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# Exploring participant perspectives on the relationship between social change theater and social change movements : a project based upon an investigation at the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Sins invalid and the OutLook Community Theatre Project, San Francisco, California

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Jesse Ehrensaft-Hawley
(San Francisco Mime Troupe,
Sins Invalid & Outlook
Theater Project, San
Francisco, CA), Exploring
Participant Perspectives on
the Relationship Between
Social Change Theater and
Social Change Movements

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative, exploratory study was designed to examine social change theater program participants' perspectives on the connection between their participation and their perceived capacity to create systemic social change. The research pursued the following questions: 1) How has participation in social change theatre affected the participants' sense of agency to create collective social change at the macro level; 2) What do participants perceive as their impact on systemic social change in relation to their participation in social change theater? 3) How do participants perceive the interaction of change at the level of the macro with change they may have experienced on the levels of the meso (for example, level of community, shift in group dynamics and mutual support) and the micro (for example, emotional well-being, personal sense of agency, values and beliefs) in relationship to their involvement in social change theater? This research included fourteen semi-structured interviews with individuals who are members of three social change oriented theater/performance programs.

The Findings revealed several themes about the perspectives of participants of social change theater projects. The majority of participants reported that they felt transformed by their involvement in their respective projects and that their groups have a transformative impact on other people whose lives are touched by their groups' work.

Additionally, the findings suggest that social change theater may play an important role in building the capacity of communities to effect social change at a macro level.

EXPLORING PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES ON THE RELATIONSHIP

BETWEEN SOCIAL CHANGE THEATER AND SOCIAL CHANGE MOVEMENTS

A project based upon an investigation at the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Sins invalid and the OutLook Community Theatre Project, San Francisco, California, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative study, entitled "Exploring Participant Perspectives on the
Relationship Between Social Change Theater and Social Change Movements", was
designed to examine social change theater program participants' perspectives on the
connection between their participation in these programs and their perceived capacity to
create social change. This study explored the following questions: 1) How has
participation in social change theatre affected the participants' sense of agency to create
collective social change at the macro level; 2) What do participants perceive as their
impact on systemic social change in relation to their participation in social change
theater? 3) How do participants perceive the interaction of change at the level of the
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example, emotional well-being, personal sense of agency, values and beliefs) in
relationship to their involvement in social change theater?

The research employed an exploratory research method and a qualitative design.
The researcher identified three groups with which to partner on the project based on a
combination of feasibility and the range of approaches and the populations that each of
these three groups worked with.  The groups with which the researcher partnered are:
Sins Invalid; The San Francisco Mime Troupe's Youth Theater Program; and the

OutLook Theater Project. Sins Invalid is a performance project that incubates and celebrates artists with disabilities, centralizing artists of color and queer and gender-variant artists as communities who have been historically marginalized. The San Francisco Mime Troupe's Youth Theater Project aims to use theater as a means to artistically and creatively express the opinions of young people on topics that are relevant to their lives. The OutLook Theater Project is an ensemble-based company that creates original performance about relevant issues from a queer perspective.

Social change theater appears to involve a powerful transformative process for the people involved, in particular among marginalized communities. The proposed research was designed to build on existing knowledge and fill key research gaps. Partnering organizations may be able to use this research for their own program evaluation and planning. This research could, potentially, be more broadly useful to both the fields of social change theater and of social work. The researcher hopes to help identify and build on themes and strengths to build on among social change theater programs, as well to provide a framework for cross-pollination between the fields.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

*Introduction*

Drama has been applied as a critical modality for effecting both macro-level

social change and therapeutic change processes. Emerging research has demonstrated

multiple benefits of theatre and drama programs broadly for individuals and communities

(Ball & Heath, 1993; Dutton, 2001; Halperin, 2002; Halverson, 2005; Heath, 2000;

McLaughlin, Irby and Langman, 1994; Proctor, Perlesz, Moloney, McIlwaine, and

O'Neill, 2008; Smokowski and Bacallao, 2009; Spratt, Houston and Magill, 2000;

Sullivan, Petronella, Brooks, Murillo, Primeau and Ward, 2008). This Study, entitled

"Exploring Participant Perspectives on the Relationship between Social Change Theater

and Social Change Movements" was informed by the knowledge gleaned from the

existing body of literature on theater, performance and social change.

*Social Work and Expressive Arts: Historical Perspective*

Expressive Arts programs have played an important historic role in social work

practice. The settlement house movement, which served as a foundation for the field of

social work, prioritized expressive arts as a means to build neighborhood-based

community. In the 1890s, Settlement Houses, primarily based in Northern and

Midwestern urban centers, began to integrate expressive arts into small group work, in

particular in work with youth (Sprecht and Courtney, 1994).  The settlement houses were

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established for the dual purpose of providing services to the poor to alleviate the most glaring manifestations of poverty and to organize local communities for social reform. The neighborhood-based direct services offered by settlement houses often took a community asset capacity-building approach, as compared to a deficit-based, problem-focused approached (Koeren, 2003). As such, cultural activities and the arts were central in Settlement House programming. Through drama and theatre, settlement houses sought to nourish and sustain community values and develop mutual aid in order to build community and individual capacities (Dutton, 2001).

The 1920s saw the decline in the settlement house movement. Koeren (2003) attributes the decline of the settlement house movement to several factors, including: the political conservatism of the 1920s; the ebb of European immigration and suburbanization of white ethnics; racism in the settlement house movement itself; and the professionalization of social work. Settlement houses continued to receive very little support through the 1960s, when the federal War on Poverty program injected capital into neighborhood-based services in cities across the US. However, the attempt to fit into federal funding parameters lead many settlement houses to abandon their community-building approach, and along with it their focus on arts and culture (Koeren, 2003).

The overall decline in the settlement house movement and the community asset-based framework in social work practice have been accompanied by a decline in the use of the arts in social work practice (Dutton, 2001). Over the past several decades, however, social work practice has begun to integrate drama therapy, psychodrama and Theatre of the Oppressed as modalities that utilize theater with the express purpose of enacting change.

*Theoretical Underpinnings of Change-focused Theater*

The emergence of drama therapy, psychodrama and Theater of the Oppressed, which is a social justice-based theory of theater and performance, has informed the practice of theater in both social work and social movement contexts. This section will review these frameworks and their relevance to social work and social justice practices.

*The Emergence of Drama Therapy and Psychodrama*

Drama therapy, as a field, developed in the United States and United Kingdom in the latter half of the twentieth century. Two forms of theatre laid the foundation for the application of dramatic techniques to the field of therapy. Experimental theatre in the 1960s and 1970s focused upon fusing the modality of theatre with consciousness-raising while improvisational theatre's focus was upon spontaneity and interpersonal interaction. These techniques would be instrumental in the practice of drama therapy (Emunah, 1997).

Informed by behaviorist, psychoanalytic and humanistic psychological theories and concepts derived from theatre and drama pedagogy, drama therapy has the dual goal of impacting clients' (internal) insight and (external) behavior. The theory behind drama therapy is that enacting scenarios of therapeutic relevance will tap into creativity and spontaneity that may be lacking in many people's lives. This in turn, will theoretically enable them to relieve stress, build more adaptive relationships, deepen trust, create new ways of seeing the self and others, and identify new adaptive behaviors (Emunah, 1997; Leeder and Wimmer, 2006). Leeder and Wimmer (2006) conducted a qualitative study on drama therapy with forty incarcerated women. Many of the participants reported that they had built trust within the group that they had not previously experienced while

incarcerated, which helped the women provide mutual support and increase resilience. Participants also reported that the drama therapy group enhanced their self-esteem, as they felt recognized as having value and something to contribute (often for the first time while incarcerated). Participants reported they developed an increased capacity to reflect on themselves and their behaviors and make more mindful choices (Leeder and Wimmer, 2006).

Jacob Moreno founded psychodrama as form of group therapy. Psychodrama tends to focus on a dilemma of one *individual* at a time, where drama therapy tends to be focused on the relationships and interactions within the group. Additionally, where psychodrama focuses on re-enactments of an individual's actual life problems, drama therapy incorporates more improvisation and fictional role-playing (Emunah, 1997). Moreno's conception of psychodrama emphasizes creativity and spontaneity applied to exploring roles and interactions that are based in participants' lived experiences (Fenhendler, 1994).

Renee Emunah (1997), a central architect of the drama therapy paradigm, posited an integrated model for psychodrama and drama therapy. Emunah's framework emphasizes the use of the creative drama mode as, "liberating, enabling clients to experience a sense of freedom from the constraints of every day life and from engrained patterns" (Emunah, 1997, p.5). Additionally, Emunah's integrative framework aims to build group trust and strengthen a group's sense of interrelatedness; the process underscores that the individual's experience is intricately linked to the group bearing witness, providing support and linking subjective experiences. The framework's process aims to unleash creativity, imagination and expressiveness and to enhance self-esteem

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and self-image. The theory holds that the individual breaks their sense of shame by experiencing one's authentic self with a trusted group. Emunah articulates that the goal of the dramatic enactments is the development of an "observing self" (Emunah, 1997).

Both drama therapy and psychodrama highlight the importance of *performing* new possible realities as allowing for *actualizing* new possible realities. While Psychodrama tends to be more individual-focused and drama therapy more group-focused, attempts to integrate the two fields have blurred those lines. Both theories prioritize effecting change with interactions at the micro level, rather than at the level of meso (broader communities) or the level of the macro (culture, social, political and economic institutions).

*Theory for Social Change Theater: Theatre of the Oppressed*

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), founded by Augusto Boal, is also rooted in the goal of using to drama to unleash human spontaneity and building the "capacity to observe ourselves in action." Sullivan, Petronella, Brooks, Murillo, Primeau and Ward (2008) describe TO as a collective parallel to Emunah's framework of an observable self. What differentiates TO from drama therapy and psychodrama is that TO integrates goals of personal, communal, social *and* political transformation, while drama therapy and psychodrama are primarily aimed at change at the level of the individual and/or the small group. Like drama therapy and psychodrama, TO focuses on using theatre as a reflection of current realities and a rehearsal for future change. However, Boal argued that an individual or group's problem might lie in laws, policies and social and political structures, as well as within the psyche or interpersonal dynamics (Boal, 1998).

Adapted from Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed framework, Boal applied

theatre concepts to the processes of popular education (an educational technique designed to raise the consciousness of its participants and allow them to become more aware of how an individual's personal experiences are connected to larger societal problems), community transformation and social justice for oppressed people. Boal understood theater as a particularly effective method for creating social justice because Boal believed that acting as both an observer and protagonist affords us the opportunity of "imaging new possibilities, of combining memory and imagination…to reinvent the past and to invent the future" (Boal, 1998, p.7). Sullivan et al. (2008) outline the primary outcomes of TO as: building a foundation for community organizing and power; popular education around concepts that may be new to communities; increased collective issue awareness; development of strategies for action; connecting citizens with popular movements; and widening coalitions.

Boal was initially skeptical of psychology and psychodrama, which Boal perceived as fields whose function was to help people adapt to the status quo, rather than work to change it. However, Boal came to see drama as a place where deep psychological processes can be expressed and processed (Feldhendler, 1994). Theatre of the Oppressed intersects with liberation psychology, a concept originated by Ignacio Martin-Baro in El Salvador in the 1980s. Movements for liberation in Latin America developed a critique of dominant institutions of psychology and their inability to address the political problems faced by communities living under brutal dictatorships (Montero, 2007). Martin-Baro emerged out of these movements, extending Freire's concept of "conscientization" (another term for popular education) to a liberation psychology framework. Martin-Baro emphasized placing relevant tools of psychology in the hands of

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community members to be used in the service of transformation and self-determination. This framework represents a significant paradigm shift from dominant, Western diagnostic practice, wherein an expert assesses and then treats a client (Schutzman, Blair, Katz, Lorenz & Rich, 2006).  Martin-Baro's liberation psychology posited psychology as a tool to be defined and used by the oppressed Latin American majority, as compared to its status as "science" and asserted that no internal liberatory change can occur for an individual without external liberation of social structures (Montero, 2007).

It is significant that Theatre of the Oppressed aims to create profound *personal* transformation through the context of *collective* process. TO can be understood as a *collective* ritual of healing for experiences of *collective* trauma. Collective trauma is defined by Cohen Silver and Wick (2009) as traumatic experience that "impacts the entire web of human endeavor including, economics, health, education, social order, infrastructure, and the well-being of the individual, family and neighborhood. The impact is not only short-term but may linger into the future and have a profound effect on identity, social relationships and future policies" (Cohen Silver & Wicke, 2009, p.233). Schutzman, Blair, Katz, Lorenz & Rich (2006) argue that TO's potential to heal collective trauma is of critical importance because we live in a society riddled with histories of genocide, slavery and oppression. They assert:

> [We are] children and grandchildren of victims, bystanders, witnesses and
> oppressors who have never gone through any healing processes together, yet may
> meet each other regularly at work, in our neighborhoods and in our classrooms.
> Communities are fragmented and broken by this kind of history, and there is
> evidence that broken communities exacerbate public and mental health issues.
> The goal of TO in these places might be to allow for dialogue, historical
> accounting, imagination and transformation (Schutzman, Blair, Katz, Lorenz &
> Rich, 2006. p 64).

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Boal developed several techniques to increase the capacity of communities for this kind of collective engagement and transformation. A critical technique was the "Cop-in-the-Head" technique which aimed at uncovering and transforming internalized colonization and oppression within the psyches of participants. Boal believed that people stopped themselves from taking political action, because representations of external authorities had "taken residence" in the minds of oppressed. This technique begins within an individual sharing a story of their experience of oppression, moving towards the whole group enacting and re-enacting the story, moving from the specific to the general (Boal, 1998). A related technique is sensory re-tuning, which involves breath work, awareness and redistribution of muscle tension, balance work and vocalization. All of these activities are designed help dismantle inhibitions against spontaneity. Through movement, TO works to enact, envision and change feelings and relationships. A core objective of TO is that people who are often silenced and isolated learn how to listen to and learn from both themselves and each other. Spratt, Houston and Magill (2000) state that this is achieved through "allocating fictional roles to allow necessary distance to debate risk issues in safety, thus liberating creativity in search of new solutions to difficult problems" (p. 119), a process with significant therapeutic value.

The primary function of Theater of the Oppressed is to use these techniques to unearth buried feelings related to collective traumas in order to develop collective power to change the social conditions that lead to those traumas. Boal developed the concept of "collective rehearsal for changing reality" (Sullivan et al., p.171).) Spratt et al. (2000) posit that the key strategy of TO is the rehearsal for change in one's life, a rehearsal that engages both the actors and the audience. TO's main goal is the sharing of

communication skills with those who have been silenced. Spratt et al. (2000) outline the steps involved in this process. The first is to create group trust and solidarity. The primary activities used to achieve this goal are based in image theatre/image "sculpting," which is a non-verbal way of creating new meanings. First groups create and interpret images to portray, unearth and synthesize subjective experiences of current realities. Then the groups create and interpret images of how they would like the reality to be, as a means to unleash previously suppressed desires and visions. The critical step in this process is the creation and interpretation of images that lay out a map of how to transform from the current to the preferred reality.

Theatre of the Oppressed shares important features with psychodrama and drama therapy in that the primary strategy is to engage people in making change through performing, imagining and enacting new realities. TO, however, emerged out of a very different context-that of a broad-based liberation movement aimed at effecting systemic social change. As such, its goals are quite different from those of drama therapy and psychodrama. Where psychodrama and drama therapy aim to provide venues for healing for individuals or small groups, TO aims to provide a venue for healing for whole communities and societies.

*Research on the Application of Theater of the Oppressed to Community-based Practice*

Emerging research that specifically examines the application of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) modality to social work practice offers promising evidence for its capacity to support personal, collective and social policy change. At the level of social policy change, Spratt et al. (2000) cite examples of application of TO processes to inform mental health legislation in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, among other significant cases of

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legislative change that emerged in Brazil from grassroots participation vis-à-vis TO.

Application of Theatre of the Oppressed to macro policy change efforts has been much

more scant in the US. However, there is emerging research on attempts to effect social

change through TO in the US.

Sullivan, Petronella, Brooks, Murillo, Primeau and Ward (2008) studied the

impact of TO's unique interplay of personal, collective and policy change on an

environmental justice coalition work in Houston, Texas. They analyzed the ways in

which the Community Environmental Forum was able to involve community members

directly affected by environmental racism and classism in community-based participatory

research (CBPR). This CPBR then informed the nature of the knowledge production and

the content of the research outcomes that, in turn, affected environmental policy. The

CBPR involved community members in performance and discussion exploring the extent

of environmental injustice, using "real to ideal": activities to envision a just, safe, healthy

neighborhood.

The 14 participants in the CPBR reported the following outcomes: a sense of

personal transformation related to feelings, behavior and cognition; increased community

leadership and skills; knowledge acquisition about critical health and environmental

justice issues; significant turning points in attitudes and beliefs; and acting and

community process facilitation skills. Participants also reported a sense of power in

expressing previously suppressed feelings and thoughts, including: anger at chronic

injustice and deeply vulnerable instances of self-revelation (Sullivan et al, 2008). The

study did not provide an analysis of how these outcomes at the personal and collective

levels translated into changes in their engagement at the macro level.

Spratt et al. (2000) demonstrated a strong link between communal transformation inspired by TO capacity-building and collective decision-making. Inspired by the application of TO processes to social welfare in Brazil, Spratt et al. (2000) initiated a study which specifically examined the application of Theatre of the Oppressed to the child protection system in Belfast, Ireland. The majority of the twenty-nine social workers who participated in the TO process left with new, collectively-generated ideas about how to enact change at the grassroots level in order to move the focus of the child protection system from one that prioritizes removal of children from families towards a focus on strengthening supports for families.  Their findings, based on the narrative accounts of the participants of their study, support Boal's theory of change that collective knowledge is greater than the sum of individual knowledge bases. The transformational impact of TO suggests that TO processes may increase capacity to move from knowledge to action. However, Spratt et al. (2000) found that it was more difficult to assess the impact of Theater of the Oppressed processes on actual institutional transformations in the child protection system.

Proctor, Perlesz, Moloney, Mcilwaine, and O'Neill (2008) reviewed the impact of applying Theatre of the Oppressed acting and action methods used in family therapy. They were interested in developing measures to better assess how family therapists address power inequities and systems of oppression in their work with families. They found through several case examples involving supervision and peer groups that TO processes helped the groups create stronger awareness about how the external world impacts the individuals in the room, developed stronger plans about how to access external supports, address "stuckness" in families and address organizational conflict and

malaise.   The authors note a gap in their research in that they focused on using Theatre of the Oppressed to innovate anti-oppressive therapeutic techniques, but did not address how to focus on developing strategies to counter oppression embedded in mental health policy.

Halperin's (2002) study of the purposeful use of theatre in group work with a multilingual, multiethnic group of elders in the South Bronx portrayed a dialectical process. On the one hand, they found that the process enabled members of oppressed and disenfranchised communities through performance to understand themselves as "effective, significant and agents of change" (Halperin, 2002, p.28). On the other, the performances that this group created engaged members of the community beyond the group itself and, in effect, involved a much larger proportion of the local communities (across lines of language, ethnicity and race) in the organization and in local community infrastructure. This ripple effect was understood to have an exponential impact on the exercise of communal self-determination on a broader societal level.

Each of these studies analyzed subjects' perceptions of the impact of their involvement in TO on their thinking about and involvement in social change.  Proctor, et al. (2008) specifically focused on using Theatre of the Oppressed to address how oppression is addressed in interpersonal and small group dynamics in the therapy room, as compared to addressing structural oppression externally. Halperin (2002), Sullivan, et al. (2008) and Spratt et al. (2001), on the other hand, analyzed efforts of groups attempting to effect institutional change. Halperin (2002) and Sullivan et al. (2008) hypothesized a strong ripple effect in the local communities, whereby community members who participated in the performances as audience members became more

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involved in the social change efforts. Both studies acknowledged, however, that it was difficult to fully *assess* the impact on the broader community.

*Social Change Theater and Social Work Practice with Youth:*

Several studies point to the particular utility of theatre and drama programs in helping adolescents more effectively take on a range of developmental tasks and indicate that performing arts can provide support to adolescents in ways that other youth development organizations do not (Heath, 2000; Ball & Heath, 1993; McLaughlin, Irby and Langman, 1994). Dutton (2001) found that identified benefits for adolescents of engaging in group work incorporating the arts include: an enhanced sense of belonging and identity; stronger interpersonal skills; learning to work with others; increased understanding of group accountability and trust; the feeling of contributing to the community through communal art; learning about themselves through finding "their own voice"; safely experimenting with new behaviors; creating venues for difficult or confusing feelings; productive expression of anger; developing group process and decision-making skills; experience of being active in one's own educational process; and enhanced academic performance. Dutton (2001) asserts that for adolescents, the combination of these factors can nourish a greater sense of power to effect change in one's life.

Smokowski and Bacallao's (2009) quantitative study, which used an experimental research design to evaluate two prevention programs for 81 Latino families, provides important correlational data. One program used a standard support group and the other, psychodramatic action-oriented skill training. Both programs were based on the same topical outline focusing on issues of mental health, aggression and academic performance

in the context of experiences of assimilation and discrimination. As such, Smokowski and

Bacallao (2009) analyzed which modality was more effective at supporting youth and

families to address specific behavioral and mental health issues by helping them to

develop "bicultural coping skills". It is notable that the behavioral and mental health

wellness indices in the study's measures are specifically associated with the social

stresses of assimilation for immigrant Latino families and first generation adolescents.

Smokowski and Bacallao (2009) found that psychodramatic techniques were particularly

effective at helping youth and families explore the link between individual experience,

affect and behavior *and the collective capacity to navigate socio-cultural experiences in

the US*.

Halverson (2005) conducted an ethnographic study of "About Face", a lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth theatre program, involving

25 participants, Like Smokowski et al. (2009), Halverson (2005) found that performing

narratives based on program members' experiences allowed members to explore multiple

possibilities for the future.  Because of the invisibility and marginalization many LGBTQ

youth face, the venue of performance allowed many of the youth a unique opportunity to

explore multiple possible selves.  This is a unique potential benefit for LGBTQ youth

because of the ways in which arts organizations for youth serve to break isolation and

alienation, and create "chances to glimpse alternatives" (Halverson, 2005, p.71),

alternatives often obscured for LGBTQ youth. Through this process, LGBTQ young

people in this study reported that they were able to construct new positive social

identities. Through the process of telling, re-writing and performing their stories, young

people reported that they were able to integrate different layers of self, on the level of the

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psychological, the interpersonal and the social/communal. Transformation of these experiences into performances allowed for possibility of transformation in real time through envisioning new imagined futures and innovating new ways to move towards the future.

The Studies by Dutton (2001) Smokowski and Bacallao (2009) and Halverson (2005) all indicate that theater and performance can be particularly useful for adolescents in navigating development tasks, which indeed vary across identity and context. Smokowski and Bacallao's (2009) and Halverson (2005) found that theater and performance can help adolescents more effectively navigate oppressive social systems and assert agency to build futures that might not have otherwise appeared possible. All three studies support the theory that change-oriented theater breaks isolation and strengthens group trust and solidarity, for adolescents in particular.

*Summary of the Literature Review*

The current social work research on social change, theater and social work practice primarily addresses change that occurs at the micro and meso levels. A gap in current social work research on social change and theatre relates to the impact of social change theatre programs on *systemic* social change. The researcher believes that exploring the perspectives of practitioners of social change theater may illuminate important themes or trends around the kinds of impact that social change theater is making. The researcher examined the *perceptions* of participants of social change theater programs in relation to how their involvement may have impacted macro social change. Conversely, this study examined perceptions of the participants in relation to how their engagement in social change work vis-a-vis social change theater has impacted them at

the meso and micro levels.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

*Formulation*

This qualitative study, entitled "Exploring Participant Perspectives on the Relationship between Social Change Theater and Social Change Movements", was designed to examine social change theater program participants' perspectives on the connection between their participation in these programs and their perceived capacity to create social change. This study explored the following questions: 1) How has participation in social change theatre affected the participants' sense of agency to create collective social change at the macro level; 2) What do participants perceive as their impact on systemic social change in relation to their participation in social change theater? 3) How do participants perceive the interaction of change at the level of the macro with change they may have experienced on the levels of the meso (for example, level of community, shift in group dynamics and mutual support) and the micro (for example, emotional well-being, personal sense of agency, values and beliefs) in relationship to their involvement in social change theater?

The researcher is defining systemic social change as change that has an impact on the macro level of society. Social change theater usually works from the assumption that effective social change occurs at the intersection of the macro, meso and micro levels of society. The research is defining macro change as change occurring at the level of policy and political, economic, social or cultural infrastructure. The researcher is defining meso

change as change that occurs at the level of community. The researcher is defining micro change as change that occurs on the level of the intra-personal and the interpersonal.

*Research Design*

As a means to add to the relatively small body of social work research on social change theater, the research employed an exploratory research method and a qualitative design. This research used empirical qualitative methods, in the form of semi-structured interviews, with members of three social change oriented theater/performance programs.

*Sample Selection*

The selection process involved purposive sampling. Participants in these identified programs that met inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the study. For inclusion in this study, participants had to be currently involved or have participated during the past year in one of the identified social change theatre groups. Additionally, participants must have spent at least 3 months of meaningful, consistent involvement in the program and completed at least one project with their group. Minors over the age of fourteen were included in the study, as social justice theater is a medium used particularly effectively with adolescents.

The researcher partnered with three specific social justice theatre organizations in order to create a research process that would be accountable to the communities involved, to explore questions that practitioners of social change theater deem relevant to their work, and to yield findings that would be relevant to the needs of social change theater practitioners. As such, the researcher began the project by making contact with key leaders in social justice theatre in the Bay Area, California to ensure that the avenue of inquiry is relevant to the field. The researcher initially made contact with fifteen social

change theater organizations (identified through various networks). Six of these organizations expressed explicit interest in working with researcher on this research project.

Ultimately, the researcher identified three groups with which to partner on the project based on a combination of feasibility and the range of approaches and populations that each of these three groups worked with. The groups with which the researcher partnered included: Sins Invalid; The San Francisco Mime Troupe's Youth Theater Program; and the OutLook Theater Project. Sins Invalid is a performance project that incubates and celebrates artists with disabilities, centralizing artists of color and queer and gender-variant artists as communities who have been historically marginalized. Theater Project, The San Francisco Mime Troupe's Youth Theater Project aims to use theater as a means to artistically and creatively express the opinions of young people on topics that are relevant to their lives. Out Look Theater Project is an ensemble-based company that creates original performance about relevant issues from a queer perspective.

At the point that each organization agreed to partner on the project, the researcher solicited letters of permission, which the researcher in turn provided to the Smith College School of Social Work Human Subjects Review committee. The researcher communicated with his primary contacts at each partnering organization to explain the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The researcher consulted with the partnering organizations to identify recruitment venues deemed appropriate by each organization. The researcher, in tandem with liaisons at the partnering organizations, developed several recruitment strategies, including: the researcher speaking at the organizations' gatherings;

liaisons at each organization soliciting participation from their members at their events;

liaisons from each organization sending e-mail announcements through the

organizations' list-serves or to specific members; and distributing recruitment letters to

appropriate contacts within the organization.

In the case of potential subjects who were minors, the researcher relied heavily on

contacts at the partnering theater organization to identify appropriate potential subjects

and to then contact the minor's legal guardian with information about the study

(including the Parent/Guardian Informed Consent Form).  Between the three

organizations, thirty to forty total potential subjects were contacted by the liaisons from

each organization, resulting in a total of fourteen subjects being interviewed.

*The Sample*

The sample was a non-probability convenience sample of social change theater

practitioners accessed through the specific organizations with which the researcher

partnered. The subjects- and in the case of minors, their guardians- were initially

contacted by point people in their respective groups who invited them to participate in the

study. The sample was not meant be representative or generalizable to the larger

population, as it is too small and created through convenience. Additionally, the sample

represents only a cross-section of the overall population as all of the participants are

people who are explicitly committed to and engaging in social justice activism.

The study was comprised of fourteen participants, who represented a relatively

diverse sample demographically (along lines of race, class, age, gender identity, sexual

orientation and ability). Subjects were asked to provide demographic information on their

age, gender identity and racial and ethnic identity.  Participants were also asked to share

any other parts of their identities that they deem relevant to their work in social change

theater.

Five subjects were in the 16-20 age bracket. One subject was in the 21-30 range.

Two subjects were in the 31-40 range. Two subjects were in the 41-50. Two subjects

were in the 51-60 range.  Two subjects were in 71-80. Seven identified as female, five

identified as male, one identified as genderqueer and one identified as bi-gendered. The

sample included: two participants who identified as Latino; two who identified as

African-American; three who identified as white; two who identified as Asian-American;

one who identified as Puerto Rican; two who identified as white and Jewish; one who

identified as  a person of color/ Japanese and Haitian; and one who idenftied as bi-racial/

Puerto Rican and Jewish.  Eight participants identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer.

One participant identified as heterosexual. Six participants identified as disabled. Two

participants identified as able-bodied.  Participants were not specifically asked about their

sexual orientation or ability/disability status; this information emerged based on the open-

ended question about other identities/demographic information that participants felt was

relevant to their work in social change theater.

The sample included two participants from Outlook Community Theater Project,

five from the San Francisco Mime Troupe Youth Theater Project and seven from Sins

Invalid. All participants had been involved in their respective groups for over one year

and less than five years. Six participants had been involved in social change-focused

theater or performance work more than a decade, while eight participants had been

involved in social change theater/performance work for five years or less.

*Data Collection Methods*

The researcher collected qualitative data through the use of open-ended, structured questions asked in interviews with study participants (see Appendix E).  Subjects were asked to supply demographic information pertaining to age, race, ethnicity, and gender identity (as well as other relevant demographic or identity aspects, as indicated by the partnering organization and by the subjects themselves). The researcher consulted with each organization about the most effective and appropriate method through which to do the interviews. San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Outlook Community Theater Project decided that they wanted the researcher to do individual interviews with their members. Sins Invalid decided that a Focus group with their members would be the most effective because members would be more motivated to participate if the interview could facilitate a conversation among members. Additionally, the liaisons at Sins Invalid expressed that Sins Invalid members might feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts in the context of being in a group with trusted comrades than they might while doing an individual interview with a stranger.

The same interview questions were used for the focus group as for the individual interviews. However, across the board, probes and modifications of questions were used when salient themes, patterns and concepts emerged. In addition, information gleaned from the initial interviews was used to re-structure interview questions going forward.

Once the research proposal was approved by the Human Subjects Review Board of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee, recruitment letters (see Appendix D) were sent (or distributed by the liaisons at the partnering organizations) to all potential participants in advance of the interviews.  The letter described the study and defined the selection criteria for participants. If the

potential participant expressed interest, the researcher or the organizational liaison sent

(via e-mail or US mail) or directly distributed the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix

C), which outlined the purpose of the study and the terms under which the data was

collected. Informed consent was obtained before the interviews were conducted.

In the case of potential subjects who are minors, the researcher relied on the

partnering theater organization (the San Francisco Mime Troupe) to identify appropriate

contacts and ensure that the minor's legal guardian was provided with information about

the study and the Informed Consent Form. Once a legal guardian had returned a signed

legal guardian consent form, the researcher invited the minor to participate in the study,

ensuring to let the minor know that they have full rights to refuse participation. The

researcher then provided all minors their own informed consent form at the appropriate

mailing address or e-mail address for their review. The researcher did not begin the

interview process with any minor before they had signed their own Informed Consent

form.

The researcher worked with the collaborating theatre groups to identify safe,

confidential and appropriate meeting spaces.  The researcher identified and offered

confidential, neutral meeting spaces (including library study rooms and cafes).  The San

Francisco Mime Troupe decided that it would be most appropriate for the researcher to

interview Youth Theater Project participants on-site in a private office space. They felt

most comfortable having the researcher interview their participants on site where the

youth are already comfortable and where their parents/guardians are already comfortable

having their children under the adult supervision of San Francisco Mime Troupe staff.

The Outlook Community Theater Project decided that it would be appropriate for the

researcher to offer to interview members in their own homes given that their participants were elders and this might offer increased accessibility.  The Sins Invalid focus group was conducted at the Sins Invalid work space.

The researcher provided all participants a list of community mental health resources (see Appendix F). The researcher informed each participant that they could decline to answer any question during the interview process. The researcher informed each participant that they were free to withdraw from the study any time before April 15th, 2010.  The interviews were audio-recorded using digital audio recording software and transcribed at a later date (all identifying information was deleted or disguised).

As subjects in qualitative research, the researcher informed each participant that their information would remain confidential, though not anonymous. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned a code number to serve as an identification marker upon completion of the interview.  In addition, any other identifiable information that would compromise confidentiality was altered to protect confidentiality in this study. Informed Consents were kept separate from the collected data and in a safe, locked place.

*Data Analysis*

Once the data was gathered and transcribed, the researcher analyzed the data using a coding system.  Data collection was coded for themes that emerged across and within the three programs. Data was be coded for themes based on the research priorities that the three organizations identified and thematic patterns that emerged through the data collection process itself. The researcher attempted to stay as close as possible to the participants' own words and meaning so as to insure greater validity of the interpretation. The patterns that arose were analyzed through the themes and to assess the frequency,

magnitude, structures, processes, causes, and consequences of these patterns. After categories developed, the data was reviewed and assigned to coded categories. Categories were then revised as some data fit in more than one category. The researcher then looked at the themes to understand how they were supported by the primary data and how they answered the research questions. Transcripts were also analyzed for important themes or ideas that had not been targeted by the semi-structured interview guide but which were raised during the interviews by participants.

Broad themes for coding include: the way that commitment to social justice on the part of individuals and the group has been impacted by participation in social change theatre programs; the ways in which that commitment has been translated into action in the world vis-à-vis social change movements; the ways in which that commitment to, or involvement in, social change movements impact the individual and collective experience of the self and of the group.

*Limitations of the Research*

Due to the small sample size and selected research design, generalizations cannot be made from the results of this study. The findings provide an in-depth understanding of some practitioners of social change oriented theater and performance perspectives on the impact of their work in social change theater. It is hoped the data gathered through this study and presented here will inspire and inform future research.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

*Introduction*

This qualitative study, entitled "Exploring Participant Perspectives on the

Relationship Between Social Change Theater and Social Change Movements" was

designed to examine social change theater program participants' perspectives on the

connection between their participation in these programs and their perceived capacity to

create social change. This study was designed to address the following questions: 1) How

has participation in social change theatre affected the participants' sense of agency to

create collective social change at the macro level; 2) What do participants perceive as

their impact on systemic social change in relation to their participation in social change

theater? 3) How do participants perceive the interaction of change at the level of the

macro with change they may have experienced on the levels of the meso (for example,

level of community, shift in group dynamics and mutual support) and the micro (for

example, emotional well-being, personal sense of agency, values and beliefs) in

relationship to their involvement in social change theater?

This chapter presents the most salient data that emerged from the eight individual

interviews and one focus group (which included six participants). This chapter has been

thematically organized into the following sections: 1) Participants' ideas about the

meaning of "social change theater"; 2) How and why participants became involved in

social change theater; 3) Participant perceptions of the impact of involvement in social

change theater on their social and political consciousness; 4) Participant perceptions of the impact of their involvement in social changer theater on their (individual and collective) capacities to create social change; 5) Participant perceptions of the impact of their involvement on their confidence and skills in relation to social change work; 6) Participant perceptions of the impact of their involvement on their commitment to and participation in social change movements; 7) participants' perception of the impact of their theater/performance projects on systemic social change. Because this research looked comparatively at three social change theater/performance groups (The San Francisco Mime Troupe's Youth Theater Project, Sins Invalid and The Outlook Community Theater Project), each section of this chapter is further divided into subsections which examine the data that emerged within each group.

*Demographics*

The study was comprised of 14 participants, who represented a relatively diverse sample demographically in terms of race, class, age, gender identity, sexual orientation and ability. Subjects were asked to provide demographic information on their age, gender identity and racial and ethnic identity. Participants were also asked to share any other parts of their identities that they deemed relevant to their work in social change theater.

Five subjects were in the 16-20 age bracket; one was in the 21-30 range; two in the 31-40 range; two in the 41-50 range; two in the 51-60 range and two in the 71-80 range. Seven participants identified as female, five identified as male, one identified as genderqueer and one identified as bi-gendered. In terms of race and ethnic identity, the sample included: two participants who identified as Latino; two who identified as African-American; two who identified as Asian-American; three who identified as white;

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two who identified as white and Jewish; one who identified as Puerto Rican; one who identified as  a person of color  and as Japanese and Haitian; and one who idenftied as bi-racial and as Puerto Rican and Jewish.  Eight participants identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer. One participant identified as heterosexual. Six participants identified as people with disabilities. Two participants identified as able-bodied.  Participants were not specifically asked about their sexual orientation or ability/disability status; this information emerged based on the open-ended question about other identities and related demographic information that participants felt was relevant to their work in social change theater.

The sample included two participants from Outlook Community Theater Project, five from the San Francisco Mime Troupe Youth Theater Project and seven from Sins Invalid. All participants had been involved in their respective groups for over one year and less than five years. Nine participants had been involved in social change-focused theater or performance work more than a decade, while five participants had been involved in social change theater/performance work for five years or less.

*Participants' Ideas about the Meaning of "Social Change Theater"*

After conducting several interviews, one interviewee, in response to the interview question, "Are there any other interview questions I did not ask but should have?",  stated that it would be useful to ask participants at the beginning of the interview what the idea of "social change theater" means to each to interviewee. The researcher added this question to the interview guide based on the theoretical guidelines of this paper. The following is the range of answers participants gave to the question, "What does the idea of 'social change theater' mean to you?"

*San Francisco Mime Troupe (SFMT)*

Two participants of the SFMT believed that social change theater is theater that addresses social problems, raises awareness with the audience about the nature of social problems, and attempts to suggest possible solutions. One SFMT participant posited that social change theater is theater that, "brings information to the people, the masses, the audience that are watching...and it's usually to bring about change." Another participant shared that s/he* viewed SFMT as an example of social change theater. S/he reflected,

> Because we share a lot of ideas around here about things that are wrong with the youth and things that are going wrong in our lives, or things that are just wrong with education, or home life, or just life out on the streets or whatever...And either trying to show solutions or just showing people that these problems are still around even though some people might think none of these problems exist anymore. But they really do.

Three participants expressed that, from their perspective, one of the important features of social change theater is the creation of a space that conveys the voices and experiences of youth that are not heard by most adults. One SFMT participant stated,

> That is definitely a big thing that we try and convey, is just getting the youth's voice out there and letting people know what's actually happening. Because people, they don't really realize how hard it is for teenagers nowadays.

Another SFMT participant affirmed that conveying youth perspectives is particularly important "since it's the youth which is the next generation that will actually take over the place after this, the current generation is like gone."

*Because of the gender binary system that is embedded in the English language, which includes only male and female third person gender pronoun options ("he/hir", "he/she", "himself/herself"), a set of third-person singular gender-neutral pronouns have been proposed by emerging social and linguistic movements. The following pronouns reflect a popular variant of these linguistic innovations: "s/he" (replacing "she" and "he"); "hir" (replacing "him and her"), "hirself" (replacing "herself" and "himself"). These gender-neutral pronouns will be used throughout this chapter to identify *all* participants of this research study.

Two participants posed that social change theater creates a safe space for youth to share political ideas and their emotions, where they may not otherwise feel safe to do so in other parts of their lives; in effect building their confidence to make change. One SFMT participant stated, "Social change is...how it makes you start to react to the theater. You might be like the shy...and then later on it helps you...find out who you are and give you confidence because you're on the stage." Another SFMT participant elaborated,

> So, it's...a good outlet for people, for sure, on letting out their emotions or just letting out the political ideas, because they might be too scared to share it at school where they might get laughed at, or something, or, you know, getting up and giving a speech to a giant crowd.

One SFMT participant stated that s/he did not know how to answer the question of what social change theater meant to hir.

*Sins Invalid*

Participants from Sins Invalid had a significant range of responses to the question of how they understand social change theater. The framework of "social change theater" did not resonate for several participants from Sins Invalid (SI). Three Sins Invalid participants identified their work around art and politics as more specific to cultural work. One SI participant offered, "I don't really know what social change theater means exactly. I've never heard the term until I read it, when you [the researcher] proposed it. So what I understand is cultural work."

Several of the participants challenged the structure of the theater as an enclosed, inaccessible space, versus performance that can happen on the street and other spaces that are rooted and accessible to communities. One SI participant elaborated,

> I don't really consider my performance work before Sins...theater-based...Mom and Dad took me to New York once and we saw the Last Poets on the corner of

Harlem. So I've always questioned, you know, the theater-based art and really identify with street art. I think I've always had some kind of cultural work in my day-to-day life.

Another SI participant stated, "I don't see myself as a real theater person. But I think that I've been supporting, been part of theater projects that are trying to contribute to systemic change....cultural work is important to me as a poet."

One SI participant identified as a radical artist. S/he stated:

I wanted to talk a little bit about being a storyteller, which has been central to my political work from very early on. My brother is also a radical artist, he's a visual artist, and we have had a multi-decade conversation about the meaning of that work...I actually prefer to talk about being a radical artist than about being a cultural worker because for me, I've experienced that as...part of the devaluing of art in this society.

For the majority of Sins Invalid participants, "theater" as an art form did not capture either the multi-media format through which they had been engaged in art and social change work or the political framework from which they approach their work.

*Outlook Community Theater Project:*

The two interviewees from Outlook were the first two interviewees whom the researcher interviewed. Therefore, the researcher did not have an opportunity to ask them the question, "What does social change theater mean to you?", due to the fact that this question was suggested by the second Outlook interviewee.

*How and Why Participants Got Involved in Social Change Theater*

*San Francisco Mime Troupe*

All five SFMT participants reported that they got involved in social change theater vis-a-vis SFMT's Youth Theater Project (YTP). All five participants reported that they got involved after SFMT presented and recruited at their high schools. Two

participants reported that they joined, in part, because they did not have many other after-school opportunities as youth. One SFMT participant number remembered, "I thought, hey, might as well do it. Not really doing much else, because I'm a freshman." Another SFMT participant stated that s/he decided to participate in the Youth Theater Program (YTP), "Because I had nothing to do after school anyway, so I just signed up for it." A third SFMT participant reflected that the fact that the SFMT offered compensation and food to participants was also a motivating factor. S/he shared, "So I went down there and it looked very interesting to me...And then they pay you, and they feed you, and it seemed like a great program. I was like, I need to be here, so I signed up."

All five participants reported that they were interested in joining SFMT because they were interested in acting. Only one SFMT participant reported that s/he had acting experience prior to joining SFMT. Only one participant shared that part of hir interest in joining SFMT was based on a prior interest in politics. This participant shared, "Well, at my school we talk a lot about like problems in society, like global warming and racism." When the SFMT presented at hir school, "They said a lot about how they do theater, that they bring things to the minds of the people that are like political to bring about change...And that they do like usually comedic work." It was the SFMT's approach to integrating theater, comedy, politics and social change that specifically drew this participant in. Other participants reported that they were not interested in politics before they got involved in the SFMT but eventually developed interest in politics and social issues through being involved over the years, which in turn, kept them coming back. One SFMT participant explained:

At that time I wasn't thinking too much about politics and stuff like that but more or less just fun. And then as the years went on I got deeper into it, and sharing more and more ideas, political ideas or just trying to help people convey their ideas. Not necessarily just political but just social problems. That was always a big thing with the groups that I was in, was social issues, like domestic violence or people who were transsexual and they weren't able to fit in because their family didn't accept them, or gay people who weren't being accepted by their families and by their peers. And so that was always kind of a big thing within my groups, was the social change.

All five SFMT participants stressed that they very quickly became very invested in and committed to the YTP. All five participants reported that a major factor in their engagement with YTP was the interactive theater exercises and games and how much fun they had. One SFMT participant remembered, "We had to improvise, which I wasn't really good at, but I caught on though and we played, it was Zip Zap Zo or something. Like people played it before but I haven't, so when I played it, it was just really fun." Another SFMT participant stated that s/he got hooked into the YTP because of, "The games. Like everybody is...like, 'oh, let's do this'...And so that's it. All the energetic games."

Three participants explained that they became and stayed involved in YTP because of the relationships and level of community. One SFMT participant explained that s/he kept coming to YTP because of,

The friendliness. Everybody here is so friendly. And...if you have a problem, they can tell when you're...kind of down...They'll pull you aside. And...they're like, oh, are you okay? If you need...anything, just talk to us...It's very welcoming

Several participants noted that the social environment SFMT is particularly distinct from their social environments at school. One SFMT participant shared that at YTP, "We don't really know each other so we get to start off fresh. It's different how they act [at the YTP] because...we're not in school...They were friendly, like they didn't judge. And they were open."

Another SFMT participant also found that a strong draw of YTP was that it created a space where youth could explore new ideas and identities. s/he stated,

> It helped people express a lot of their own ideas and not just say "Me, this is my problem," but  create a character that conveyed it. It opens people up a little bit more, because they're not worrying about it's me, me, me all the time. I mean it's a little bit of them, but they can kind of fool the audience and think it's somebody else. And that kind of impact was really strong for a lot of people.

All five participants expressed that they have continued to feel deeply invested in the YTP and the YTP community and, thus, return to participate year after year. One SFMT participant described hir experience of YTP as a place where everybody would say things like, "Oh, what's your phone number? Let's talk and, like, text each other. Facebook, Myspace. It's like we all like just clicked and that's why. That's how it became fun." Another SFMT participant stated, "I loved it...And I've been...back, ever since, every year."

*Sins Invalid*

Where the YTP was the first experience of participating in social change theater for all five SFMT participants, all seven Sins Invalid participants had extensive previous experience in social change-focused theater and performance, cultural work and political art. During the Sins Invalid Focus Group, each participant shared in-depth stories of their paths towards involvement in social change theater and political performance.

Six of the seven SI participants identified youth activism as the original venue through which they were exposed to social change theater or cultural work. Five of the seven SI participants specifically identified college student activism as a critical entry point for cultural work and/or social change theater, while one identified high school as the venue for hir involvement, and the other two reported that they got involved as

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teenagers in social change theater and performance through social justice movements that

were not based in schools. One SI participant shared,

> In college...I was the president of the disability students project and we used to
> just take over...the campus and just do poetry and artwork and just do it right
> there, on campus. Because I thought that disability was too hush-hush so I wanted
> to get it really out there...So I think my cultural work started in my early college
> years.

S/he reflected that hir involvement began in college but that hir initial inspiration

for cultural work started as a child. S/he recalled,

> I think the seed of that started when I was younger, when my father took me to
> New York and saw the Last Poets...We saw the Last Poets on the corner of
> Harlem. I was like, okay, this is what I want to do. So I've always questioned, you
> know, the theater-based art and really [identify with] street art. I think I've always
> had some kind of cultural work in my day-to-day life.

Five of the seven SI participants identified Guerilla Theater specifically as the

forum through which they got involved in social change theater, cultural work or political

art. One SI participant remembered participating in college in, "fishbowls and

intensive...encounter groups between people who...had been...polarized...We

did...readings, histories...about racial oppression, disability, etc., and people, participants

from that, went on to do a little bit of guerrilla theater around campus." Another SI

participant got involved in Guerilla Theater through women's liberation work in the

1970s. S/he stated, "I have been doing performance all along. It hasn't been strictly

theater in a traditional sense. I Came to the States at thirteen and was involved in

Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell in Chicago, which did Guerrilla

Theater at the Chicago Seven trial and in front of the Playboy building."

Four SI participants noted that they had also become involved in guerilla art and

theater through their involvement in college student movements. Another SI participant

recounted hir experience of finding hir way to multi-media performance in connection to

a specific campaign around prisoner's and ex-prisoner's rights. S/he recollected:

> When I was living in Providence I was involved with an organization called Direct  Action for Rights Equality... I was involved in anti-prison and prisoners' rights organizing and some specific campaigns and we had just won a campaign...to  restore food stamps to people with felonies who were coming out [of prison]. And then we were gearing up for another campaign...to restore voting rights for people coming out and also Mandatory Minimums campaign. Simultaneously, there was a body of work that was coming out of the prisons, body of writings coming into DARE (Direction Action for  Rights Equality) through their...Behind the Walls committee, which was where...a lot of these campaigns and organizing was housed.... So that sort of became a project that some of my friends were involved in, called Voice of the Voiceless, which was based on all of those writings from people serving time.  I was really invested in...channeling resources I had access to through Brown to support the local work. And so they [DARE] were like...will you help us bring this to Brown? The Voice of the Voiceless reading that had just happened.  That wasn't really my goal-to... bring this theater project to Brown, but they were...offering the resource to produce it.

Where the majority of participants connected with social change theater work through

social change activism, only one of the seven participants located traditional theater as

the beginning of hir path towards social change theater/performance. One SI participant

recollected,

> I did a lot of...musical theater in middle school and high school, and then in high school...I think because of disability stuff, trauma from my childhood, political leanings, etc., I just was having a really hard time in high school and ended up going to kind of an alternative school and...it was a night school so I had to stop doing theater.

S/he added that, "Theater has always been really big for me and I think there aren't a lot

of parts that I can play in traditional theater" based on hir experience of ableism and fat

oppression in the theater world. S/he reported, "When I was seventeen, Riot Girl was

something that was just starting to happen, and kind of grew out of the punk scene in

Olympia and I happened to be like the perfect age for it to hit me" and began to do

projects "that kind of brought together...performance and politics and trying to create a

space for myself to be a whole person in the world and have a community."

Another SI participant also articulated political performance and art as a key

venue through which s/he found and built community. S/he offered the following story:

> I was part of a community of people who were doing this together...In 1981 I was
> one of the contributors to This Bridge Called My Back and we had the initial
> reading as the book came out in Arlington Street Church in Boston. And it was
> extremely theatrical. We spent the day transforming the space and draping the
> statues of dead white men with African cloth and putting bowls of tropical fruit
> out, and kimonos on the walls, et cetera. But you know, it was a building that was
> meant to hold 800 people. There were 1200 people in it. And there was this
> moment where the ten of us who were...reading...came out onto the stage, and we
> got a standing ovation before we'd said anything. And that was a moment where I
> understood that it wasn't personal. That, I mean what I felt was there was this vast
> animal that for whatever biographical and other kinds of reasons, we were at that
> moment being the mouth of. But that we were vibrating to what this community
> needed to speak and then we were being tongues in that moment. And I remember
> thinking this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. I became a writer in the
> context of the women's movement, and then particularly the women of color
> movement, and it was in that context of speaking what has not been spoken that I
> became a public writer.

Similarly, Several of the participants shared that their motivation for getting

involved in Sins Invalid was to create space for voices of people with disabilities,

particularly people of color with disabilities and queer people with disabilities, in the

context of helping to build a disability justice movement. One SI participant stated that

s/he was motivated to co-found Sins Invalid as means to make visible, "All the art and

the history and the culture and the beauty of people with disabilities that have been made

throughout the years, that's not recognized." S/he went on to say, "I think the society

makes you separated. You know...art and movement stuff. So I think...Sins, you know,

creates that kind of platform where, you know, you don't have to be separated."

Several SI participants talked about their motivations of integrating art with social movement-building and integrating personal material with commentary about social, political, cultural and economic structures. One SI participant observed, "The stuff that I'm drawn to do with Sins very much has to do with weaving historical threads through the personal material." Another SI participant remembered "feeling compelled...to come up with a body of solo material about my own experience, relationship to disability, to sexuality, to gender." Several SI participants shared that past experiences of not being able to be their full, complex selves was part of what lead them to their work with SI. One SI participant commented,

> The other thing I wanted to say that's been very affirmative for me as well as extremely painful is that I exist in a lot of mixed heritage spaces as somebody who's bilingual, who's of mixed heritage and light skinned, who is bisexual at a time of separatism, whose disabilities have, I spent two years in a wheelchair after a stroke, were not easily visible. So that I was not part of many communities I longed to be part of because of the way lines were drawn...and this particular moment and getting to relate to Sins is a space in which I can be in all the blurry, intermediate, marginalized ancestral races that I am.

Three SI participants cited a lack of sustainability in their past work as a motivation for getting involved in SI, where the value of embodiment is paramount. One of these SI participant commented, "In creating *The Transfused* [a political rock opera that toured around the US], I hit a really big wall inside myself around self-care. Like I had really left that piece out of my own organizing and performance, like I was working so hard to try to create a world that I could be in? So I...totally collapsed after that." Another SI participant shared that s/he had been involved in:

> Speaking tours for many, many years, doing a lot of anti-oppression work and readings and story telling...and...I collapsed because of it being such a disembodied model of how to do political work. I've spent the last five years reworking my concept of how one does this and my political work is primarily

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done from my desk and computer. And so seeing Sins two years ago and recognizing in it the complexity and richness of how people were talking about the issues...the embodiment, you know, I saw the possibility to be publicly a political artist in a space where I was not gonna be demanded. It wasn't gonna be demanded of me that I sacrifice my body in order to do it.

*Outlook Community Theater Project*

Both participants from Outlook reported that they got involved in LGBT and women's community theater in the 1970s, at a time where these were new innovations.

One participant commented,

Back in the 1970s, this gay theater started in Minneapolis and so I just went to the performances and after a while because I was going regularly, I was asked to join the board...at that time it was very unusual to have gay theater, and...I wanted to support it.

The other Outlook participant also found hir way into theater to help fill a community niche; the need for creating spaces for women's voices. S/he stated:

I was into theater before...and...I was mad at all the  male playwrights, and I was mad at all the roles of women who were mentally ill, alcoholic, sick, passive, you know. I didn't  want to do any of those parts anymore. I didn't want to see any of those plays anymore.  And so we started writing on a given theme about our own lives. And there was an audience, and I had not written for theater before. You know, we were saying our truths and there were people out there who needed to hear them, you know, there was hunger for the material.

Both participants also got involved in Outlook Community Theater Project to create visibility for a community (LGBT elders) that they each felt had been rendered, to some degree, invisible. One participant shared, "What drew me to Outlook was that I don't think the stories of elders, in general, have been much told, and that they were anxious to hear about our lives was very wonderful. The lives of lesbian and gay elders."

*Impact on Participants' Social and Political Consciousness*

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A significant theme that emerged through each of the three groups was the question of how involvement in social change theater or performance had impacted participants' consciousness about their own relationship to their communities and to society.

*San Francisco Mime Troupe*

All SFMT participants shared that involvement in the YTP had shifted their consciousness. Several participants reflected that the group conversations on social and political issues (that are central to the YTP) had expanded their perspectives. One participant stated,

> It opens your mind...your ideas. Because...we have a brainstorm, like what do you guys want to talk about? What's going on in the world? It's all these things you knew, it was always in the back of your head.

Several participants reported that their consciousness was profoundly impacted by learning from the ideas and experiences of other YTP students. One SFMT participant shared that learning about other students' cultural backgrounds had helped hir deepen hir relationship to hir own cultural background. S/he reflected,

> I was able to learn more about myself just looking deeper in myself... I did more research on my background. Mime Troupe helped do that for sure...with students bringing in cultural things of their backgrounds or just learning about different things throughout.

Most SFMT participants talked about learning from the diverse perspectives and lived experiences of other students. One participant recalled, "One thing I remember, people have different perceptions of things...Like if you're directly affected by something you see it, but if somebody else never have seen it before, that didn't even come to their mind." This participant reflected that after having had group conversations about their various experiences of the world, the students, "Actually value...things that happened

outside of their own world." Three SFMT participants shared that YTP discussions about

homelessness had lead them to have more compassion for the homeless and feel more

motivated to help homeless populations.

Several SFMT participants commented that the political discussions they had at

YTP helped deepened their understandings of how their own lived experiences were

shaped by institutional inequities and oppression. One participant responded to the

question of what s/he had learned from political conversations at SFMT, "Things like

having all those big corporations...really screw with us, the people...and just burning up

resources and water and forest life." The destruction of the environment and its impact on

participants' lives was a significant theme that emerged in four of the SFMT interviews.

All of the SFMT participations referenced powerful conversations they had at the YTP

about the California educational budget cuts. For several students, these conversations

lead to realizations about how the budget cuts directly affect access to education- both for

them and for other youth in their communities.

*Sins Invalid*

An over-arching theme for SI participants was the way in which SI had touched

their consciousness at a core visceral level.  One SI participant illustrated the impact of

hir exposure to Sins Invalid in this way:

> I think about my own experience of being in the audience the first performance of
> Sins that I saw and watching my perception of my own body change during the
> course of the performance. And I was then relatively newly in a wheelchair and
> therefore getting targeted with able-ism in a brand new way...And what it has
> allowed me to do is an example for me of what I want it to do for other people,
> which is that...I've been able to write about things that I haven't written about
> before. And the most dramatic example of that is writing about epilepsy which is
> of the various disabilities that I deal with, the most taboo, and is life threatening
> for people to acknowledge in many, many circumstances. And you know, the

work that I'm doing right now for the next show is talking about epilepsy and it's talking about the eugenics movement and...it's linking together the many different ways that different groups of people have been deemed disposable and unnecessary and in fact a menace to privilege. And there's a way that I'm being able to bring that politics home into my own body and my personal story and it ratchets up the power of my work as an artist just incredibly, to be able to speak yet another layer of truth about my experience that I, until I got involved with Sins, I didn't have the affirmation around me to make possible

Several SI participants echoed this theme about how their involvement in SI had

transformed their consciousness in terms of their relationship to their own bodies (as they

exist in the context of political and social realities). One SI participant reflected,

I think...trauma happens the way it does because...it's from inside out so deeply, from your psyche through your body to where these...pains happen...I feel like that healing happens in that same way, from...your consciousness out....I've often said Sins is, I can see in people's face, like people in church. People are like paradigm shifting in front of you, around you. People are tripping.

As such, several SI participants reflected that through SI, people experience shifts in

consciousness not just intellectually, but in a fully embodied way. One SI participant

reflected on the power of theater to shift consciousness in a uniquely embodied way:

There's something about the authenticity of...allowing other parts of ourselves to speak, and that's where theater can be so powerful whether it's...Theater of the Oppressed, or it's actually taking specific experiences and re-imagining what they could have been or what they could be by being in them.

*Outlook Community Theater Project*

One Outlook participant reflected that hir first exposure to political theater in the

1970s completely transformed hir consciousness. S/he recalled:

The First time I went to a performance of Mother Tongue, I had just come to the city and somebody stood up and announced that they were looking for people to come speak to their college class about being lesbian mothers. This was long before any lesbians were having babies or any of that, lesbian mothers. And so that was such an interesting concept. I'd never thought of such a thing. And so I was talking to her afterwards and I said, well, I am a lesbian and I am a

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mother...so...it was a whole, huge, huge emotional affirmation and understanding of my own life that came out of this.

While this participant felt strongly that hir involvement in social change and community theater had deeply impacted hir consciousness and path in life, the other Outlook participant stated that s/he had not considered how hir involvement had impacted hir consciousness about hir relationship to broader society. S/he responded, "You ask me questions of things I never even think about. I guess I'd say I suppose it has, but I don't know that I can give any examples. Everything you do in a sense...affects how you deal with the society."

*Perceptions of the Impact of Social Changer Theater on Capacities to Create Social Change*
*San Francisco Mime Troupe*

When asked if involvement in social change theater had impacted their sense of their own capacities to create social change, four of the five SFMT participants responded that it had. One participant shared that s/he was unsure if it had. One SFMT participant responded with a resounding statement: "We're gonna change the world. Just write something. Really from my heart, my mind." Indeed, the theme of making social change through collective self-expression runs strong through the SFMT participants' responses.

Several of the participants shared that, prior to joining SFMT, they had not thought about themselves as people who could impact social change One SFMT participant commented,

> Before I didn't feel like I...made a difference. I mean, I was always outspoken, but...I  never really thought...I can actually make three plays about politics or the things that's going on around the world, like money problems, poverty and racism, and it's just like, wow! Like you really, really can speak up about things and be able to express them.

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Another SFMT participant described the process by which s/he experienced a similar

transformation from the time s/he first joined SFMT to the time of the interview:

> At that time I wasn't thinking too much about politics and stuff like that but more
> or less  just fun. And then as the years went on I got deeper into it, and sharing
> more and more ideas, political ideas or just trying to help people convey their
> ideas. Not necessarily just political but just social, social problems. That was
> always a big thing with the groups that I was in, was social issues, like domestic
> violence or people who were transsexual and they weren't able to fit in because
> their family didn't accept them, or gay people who weren't being accepted by their
> families and by their peers. And so that was always kind of a big thing within my
> groups, was the social change.

> Indeed, several participants commented that the process of sharing their own

stories with each other had lead to their experiencing a raised level of consciousness

about a range of social problems. Another participant commented, "Here we always have

like really in-depth personal conversations, like conversations about like school and our

community and just like being involved in stuff."  Several participants shared that their

exposure to conversations about social problems lead them to want to make social

change. One participant remarked, "So that kind of just motivated me to...be the one to...

actually try to fix those problems too."

 Several participants remarked that their exposure to people who were already

involved in social change work inspired them to think about themselves as people who

could also make social change. One SFMT participant commented, "Coming here it's

like you meet a lot of people that are like you, that want to bring about change." Breaking

isolation and finding community with others who want to make change was a significant

theme for several of the participants. One participant shared,

> So I wasn't like the only one. I felt like we had some power. And that we can
> actually change something.  And make a difference. We all like agreed with some

stuff and I guess if everyone wanted to do something that it'll be easier because...one person is not enough. So if you have a group it's easier.

Another SFMT participant expressed a similar sentiment:

Well, it's made me think that one person can like go and convince other people and tell them the truth and...they might agree...with your views, and then they get more people and then it like grows. So I think that's a really great way that I think really influences me in thinking that I can go about making social change.

This participant posited the idea that when a group of people go about trying to make social change together, this group is likely to inspire other groups of people to also get involved in social change work.

One SFMT participant shared that s/he was unsure if s/he felt that hir capacity to make social change had increased. Where other participants focused on the power they felt to effect change vis-a-vis collective power, this participant reflected that s/he had learned to make personal changes in hir daily practices that reflect a higher level of social awareness (s/he gave the example of conserving water because of the water crisis). This participant commented,

I don't think it's ways to change it so much as bringing up the idea that like just putting it on the table that like there's something that needs to be done. But not exactly what you need to do. Just like, there's a problem here. You guys should notice the problem.

Another SFMT participant shared that s/he now feels more capable of effecting social change because, "I look at everything kind of differently, like I try to like be more open and I try to not judge. Because that's what happens here [the SFMT]."

Two participants raised a concern that fear has been one of the primary responses they and other participants have had to the YTP political education process. One participant observed, "People may not know a lot about social issues and then coming

here they...learn a lot about it and they're like, whoa, that's horrible. And some people go all crazy...like, 'we're gonna die!'" While all the participants talked about being motivated to do something to address the social problems they were becoming aware of, increased anxiety and despair was also a salient experience that emerged in relation to this learning process.

Most of the SFMT participants shared that they had felt that they had impacted social change through their impact on the audience of their performances. In particular, several participants felt that teen voices are not often heard in society and that SFMT provides a venue for those voices, in effect, creating social change. One participant noted,

> I feel like...teenagers are not really heard. That's a very good way of us being heard and say how we see the world. I'm pretty sure they [adult audience members] realize like wow, that's how they really see the world...They probably gave to it probably a little more credit if they had a teenager of their own or going to have a teenager. They might be like, man...I'm aware now of what's going on.

Another participant felt strongly about the impact of the performances specifically on teen audience members. S/he stated, "To me it could be like teenagers projecting this to another teenager...a lot of the teenagers...connect to it..I think the teenagers are really enlightening and...able to connect more with the audience."

*Sins Invalid*

Many SI participants discussed experience of learning about their own effectiveness at reaching a broad base of people, mobilizing support and resources and projecting their voices into media outlets through their use of cultural work and political performance. One SI participant noted how s/he became aware of the political effectiveness of guerilla art through hir involvement in solidarity work. S/he reflected:

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We did a mixed media installation of Guatemalan survivors of counter-insurgency movements, and it was just really...powerful and so we did installations all over the UC Berkeley campus of survivors' arts, survivors of counter-insurgency programs, and that was probably the first time that I realized the power of cultural work. Because you know, no matter how much pamphleting or whatever else, everybody in like all the hallways were like stopping and staring at the artwork. And all these students that would usually just, whatever, about it. And so I was like, well, that was effective. So then a year later we did a guerilla theater piece, and got on CNN, and it got transmitted to Haiti and I felt really proud because...colleagues that I had worked with...were calling and saying I just saw your thing. And it was around...the coup in Haiti.

Another SI participant shared that social change theater gave hir new ideas about

ways to communicate campaign messages. S/he commented:

My training is partly in communication so if it's not on the campaign message, there's a problem. At some point I realized...I don't want to just do...outreach and legislative visits and press releases and meetings... I think there's something more...I got really stuck in..."policy-land" around how much non-truth telling or truth evasion there was with   policy makers.  And having to navigate that in terms of communication strategy and policy campaigns...I was in denial about my poetry collection. And now...I've accepted that poetry collection as an offering for the anti-prison movement and broader movement workers.

This participant came to the idea that creative expression is a critical form of

communication within movement-building work.

Another SI participant shared what s/he had learned from hir work in various

movements about the power of story-telling as means of sparking transformative change:

I think of the power of bearing witness and story telling and how much the way that were taught history, you know, tells an imperial story that keeps us in our place...We had learned from the anti-violence movement, from the incest survivor's movement, from the various movements about individual surviving that kind of trauma that the retelling of the story that made you the agent and not the victim was powerfully restorative and that as a historian I wanted to do that for communities.

*Outlook Community Theater Project*

The two Outlook participants had divergent responses to the question of how their involvement in social change or community theater had impacted their capacities to effect social change. One Outlook participant stressed the important function of hir work with Mother Tongue Theater Collective in the 1970s in the shift in hir own consciousness. S/he stated, "It was just amazing, you know, and it really encouraged writing and encouraged, self-examination and wonderful consciousness raising among us, and then with the audience. We always engaged with the audience after our performances." The other Outlook participant was unsure about how hir involvement in Out and About Theater in the 1970s or hir current involvement in Outlook had impacted hir perception of hir capacity to create social change. S/he did reflect that s/he had felt that hir participation in creating visibility for gay communities was a key strategy for social change. Below is hir response to the question of whether hir involvement had impacted hir own sense of capacity to create social change:

> I don't know that it has. I suppose it has. My feeling about social change, and we're talking I guess particularly about changing attitudes toward LGBT people, and my feeling about that is that the more the people know who we are, the more they understand and accept and so forth. And I've lived my life that way. You know, and just, I've lived a very openly gay life. I'm not like an activist in the usual sense but I've lived very openly since 1974...I think that...doing shows like this that show gay people in real life type situations is really great.

This participant perceived hir daily practices and decisions as the means through which s/he had effected social change. For this participant, hir work with LGBT community theater was both a manifestation of that commitment and a forum which informed that commitment. .

*Impact on Confidence and Skills Relevant to Social Change Work*

*San Francisco Mime Troupe*

When asked if SFMT had affected their confidence to be able to create social change, all participants responded that it had. A significant theme was ways in which the YTP helped participants feel comfortable and freely to fully express themselves. One participant noted, "No one's gonna shut you down and be like, what are you doing?...Kids are given a freedom to let themselves out." Several SFMT participants argued that the confidence and capacity to express one's ideas is a crucial step towards being able to participate in social change. One participant reflected that the YTP, "makes you not be afraid to express yourself. To make a change you have to say something, can't just be sitting at home like 'I'll make a change but tomorrow.'"

Most of the SFMT participants stated that they had developed significant communication skills including: increased ability to articulate their ideas; voice projection and enunciation; stage presence; ability to create a good speech; the ability to speak in front of a crowd and effectively communicate to an audience; active listening; and a deeper capacity for observing. One SFMT participant made the following connection about how these skills are important for social change work:

> A big thing about social change and politics is you gotta be able to rally the troops...Either creating a really good speech so that you can get people to...see what your ideas are and then agree or disagree, and just being able to create connections within groups of people either at school or, you know, farther out.

Several participants that they had learned many of these skills through learning to improvise and through the process of collectively writing, creating and performing a play. One participant asserted, "The big thing of coming to the Mime Troupe is hearing everybody's ideas, because we're creating a play together with either fifteen or twenty kids. So you really want to try and listen to everybody and try and get as many ideas as

you can." Several participants noted that the process of creating a play together had taught them the art of teamwork. Another SFMT participant responded that a key skill s/he had developed was:

> Working with a team, because you have to work with a whole bunch of people writing a play...We're gonna have our differences. We agreed to disagree, basically...Because if we sit there all day and just talk about the same debate over and over again we're not gonna get any work done...To make a change- you can't make a change by yourself. You have to learn how to be around people and work with people.

Several participants acknowledged that conflict-resolution and compromise was an important skill that they learned thru YTP. The ability to mediate group conflict and participate in collective decision-making helped them feel a greater capacity to participate in collective social change efforts.

One participant reflected that s/he felt hir leadership as a social justice educator had deepened thru hir role as YTP Peer Advisor. S/he stated that moving into this role had taught hir how "to educate youth on different things outside of school...in politics or in theater and art."

*Sins Invalid*

Related to the theme of Sins Invalid being a space where many SI participants felt they could be and speak form their whole selves, several SI participants discussed the phenomenon of Sins Invalid nurturing their confidence to be visible in new ways. One SI participant conveyed,

> I've done a bunch of work that was different cultural work. But...I wasn't visible in any of it...I've been really good at creating spaces and not as good at filling the space... I think that ties very directly to the kind of cultural...and political framings around disability. And even at Sins...I'm slowly publicly emerging as one of the artists.  And that's a really a big change.

The profound impact of the stigma attached to visibility for people with disabilities in our society emerged as a critical theme in the SI focus group. The same participant elaborated:

> Eli Clare has a concept...called 'public shaming', which is where people with disabilities are kind of flaunted in front of the public for shaming. You know, through telethons...to the medical-industrial complex and the way the doctors will use people with disabilities to educate interns. Groups...of people will look at you to find fault. And that influences our capacity to love ourselves, but also to take up public space in very visible ways, because the visibility is what has been used to point out [fault].

Most SI participants talked about SI as creating space where one can address trauma and feel safe enough to enter public space on one's own terms.

*Outlook Community Theater Project*

One outlook participant shared that hir involvement in political theater in the 1970s had imbued hir with the confidence to engage politically. S/he states, that hir involvement in Mother Tongue Theater Collective, "Certainly brought me a long way from my Southern training, which was 'you just press it down. You don't talk about it. If you disagree, you separate. You, you know. Never talk about sex, politics, religion, or anything else important.' I've come a long way from that and Mother Tongue helped." This participant shared that s/he developed both the confidence in hir own voice and political ideology, and also the writing, performing and community engagement skills to live out hir ideology. S/he also shared that, "Another way that Mother Tongue has definitely influenced my life is in the process of consensus decision- making, and everybody being equal." S/he acknowledged that this was a skill and value which s/he as brought other social change projects.

Both Outlook participants shared that their involvement in Outlook both had increased their play-writing skills and oral history interviewing skills. The second Outlook participant did not know if hir involvement in Outlook had helped hir develop skills or confidence that were particularly relevant to social change work.

*Impact of Involvement on Commitment to and Participation in Social Change Movements*

*San Francisco Mime Troupe*

All five SFMT participants reported that their involvement in SFMT had deepened their commitment and desire to participate in social change movements. Three SFMT participants expressed that it was not until they were involved in SFMT that they actually began to believe in or want to be part of social change. One participant enumerated,

> Before...I didn't really care much about anything going on. Like there were a lot of protests...and I just sat back and let it happen and watch, and not help out. And I think I got that from my parents because they just sit back and do whatever, so I thought I could...just follow what they do. But now I actually want to...be a part of it...because it's good to be a part of your community and actually try and make things happen...if everyone just sat back, like what I did, then there wouldn't be any change and people's voices and opinions won't be heard, and it'll be a disaster.

Several participants asserted that SFMT helps teens to move beyond focusing on immediate preoccupations. One participant remarked, "Teenagers are not really concerned about [social change]. We're concerned about our cell phones, doing homework, and going out on the weekends. So [SFMT] kind of made me think that we are part of society still, and we have a right and a voice."

Two SFMT participants expressed that they had felt a desire to be part of social change before coming to the YTP and that participating in the YTP had served to deepen

their desire and commitment. All five participants reflected that being surrounded by a community of "political thinkers" who were united in their commitment to making change was the key factor in their deepening commitment. One participant also noted that the SFMT adult performances in the parks, which s/he had gone to, had inspired hir to "look deeper into politics and deeper into...social problems around the Bay Area."

All SFMT participants acknowledged that SFMT had moved them to participate, in some way, in social change activism beyond the YTP itself. All five participants discussed their participation in the student mobilizations countering the educational budget cuts in California. Two participants shared that their involvement in the SFMT had lead to their subsequent involvement in other ongoing social change performance and media projects (through their schools and community-based organizations).

One participant shared that SFMT had helped hir make connections to many people and organizations doing political or social change projects, which in turn lead to hir involvement in both volunteer and paid capacities. S/he commented,

> Just being able to get a lot of different connections from meeting people here, because people were always doing all kinds of different projects, either politics or social change...it just created a lot of connections with either finding...fun rallies to go to or good jobs or something like that.

S/he also shared that that hir work YTP and with these other social change groups mutually informed each other.

Three SFMT participants reported that they are not consistently involved in other social change projects outside of the SFMT. One participant argued that, "Mime Troupe is a social change movement." Another participant's felt that there is a lack of opportunities for youth to participate in social change movements. S/he stated, "I don't

think that there are like a lot of opportunities like that and [the YTP] is pretty much...one of the few that I've heard of."

One participant shared that between two jobs, work and school, s/he does not have additional time to be involved in social change work beyond the SFMT. Another participant expressed s/he would like to be more involved in social change work, but that hir own perceived "laziness" is a major obstacle. The following is hir response to the question about how the SFMT had impacted hir participation in social change work, " I always feel like, like I should do it. I always...try to do it. I don't think I succeed most of the times but I always feel like I should be trying a little bit harder." When asked what gets in the way of hir feeling like s/he is succeeding, s/he responded, "laziness. I'm a really lazy person. It's like, oh, do this. Oh, okay. After I watch some TV." As s/he reflected further, however, s/he shared that,

> I have this...passion to go out and...do stuff...The idea is right there in the back of my head. I just need...the extra push to go and do it. I just don't want to go by myself and be all like scared and shy. I want like friends to go with me so I don't feel like so out there...

Where s/he initially identified hir perception of hir own shortcomings for not being as active as s/he would like to be (or feels that s/he should be), it became clear that a perceived lack of support from people around hir was a significant obstacle. Another participant shared that s/he is not currently involved in social change projects beyond the YTP but has been thinking about social change more often and increasingly having a desire "to be part of it in the future."

*Sins Invalid*

Where all five SFMT participants saw the SFMT as a point of entry into social change work as youth, all eight SI participants had a long history of involvement in social change and political work prior to their involvement in SI. SI participants did discuss the *ways* in which their participation in social change movements had shifted as a result of their involvement in SI.

Several SI participants also shared that involvement in SI had facilitated their learning to do movement-building work in new ways. One SI participant commented of hir political work prior to SI, "It was...a non-embodied world that I was organizing in. It was just very...dissociated. I wanted a change in the direct work but also to cultivate more spaciousness in my daily practices" as compared to the "crisis mode of organizing" s/he had been immersed in previously. S/he commented, "I think the work with Sins...has really fed my transition...in terms of really integrating more...somatic practices." The framework of embodiment, "The integration of the full and multi-dimensional experiences" of people and communities, was discussed as foundational in the development of the capacity, skill and confidence to participate fully in movement-building work.

Several SI participants discussed that they felt their work with SI had strengthened their commitment to and practice of centralizing disability justice in the movements and communities they are involved in. One SI participant noted,

> I feel particularly motivated to stay active with Sins Invalid and to...be inspired from that to be involved in other performance projects where I'm really motivated around centralizing disability as an issue...And I feel like I have a particular privilege and responsibility in how I relate to that because my own personal relationship to disability is not immediately visible to most people. I did have a brace, like a full neck to pelvis brace for a couple years in puberty, but in general

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in my adult life now I am regularly welcomed into spaces where I think
everybody else is assuming that we're on the same kind of able bodied plane, and
so I feel like I have a role as a bridge in some way to bring...information in
a...way that will be graspable.

Several participants talked about SI as a "political home" from which they have gathered

a deeper grounding in a disability justice framework that they have then attempted to

bring to other social projects with which they are involved.

*Outlook Community Theater Project*

Like the SI participants, both Outlook participants had a long history of

involvement in activist and/or community projects. One participant expressed that hir

involvement in the Mother Tongue Theater Collective had greatly impacted hir

involvement in other social change projects. S/he shared,

In Mother Tongue, almost every performance is a benefit for some cause. So...it
connected me to all those causes. I might have had an idealistic connection, but
now I have a pragmatic connection...The Women's Building, jobs for women
over 40, and the creation of women's health clinics for lesbians...AIDS work,
cancer work. I got involved in all of those things.

Neither Outlook participant felt that their involvement in Outlook, per se, had a

significant impact on their involvement in social change movements.

*"The Ripple Effect": Participants' Perception of the Impact of Their Performance*

*Groups on Systemic Social Change*

*San Francisco Mime Troupe*

All five SFMT responded to the question of what they perceive as SFMT's impact

on systemic social change by observing that the YTP enacts broader social change vis-a-

vis the change that participants and the audience experience. One participant provided

the following illustration,

> Everybody...all the people who participate in [the YTP}, they all change...I
> remember once I was...walking down Mission [Street] with my friend and they
> had...seen the show and they were like, 'I loved it. I loved the thing about schools.
> That was really important to me because I'm always...thinking about budget cuts
> and stuff like that'...It always...affects people when they watch the show...They
> always think about it more...It's...awareness for them too, not only us.

All five participants expressed a strong sentiment that their greatest power to effect

change could happen through moving the audience. One participant added that the YTP

has the capacity to reach many communities because the audience crosses boundaries of

age, race and social class. S/he added, that YTP shows, "Brings a lot of people in because

it is free." Another participant expressed that s/he felt that the shows have a strong impact

on helping youth (both participants and audience members) feel less isolated and more

able seek support for social problems they are experiencing.

Several SFMT participants noted that they were unsure, however, of *how* the

audience members have been impacted by the show, and whether audience members are

moved to take action on the issues the shows convey. One participant responded to the

question of whether s/he thinks YTP shows can effect social change, "I'm curious about

how people...take our plays...what message they get from it. Because now that I think of

it, it can actually make a big difference." The participants who expressed that they were

unsure about the impact of the shows on the audience, were very clear about their

intended impact. Several participants stated that they hoped that the shows help audience

members feel less fear of talking about their problems, or in the words of one participant,

"Help them speak up." One participant expressed that hir primary hope was to move the

audience to take action on the issues. S/he stated,

> It has to be...brought to the attention of people and they have to do something
> about it. Because if it's only us and we only do...the show and that's it

and...everyone goes out thinking that it's a great show and doesn't think about it ever again, I think that that won't do anything.

*Sins Invalid:*

Like the respondents from SFMT, SI participants focused on SI's impact on the participants and audience as the central site for effecting social change. Several SI participants articulated that, currently, SI is helping to create the necessary groundwork for movement-building around disability justice goals. One SI participant offered the following assessment:

> Right now, in this historical moment...there's no way to do movement-building work around people with disabilities. There's no...base that's organized. There's...direct services...The disability rights movement completely cut off a base and moved into, you know, litigation around ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act]. And I think that's important...but...did not touch shifting consciousness around disability. The average person with a disability...hates their body now the way they did before the passage of ADA. Right? Because of the way we've been under-taught to understand our bodies...My hope is that disability justice actually shifts consciousness. That'll allow for a deeper kind of material change. But right now we're starting where we are, which is...with the political vision.

Several participants discussed the centrality of addressing consciousness and creating a community of affirmation for people with disabilities as a key step in building disability justice movements. One SI participant shared that the SI artistic core is addressing,

> This ongoing question about the relationship between the cultural work and the movement building...continuing to track questions like…'how does the work that we're doing contribute to more systemic change?' And knowing that the consciousness raising and people feeling whole and affirmed is an important part of that...feeling affirmed and empowered and feeling like..."I can do something. I can be part of something bigger that impacts the conditions that I have in my life...and to connect with people towards some really concrete solutions.

Another participant added,

There's a strategy in this politically also. It's not random...it's not a support
group. The methodology is supportive but it's, there's a political intention and
strategy, in terms of leading through creative artistic work...Life is kind of a
struggle...when you're trying to get your material subsistence needs met, and
so...we need to find ways to give ourselves juice...

Several participants acknowledged the necessity of doing political work that

engages the whole selves and the whole bodies of community members, particularly

when community members are addressing body and emotional self-care. One SI

participant stated,

Standing within our vulnerabilities and...acknowledging their power...it's actually
quite transformative both for people bearing witness to that and for the people
doing it. And it's deep. It's what I would call very deep transformative liberatory
work.

Another SI participant elaborated,

There's such a tremendous power in somebody bearing witness publicly to
something that you have not yet been able to do that with...We know, we've seen
that in movements over and over and over again, that when a few people start
telling stories there's a chain reaction in the people around being able to speak
who haven't been able to.

Several SI participants assessed that the disability justice movement they are

helping to build is not yet at a place in its evolution to initiate campaign, with specific

policy change goals or institutional targets. Rather, the disability justice movement, from

several SI participants' perspective, is at a place of beginning to organize a conscious

base of people, in order to build the collective the unity and power necessary to tackle

institutional change.

One SI participant observed that the movement-building work of SI is very

different than that of the Voice of the Voiceless performance s/he had worked with years

prior. Hir analysis was that SI's context is entirely different than that of Voice of the

Voiceless. Voices of the Voiceless emerged out of a concrete campaign, lead by DARE,

to end mandatory minimums and to restore welfare rights and, later, voting rights to

people with felonies who were coming out of prisons in Providence, Rhode Island. S/he

described the process of how, from hir perspective, Voices of the Voiceless, ultimately,

helped lead to both electoral and legislative victories for the is campaign. S/he recalled of

the performances:

> There was all sorts of people, and people that DARE hadn't met before, whose
> families have been impacted by prisons...potentially new...members...I realized,
> "We can integrate the show with the grassroots fundraising efforts of DARE, with
> a panel [with] organizers sharing updates on the different campaigns...and doing
> political education, and...using it as...an outreach opportunity...to plug more
> people into...the network of people...That was part of the groundwork
> towards what, ultimately, became a successful campaign [which] went through
> multiple stages...It went through legislative and electoral phases...I went back for
> a visit for Get Out the Vote weekend, where we won...There was so much that
> went into that victory...[Voice of the Voiceless] was just one part of it...That
> performance was an important point of entry for...people. There'd been so much
> work that anti-prison movements have been doing to get us to [that] point...It just
> illustrates [that] the anti-prison movement/prison rights movements are in a
> different stage than disability justice.

Most SI participants were in agreement with the assessment that the disability justice

movement has not yet evolved to the point of capacity to exercise the level of collective

power compared to movements like the prisoner's rights movement. Several SI

participants expressed the intention that SI's work of (what one participant referred to as)

"providing a channel for resistance that can inspire more resilience" in disabled

communities create the groundwork for a disability justice movement, wherein disabled

communities can exercise collective power to effect institutional change.  One SI

participant offered the following perspective:

> I think Sins Invalid...started with people seizing inspiration, seizing a moment,
> deciding to take action and start putting some artistic work together and to call on

other people's vision to also really engage around [disability justice]..It has continued to open up space for changing this paradigm and for inspiring whole new groups of people who have been encountering the project over the years.

*Outlook Community Theater Project*

Both Outlook participants posited the audience as the central vehicle for social change. However, each participant had different perceptions on the potential for impacting broader social change (vis-a-vis impacting the audience). One Outlook participant identified hirself as a cynic about community theater's potential to impact social change impact. S/he stated,

> I don't know that there's gonna be much of anything. The thing that I have certainly learned, and I find it more true here than I did in the Midwest, is that everybody's in their own little niche doing whatever they're doing and nobody else is paying any attention. And it's strange to me that of all the gay people I know in San Francisco, whenever I mention something like Outlook Theater that I get a blank look.

This participant also noted that hir efforts to raise awareness in the LGBT community about the play and about the issues of LGBT elders was, in itself, a form of social change.

The other participant expressed that s/he does believe that the theater work s/he has been involved in has had an impact on social change, but that its impact is hard to measure. S/he argued,

> I have very little idea about what the result is. I understand the goal but I don't see what the result is. I just have to take it on faith. You know, I see individuals' response and...You can feel the audience with you or...you can hear a little gasp or, you know, you notice that somebody's crying...There's that silence that is attention...You get it, you can feel it when people are moved. But how that changes beyond those individuals, I don't know.

When asked if s/he has been able to reflect on how the impact on the audience may have lead to social change, s/he responded,

The impact on social change is subtle, indirect; change ourselves and change the audience...I think we effect change in their audiences, and I'm sure that that causes connections...It's an interchange that's going on, not so much out in the street changing the non-believers. We are speaking to the choir, it's true. But we think that it has a ripple effect...it is interesting to see if people outside the community start coming. And that did, does happen sometimes, and so that makes me think that something is rippling.

*Summary*

Important themes emerged about the perspectives of participants of social change theater projects; on their points of entry and motivations for doing this work; their perceptions of their capacities to effect social change as a result of their involvement; and their assessments of the impact of their respective projects on macro-level change. The majority of participants reported that they felt transformed by their involvement in their respective projects and that they believe that their groups have a transformative impact on the other people whose lives are touched by their groups' work. Some participants articulated that their social change theater work is informed by a particular political strategy that they believe will lead to particular forms of social change. Some participants revealed that they have more questions than answers about how to assess the impact of their groups on systemic social change. The most salient implications of these findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

*Introduction*

This qualitative study, entitled "Exploring Participant Perspectives on the Relationship Between Social Change Theater and Social Change Movements", was designed to examine social change theater program participants' perspectives on the connection between their participation in these programs and their perceived capacity to create social change. This study explored the following questions: 1) How has participation in social change theatre affected the participants' sense of agency to create collective social change at the macro level; 2) What do participants perceive as their impact on systemic social change in relation to their participation in social change theater? 3) How do participants perceive the interaction of change at the level of the macro with change they may have experienced on the levels of the meso (for example, level of community, shift in group dynamics and mutual support) and the micro (for example, emotional well-being, personal sense of agency, values and beliefs) in relationship to their involvement in social change theater?  This study looked comparatively at three social change theater/performance groups; The San Francisco Mime Troupe's Youth Theater Project (SFMT); Sins Invalid (SI); and The Outlook Community Theater Project.

This chapter will discuss the most salient themes that emerged in the findings, including: 1) Participants' ideas about the meaning of "social change theater"; 2) How and why participants became involved in social change theater; 3) Participant perceptions of the impact of involvement in social change theater on their social and political consciousness; 4) Participant perceptions of the impact of their involvement in social

change theater on their (individual and collective) capacities to create social change; 5) Participant perceptions of the impact of their involvement on their confidence and skills in relation to social change work; 6) Participant perceptions of the impact of their involvement on their commitment to and participation in social change movements; 7) participants' perception of the impact of their theater/performance projects on systemic social change.

Previous social work research on social change, theater and social work practice primarily addresses change that occurs at the micro and meso levels. A gap in this research on social change and theatre relates to the impact of social change theatre programs on systemic social change. The researcher believes the findings of this study illuminate important themes and trends around the social change impact of social change theater.

*The Findings in Light of Theory and Previous Social Work Research*

Drama therapy, psychodrama and Theater of the Oppressed (TO) each represent a theory of change-oriented theater and performance that has been applied both to social work practice and social movement practices. All three formats highlight the importance of the act of "performing" new possible realities as a method for changing current realities. Halverson (2005) found that performing narratives based on program members' experiences allowed participants to integrate different layers of self and to innovate multiple possibilities for the future, at the level of the intra-personal, the interpersonal and the social/communal. These themes were also reflected strongly in this study's findings. Participants from all three groups articulated that a strong draw of their programs was having a space where members could explore new ideas and identities and

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create pathways to new possible futures. As one SFMT articulated it, "We're gonna change the world. Just write something. Really from my heart, my mind." The theme of making social change through collective self-expression runs strong through the all fourteen participants' responses.

Both TO and Drama Therapy aim to build group trust and solidarity (Boal 1998; Emunah, 1997). This theory that the individual breaks their sense of shame by experiencing one's authentic self with a trusted group is confirmed both by prior social work literature and the findings of this research. Previous research (Leeder and Wimmer, 2006; Dutton, 2001) found that group work incorporating expressive arts helped group members build trust, mutual support, increased resilience, an enhanced sense of belonging and identity; stronger interpersonal skills; increased capacity to work with others; increased understanding of group accountability and trust; enhanced self-esteem and sense of value. Previous research (Dutton; 2001; Smokowski and Bacallao, 2009; Halverson, 2005) supports the theory that change-oriented theater breaks isolation and strengthens group trust and solidarity. Breaking isolation and finding community with others who want to make change was a significant theme across all the participants in all three groups.

SFMT Participants were particularly emphatic about the importance of the emotional bonding and cohesion that occurs at the level of the group. Most SFMT participants stressed that young people act and express themselves differently at the Youth Theater Project (YTP) than they do at school or at home. SFMT participants stressed that YTP is a unique environment in that they feel supported and not judged. This environment seems to help young people feel safe to express vulnerability in a way

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that they may have difficulty doing in the rest of their lives. This emotionally supportive environment seems to allow for group activities where students: 1) Find connections amongst each other about their subjective experiences of problems in their lives and in the world; 2) Work effectively as a group to identify themes for the performances, based on participants' shared understanding of both their own lived experiences and their collective resilience. All SFMT participants remarked that this process brings individuals "out of their shells" and creates deep closeness in the group. Several participants remarked that this process of working as a group shifted many participants' orientations from one of arguing for "their own" idea towards sharing, making connections between and building off of each other's ideas.

One Outlook participant reflected that at Outlook and (previously) at Mother Tongue Theater Collective, everything was done collaboratively, leading to the generation of collective ideas; or in hir words, "A collective instead of one mind." Mother Tongue provided hir with the collective affirmation to transform hir values about holding down feelings, suppressing conflict and avoiding discussion of charged topics like "sex, politics and religion." SI participants stressed the centrality of relationship-building in their work, particularly given the stage they are in as a relatively new organization developing a "new politic." As such, SI brings people together to eat, talk and engage creatively as way of nurturing community.

Drama Therapy and Psychodrama theories prioritize effecting change with interactions at the micro level, rather than at the level of meso or the level of the macro, where TO operates from an assumption that the micro, meso and macro are inextricably linked (Sullivan, Petronella, Brooks, Murillo, Primeau and Ward, 2008). Sullivan et al.

(2008) describe TO as the use of theatre as a reflection of current social realities and a rehearsal for future social change with the primary goal of building a foundation for community organizing and power. Previous studies and this researcher's findings support the theory that changes at the micro, meso and macro levels are not only linked, but mutually reinforcing. Smokowski and Bacallao (2009) found that psychodramatic techniques were particularly effective at helping youth explore the link between individual experience and the collective capacity to navigate socio-cultural experiences in the US. Halperin (2002) found that the use of theatre and performance in group work enabled members of oppressed and disenfranchised communities to understand themselves as "effective, significant and agents of change" (Halperin, 2002, p.28) in society.

All five youth from the San Francisco Mime Troupe (SFMT) commented that both the dramatic exercises and the process of creating a play based on their own lived experiences helped them to deepen their understandings of how their own experiences were shaped by institutional inequities and oppression. Several SFMT participants also shared that the SFMT Youth Theater Project (YTP) had helped them to address issues of social justice, as it related to their daily lives. SFMT Participants shared that the YTP had helped them and/or their peers address a range of social issues, including: depression and other mental health issues; domestic violence; struggles around education; and homophobia and transphobia, racism, ageism and other forms of oppression. Several SFMT participants also expressed the view that the YTP helps youth (both participants and audience members) feel empowered to seek support for these kinds of social problems. SFMT Participants posed that social change theater creates a safe space for

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youth to share political ideas and their emotions, where they may not otherwise feel safe to do so in other parts of their lives; in effect, building their confidence to make change.

Even the two participants from this study (one from SFMT and one from Outlook) who were unsure if their involvement in social change theater had increased their capacities to make systemic social change, reported that their involvement had impacted their capacity to challenge social injustice in the micro and meso levels. One participant reported that s/he had learned to make personal changes in hir daily practices that reflect a higher level of social awareness about issues of environmental justice. The other reported that s/he was emboldened to come out as gay in the face of everyday experiences of homophobia and heterosexism. This study further illustrated Leeder and Wimmer's (2006) finding that psychodrama programs help participants develop an increased capacity to reflect on themselves and their behaviors and make more mindful choices. However, this study found that this increased capacity to make mindful decisions extended to a sense of social responsibility, rooted in a belief that the daily choices we make have an impact on society at large. These findings underscore the Sullivan et al. (2008) study which found that TO exercises had lead to participants' acquisition of knowledge about critical health and environmental justice issues and significant turning points in social attitudes and beliefs.

Sullivan et al. (2008) identified popular education and increased collective issue awareness as primary steps in TO toward building a foundation for community organizing and power. Many participants in this study shared that a significant result of their involvement in social change theater was their own learning from the diverse perspectives and lived experiences of other students. All SFMT participants reported that

they had felt transformed in some way because of what they learned from their peers and teachers at the YTP. Several SFMT participants framed this process as one where participants learned about social issues that they had never thought about because the issues had not directly affected them. Participants gave examples of heterosexual-identified youth learning about the struggles that LGBT youth face and youth who do not live in project housing learning about experiences of those youth that do. Several SI participants discussed the ways in which this learning about the different experiences of members lead them to take action about the various forms of oppression members face. SI participants talked about the value of becoming allies to each other. For example, SI emphasized the importance of members with different forms of disabilities addressing the various manifestation ableism, white members working to counter racism, and men working to counter sexism and gender oppression.

Boal (1998) believed that people stop themselves from taking political action, because representations of external authorities had "taken residence" in the minds of oppressed and that TO can help people who are silenced and marginalized learn how to listen to and learn from their own stories and the stories of community members (as opposed to the stories of external authorities). Previous social work research found that social change theater helped individuals and groups experience a sense of personal transformation related to feelings; behavior and cognition; develop a sense of power in expressing previously suppressed feelings and thoughts; find new ways to channel anger at chronic injustice; learn about themselves through finding "their own voice" and safely experimenting with new behaviors (Sullivan, et al., 2008; Dutton, 2001).

This study's findings also demonstrate that through the process of the group bearing witness, providing support and linking subjective experiences, individuals and groups experience some kind of transformation. Participants from all three groups shared that their experiences in their respective groups enabled them to be their full, complex selves. Participants across all three groups articulated a belief in the power of story-telling as a means to create "people's" knowledge and challenge the ways communities and individuals internalize dominant narratives of reality and history; or in the words of one SI participant, "that the retelling of the story that made you the agent and not the victim was powerfully restorative." The confidence and capacity to develop express one's own story can be understood as a critical first step towards increased capacity to effect social change.

Participants from all three groups noted that the centering of marginalized voices as central to the work of their groups. Participants from SI discussed the ways in which SI was created as a means to reclaim the art, history, political resistance, culture, beauty and very humanity of people with disabilities, which have been rendered by dominant society. Both Outlook participants got involved in Outlook Community Theater Project to counter the invisibility of LGBT elders. Several SFMT participants articulated that teen voices are suppressed in our society and that SFMT provides a venue for those voices. For participants from all three groups, centering their own community's voices allowed participants to move through negative self-concepts connected to their social identities.

Boal (1998) articulated TO as a collective ritual of healing for experiences of collective trauma and internalized oppression. Boal conceptualized this collective ritual as laying a foundation for the development of collective power to change the social

conditions that lead to those traumas. Participants from all three groups discussed the ways in which their experiences had helped them and transform collective trauma into collective healing. Several SI participants echoed this theme about how their involvement in SI had transformed their relationships to their own bodies, a relationship that participants articulated as having been alienated because of pervasive ableism. Most SI participants talked about SI as creating space where one can address trauma and feel safe enough to enter public space on one's own terms. The SI framework of centering embodiment practice (versus an alienated or intellectualized process) was critical in this process.

Several SFMT participants talked about how YTP had impacted their own negative self-concepts and negative conceptions about youth in general. One participant talked about youth as generally "self-involved" and socially unaware. S/he noted that SFMT helps youth become communally-oriented and socially responsible by helping them see that youth have a right to a voice. Another described hirself as "lazy"- a punitive description often particularly associated with ageist and racist stereotypes of young people of color. However, as this participant reflected during the interview, s/he realized that hir lack of involvement was connected to her feeling of isolation and lack of support from her school and from her peer group. Both participants identified that their experiences building community with other youth at SFMT had shifted these negative self-perceptions because they challenged the idea that young people lack a voice in our society. Indeed, both participants were able to externalize what began as a self-blaming assessment of their perception of young people's lack of involvement in social change to a critique of ageism's impact on young people's sense of agency.

Several of the SFMT participants shared that prior to joining The YTP, they had not thought about themselves as people who could impact social change. When asked if SFMT had affected their confidence to be able to create social change, all participants responded that it had. However, two participants raised a concern that fear and despair about the state of the world has been one of the primary responses they and other participants have had to the YTP political education process. This finding was not reflected in either the theory or research reviewed in this study's literature review.

Critical to the capacity to enact social change is the development of the skills needed for effective social change work.  Previous studies (Dutton, 2001; Spratt et al., 2000; Sullivan et al., 2008) indicate that involvement in community theater resulted in participants benefiting from increased community leadership and skills, including communication, group process and facilitation skills. Participants from all three groups stated that they had developed significant communication skills including: increased ability to articulate their ideas; the ability to speak in front of a crowd and effectively communicate to an audience; active listening; and a deeper capacity for observing. One participant shared that when s/he worked with the Mother Tonge Theater Collective, they created both structure and policy to address conflicts and differing perspectives. Given that Mother Tongue operated as a flat collective, the capacity to collectively address problems needed to be supported by well developed group process. Participants from all three groups reported an increased ability to mediate group conflict and participate in collective decision-making, which helped them feel a greater capacity to participate in collective social change efforts.

Connecting citizens with popular movements and widening coalitions for social change is another critical goal of Theater of the Oppressed (Boal, 1998). Heparin's (2002) study found that community theater engaged members of the community beyond the theater group itself and, in effect, involved a much larger proportion of the local communities (across lines of language, ethnicity and race) in local community infrastructure. Halperin (2002) argued that this "ripple effect" was understood to have an exponential impact on the exercise of community self-determination. Dutton (2001) found that the feeling of contributing to the community through communal art was a central benefit for adolescents of engaging in group work incorporating the arts.

Much of the data from this research suggests that social change theater and performance does expand community participation and help grow popular movements. All five SFMT participants reported that their involvement in SFMT had deepened their commitment to and participation in social change movements. The majority of SI participants reported experiences of learning about their own effectiveness at reaching a broad base of people, mobilizing support and resources and projecting their voices into media outlets through their use of cultural work and political performance. Both Outlook participants reported that their involvement in Outlook, per se, had not a significant impact on their involvement in social change movements. This may be due, in part, to the fact that Outlook's orientation is based more on a community theater model than a social movement model. It may also be due to the fact that both Outlook participants had been less centrally involved in Outlook as an organization than the participants of SI and SFMT. Both Outlook participants were involved in many other projects and did not see Outlook as the center of their political or community involvement.

Where much of the previous social work research primarily focused on the transformations experienced by the actors in the theater programs (Proctor, Perlesz, Moloney, Mcilwaine, and O'Neill, 2008; Sullivan et al., 2008; Dutton, 2001; Spratt et al.; 2000; Smokowski and Bacallao, 2009; Halverson, 2005), all of the participants in this study addressed transformations they have experience and witnessed among both the actors and the audience. Several participants talked about social change theater as a phenomenon where a group of people (the performers) speak what a whole community (or communities) of people are yearning to collectively express. One participant stated, "We were saying our truths and there were people out there who needed to hear them, you know, there was hunger for the material"; another stated, "We were vibrating to what this community needed to speak and then we were being tongues in that moment."

All SFMT participants emphasized that the primary way that they had felt that they had impacted social change was through their impact on the audiences of their performances. YTP aims to enact broader social change vis-a-vis the interchange between participants and the audience. SFMT participants described a dynamic where youth actors and audience members together break isolation and are able to collectively develop youth-driven political perspectives and agendas. For YTP, the construction of a venue for youth voices that are often silenced in society is in itself a form of social change.

Both Outlook participants also posited the audience as the central vehicle for social change. Both participants noted that their primary social change goal (in relation to their work with Outlook) is to raise awareness in the LGBT community about the issues and experiences of LGBT elders. SI participants also focused on SI's impact on the participants and audience as the central site for effecting social change. Several SI

participants articulated that SI is creating a foundation of political unity around disability justice values amongst its participants and audience.

Participants from all three groups addressed the question of how change ripples outward from and beyond the audience, a phenomenon not addressed in any of the social work research reviewed in this study. One participant talked about a "ripple effect" where new ideas generated by the play impacts audience members, who in turn translate those ideas into action in their communities. S/he said s/he has observed this "ripple effect" manifested in instances of people from outside of the particular community in which a community theater project is based beginning to come to the performances. Participants at SI and SFMT echoed this belief that their work "ripples out" beyond their audiences. However, several SFMT participants noted that they were unsure, however, of how audience members are moved to take action on the issues the shows convey. One participant from Outlook expressed doubt that Outlook's play would have much reach beyond the community. In fact, s/he felt that because the LGBT community in San Francisco is so fragmented, Outlook faces an many obstacles in its efforts to reach people within the LGBT (and even LGBT elder) community.

A significant gap in current social work research on social change and theatre relates to the impact of social change theatre programs on systemic social change and policy. Spratt et al. (2000) explicitly noted that that a limitation of their study was their inability to assess the impact of social change theater on actual institutional transformations. Other studies (Dutton, 2001; Smokowski and Bacallao, 2009; Halverson, 2005; Proctor et al., 2008; Sullivan et al., 2008) did not address at all how change at the micro and meso levels translated into changes at the macro level. However,

rich data emerged in this study about how participants saw social change theater leading to macro change. In particular, one SI participant's reported hir prior involvement in social change theater which was explicitly tied to a prisoners' rights campaign. This campaign, ultimately, won concrete legislative and electoral victories around welfare rights for ex-prisoners and mandatory minimums. This case of successful integration of theater and campaign development is illustrative of the way that expressive arts can be used as an organizing tool for building community and power. Several SI participants also noted that they had been previously involved in Guerilla Theater in which they had effected systemic social change. In particular, one SI participant noted that Guerilla Theater work around the presidential coup in Haiti had reached both corporate media conglomerates in the US (such as CNN) as well as international media outlets.

Several SI participants assessed that the disability justice movement they are working to build is not yet at a place in its evolution to initiate campaign work or to exercise influence on macro policy. Rather, the disability justice movement, from several SI participants' perspective, is at a place of beginning to organize a conscious base of people, in order to build the collective the unity and power necessary to tackle institutional change. While SI participants assessed that SI does not currently exert direct influence on institutional change, they articulated a clear strategy for how SI's work is designed to building a foundation of community power. They articulated a longer term strategic vision, wherein their current work is a first step towards building a disability justice movement that, ultimately, will have a strong enough base to effect social change at the systemic level.

*Implications for Clinical Social Work Practice*

The findings of this study have significant relevance for clinical social work practice. All fourteen participants of this study reflected on the individual and collective healing power of the social change theater groups with which they have been involved. In particular, the findings from the SFMT participants point to the effectiveness of programs like the YTP as a treatment modality for young people experiencing withdrawal, depression, anxiety or stress associated with traumatic or stressful experiences.

All five SFMT participants emphasized that one of the primary draws of the YTP was the personal support they experience both from SFMT staff and the YTP youth community. Four of the five participants discussed specific forms of emotional support they and their peers had received from SFMT through very difficult emotional processes, including:  grief  about the deaths of loved ones;  profound academic and peer-based challenges in high school; the challenges of navigating harassment and discrimination for LGBT youth; the stresses associated with daily experiences of racism and poverty; experiences of domestic violence, abuse and other family stressors; and generalized experiences of depression and isolation.

SFMT participants emphatically stressed that the emotional support that they receive from the group is unparalleled in any other dimension of their lives.  One participant reflected, "It definitely helps coming in, you know, fourteen other people helping you with your problems, either expressing them or just in another way helping." That YTP students learned skills related to active listening seems to have lead to enhanced mutual support within the group. SFMT participants expressed that SFMT participants are genuinely listening to and connecting with each other. Several

participants noted that they have seen "shy" or reserved people begin to express themselves after going thru YTP in a way that surprised many of their peers.

Most SFMT participants echoed that they have experienced profound shifts in their mood because of their participation in the YTP. As stated by one participant, "I can feel kind of sad but when I come here, I just feel so much better, in general. I can have a really bad day at school but once I get here I know that I have to do work, and I have to do stuff so it just, it brings my mood up." Indeed, several SFMT participants acknowledged that the YTP creates in them and their peers a sense of accountability to the group, which helps students feel needed and appreciated by the group. Increased confidence and enhanced mood based on the feeling that one has something to contribute to the group is pattern that has been repeatedly documented in social work research about the benefits of group work, especially for adolescents (Halverson, 2005; Dutton; 2001; Smokowski and Bacallao, 2009). Another participant noted that s/he sees a pattern where students may, "Just be having a genuinely bad day but...when they come through that door they always have a grin on their face just because they're so happy to be here and be around people that they genuinely enjoy to be around." Several participants reflected that SFMT functions both as a positive, supportive environment and as an outlet for challenging or confusing feelings and creative energy.

Not only did SFMT participants report that they experience change in their mood and affect when they are at SFMT, several also shared that this experience impacts their mood and interpersonal relationships when they go back to the rest of their lives. One SFMY participants noted that YTP participants often become more outgoing at school leading to improved relationships with teachers and peers. Several SFMT participants

noted that youth become more open with their families and begin to seek out more meaningful friendships, friendships based on mutual emotional support and not just "hanging out." Several participants shared that the YTP helps them and their peers learn new ways of coping with problems in rest of their life. One participant elaborated that s/he now regularly uses acting exercises that involve breathing, clearing and focusing the mind, and paying attention to one's body and posture to help hir cope with stress. S/he stated, "I always tell myself to breathe through stuff. Like whenever I have an argument with my boyfriend or whenever I feel like I have so much work...I always like try to take a moment and like clear my head like we do here...to stop and breathe...to stay focused and clear your head for a minute."

The emphasis at Sins Invalid on sustainability, wholeness and embodiment is also of particular relevance to clinical social work. SI participants asserted that SI prioritizes doing artistic and political work that engages the whole selves and the whole bodies of community members, particularly because community members are addressing ongoing bodily and emotional self-care. The framework of embodiment, "The integration of the full and multi-dimensional experiences" of people and communities, was discussed as foundational in the development of the capacity, skills and confidence to participate fully in movement-building work. SI participants echoed how much their leadership and participation in SI was made possible by SI's embodiment practices; in the words of one SI participant, "It wasn't gonna be demanded of me that I sacrifice my body in order to [to participate in SI]."

Interestingly, one SI participant talked about hir past political work as operating from a "non-embodied" and "dissociated" place of "crisis mode." SI understands that

both community theater and social change movement-building address and work to transform traumatic experience. As such, SI offers a practice that can help participants move through dissociative coping mechanisms associated with trauma, towards a fully-embodied and connected experience of the self and community. Like the SFMT participants, SI participants reflected that SI has helped them and others feel whole in their bodies and the world in a way that they have not felt in other performing spaces, social movement spaces, or direct services spaces.

While none of these three theater programs are based in clinical social work, certainly SFMT and SI seem to offer their participants ways to access and transform difficult emotions in a way that no participants reported they had experienced vis-a-vis traditional mental health programs.  Interestingly, one SFMT participant compared the YTP to group therapy. S/he stated, "I mean in some ways we don't like to say it but it is group therapy sometimes...But it's not just like mental therapy but it's just soothing a person. You know, who might have a really bad day at school, that somebody broke up with them...or whatever." Not only did this participant see YTP as effective in helping participants feel soothed- and by extension increase their capacities for self-soothing- s/he reflected that the YTP is offering a therapeutic service to people who would otherwise not be accessing therapy. S/he continued, "But we don't try to promote it that way [as group therapy] of course...When you're trying to get new people in, it can kind of push them off because they're like, 'Ew, we gotta share ourselves? Uh. That's not cool. No.'''

*Implications Program Planning*

Perceptions that exist within communities about therapy, social work, theater and social change must be addressed in order to effectively build a program that is rooted in and accountable to the communities that the program serves. Recruitment is a critical dimension of program-planning that each of these three groups have important strategies around. For the SFMT, it was often an interest in acting and the way that YTP presentations in high schools that engaged students and provide an initial link. While YTP participants stressed how much YTP had served as both an agent of therapeutic change and a space for building community consciousness and power, participants were initially drawn in by the SFMT staff and youth presenters, who they perceived as fun, comedic, creative and interactive. SFMT participants also asserted that the fact that the SFMT offered financial compensation and food to participants was also a motivating factor. However, they also noted that after getting involved, youth in the YTP would become so invested in the YTP that they would put in work regardless of whether they were getting paid for their time.

Venue is also an important factor for recruitment. Most of the SFMT participants got involved through presentations at their high schools. Both Outlook participants got involved vis-a-vis Outlook's collaboration with LGBT direct service organizations. SI participants got involved either through founding the project, coming to the performances as an audience member, or through broad movement-building and performance networks. Also important to note is that all participants from Outlook and SI initially became involved in social change theater prior to their involvement in Outlook and SI. Most participants got involved through social change movements. Several of the SI participants originally got involved in social change theater/performance through student activism

and/or street activism. This data suggests, on the one hand, that it is crucial that social change theater programs develop meaningful connections with schools, social service agencies, and other local community institutions in which community members live their lives. On the other, it suggests that social change theater is particularly powerful when it disinvests from such institutions; that people become powerfully engaged through participation in grassroots movements and the practice of creating art in public space.

Another important dimension of program-planning is the development of tools to reflect on and assess implemenation of programmtic goals and objectives. All three groups shared different ways in which they track the impact of their work. Both Outlook and SI do feedback or "talk back" sessions with the audience after all performances and later address the content of those sessions in evalution and planning meetings. SI participants shared that they will often keep track of the following questions: 1) How did the audience engage with the show?; 2) To what extent did audience members express that their consciousness had been impacted; 3) To what extent did audience members express that they felt more whole and affirmed in their own experiences?; 4) How did the performance and "talk back" session deepen relationships between audience members and SI; 5) How did the talk-back session contribute to movement building?; 6) How does the work that were doing contribute to more systemic social change?  While SI's work is not connected to an organizing campaign, One SI participant shared that in hir past work with Voices of the Voiceless and DARE,  each performance would be followed by a panel of organizers who would talk about the campaigns (in addition to the "tallk back" session). S/he reported that DARE would then sign people up to participate in their

campaign work and do tracking sheets at each performance to concretely assess how the performances were hooking people in with the organization and campaign.

Another component of program-planning is the leadership structures which these programs use. None of the three groups operate as flat collectives. However, participants talked about all three as operating with some level of flexible or "soft" hierarchy. All three groups emphasized collective process and collective decision-making. One SI participant shared that SI has re-built hir confidence and capacity to share leadership. Both Outlook participants expressed that the three Co-Diretors of Outlook were extremely reflexive and responsive to the voices and feedback of all participants in the project. Several SFMT participants emphasized that the adult teachers for the YTP were never authoritative and always made them feel empowered. One SFMT participant reflected that s/he felt hir leadership as a social justice educator had deepened thru hir role as YTP Peer Advisor. S/he stated that moving into this role had taught hir how "to educate youth on different things outside of school...in politics or in theater and art." Having a structure whereby previous youth participants move into an intermediate role (between participant and teacher) seems to provide an important venue for cultivating the leadership of the youth that YTP serves.

*Implications for Policy*

When asked, "Is there anything else about your involvement in social change theater that you would like to share with me?", one SFMT jokingly responded, "Give us money." Indeed, several SFMT students shared that a significant challenge to reaching as many youth as they would like is funding, which has been cut in recent years. SFMT participants were concerned about the increasing lack of after-school options for youth in

urban areas (particularly youth of color and low-income youth). Two participants reported that they joined YTP, in part, because they did not have many other after-school opportunities as youth. SFMT participants also raised concerns that arts programs are the first programs to get cut (both within high schools and in youth centers) during economic crises. One SFMT participant noted that often only a select group of youth who are identified (by an adult with authority) as "talented" get opportunities to make art. One participant bemoaned that during high school, s/he has had to create hir own opportunities to make art. S/he noted that s/he has been able to both learn and express hirself through art in a way that is different (and for hir, deeper) than traditional academic work. This data underscores the belief that art is a method of learning and expressing one's ideas and emotions that all youth should have access to.

While arts programs are often designated as recreational and undervalued in our education system, participants in this study revealed that the benefits of participation are far-reaching. In addition to the benefits described above, SFMT participants shared that their involvement in YTP had helped them develop a high level of commitment and responsibility. They reported developing life skills that translated into increased academic success and access to a greater range of jobs. One student reported that s/he went to college because of feeling inspired by seeing other peers at YTP s/he respected going on to higher education (in addition to getting support to go to college from SFMT staff and peers). Several SFMT participants reported that they had developed a sense of direction and life purpose through the SFMT. Several have launched into involvement in theater and the arts beyond the YTP.

YTP participants also unanimously reported that their involvement deepened their sense of social responsibility and commitment to social change. One SFMT participant stated,

> There have been people that I've known who have come in and they're eighteen and they say they don't vote because there's no reason to. But at the end they've changed their minds entirely...It's that whole thing, people saying, you know, one vote won't matter. But you know, if a million people say that then it matters, so it changes people for sure.

The unanimous belief that young people can effect change in our society among the SFMT participants is powerful. A major component of social justice is the development of capacity in communities who are excluded from policy-making to demand changes in the policies that affect their lives.

Several participants at Sins Invalid argued that activists often precipitously engage in policy reform work before having done the work of building community power so that the work around policy change is actually lead by and accountable to the communities most directly affected by those policies. One SI participant offered the critique that, "The disability rights movement completely cut off a base and moved into...litigation around the ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act]. And I think that's important...but...did not touch shifting consciousness around disability. The average person with a disability...hates their body now the way they did before the passage of ADA." As such people with disabilities often continue to be isolated and disempowered, leading to a lack of capacity of the disability justice movement to wield the collective power to hold policy-makers accountable.  This is a place where SI's work exists at the intersection of community healing and developing strategies for systemic change.

*Strengths & Limitations*

This study was originally intended to use a Participatory Action Research method of research, which the researcher believed would have been particularly useful for inquiry into research questions around social change and community transformation. In Participatory Action Research designs, the subjects of the research play a central role in developing the design itself, as well as carrying out the research. Because of the limitations of time and resources, the researcher was not able to employ a Participatory Action Research design.

The researcher did base the research design on some of the principles of Participatory Action Research, however. After identifying which groups the researcher would be collaborating with the, the researcher met with liaisons from each group. They discussed the kinds questions that each group was looking to further explore about its work. The researcher constructed the research formulation, design and interview questions based on input from these liaisons. The researcher conducted individual interviews with participants from SFMT and Outlook and a focus group with SI because the liaisons from each group (who, in turn, got feedback from others in their groups) articulated that these respective formats would be most accessible and open format for their respective members. A limitation of using different interview formats was that it lead to findings which were more difficult to compare.

A significant drawback of not having used the Participatory Action Design was that the research formulation, questions and data collection tool were not designed by the participants of the programs themselves. In addition to the potential for having missed important avenues of inquiry, the language of the research formulation and questions did not necessarily match the language used by the groups themselves. For example, many of

the interview questions were phrased using terms that are not accessible or relevant to many people. With several of the youth from the SFMT, the researcher had to rephrase some of the questions several times as the language was not constructed in a way that made sense. For many of the Sins Invalid and Outlook partiticpants, the concept of "social change theater" did not resonate with the work they do and was seen as limiting language (both artisitically and politically).

In terms of the sample, one limitation was that none of the three groups were employing theater/performance work in tandem with a campaign with concrete institutional targets or policy goals. Each group had a vision and strategy around social change. Sins Invalid had a vision and strategy about how to contribute to movement-building such that disability justice work can evolve into a place where campaigns can be developed. There were participants who had prior experiences of doing social change theater/performance that were concretely tied to campaign work, but none of these experiences reflected their current work.

The sample included only two participants from Outlook Community Theater Project which respresents a signifcant limitation. It was difficult to compare Outlook to the other two groups based on the limited data. It was also difficult to make any generalizations about Outlook's work based on only two interviews. The work of each group is so context specific that the researcher questions extent to which "generalizability" is possibile (or desirable). The findings do, however, provide an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of practitioners' of social change theater and performance on the impact of their work. It is hoped the data gathered through this study and presented here will inspire and inform future research.

Areas for Future Research

This research was designed to explore participant perspectives on the relationship between social change theater and capacity to effect social change. This study did not intend to measure or assess the impact of social change theater programs on social change, per se. However, the researcher did explore with participants what they perceive as the impact of social change theater on systemic social change. Much of the data from this research suggests that social change theater and performance does expand community participation and help grow popular movements. Some participants offered stories about the ways in which social change theater projects they were part of had impacted macro change (including legislative and electoral change). Other participants articulated a theory of change where social change theater, performance and cultural work plays a significant role in movement-building, which can, ultimately lead to systemic social change. Other participants raised questions about if and how social change theater programs impacts systemic change.

It would be extremely valuable for future researchers to support social change theater and cultural work projects to further develop their "tracking" and evaluation tools to better assess how they are impacting social change. One specific area of research that would be useful would be to further explore and assess the "ripple effect" (as described by one participant) where new ideas generated by the play impacts audience members, who in turn translate those ideas into action in their communities. Another specific area of further research relates social change to the systemic impact of theater and performance groups whose work is concretely tied to campaigns that aim to change policy.

This study was originally intended to use a Participatory Action Research method of research that would be particularly useful for further inquiry into these questions. Indeed, the very practice of participatory research has historically been used in tandem with theatre of the oppressed work. Both processes engage the affected community in the framing and asking of the questions, as well as in the gathering of information from other community members, in a way that aims to transform the community (Blair, Katz, Lorenz, Rich & Schutzman, 2006). Indeed, one participant drew this connection hirself, based on hir work doing community-based research as part of the women's liberation movement. S/he reflected:

> I remember I was fourteen...and being the youngest member of the Chicago Women's Liberation Unit and being in a consciousness-raising group. And the power of sitting around and saying, 'okay, what's your experience, what's your experience, what's your experience'...juxtaposing them to what our experiences are supposed to be and going, 'okay, well, by the authority vested in our lives here, we decide that this is how we're supposed to be.' You know, that setting of experiences side by side, that form of research that we do with our own stories, and the things we realize as we lay our stories next to each other is just so potent compared to reading abstracted political theory.

Given the importance of self-determination of communities to create their own vision and strategy for social change, it is critical than any future research agenda be rooted in the priorities of the theater/performance groups and the communities they are based in.


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Appendix A

**Recruitment Letter**

Dear colleague,

My name is Jesse Ehrensaft-Hawley and I am currently a Masters in Social Work student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am contacting you at the recommendation of _____ at _____organization about a thesis project on social change theater that I am conducting. I am planning to interview participants of your program about your perspectives on the connection between you participation and your sense of your own capacity to create systemic social change.

My hope is that the research serves as a useful reflection and evaluation tool for you, your organization and for social change theater work more broadly. The interviews will last from 45 minutes to an hour (and will take place during March 2010).

If you are interested in potentially being interviewed, please do not hesitate to e-mail me at XXXXXX or XXXXXXXXX. I would be more than happy to provide additional information or answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

Jesse Ehrensaft-Hawley
Smith College School for Social Work
Class of 2010

Appendix B

**Recruitment Letter for Parents or Legal Guardians of Minors**

Dear parent of San Francisco Mime Troupe participant,

My name is Jesse Ehrensaft-Hawley and I am currently a Masters in Social Work student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am contacting you at the recommendation of _____ at_____ about a thesis project on social change theater that I am conducting. I am planning to interview participants of your child or ward's program about their perspectives on the connection between their participation and their sense of their own capacity to create systemic social change.

My hope is that the research serves as a useful reflection and evaluation tool for your child or ward, the organization with which they are doing social change theater, as well as a contribution to social change theater work more broadly. The interviews will last from 45 minutes to an hour (and will take place during March 2010).

If you are interested in potentially having your child or ward being interviewed, please do not hesitate to e-mail me at XXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXX. I would be more than happy to provide additional information or answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

Jesse Ehrensaft-Hawley
Smith College School for Social Work
Class of 2010

Appendix C

**Informed Consent Form**

Dear Participant,

My name is Jesse Ehrensaft-Hawley. I am a graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am doing a research project about participants of social change theater programs and participants' thoughts on how their participation has affected their activism social change in social change movements. The project will serve as my Master's level thesis, as well as for possible public presentations and publication.

To participate in the study, I would be asking you to do a one hour long in person interview with me. I am reaching out to you to be part of the study because of your involvement in _____with which I am partnering with for this research project. I will be taking notes and, with your permission, audio taping the interview. I will be doing all of the transcriptions of the interviews myself.

The interview could bring up feelings or emotions that are connected to your social justice theatre work. I will be providing you with a list of supportive services and agency referrals that you can use if any strong emotions that you would like to get more support around come up for you during the interview. My hope is that through participating in this study, you will be contributing to the body of knowledge about social justice theatre, in addition to providing an opportunity for you to reflect on your work with the programs you have been a part of. I am not able to provide money to compensate you for your time.

Your participation in this study will remain confidential, though not anonymous, as I will be meeting with you in person. Your name and any other information that might make you identifiable will be removed from all of the statements you make. Any statements you make that I use in quotes or vignettes in my thesis and in any publications and presentations will be carefully disguised. All data will kept in a secure location for a period of three years, as required by Federal guidelines, and all electronic data will be password protected. If I need the material for longer than three years, they will continue to be kept in a secure location and will be destroyed when no longer needed.

Participating in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time over the period that I am continuing to do interviews up until April 15th, 2010, when the final report will be written. If you do choose to withdraw form the study, all of the information relating to your interview will be destroyed immediately. During the interview, you have full rights to skip interview questions or to stop in the process. If you have any additional questions or do decide to withdraw, please feel free to contact me at  XXXXXXX or XXXXXXX. If you have any concerns about your rights or any aspect of the study, I encourage you to contact me or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

_____ _____

Researcher signature                                                                        date


_____ _____

Participant signature                                                                        date

Appendix D

**Informed Consent Form for Parents/Legal Guardian**

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Jesse Ehrensaft-Hawley. I am a graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a research project examining participants' of social change theater programs perspectives on the connection between their participation and their perceived capacity to create systemic social change The project will serves as my Master's level thesis, as well as for possible public presentations and publication.

Your child or ward's involvement in this study will involve a 45-minute to one hour long in person interview. You child or ward is being included because of your child or ward's involvement in the San Francisco Mime Troupe's Youth Theater Project with which this research project is partnering. I will be taking field notes and, with your permission, audio taping the interview. I will be doing all of the transcriptions myself.

This study has the potential to bring up emotional issues related to your child or ward's connection to your social justice theatre work. I am providing you with a list of supportive services and agency referrals should any strong emotions for which your child or ward would like further support emerge during the interview. My hope is that through participating in this study, your child or ward will be contributing to the body of knowledge about social justice theatre in addition to providing an opportunity for your child or ward to reflect on the work he or she has done. I am not able to provide money to compensate your child or ward for his or her time.

Your child or ward's participation in this study will remain confidential, though not anonymous, as I will be meeting with your child or ward in person. Your child or ward's name and identifying information will be removed from all of the statements he or she makes. Any statements your child or ward makes that I use in quotes or vignettes in my thesis and in any publications and presentations will be carefully disguised. All data will kept in a secure location for a period of three years, as required by Federal guidelines, and all electronic data will be password protected. Should I need the material for longer than three years, they will continue to be kept in a secure location and will be destroyed when no longer needed.

Participating in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw your child or ward's participation at any time over the course of the data collection up until April 15th, 2010, when the final report will be written. If you do choose to withdraw your child or ward from the study, all of the data pertaining to your child or ward's interview will be destroyed immediately. During the interview, your child or ward will have full right to skip interview questions or to stop in the process. If you have any additional questions or do decide to withdraw, please feel free to contact me at XXXXXXX or XXXXXXXX. If you have any concerns about your child or ward's rights or any aspect of the study, I encourage you to contact me or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR CHILD OR WARD'S PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO YOUR CHILD OR WARD'S PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY.

_____          _____
Researcher Signature                                                                    date


_____          _____
Parent/Guardian Signature                                                            date

Appendix E

**Referral List**


Adolescent Health Working Group
1390 Market Street, Ste. 900
San Francisco, CA 94102
tel: (415) 554-8429
www.ahwg.net

California Youth Crisis Line
800-843-5200
Website http://www.youthcrisisline.org/
E-mail cycl@calyouth.org

Lavender Youth Recreation Center (LYRIC)
127 Collingwood Street
San Francisco, CA 94114
One block west of Castro between 18th & 19th Streets
Phone: 415.703.6150
E-mail: lyricinfo@lyric.org


Mental Health Association of San Francisco
Tel: 415-421-2926
870 Market Street, Suite 928
M-F 9-5
http://www.mha-sf.org/

New Leaf Services
103 Hayes Street (near Market Street)
San Francisco, CA 94102
Tel: 415-626-7000
intake@newleafservices.org

www.newleafservices.org

San Francisco Mental Health Access Line
Tell 415-255-3737/ toll fee: 1-888-246-3333

San Francisco Women Against Rape
San Francisco, CA 94110
Hotline Phone: 415-647-RAPE (7273)
Business Phone: 415-861-2024

Appendix E

**Interview Guide**

Demographic questions:

1) What is your age?

2) How do you identify racially and ethnically?

3) How do you identify in terms of gender?

4) Are there other parts of your identity that you think are important for me to know as it relates to this research?

5) How many months or years have you been involved in social change theater work?

6) Are you currently engaged in social change theater work?

Semi-structured interview questions:

1) What does the idea of "social change theater" mean to you?

2) How and why did you get involved in social change theater?

3) Has your involvement in social change theater affected your perception of your own capacity to create social change?

   *If no: follow up:* What would you say has affected your perception of your capacity to create social change?

If no: follow up: How has your involved in social change theater affected you?

*If yes: follow up:* How has your involvement in social change theater affected your perception of your capacity to create social change?

*If yes: possible follow up:* Did your involvement affect you awareness of your self in relation to broader society? If yes, how?

*If yes: possible follow up:* Did your involvement affect your belief in or commitment to social change? If yes, how?

*If yes: possible follow up:* Did your involvement have an impact on your confidence or you skills to be able to do social change work? If yes, how?

*If yes: follow up:* Has your involvement in social change theater affected your participation in social change movements? If yes, how?

4) What do you perceive as the impact on systemic social change of the social change theater projects you are involved in;

*Possible follow up*: How do you see the project relating to broader social change movements?

*Possible follow up*: Do you see the project supporting social movement-building?

*Possible follow up:* How do you see the project having an impact on the community(ies) the project is based in or engaging?

*Possible follow up:* What do you see as the project having an impact on policy or social, political or economic infrastructures, if any?

5) How do you perceive the interaction of broad social change that the project aims to make with the kinds of change that happen at the level of group and the individual vis-a-vis involvement in the work of social change theater?

*Follow up (if the participant answered yes to question 1)*: How do you see you increased sense of capacity to make social change affecting your sense of your capacity in other dimensions of your life?

Follow-up *(if the participant answered that they did think that their program has impacted systemic social change)*: What do you see as the impact of having had effected systemic social change on the group that makes up your theatre project? On yourself?

*Possible follow-up:* What happened at the level of the group to make collective social action possible?

*Possible follow-up:* What happened for you on a personal level that supported your involvement collective social change?


6) In addition to your involvement in social change theater, were there other influences to the kinds of changes you described in the previous questions?

Follow *up:* How do you see the various influences interacting?


7) Is there anything else about your involvement in social change theater that you would like to share with me?


8) Are there any questions that I did not ask but should have or do you have any comments about this interview?