildwood (Emily)

Every summer from grades 3 to grade 7 I went to Camp. I LOVED camp. Because my parents were poor our church used to sponsor me to go for 6 whole nights to camp wildwood, a Baptist camp in Bouctouche NB. My favourite part of camp wasn't the daily activities or games or crafts or jumping on the trampoline. My favourite part of camp was the music. At camp we sang constantly. We sang or grace- Johnny Appleseed was my favourite- we sang after breakfast during praise craze , which was essentially just a dance party to songs about God. We sang during campfire and we sang before and during vespers, which was like this meditative prayer time. I really liked vespers. It always happened in this big nook in the forest at this enormous, super old oak tree just at dusk. Before we went into the woods we all had to line up in our cabin groups and be silent. Then someone would start singing this psalm that went "Be still and know that I am God" and then everyone would join in until *(all join in and continue singing while Emily talks)* we were all singing together near the ocean and the forest at sunset. It was the most beautiful, unifying experience.

In fact, the music is what always brought me back to church. Everyone singing about love and peace makes me feel grounded and a part of something. Thinking about it

makes me wish there was a way to reconcile the animosity I now have toward religion so that I could experience that feeling again. That sense of community is something that I miss, even if I don't miss other things about Christianity. That's the one thing that makes me feel guilty for not being the good Christian girl that I always wished I could be.

Even though I have qualms about religion now, that memory of singing before Vespers is still one of my most nostalgia-inducing memories. Even now, sometimes I just think to myself

All: "Be still"

and I am.

Death (Sophie)

The first time you appreciate the finality of death it kinda messes you up. Like one minute, everyone is there forever and you don't give a shit about them- and then they're dead and you will literally never hear their voice again.

When I was fourteen my grandfather died, totally out of the blue and only three months after his mum had died.

It was overwhelming. I left my house and climbed a tree, I laid in a field, I ran aggressively smashing my feet into the ground with each step. Things felt like they were slipping away and I needed to be the one to keep them from disappearing. But I couldn't. He died; a few thousand kilometres away it was over.

I went home that night and it was raining. I was sitting, looking out my window and trying to figure out what the fuck it even meant to be dead. What would happen to his body? How do funerals even happen? Was he already cold? Was everything still? How long did it take for bodies to turn into skeletons? Where did all the fleshy stuff go? Do people get buried in suits? Is that bad for the environment? How long does it take for coffins to break apart and for bodies to actually touch the earth? What does it smell like?

The questions continued, the rain continued. I remember wanting to drag my mattress outside and lie there in the rain. I wanted to lay on the ground to learn what it felt like when you're about to be buried. Wanted to watch skin abandon muscle and muscle slip off of bone and let it get so close to the dirt you're buried in that you can't tell where skin ends and Earth begins. How long would it take for those bits to get back to the surface? How long did it take for bodies turn into flowers? Trees?

I imagined his body falling apart, being dissolved into the Earth, growing into a blade of grass, being eaten by a bird and me, one day visiting Winnipeg and seeing that bird. I like that idea. I'm not sure if it's scientifically viable, but I like it.

Death part 2 (Heather)

When I think about death, I think about love. Last year my partner's nana passed away. I was at work when I got a message saying she was in the hospital. I immediately left to be with him. Some people seem surprised that I would leave work for "just a grandparent," and not even my own. But she was so much more than that.

We went back to his hometown and his whole family was there, gathering in the hospital to take turns talking to her, having worried conversations in the hallway, and sharing memories. Nana, and Poppy, her husband, helped raise my partner and his

brothers. I've heard countless stories about how they moved from Cape Breton to Truro to be there for the kids. Nana was his second mother.

I remember how kind she had always been to me. I remember how much she loved her grandchildren. I remember the story my partner told me, that Nana claimed that she would love her grandchildren no matter what or who they were, because everyone should have someone who loves them unconditionally.

I could feel that love reflected back on her in the hospital room.

I was witness to this family's pain, as well as part of it. I was part of their tears, their embraces, their quiet laughs. I never knew the human heart could be so full and simultaneously so very sad. I didn't feel God in that room, but I felt an overwhelming sense of love, and maybe that's the same thing.

A few months later, I got a birthday card from my partner's grandfather. It was signed "Love, Poppy and Nana." I sobbed.

Christianity is Weird (Asmita, Emily, Katerina)

A: The schools in my town stopped being denominational schools in 1996 or 1997. I started kindergarten in 1998. I remember at Christmas we had to sing a song about Jesus, one which was similar to the BINGO song: as in,

All: J-E-S-U-S!

A: and I had absolutely no idea who that was. My fellow five-year-olds thought I was a heathen.

E: When I was a kid my mother told me that the reason I wasn't baptized was because the Catholic church in Sackville wouldn't baptize me because we lived in Moncton. Later I found out that the real reason they wouldn't baptize me was because my parents weren't married. Why a priest would deny an innocent baby everlasting life based on the sins of her parents I will never understand, but alas, Catholicism. Unsurprisingly, my catholic grandmother was appalled...so she took it upon herself to baptize me one afternoon in her kitchen sink.

K: My dear friend once said: "Communion is such a macabre zombi-ritual! It's almost like Voodoo magic: they are eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking his blood! And yet they are upset with us, goth people and heavy metal musicians"

Narnia (Asmita)

I was four when my father first read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to me. I loved it so much that as soon as we finished it, we'd start reading it again the next night. When I went on a trip out of the country when I was five, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy came with me as my imaginary friends. I read all the books myself when I got older, and loved the stories. *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* has always been my favourite. A few years ago when the collector's editions came out, I bought them -- now there are three boxed sets in my house. But when I was old enough to understand, I learned that all of Narnia was Christian allegory, that when Aslan tells Edmund and Lucy that they can't

go back to Narnia and must come to know him in their own world, that he's talking about coming to know God. Or the blatant discrimination in having Tash, the god of the dark-skinned inhabitants of nearby Calormen, being evil, or that everyone ends up in heaven at the end of *The Last Battle*. Knowing that my favourite books from my childhood are just a vehicle for Christianity, a concept I feel guilty for participating in at all, makes it so much harder to return to that world.

Suicide/Catholicism (Faustina)

I was baptized a Catholic in 2008, and this was one of the deepest emotional events in my life. I was born in a Presbyterian family, and went to a Presbyterian church with my parents until I was a teenager. At that time, though I felt God was always around me, it didn't resonate with anything special in me. However, I began going to Catholic Church, and there were some important changes to me. One of them is related to my feeling suicidal. I have suffered from depression for many years, and because of it, I often feel suicidal. I have tried several times before, actually. But, after being a Catholic, I started controlling myself whenever the feeling came to me. Can it happen by God's love? Well, maybe, kind of. If I killed myself, my funeral could not be held in a Catholic church. That is the only reason. I just want to say goodbye in a Catholic church. Isn't it wonderful? Feeling suicidal had been my burden for a long time, but it feels controlled thanks to the Catholic rule of funeral. I think this shows a merit of being religious.

Higher Power (Heather, Katerina, Emily, Asmita, Sophie)

H: Things that make me feel a higher power might exist

H&K: Yoga

E&H&A: Sunshine

A: When the sun smiles at me, and I turn my face to it as it pours down its warmth.

S: Finishing a book

K: Shamanism

S&E: Beer

E: Kidneys

A: The Public Gardens

K: Candles

H: My cat

E&S: Kittens, puppies, babies!

H&K: The laughter of children

K: The colors of nature

A: Leaves in the fall

A&H&K: The sea

K: Lightning

S: Cookie dough

K: Incense

E&S: Hugs

A: When it is pouring outside but you are safe and warm, curled up with a good book

H: Cuddling in a cozy bed with really soft blankets

K: My dreams

A: The beauty of Western Newfoundland

E: Harmony (the musical kind)

H: Good tea

A: Adventures!

K: Coincidences

A: When I feel lucky beyond belief, and have no explanation for how

S: That feeling you get every once in awhile, when for a split second you feel like you can understand the enormity of the universe

Atheism (Sansom)

I feel a sense of shame when identifying as an atheist. I have never felt oppressed or marginalized because of it unlike some of the people I have read about on the internet. There seems to be this incredibly large community of people online who take pride in idealizing Neil DeGrasse Tyson and Carl Sagan. They also wish to point out any flaw in any church or gladly spread hate after a supposedly religious-fuelled attack. They are seen as fedora wearing, overweight, still living at home angry fat white guys with nothing better to do with their time. I just don't care. What people do on their time and spend their own money on is no concern of mine as long as they're not shoving it down my throat. However just like most pamphlet carriers on the street a simple smile and a no is enough to walk away in peace.

Not believing in God was never a choice for me, I was never raised to believe in one, my parents never pushed it on me. They never baptized me so that I would not feel constrained if I chose a different one. I did not become atheist in my angsty teen years as a way to rebel against my tyrannical parents and community.

I believe that part of this guilt comes from the fact that I feel weak since I am unable to devote such a large part of myself to something bigger than I am. Religion has helped countless people get through extremely difficult times in their lives by creating a sense of hope and community. So I try not to look down on those with faith. Personally, God has never been there for me and I have never asked them to be.

If there is one all I ask is that they be just and fair. Please don't send me to hell just because I like masturbating.

Islam (Katerina)

When I was 6, I freaked my parents out by praying the way Muslims do: Bowing to the ground and saying "Allahu akbar". I had no Muslim friends and did not know any Muslim person. There were almost no Muslims in my hometown and we had just had some terrorist attacks. But for some reason, I was super interested in Islam and got information from books and online, especially during the computer applications course at school. When my classmates saw what I was searching, they yelled:

H: Look, she is reading about Islam! She is going to blow herself up.

I never knew if it was a joke.

My parents noticed my interest in religions quite early and gave me books as presents for my birthdays. They never gave me the Bible or Quran - but books that

described the history and development of most common religions from their start. For some reason, I was least interested in Christianity- maybe because it seemed too trivial. The first was Islam, followed by Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. In different points in my life, I experimented with these world views and each time I picked one, I was sure it was for life. I made my parents get baptised and baptise me when I was 8.

At the same time, my beliefs never fit into any monotheistic religion. I was always secretly believing in Spirits of Nature, fairies, multiple gods that were all different sides of One... but choosing a specific religion was like trying on a new dress: I would play with it for a while, then realize that the angles weren't working, that it was too short here and too long there. Some dresses were completely the wrong size.

However, with Islam it's a special story. My attraction to the whole Middle Eastern region started when I was little and it seemed irrational, even scary to many. Maybe I existed in that area of the world in my past lives. I felt so much at home when I went to Egypt! When I started living in Canada, I got a chance to learn about Middle Eastern culture from people who were from there. I immersed myself into this community. It was wonderful and felt like family to me, and I met some of my closest friends at that time. Till now, those friends introduce me as "Katerina, who is Russian but she is from Egypt" and joke that I am "mentally Arab".

Terrorism (Asmita)

By the time I was twelve, I understood that being a Sikh was the second-worst religion to be when trying to get through an airport. I was eight when 9/11 happened, and things got a little worse for Sikhs because people equate turbans with Islam. A man in Arizona with the same last name as mine was shot because someone wanted to "shoot some towel-heads" after the events in New York. When I was ten, my family was detained upon arrival in St. John's from London on suspicion of drug smuggling. We were the only ones kept behind. I don't think there were a whole lot of coloured people on the plane. In 2005, at age 12, when the bombings on the London underground occurred, I remember asking my parents, "is this going to make things harder for us again?". Twelve is too young to understand.

GayStuff

F: As a lesbian feminist, it is not easy to say "I'm a Catholic." The Korean Catholic Church has been considered as a guardian of human rights or advocate for Korean democracy.

Nonetheless, it is still hard to say that I am a Catholic, because many of the magisterial teachings of the Roman Catholic Church are totally different from my values. Above all, I'm a homosexual who cannot receive Communion. I'm pro-choice, which is exactly opposite to the Church, and I even feel uncomfortable whenever I pray "our father" (why not mother?) or "blessed Mary, ever virgin" (I love Mary, but is her virginity important?). Reversely, as a Catholic in a church community, I have difficulties saying I am a feminist or I'm a lesbian.

K: Being gay is one of the reasons I "dropped out" from Islam. Another one is being a dancer. I still remember this agonizing evening when I could not decide whether or not I

should perform belly dance at the student's bar. I asked one of my favourite university professors who is a Muslim scholar for his opinion.

Sa: Of course, you can perform! But in a women's only setting... So you do not invoke desire in men.

K: I wondered, "what about lesbian or bisexual women who may also find the dance sexually attractive?" I was too shy to ask. I nodded and cancelled my performance.

When I showed up at the bar as an audience member, I realized that the event was organized by a queer group and most men there were gay. So no matter what kind of performance I do, they probably won't be attracted to me in a sexual way. This whole "women only setting" was making less and less sense to me. I also struggled trying to reconcile my sexual orientation with religion norms. After a while it became unbearable and I dropped out.

F: Soon after being baptized, I felt God's calling to be a nun. I started attending a meeting for people like me to decide whether the calling is real or the desire is sincere before making a decision. Though I stopped and came here to Canada, I still have the desire to be a nun in my innermost heart.

K: At my 19th birthday party half of the friends that I invited were Muslim and the other half were gay. I managed to cross them, and since then I have even found friends who are both!

E: There is a woman who is possibly the most Christian person I know. She is lovely. Kind, open, understanding and so non-judgemental. When I was in high school she sort of took it upon herself to be my mentor. I would go to her house after school at least once a week to sing and pray and chat. She'd give me cookies, cake, or fruit, or some other snack. We got along so well and she made me want to be better. A better musician, a better Christian, a better person. She never judged, only offered advice and concern. Even when she was sick with cancer she would check in to see how I was doing. She is the most Christ-like person I've ever known. She exudes love. So why am I so afraid for her to find out that I'm gay?

F: I was serious and I am still serious. One day after I began to attend the meetings, my friend said to me.

E: "Well, are you sure you can be a nun? You are a lesbian, you are a feminist, you are a smoker. Is that all? No. You are a fashion lover. You love pretty clothes and shoes."

F: She was serious. Seriously dubious. At that time, my answer was "Umm, well, I think I can be, but it's true I don't like the ugly black flat shoes which sisters usually wear." I still think so.

Though there can be some feminists or queers who laugh at me, I feel how much God loves and supports me, so I want to do something for others as I have been given. It will be something for minority women because I think it's also God's calling. Well, I

could be back someday as a lesbian feminist activist nun who puts on fashionable shoes.
Who knows?

SEX

Virginity?

Asmita: 19?

Emily: Fuck you social norms

Sansom: 18

Faustina: 18?

Katerina: 17

Sophie: 17

Heather: 15

Weird places we've had sex?

Asmita: His sister's bed

Emily: On a kitchen counter with all the blinds open, her parent's living room, her sister's bedroom, her best friend's bedroom, my best friend's bedroom, an old professor's shower

Sansom: In a room full of my friends watching *Pulp Fiction*

Faustina: The Korean literature department lounge

Katerina: On a windowsill at Reflections

Sophie: Going 140 down the Trans-Canada highway

Heather: The Waterfowl Park in Sackville, NB, a lighthouse on the beach, the woods behind our farm, the Mount Allison University Library, on top of a freezer, my grandparent's bathroom floor

How often masturbate?

Asmita: Never, but I wish I could

Emily: Weekly

Sansom: Whenever my roommates are gone

Faustina: When my period is coming

Katerina: Very irregularly

Sophie: Weekly

Heather: Occasionally, but always in the afternoon

Penis Test (Emily)

In the ninth grade I failed the penis test. Retrospectively this is really funny because I'm a homo. But anyway. In grade 9 I failed the penis test. You know the one where you have to label all the parts? I'd never failed anything before in my life. I was a straight A+ student. A keener. A preppy kid. I was mortified that I had failed anything at all. I was worried about what my parents were going to say... My parents thought it was HILARIOUS.

You see, I failed the penis test because I didn't get the notes. I didn't get the notes because I was away at an extracurricular event for students who were ahead in English. Apparently my emphatic "But I didn't get the notes!" Was funnier than the fact that I failed in the first place. Apparently I was supposed to just KNOW the parts of the penis. At 14. How the hell was I supposed to know where the vas deferens is? Do you know where the vas deferens is? Do you even know what the vas deferens does? I didn't think so.

Anyway, several years later during my undergrad I took a class called "Human Sexuality" and this time I got the notes and I passed the penis test. Take that grade nine haters!

Guys or Girls (Katerina)

I met this beautiful guy with huge brown eyes. His name, let's say, is Harold. He takes me to the lake and we have beautiful discussions about religion & spirituality. We start dating. Spend time in his music studio sharing some awesome bands and smoking up sometimes. We kiss and it is pleasant. It's okay.

One time we lie on his sofa watching a tv show and the topic of bisexuality comes up. I tell my story, he tells his. We open up to each other and feel at ease; we both get how being bisexual 'works'. He mentions that some girls rejected him after finding out. We have great conversations.

We go out in a group of friends and on our way to the club, we meet his friend and Harold introduces me as his girlfriend. It's weird. There is also a girl in our group of friends and I notice that I am more attracted to her than to him. My other friend points out:

So: Listen, I can see you are uncomfortable with him. He tries to kiss you, hug you, dance with you but you don't look like you're enjoying it...

That's true. Is it that obvious??
 We break up in a park, where the birds sing.
 There is no chemistry.

Sa: Are you sure?

Yes...

Then we go to the movies. Weird.

Why do I keep telling myself that it's harder to meet a girl? I see myself with a girl but it's scary. And it might hurt, while with guys... I never really get romantically attached to them. But I just miss feeling loved, being held... So I try things with a guy again.

Again, GREAT conversations. Again, cute brown eyes and seeing admiration in them is so pleasant.. Again, not much emotion when we kiss.. But it feels okay. Is just okay actually okay?

Sa: You have such a great self-control!

- he says, when we're cuddling.

You see, it's not about my self-control. I just don't feel attracted to him this way. But I hope that I will in the future. Because we would be such a nice couple! And I am tired of being single plus I am terrified of approaching girls. Excuses.

We cuddle, we watch movies.

F: I used to always rush to intimacy but I don't want to do it with you.

My words. I feel like it is something real. It could be, right? We have a nice human connection.

Then the "Sex Day" comes. Oh, I have never approached it so rationally. There is also a sense of specialness because we both waited. Never had that before. And you know... It didn't work out. I didn't want to disappoint him. I didn't want to disappoint ME. But what can I do?? If I have never had sex with a girl, I would probably think that I am asexual or frigid...But I know that's not true

First sex (Faustina)

We were a new couple. Both she and I were 18. I only had experience with sex with boys, and she didn't have any experience even dating someone. We were in her room, and the air surrounding us was hot. We started kissing, and kept kissing, and kissing. I knew I had to do something, but I had no idea how to do it. I think we were just kissing for an hour or more. Finally, I just took her shirt off, and undressed myself, and then, started kissing and

kept kissing again. I remember I kissed all over her upper body, but that's it. I had to leave her house as it was almost time for the last subway while spending time just kissing. How

tragic! When I arrived home, I got a message from her, saying "I feel weird, I mean I felt really good, but I feel something wet." I couldn't help smiling. She was so cute. Well, so was I.

8 months / Asshole (Sansom)

When I was 19 I met the girl I thought I was going to spend the rest of my life with. I was in the midst of my second year drinking-too-much and not-caring-enough phases when she showed up. We met at a party at my house and talked for most of the night-- being blackout drunk I have no memory of this, but by pure fate we happened to meet the next night and once again talked the whole night. We began dating shortly after. We both loved theatre, folk-punk, corny puns and we even accidentally dressed the same from time to time. The only real difference there was between us was that she was a virgin and I was not. We talked about it at length and she said that she wanted to wait until we were secure and she was on birth control, I said that I understood and would wait until she was ready. We dated for eight months before we finally had sex, but it was completely worth it. Never before had I felt so close to someone, it was pure romance, and it was then and there that I knew we would be together forever. Things only went downhill after that-- we fought constantly, became emotionally distant and broke up shortly after. We got back together a couple months later, but of course that didn't work out either. Approximately a year after we first had sex we broke up for the second and final time.

By this point in my life my ego had grown to gross proportions after receiving attention from girls all summer and getting some prime roles in my acting program. Newly single I had attracted the attention of a girl in the year below me. Let's call her "M". M and I had never really spoken before, but after matching on Tinder we began to talk every day. I knew she liked me and I liked the attention. About two weeks later we had a cast party at Pacifico. M and I chatted, joked and even danced a little. That was until a friend of mine informed me that her friend "E" wanted to sleep with me that night. Being a drunken horndog I quickly found E on the dance floor and ended up at her place shortly after. The next day M and I messaged as if nothing had happened, and this continued on for the rest of the week. The next weekend M and I were both attending the same pub-crawl; we wrote on each other's shirts, did shots and even climbed a stop sign together. Shortly after arriving at the Toothy Moose I was told I would have to leave because I had cut the sleeves off my shirt, which is apparently against their dress code. Drunk and angry I asked a girl sitting beside me if she wanted to leave with me and she did. The next day I woke up with blurred memories of the night before, the girl gone from my room and concerned texts from M wondering if I was okay (I later learned that she had left Toothy shortly after me crying). For reasons I still don't understand M asked me out later that day and we dated for six wonderful months, but we always had the memories of my debauchery looming over us. I really wish I could say that was the last time I treated a girl like that, but it isn't, however that is a story for another day.

Osheaga/Roofies (Sophie & Emily)

S: We started talking about a year after graduation, right after my ex and I broke up. He was working out west. I snap chatted him pictures while I was high and we talked on the phone and Skype a few times. I called him once when I was upset. I knew he liked me, and I really liked that he liked me- I felt lonely and undesirable and I wanted to be convinced otherwise.

He asked me a few months later if I wanted to go to Osheaga that summer, for free. The three day pass, hotel downtown and my two other best friends were also going.

Um, yes, of course I wanted that. There was a lot of pussyfooting but I had every intention of going. Kendrick Lamar was going to be there. In the flesh.

E: Two years ago during a convocation party at my undergraduate university I was roofied. I'd had 2 drinks. Vodka and sprite or some other pop. I remember being in Harper hall. I remember feeling like I was too drunk for the amount that I'd had to drink. I remember flashes of sitting outside of the biology building on the way to the campus pub. I remember someone's- a friend's- hands on me on the dance floor. I remember waking up terrified on my mother's couch the next morning.

S: We got there, I had to loan him twelve hundred dollars for a hot second for the hotel room, he was angry and frustrated and wouldn't engage. He was distant until he got drunk and then things felt normal.

We shared a bed, he asked to cuddle, I said okay, I remember feeling like I was in a coffin. I couldn't move and I didn't want to be annoying and I felt I should just let this happen and then he'll be over it and everything will be fine.

E: I don't remember arriving at the bar. I still had my \$10 cover in my pocket the next day. I don't remember falling over. I don't remember not being able to hold my head up or my friend walking me to a taxi, knocking on the door at 1am, my uncle helping her to carry my non-responsive body into the house. I don't remember dry heaving all night long. I don't remember my mother totally terrified wondering if she should call an ambulance.

S: Then the next morning I woke up, still wrapped up in him and it happened. I don't know if it was intentional, or if he was even awake, or if he was super embarrassed by it afterwards and couldn't say anything. But a hand moved under my shirt and... rubbed? my boob. I remember after the fact thinking that I had made it up, that I should never tell anyone because I didn't want people to think he was gross or bad or weird. I remember shock - my eyes popping open, replaying it time and time again to make sure I felt what I did.

I am sure to myself that it happened. But I am not sure to others. That is probably indicative of something.

I am still so incredibly grateful to you for getting me to that festival, and in a

bizarre way, maybe it was worth it?
I don't know if you should be sorry or if I should be sorry.

E: I remember a nurse the next morning at the ER saying "oh, you're hungover, just go home and drink some Gatorade and get some sleep" despite my insistence that I hadn't had more to drink than usual. I remember a friend saying "But why would someone do that to you if they weren't planning on taking advantage of you?" I remember thinking "Maybe I did just drink too much. Maybe I'm misremembering."

But recently my school's student paper wrote an article with accounts of people who had had similar experiences. My friend read it and apologized. I apologized to myself.

Boys and Girls (Heather and Sophie)

H: Isaac was my first official boyfriend, or as official you can be in the seventh grade. On our first date, we saw "Because of Winn-Dixie". His dad and sisters sat a few rows behind us.

S: Liam read me the beginning of his novel after we had sex. It wasn't bad, I was surprised.

H: Jared and I kissed in the barn. I got a cold sore, and when I tried to ask him about it at recess he ran away.

S: Alex didn't kiss me for the first three weeks we dated because he thought he got herpes from a saxophone.

H: On my third date with Connor, I threw up all over his floor. We're still together!

S: Before we were official, Jeremy and I went out and I threw up on a table at Cheers. We're still together!

H: Mike was the older, brooding pianist that I thought was very handsome and wordly. He insisted he needed to use magnum condoms.

S: Brandon M. was president when I was on student council. One time we kissed in a freezer. He wouldn't stop talking about God.

H: Sam asked me out on a date after a school dance. The next day at school, he told everyone I was his girlfriend and wrote "eye heart u Heather" in his MSN tagline.

S: Brandon L. asked me very formally to be his girlfriend. He said:

H: "Sophie: Will you be my girlfriend?"

S: And I went "Um, no".

H: Olivia was the first girl I'd ever had a crush on. She wanted to be a masseuse and one time she gave me a full body massage.

S: Kate never stopped joking. Nothing ever felt real.

H: Cody was sweet but a little clueless. The first time we admitted our feelings for each other, I whispered in his ear "I want you" and he replied

S: "I love you too".

S: I ghosted Thomas because he ejaculated prematurely.

H: Carter seemed smarter than the average ninth-grader. He wasn't.

S: Ryan and I were high like, literally the whole time we were together.

H: How long were you together?

S: Oh, like, two weeks.

H: Alyssa had such a sweet smile. She also didn't know what I meant by "slow down."

S: Dillon is a dad now.

H: Dylan and I were late for our residence banquet because we were... Preoccupied.

S: Brett and I have almost had sex like at least three times.

H: Sophie (not this one) and I ate freezies in bed because it was such a hot summer day.

S: When Andrew and I broke up, we made a pact that neither of us would get pregnant OR get someone else pregnant. He's also a dad now.

H: Becca *stunned, confused silence*

S: When I left Matt's house the next morning, in a crop top, athletic shorts, and high heels, his dad was in the driveway.

H: Robert seemed like a big cuddly teddy bear. He wasn't.

The Pirate (Heather)

I didn't realize I was in an abusive relationship at the time. I probably didn't name it as "abuse" until almost a year later, when I was in a new, loving relationship.

I've thought about giving him a pseudonym, or a character name. Sometimes I

think of him as a monster, sometimes as a villain. But I think the easiest, most humorous and fitting title for him would be The Pirate.

The Pirate and I started dating in July 2012. He was romantic; he liked to dance with me to Frank Sinatra and talk about our future. The Pirate was also charming, and friendly, and persuasive. Rather than coming and violently stealing your gold, he would convince you that it was your fault your gold was gone.

About two years ago, I came across an infographic on the internet that outlined characteristics of abusers. I remember how it felt to read the list, to quietly nod along with every behaviour:

A: Manipulative and controlling

E: Blames others

K: Issues with alcohol and drugs

F: Intentionally cruel and degrading

A: Insecure, with poor self-image

E: Moody and unpredictable

K: Uses physical force and verbal threats

F: Acts out instead of talking

What I remember best is his jealous nature, his raging temper, his self-pity. I remember his selfishness in the bedroom, his manipulative way of making me feel small. I remember how I cried in fear when he was drunkenly angry, how I later cried in fear when I felt unworthy with my new partner. I remember the way he forced me to say ‘I love you’ after only two weeks of dating.

I was with him for six months, but the effects have lasted years. I can picture him with a wooden leg, an eyepatch, a parrot on his shoulder, and laugh... but the laughter is uneasy. My memory is awash with fear, anger, and self-blame. The Pirate came into my harbour and fucked me up. I’m forever glad I sent him sailing.

Being selective (Katerina)

Since I became more selective about who I have sex with, I have way less sex than I used to.

University. James! We would cuddle and make out but never have actual sex. We would sleep in the same bed. We were not dating. I would leave early in the morning. Did I leave my bracelets in your room?

Sa: Yes. And you left ME, too!

He told all his friends that we did have sex, but honestly - I did not care.

Iranian guy. I was drinking & partying on residence and ended up in his room. Not sure, how. He was so drunk that his penis didn't go up and eventually I had to leave. Later, he asked me to come to his room couple times which I did not.

A guy I used to see in the residence hallway a lot. Really cute hairstyle. Really wasn't worth it. Lots of boring kissing and awkwardness.

A girl in Reflections and a very awkward date after. But kissing was not boring.

Another guy, another girl.. Do these random sexual encounters matter? Would my life lose a lot if I did not have them?

My friend (who loves sex) recently said:

E: Having bad sex is worse than having no sex at all.

And I am starting to understand what she meant.

Last sex (Faustina)

She was a nice person in many ways, including sex, but as you know, every love story has its ending, and we finally broke up after 2 years. She was my good friend before we started dating, and still remains my friend. I'm not sure if it is good or bad for me, for my mental health.

One day, we had coffee at the café where both of us usually went together. And then, we went to the motel we sometimes went to together, before. At the time, both of us weren't dating anybody, but had a strong desire to have sex with a person who had a familiar body. Our habits were the same such as smoking before turning on TV, then taking a shower. Even the clerk at the front desk was the same person. The only thing that had changed was our relationship.

I think this one "change" probably made her upset. When we began doing something, she suddenly started crying, and stopped kissing. She kept crying quietly for a couple of minutes more, and I just lay on my back beside her without saying or doing anything. I can't remember how long we stayed on the bed, but finally she opened her mouth saying "No, I can't." and adding "나 없이도 잘 살 수 있지?" which can be translated in English, "You can be fine without me, can't you?" I didn't answer. I couldn't answer because I wanted to say both "Yes, I can" and "No, I can't." I could have sex with her and eagerly wanted to, but, to be honest, I could not bear to think about our break up at all. I just wanted to shut her mouth and keep going on what we were supposed to do, but everything was over.

In fact, the question "You can be fine without me, right?" with teary eyes on the bed, it is funny, isn't it? I would eventually be fine; I'm totally fine now. Some of my close friends used to tease me about that childish pillow talk after I overcame the sadness. I laughed at it with them, too. However, the memory of this last sex with her haunted me, it is still haunting me even though it was more than 10 years ago. Is it because I didn't answer her question? I don't know. I just feel I still cannot answer her. My answers are

still “Yes, I can” and “No, I can’t” which won’t come out of my mouth now and forever.

Consent (Asmita)

About six months into our relationship, my first (and only) relationship, my partner and I had been touching one another below the belt, but always with our underwear still on. One sunny, warm, lazy Saturday morning, we were lying in his bed and being close. He was kissing me around my inner thighs and over my underwear, and I knew exactly what I wanted. So I pulled off the fabric that was in the way. He paused, and gave me a soft and meaningful look as if to say, "Are you ready for this? Is this is okay?". I unambiguously indicated to him that it was, and he carefully moved his head down. It was much, much more than okay.

FINALE

What word summarizes this experience for you?

Asmita:

Emily:

Sansom:

Faustina:

Katerina:

Sophie:

Heather:

Final Thoughts:

Heather: Here is the evidence of our lives

Faustina: The scene of our crimes of self-doubt

Katerina: And self-forgiveness

Emily: The mess of our memories, ourselves

Sansom: This is the debris of which we speak

Katerina: No bodies or minds or hearts are clean

Sophie: But perhaps they are beautiful beneath the muck

Asmita: So we share the clutter of us

Sansom: A medley which is ever-changing

Emily: We leave you now to question yourselves

Faustina: Who are you?

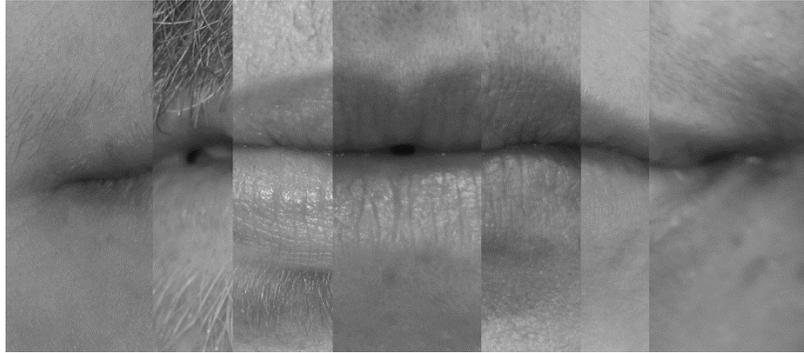
Heather: Who have you been?

Sophie: Who will you become?

All: And what mess will you leave behind?

END

Appendix E: *speak!* Program



speak!

the collective.....asmita, emily, hyunjoo faustina,
 heather, katerina, sansom, sophie
 stage manager.....chelsea dickie

The show will run approximately 120 minutes, including a
 15-minute intermission.

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the
 Women's and Gender Studies program at Saint Mary's University



Social Sciences and Humanities
 Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
 sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

Actors' Note

Hi everyone!

This is a show written, performed and directed by us as a collective. We have been working since February on this piece of verbatim theatre with the hope of sharing our unedited selves with audiences. The process has been exciting, frustrating and has made each of us confront things we may have wanted to forget. We are really looking forward

to sharing our stories and being seen as the humans-in-progress we are. Thank you so much for coming! Enjoy the show!

Researcher's Note

For my Master's thesis in Women's and Gender Studies at Saint Mary's University, I am studying the ethics of turning people's lived experiences into theatre. I question whether people can be accurately represented in plays where the contributors are not credited, consulted, or allowed creative control over their own story. I have researched plays which, in one way or another, present ethical concerns. I wanted to do it better.

The group of people before you have dedicated their time and energy into sharing their memories, stories, and experiences with you. They have been incredibly creative and incredibly brave. How lucky am I to have found such a diverse, talented, and open collective? Thank you for allowing me into your lives, for allowing me to share the stage with you. – heather

Appendix F: Cast Biographies

Aja is a brown, underweight, female-passing Ph.D. student in math, who would really like people to stop acting so surprised to find out she likes artsy things too. She grew up in Newfoundland surrounded by white people, and her earliest memory of rejecting femininity was insisting on standing to pee around age five because she was told "girls can't do that".

Emily describes herself as a queer, dog-loving, coffee-drinking, conflict-avoiding, over-analyzing hypochondriac. She is interested in far too many things, including language, psychology, making music, watching sketch comedy, and reading about linguistic relativity. She doesn't like to define herself by what she can't do, so we'll leave the part about chronic pain and invisible illness out of this biography.

Chelsea comes originally from the back woods of Nova Scotia, but now lives in Halifax. She's spent her last few years in the city stage managing and making art with various theatre companies around town. She is always excited to be a part of new, experimental, and challenging theatre pieces. She also loves dogs. And cats. Both equally.

Faith holds a wide range of words in her both hands: Feminism, Catholicism, Minority, Documentary, Image, Art, Creativity, Mundaneness, Passion, Depression, Enthusiasm, Hatred, etc. She is still filling in the blanks.

Heather is a 24-year-old femme, fat, bisexual Canadian working toward a Master of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies. Heather is a theatre nerd who acts, directs, and writes plays. She hails originally from the province of Prince Edward Island, where she grew up on a very white, very Christian cow farm.

Katerina, a 22-year old mostly not straight lady who just graduated from university and got involved with different theatre groups in Halifax. Cares too much about being polite to people and loves thunderstorms. Left home (Saint Petersburg, Russia) by herself at 16 and hasn't stopped being adventurous ever since.

Sansom is a 23 year old hairy mountain man from backwoods Quebec who is still surprised by how soft city folk are. Sansom identifies as straight but that hasn't stopped him from making out with a few dudes. He is and always will be a theatre-maker.

Sophie is a 20-year old working through her ungrad. She was born in the Prairies and now lives next to the ocean. The driving force in Sophie's life is solving big problems with thoughtful solutions that will last forever. She learns by listening, talking, and questioning to help untangle feelings and thoughts about the world. She has the most amazing family, friends and partner who empower her on the daily.