"FOR PEOPLE WHO AREN'T SURE WHO THEY ARE, THEATRE IS A GREAT PLACE TO BE":

NARRATIVES OF ACTORS AND THEIR SEXUAL IDENTITIES

A Dissertation in
Adult Education

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

May 2015
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ABSTRACT

This narrative study seeks to understand the relationship between the practice of acting and sexual identity in non-heterosexual male actors. The study applies two lenses of analysis, a narrative analysis following Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and a constant-comparative analysis, and presents the data in those two distinct lenses.

This study examines the narratives of nine male actors in early adulthood through middle age, and of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Framed in D'Augelli's (1994) lifespan developmental model of sexual identity, the data in this study illustrate several relevant themes that emerge in the narrative analysis. First, participants reported that theatre can be a safe space for sexual identity exploration in its openness and the propensity for actors to be more emotionally astute. Participants described theatre as a site for understanding relationships within several contexts: mentoring, family, romance, and a community of support. For many participants, theatre was a site of embodied learning, through the use of the voice and movement, as well as the performance of gender. Finally, participants framed acting as a politic, and described ways in which they've come to understand power and positionality through their art, and how they have reacted to that understanding through both mainstream and activist theatre.

The analysis and discussion of the data bridges the gap in empirical literature between adult development and the experience of acting by framing acting within several relevant adult education concepts: acting as a community of practice, acting as an embodied experience, acting as a site of sociopolitical action, and acting as a safe space for identity exploration and development. Each theme is presented in parallel with D'Augelli's model to illustrate the connection between the adult education themes and the processes within the model. The data confirm the theoretical model and support its relevance in a contemporary zeitgeist, while
challenging some shortcomings in the model: the linear, unidirectional concept of sexual identity, and the absence of a practical illustration of the role of cultural intersectionality on sexual identity development.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................. viii  
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................ ix  
CHAPTER ONE ........................................................................ 1  
  Background and Review of the Literature .................................. 4  
  Theoretical Framework .......................................................... 9  
  Problem Statement ............................................................... 11  
  Purpose of the Study ............................................................. 13  
  Research Methodology .......................................................... 14  
  Definitions of Key Terms ...................................................... 15  
  Significance of the Study ....................................................... 16  
  Assumptions and Limitations .................................................. 17  
  Postlude ................................................................................ 19  
CHAPTER TWO ......................................................................... 20  
  Setting the Context ................................................................ 20  
  Research Questions ................................................................ 21  
  Adult Development ................................................................ 22  
  Biological Development ....................................................... 24  
  Psychological Development ................................................... 24  
  Sociocultural Models ............................................................ 26  
  Integrative Theories ............................................................... 26  
  Adult Development as Learning .............................................. 27  
  Identity Development ............................................................ 29  
  Sexual Identity ........................................................................ 33  
  Sexual Identity Development Models ..................................... 35  
  Theoretical Framework--Lifespan Developmental Model ............. 39  
  Processes of Development ...................................................... 42
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empirical Support for the Model</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critiques of the Model</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing the Critiques-ADRESSING Framework</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer Theory</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance of Gender</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodied Learning</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives on Acting</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Culminating Example-The Rocky Horror Show</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for the Research Questions</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Research Paradigm</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Narrative Research Design</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Researcher</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Selection</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness of the Data</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone in Theatre Gets to Be Someone Else</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Me, It's all about Storytelling</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Was in Theatre--'Gay' Came with the Territory</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Got to Deal with My Problem Without Dealing with My Problem</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Don't Think I Am Who I Am Without Theatre Training</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We're So Dialed in to Our Emotions</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Do Think, In the Beginning, Theatre Was Something for Me to Hide In</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But When I'm Performing, It's an Emotional Escape</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And It Was Basically My Story that I Got to Play</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre Can Be a Safe Space</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Everyone is Welcome in Theatre ................................................................. 195
Recognizing Feelings of Otherness ........................................................ 197
Acting Makes Us Vulnerable ................................................................. 200
The Shadow Side of Vulnerability-Theatre as an Unsafe Space ............... 202
Relationships with Others within Acting ............................................ 203
Developing a Support Network ............................................................ 203
Mentors within Acting ........................................................................... 207
Intimate Relationships .......................................................................... 209
Actors' Relationships with their Families ............................................. 212
Acting as an Embodied Experience ..................................................... 214
Performance of Gender .......................................................................... 215
Movement ................................................................................................ 217
Voice ......................................................................................................... 219
Acting as a Political Stance ...................................................................... 220
Connections to the Theoretical Framework ......................................... 223
Summary .................................................................................................. 228
CHAPTER SIX ........................................................................................... 229
Conclusions ............................................................................................. 229
Performance of Gender .......................................................................... 229
Embodied Learning ................................................................................ 232
Acting as a Way of Knowing ................................................................... 233
Implications of the Study ....................................................................... 234
Adult Learning ......................................................................................... 234
Adult Development ................................................................................ 236
Acting Pedagogies .................................................................................. 236
Developmental Psychology ..................................................................... 238
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research .................................. 239
Reflections on the Study ......................................................................... 246
REFERENCES .......................................................................................... 250
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Data Analysis Process ........................................................................................................97
Figure 2: Themes Within the Narratives ............................................................................................195
Figure 2: D'Augelli’s Model Compared to Themes ........................................................................220
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are no words that can summarize the experience of writing this document. While at times it seemed to be a Sisyphean task of writing, revising, and writing again, this study has truly been a labor of love. In the end, my job was much easier once I learned to simply listen to the stories and let them guide the process.

There are so many individuals who contributed to this study; it would be impossible to name each one individually. I am confident that I would not have seen this study through to the end without the encouragement of the faculty in the Adult Education Doctoral Program at Penn State Harrisburg. My primary advisor, Dr. Robin Redmon Wright, provided just the right amount of encouragement while always challenging me to think outside of myself and outside of the suppositions that I held about what this study should be. Dr. Ed Taylor reminded me throughout the process to keep my head in the study and to keep writing, even when I didn't think I could write any more. I appreciate the support I received from Dr. Libby Tisdell, who pushed me from the beginning to follow my passion to write a study that I loved, rather than a study that would be easy. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Patricia Cranton, who guided me to write from an authentic perspective and to always make sure that I was writing in my own voice.

I was fortunate to find the two ideal professors to round out my committee--a musician who is committed understanding to psychosocial power inherent in the arts, and a psychologist who is also an accomplished artist. Dr. Adam Gustafson and Dr. Holly Angelique offered unique and invaluable perspectives to this study, and I am grateful for their contributions. As well, I thank Dr. Jo Tyler and Dr. Katie Robinson for their input and guidance during my coursework and comprehensive examinations.
My friends and classmates in the 2007 doctoral cohort truly have become like a family to me. Despite the time and distance between all of us, I have found great comfort in this process knowing that they were by my side while I was writing. My sincerest thanks to all of them for their love and friendship over the past eight years. I offer a special "thank you" to Dr. Nancy Zimmerman, Dr. Jennifer Tobin, and Dr. Carolyn Callaghan for their notes of support, listening ears, and sage advice during the writing process.

It takes a village to write a dissertation, and I would not have been able to complete this volume without the efforts of my very supportive professional colleagues. I am grateful to my colleague, Professor Tom Robertson, for his frequent reminders to "finish the damn dissertation". Tom has been a valued mentor and friend, and I am eternally grateful to him for his advice, guidance, and support. It is a gift to have a mentor like Tom! My colleague and classmate in the doctoral program, Jennifer Pemberton, deserves many thanks for being a friend, respected colleague, confidante, and restorer of sanity throughout the writing process and beyond! My colleagues at the Community College of Baltimore County have provided me with invaluable support and encouragement throughout this journey. Thanks to all of them!

The friends and family members who contributed support to this volume are too numerous to name. To each of them, I say "thank you" and apologize for seven years of saying "I can't do that...I have schoolwork to do!" I thank my parents for instilling in me the value of education and a love for learning. I thank them for the sacrifices that they've made so that I could experience all that life has to offer. They have given me the greatest gift that parents could ever give their child: the knowledge that I could accomplish any task if I worked hard enough for it.
I dedicate this volume to one very special woman in my life, my grandmother, Mrs. Margaret "Peggy" McCadden, who passed away eight days after the oral defense of this dissertation. When I ponder the experiences that my Grammy had during her 95 years, I find myself in bewildered awe. Above all, Grammy was a nurturer, and in the days after her passing, I found the most comfort in the many times that I heard people say, "she was like a mother/grandmother to me". I hope one day to find her wisdom, generosity, and capacity to love and forgive without condition. She was my first and greatest teacher, and I hold dear the lessons that I have learned from her, both in childhood and adulthood. I am grateful to have had her in my life well into my adult years, and thankful that I was able to hold her hand, as she had held mine in my childhood, while she transitioned from this life into the next. I hope that I have made her as proud as she has made me.

Finally, I would like to thank nine very special men who shared their stories and bared their souls to make my dream a reality. To Aaron, Andy, Aundra, Dan, Jon, Lee, Michael, Sean, and Ted, I give my sincerest thanks. I hope that I have given their stories the respect and voice that they deserve. I thank them for generously offering their time and their stories to me, and for helping me to craft them into this final collection of narratives.
CHAPTER ONE

Even if you don't realize it, the pieces of entertainment that you like, and that you choose to digest have an effect on you...
Art deserves a lot of respect considering the impact it has on our lives.

-"Aaron"

My friend "Aaron," in his own narrative on the powerful impact that acting has had on his life, shares this statement to summate a significant life-changing experience when acting a particular character. While portraying the germ-fearing, homophobic, crack-smoking "Matt" in Bert Royal's DOG SEES GOD: Confessions of a Teenage Blockhead (a dark satire on the Peanuts comic strip), he experienced and acted a character that differed so sharply from his own identity that he was deeply unsettled by the process. Describing the scene in which Matt realizes that his friend, Beethoven, is gay, and then he crushes Beethoven’s fingers in a piano lid, which subsequently drives Beethoven to suicide, Aaron relates:

This is where all my backstory comes into play. I'm not like that. I have my own history of being bullied, and while it's not quite to the extent [that appears in] the play, it's pretty emotionally scarring. I've never understood why people would degrade and humiliate people the way I've been degraded and humiliated, or my friends have been... Playing a character who does things like that, it's important to understand why you are doing it. And I feel like I should emphasize this point extremely heavily; whatever the character is doing in the script, YOU AS AN ACTOR ARE DOING IT (emphasis in original). It is almost impossible to completely separate a character from an actor when you are onstage...When we put the show on, a character on a page didn't slam someone's fingers in a piano, I did. Some person named Matt didn't break someone down to the point [that] they wanted to end their own life, I did. ...Every show, after the scene where I smashed Beethoven's fingers, I ran backstage and punched a wall to keep myself from crying...this was painful to me, more painful than anything I'd experienced before. It drove me into a depression. I found that these emotions were carrying over into my social life. I stopped going out with friends and holed myself up in my room because I was so upset...[about] what I had seen in myself...I stopped eating; I stopped going to class. I couldn't
handle myself anymore, and I honestly had no idea why. ("Aaron", personal communication, March 6, 2012)

During the process of bringing Matt to life on the stage, Aaron had, in fact, struggled with his own sexual identity, and he intimated to me later that stepping into Matt's shoes for 90 minutes at a time had clarified his own perspectives on sexual orientation more sharply than his own direct contemplative process and years of therapy. By examining the values and beliefs of the homophobic character through creating that character on stage, Aaron was able to examine his own belief set and develop a new perspective on his sense of self. Through playing the character of the bully, Matt, he was able to make meaning of the experience of being bullied. Because the process of developing a character is somewhat depersonalized from one's own values, it may be easier to examine value-laden issues of self through an external lens, than through a direct and purposeful deconstruction of one's own beliefs and values (Walsh-Bowers, 1996). In essence, playing a role that confronted his belief set allowed him to re-story his own experiences. Aaron's story illustrates the intersection at which I situate this research. His experience as an actor allows for a third-person exploration of his personal narrative. Aaron's story is one of change, in which he approaches a critical life issues at a moment of reflection. Adult development provides a lens through which to frame Aaron's personal history.

Adult development represents change over time, often regarded as irreversible change, resulting in some new knowledge or skill (Clark & Caffarella, 1999). Based on the assumption that each adult is unique, it is difficult to generalize theories of development to describe all changes. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) offer a typology of adult development, distinguishing developmental theories into biological, psychological, sociocultural, and integrative models. The integrative perspectives account for the intersections of biological and psychological changes as they are influenced by social and cultural forces. In Aaron's case, he is
examining the social and cultural notions around sexual identity for his character, and reflecting on the implications that those cultural notions may have for himself in his personal narrative.

The personal narrative represents the sum of experiences, events, and social influences across the lifespan (Hammack & Cohler, 2009). The personal narrative is a process of becoming across the lifespan, or the story of who the individual is, how he or she has become that individual, and how those experiences might influence future experiences. Anecdotally, actors often remark that acting is essential to their understandings of the world and their own experiences. This study seeks to provide insight in how that meaning-making process occurs within a context of sexual identity.

Sexual identity represents the intersection of biology, gender expression, social influences, and sexual orientation; however, sexual orientation remains the unit of analysis in most discussions of sexual identity in adult education (Edwards & Brooks, 1999). Specific to sexual identity, Hammack and Cohler (2011) suggest that personal narratives are an essential avenue through which to explore the meaning of one's own sexual identity, an idea reflected in the adult education literature around narrative learning (Brooks & Edwards, 1997; King, 1996).

My conversations with Aaron and many other actors and performers, as well as my own experiences of theatre and performance art, have led me to believe that the process of acting holds significant meaning-making power for the actor, particularly in understanding the actors' own belief sets and motivations. This type of changed understanding of identity represents an important facet of adult development (Clark & Cafferella, 1999); adult development and learning have been inextricably linked in the adult learning literature (Grannot, 1998). In particular, it is well established in the psychology and adult education literature that sexual identity is formed as the individual interacts with the social world and integrates social messages with thoughts and
feelings (Cass, 1984; D'Augelli, 1994). The same exploration occurs within the actor, but with
the character (rather than the actor) as the unit of analysis. There remains, however, a gap in the
literature to explore the role of acting as a vehicle for development for the actor, and how it
might influence the actor's own sexual identity.

The purpose of this study is to examine the development of sexual identity in adult male
actors in order to explore the relationship between acting and sexual identity, and the actors'
processes of making meaning about that relationship. Through examining the narratives of actors
to determine how their experiences have impacted their sexual identity, I shed light on how
acting may initiate and perpetuate personal development and provide a space through which the
actor may reflect on sexual identity.

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the study, including the theoretical
framework, the literature reviewed, the methodology, the significance and the limitations. I begin
with an outline of the underlying philosophies applied in this study. I then provide a brief
description of the sexual identity development models that I will use for this study. Next, I begin
to draw connections between acting and adult sexual identity development, leading to the
questions that study explores. I conclude with an overview of the methodology, its underlying
assumptions, and a summary of the limitations of this study.

**Background and Review of the Literature**

In this section, I will provide a brief description of the literature reviewed for this study.
A more in-depth overview of the literature will be discussed in Chapter 2. I will also attempt to
set the stage for this study by providing appropriate background and context for the project.
Adult Development

As this study is grounded in adult development, it is important to present an operational definition of adult development, and explore its implications. For this study, I have chosen to follow Merriam and Clark's (2006) model of development as a change over time, in which the change is reflected in learning. As they delineate, development can be a biological process (aging), psychological process (cognition), or a sociocultural process (social role performance). In particular, this notion of development is appropriate for this study because Merriam and Clark focus on development as a learning process, whether that learning is oppressive or liberatory. Much of the sexual identity development presented in this study, as it is understood by the participants, speaks of coming to understand the self as a learning process.

In this study, I apply an integrated lens on sexual identity as both the product of psychological change and a response to social mores. From a liberatory perspective, sexual identity as a reflection of development represents the breaking away from preconceived notions and coming to understand new perspectives. As I will describe later, some of that process can be overtly or subtly political. To better illustrate the social framework in which psychological change occurs, I will briefly summarize here one of the underlying philosophies of this study, queer theory.

A Queer Politic

Queer theory is a philosophy rooted in the understanding that sexual identity is a political construct, and can therefore be understood as a position of power (Morris, 2005). The underlying tenet of queer theory suggests that sexual minorities have been oppressed by dominant narratives and the social structures that reinforce hegemony. One primary goal of those who embrace queer theory as a politic is to destabilize previously unquestioned positions of power and empower the
oppressed. Queer theorists bring to light the external forces of oppression and encourage introspection as to one's own place in the world. In a sense, queer theory is a call to learning, suggesting that by examining one's situation within a context of power and positionality, an individual can derive meaning through understanding (and ultimately confronting) social structures. One of the significant social structures addressed within queer theory is heteronormativity, which is also an underlying assumption of the theoretical lens of this study. In the next section, I will begin to focus on the theoretical framework by presenting a broad discussion of sexual identity development models that have emerged in the adult education literature.

**Sexual Identity Development Models**

Adult education literature has largely overlooked the unique developmental patterns of gay men and lesbian women, except in terms of sexual identity, reinforcing a notion of heteronormativity in adult development (Bettinger, 2007). This reflects the hegemonic notion of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) that is cited throughout the adult education literature on sexual identity (Tisdell, Timmens, and Bettinger, 2006; Bettinger, 2007; Hill, 2004). Sexual identity represents one of many facets of identity development, and lies at an intersection of biology, psychology, and social influence (Edwards & Brooks, 1999). In Chapter 2, I will situate sexual identity development more firmly within broader adult identity development models, but a brief discussion of sexual identity development is needed here for clarification. Sexual identity development models historically have been exclusive to other-than-heterosexual identity development, reflecting the hegemonic privilege of heterosexuality in Western culture (Edwards & Brooks, 1999; Hill, 2008). While one prominent model of heterosexual identity development has emerged (Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002), this model describes a
confirmation of heterosexual identity, rather than the development or affirmation of identity. So, sexual identity development, in this context, refers to a shift to an other-than-heterosexual identity.

For ease of presentation, sexual identity development models can be categorized as either biological, psychological, or lifespan models (Edwards & Brooks, 1999). The biological models seek to describe physiological differences between individuals of differing sexual identities, while the stagewise models, drawing on developmental psychology, define a predictable set of steps or stages toward the development of a gay or lesbian identity (Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1988). Both the biological and stagewise models privilege heterosexuality and examine other-than-heterosexual identities as anomalies.

Recognizing the inherent heterosexual privilege in most sexual identity models, D'Augelli (1994) integrates sociocultural and psychological influences in his lifespan model of sexual identity development. While he posits a stagewise model, he acknowledges the myriad differences in the developmental processes of individuals, and dismisses dichotomous notions of gay vs. straight in favor of fluid phases of development (Hill, 2008). Importantly, and integral to this study, is the focus on the modification of self-view based on social messages and interaction with others. While he rejects an essentialist perspective of awareness of a 'true self' in favor of an ever-fluid process of development, he does assert that "to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual in the fullest sense--to have a meaningful identity--leads to a consciousness of the history of one's own oppression. It also, generally, leads to an appreciation of how the oppression continues, and a commitment to resisting it" (p. 328).

As an integrative lifespan development model, as those described earlier in this chapter, this perspective espouses a social constructionist perspective of identity. The social
constructionist perspective of sexual identity development suggests that individuals derive sexual meaning from environmental cues from others in the social world, from media, and through internalized instruction from the world around them (Gagnon, 1977; Kitzinger, D'Augelli, & Patterson, 1995). While this process evolves somewhat naturally for most people, actors are, by their training, in situations in which they must critically examine those messages overtly in their development of roles. Gagnon (1977) likens the social constructionist view of identity to playing a role, in that social identity is an outcome of the interaction between the individual and the social script.

**Sexual Identity through Performance**

In describing American musical theatre’s influence on identity, Raymond Knapp (2006) asserts that live performance of a role can help to negotiate between the inner self and the outer persona of experience. Specifically, he points to the heightened emotions of public performance and the attention paid to the “performer behind the persona” (p.7) and a stronger connection to the content of the performance. He suggests that American musical theatre creates a space to explore alternate interpretations of social values and attitudes by paralleling social mores, advancing alternatives, or bringing subtle social messages to the forefront through persuasive performance. Gender roles and sexuality are, he states, “above all, performed attributes of personal identity and so constitute a central dimension of how people are defined, both onstage and off” (p. 205).

In adult education, this resonates with the work of Butterwick and Selman (2012) in their description of the performance of gender, and how gender performance can guide a meaning-making process around personal identity. Drawing from the work of Judith Butler (1993), Butterwick and Selman use the gendered performance of theatre to illustrate the social
construction of gender and attitudes of positionality. As an embodied way of understanding gender, the performance of gender and sexuality in theatre relates as well to the work of Lawrence and Butterwick (2007) and their exploration of embodied oppression in theatre and acting as a way of liberating through the body.

Drawing on the model developed by Brooks and Edwards (1997), this exploration of personal and cultural values may mirror the process through which individuals construct sexual identities. Aaron, whose story opens this chapter, by his own admission, did not actively contemplate his sexual identity, and was nonplussed by his sexual identity before playing the role of Matt. Through experiencing Matt’s homophobia and playing the role of an aggressor toward someone like himself, Aaron’s sense of self was called into question; he was somewhat disoriented in his own self-image as a result of seeing the world through Matt’s eyes. Through the language of acting, Aaron also internalized some of the social influences that Matt experienced, and transposed them onto his own sense of self. This experience in many ways laid the foundation for this study by leaving questions unanswered.

There are myriad ways to understand this phenomenon, as people have sought to understand sexual identity throughout human history. Theorists have framed sexual identity as a biological, psychological, or social construct. In the next section, I present the framework through which I have come to understand sexual identity, and justify its use as the theoretical lens for this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study rests that the intersection of development and learning, in which development implies learning and learning reflects development (Clark & Caffarella, 1999). In particular, this is a study of adult sexual identity development. I frame this study using D’Augelli’s (1994)
lifespan model of sexual identity development, as this model describes sexual identity as fluid and ever-changing, without an ideal outcome or terminus. In this model, identity is not an endpoint but a lifelong process (Hill, 2008). As a psychologist, he focuses on psychological events as the determiners for movement between stages; however, the model itself describes peer interactions, biological influences, and the role of social institutions. Moreover, this model is preferential in its privilege of the individual as an active participant in identity development rather than as a passive recipient of biology and environmental influence.

D'Augelli (1994) describes six loosely-bound steps in his Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB\textsuperscript{1}) Identity Development model: (a) exiting heterosexual identity; (b) developing a LGB personal identity status; (c) developing a LGB social identity; (d) becoming a LGB offspring; (e) developing a LGB intimacy status; and (f) entering a LGB community. Although D'Augelli describes the model in steps, progression through the model is not stagewise; this model is distinct from the psychological stagewise models, which require developmental tasks to move between stages (Edwards & Brooks, 1999; Hill, 2008). Rather than identity achievement (as in the stagewise models, see Marcia, 1996), the outcome of this model is that the individual finds meaning and direction in his own life through his sexual identity.

No single identity development model is all-inclusive, and sexual identity is but one facet of a holistic adult identity (Barret and Logan, 2005). Sexual identity rests at the intersection of racial, cultural, and gender identity, and influences the integration of individual identity.

D'Augelli's model accounts for this integration of sexual identity into the holistic sense of self, as do many of the psychological stagewise models (Cass, 1984, for example). However, the sexual identity development models fall short in describing a holistic picture of the individual. For this

\textsuperscript{1} While this study exclusively addresses the experiences of men, I maintain consistency to D'Augelli's (1994) model by using his acronym LGB (lesbian, gay, and bisexual) throughout this paper.
reason, I will also integrate the ADRESSING model of identity description (Hays, 1996) as a framework through which my participants can begin to describe their personal identities. The ADRESSING model will allow participants to describe their personal identities through influences of: Age, Disability, Religion, Ethnicity, Social Class, Sexual Orientation, Indigenous heritage, Nationality, and Gender. In this model, participants self-identify and can describe themselves and their participation within each area of diversity. For example, someone may be Jewish by birth heritage (ethnicity); however, he or she may not participate in the practice of the Jewish faith (religion). The ADRESSING model is one possible illustration of the intersectionality of identity, and may provide an impetus for discussions of how one facet of identity may influence others. As individuals negotiate the identity development process, for example, religion, age, and ethnicity may influence how or when one may disclose his or her other-than-heterosexual identity. Disclosure is an integral component in the process posited by D'Augelli (1996); therefore, the ADRESSING model may provide a lens through which to examine confounding influences. This model is not intended to describe formation of identity, but to provide a 'snapshot' of an individual's identity at a moment in time (P. Hays, personal communication, November 11, 2013). The ADRESSING model will serve as a framework for participants to describe their overall identity and will provide a foundation for the interview process.

**Problem Statement**

In the academic theatre and theatre critique literature, there is a wealth of discussion around the propensity of theatre to impact both audience and actor. Theatre also appears within the adult education literature as a means to draw attention to a problem or to affect change. As a field of study, critical performance pedagogy uses the art of performance to illustrate problems
and solutions. These discussions situate theatre as a powerful force for both individuals and for cultures. Whether through popular theatre intended for the masses, politicized theatre intended to further an agenda, or satirical theatre intended to draw attention to a social problem, theatre is persuasive. To date, the literature in adult education examines theatre almost exclusively with the audience as the unit of analysis (Picher, 2007; Newman, 2006; Sandlin, 2007). Some adult educators frame theatre as a vehicle for learning with the actor as a unit of analysis, but fail to address the specific lenses of adult development that are critical in understanding sexual identity. Critical performance pedagogy examines the interaction between art and artist, but tends not to frame outcomes in an adult development model (Denzin, 2010, Slattery, 2010). Similarly, adult educators who address the embodied experience discuss theatre on the periphery (Lawrence, 2012) or as the primary medium of their study (Butterwick and Selman, 2012), but fall short in framing their discussions within adult development theory.

While some adult educators address sexual identity as a facet of adult development relevant to teaching and learning, none of the adult education literature addresses sexual identity as a developmental process with practical application. Literature relevant to practical applications in adult learning and development often overlook the developmental process as a informative to the individual's sense of self. There remains a paucity of literature that explores the learning and meaning-making that happens within the actor, and none that explores that learning as the interaction between sexual identity development and the individual's participation in acting.

Anecdotally, actors describe the indelible mark left behind by a particularly powerful role that they play--these are the examples sensationalized by the mass media when actors suicide or develop self-destructive behaviors. As the narratives within this study illustrate, acting provides
a metaperspective through which actors view their experiences in the world. To date, however, there remains no study that examines the acting praxis as a learning process framed in adult learning and identity development literature, in which the sexual identity development process of the actor is the unit of analysis. This study seeks to bridge the gap between the disparate fields of adult education, developmental psychology, LGB studies, and acting methods.

Where this study stands alone as unique and formative is its attention to both adult development and the experiences of actors, and its positioning within the discourse of adult education; this study bridges a gap between these areas of research that has not yet been addressed in empirical literature. It provides a framework to understand sexual identity development and the ways in which acting may impact development. As well, this study provides a new understanding of the processes within D'Augelli’s (1994) model and, while challenging some facets of the model, confirms its relevance twenty years later.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the development of sexual identity in adult male actors in order to explore the relationship between acting and sexual identity, and the actors' processes of making meaning about that relationship. This study of actors and their sexual identity development processes is guided by the following three questions:

1. How does the actor perceive a relationship between acting and his or her sexual identity development?
2. How does acting influence an actor's self-knowledge, self-perception, and sexual identity?
3. How do actors make meaning of this evolving identity development process?
Research Methodology

Theatre is enacted storytelling. It integrates character, plot, and setting and brings them to life on the performance stage. Actors are storytellers who embody and portray characters every day. It seems natural to study their experiences by creating a space in which actors can create and share their own stories. Rossiter (1999) draws the connection between narrative as a research methodology and as a means of understanding our own experiences retrospectively. She reminds the reader of several foundational implications for narrative in the study of adult education: (a) that the individual is the only expert in his or her own lived experience, (b) that the telling of the narrative helps us to make meaning of experience, (c) that examining one's own history provides the impetus for further development, and (d) telling and re-storying a narrative facilitates perspective changes. This study is informed by a narrative research methodology underscored by the analytic strategies defined by Chase (2005) and Clark and Rossiter (2007). Narrative analysis, as a research methodology, shares with other qualitative methodologies the assumption that knowledge is based on the subjective view of the research participant, providing credibility to the unique reality of each participant. However, narrative analysis, stands apart from other qualitative methods in its situation of the research participant at the center of the study, and its focus on how the participant tells her or his story and his or her perception of the phenomenon being described (Chase, 2005).

As the actor relies on his or her fellow performers to co-act and react with him or her on stage, the researcher and participant in this study worked together to negotiate the story as it is presented in later chapters. In this study, I collected stories through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each of the 9 participants, who I selected through a purposeful snowball sampling process. I reviewed verbatim transcripts of the interviews with the participants in a
multi-stage narrative analysis process outlined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Through the analytic process, the participants and I collaborated to negotiate and re-story the narrative, highlighting themes that emerged in the interview process. The re-storied narratives are presented in Chapter Four of the study, in the words and voices of the participants. In Chapter Five, examples from the stories paint a picture through which I illustrate how the participants’ practices in acting have informed their understandings of sexual identity.

Definitions of Key Terms

1. identity: There are many disparate definitions of identity throughout psychology and adult education (Merriam & Clark, 2006). An inclusive contemporary definition of identity suggests that identity is our notion of who we are within our own direction or trajectory in life (Lemme, 1999).

2. mainstream theatre: Theatre that is intended for mass-consumption within popular culture (Bates, 1996).

3. narrative inquiry: A research methodology concerned with examining the stories of a group or individual to understand their experiences and perceptions on experience as defined through story (Creswell, 2013).

4. popular theatre: In adult education, theatre that is intended to engage groups in social change (Bates, 1996; Picher, 2007).

5. sexual identity: "An individual's overall understanding of his [or her] sexual nature, which includes one's sexual desires, wishes, fantasies, attitudes, traits, and typical patterns of behavior, as well as the types of individuals he or she finds attractive" (Hill, 2008, p. 236)
Significance of the Study

As a multidisciplinary study of identity development and adult learning through practice of acting, this study holds significant implications for several areas of study. To date, no single study has sought to frame the experiences of mainstream theatre actors as they have come to understand their sexual identities. For actors, this study provides a framework to understand the process and a voice to stories that have never before been told in the language of adult development. As well, there remains a paucity of discussion within adult education about how adults make meaning through sexual identity development. This study stands alone in its treatment of sexual identity development narratives of male actors who identity as other-than-heterosexual within the context of adult education.

In adult education, development and learning are inextricably linked. (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Clark & Caffarella, 1999a; Granott, 1998). Their relationship is reflexive and mutually dependent; development leads to learning and learning leads to development (Granott, 1998). By examining the way in which adults develop, in this case identity development, this study sheds light on an integral learning process for actors. As well, following Clark and Rossiter (2006) and Hammack & Cohler (2011), telling the story while participating in this study, the process itself may have sparked learning and development in the participant.

As an individual who has been immersed in the arts and arts education for most of my life, I have experienced the significant influences that the arts have had on my own development and identity. Assuming a new, albeit temporary, role, using the body and voice to communicate, and participating in a community of actors are all powerful and enlightening experiences.

Conversations over the years have led me to believe that this phenomenon has more than anecdotal significance, and has driven me to seek to better understand, through research, my 25
years of performance experience in the arts. I began my career with an interest in arts education and trained as a music educator. While I opted to follow a different career path after receiving my undergraduate degree, I maintained my involvement in the arts informally. I have been engaged in arts education for many years as a performer, director, teacher, and mentor in community-based, semi-professional, and professional theatre. K-12 arts pedagogy rests on the understanding that the arts hold significant developmental influence on children, and adult education has used the arts to teach innumerable topics and lessons. My personal goal in this research is to give voice to those who experience a significant shift in their perspectives as a result of their training and experience as actors and to lend validity, vocabulary, and voice to their experiences.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

The research behind this study and the purpose of the study itself are governed by the underlying assumption that there is a relationship between the practice of acting in which an actor engages and the actor’s own identity development. This is supported anecdotally in the author’s experience and draws upon the notion that the arts have a liberating potential for the participant. While this is foundational to an understanding of theatre as a pedagogy, that body of research examines this phenomenon from the audience members’ perspectives only, while overlooking the experience of the actor. This study seeks to bridge this gap to examine the experiences of the performer, rather than maintaining focus on the audience.

This study rests on the assumption that actors engage in introspection and reflection on their own experiences. This may not be a universally automatic process, but is an integral component of this study. Actors, like most of us, may have a difficult time making connections between their experiences and their practice. While the participants in this study readily drew
connections between their acting and their experiences of sexual identity, this study cannot assume that the stories told here are complete. Because this is a retrospective research project, it is also guided by the notion that the participants recognize that this process has occurred and will be able to describe examples of how the development of their characters has impacted their perspectives and experiences.

A significant assumption underlying the model used as the theoretical framework for this study is that sexual identity is a binary construct; that there are distinct gay and straight identities with bisexuality positioned in between. In the study of human sexuality (Hill, 2008) and adult education (Hill, 2006; Tisdell, 2006), some authors reject a dichotomous model of sexual and sexual identity.

There are several limitations inherent in this research design. This study cannot account for all of the factors that influence sexual identity. As illustrated by the ADDRESSING model (Hays, 2001), the participants in this study are the sum of their backgrounds and experiences. Each one came to the table with unique biological, psychological, and sociocultural backgrounds. Framing their experiences in the same light is perhaps a limiting lens through which to view their unique experiences. There is no practical way to control for or describe how these influences collide, nor is that within the scope of this narrative research to attempt. Rather, it is the goal of this study to clarify and describe the experiences of these participants, in their lives and their perceptions. I have been faithful to their stories; however, and facilitated for them a space to tell those stories, and perhaps gain some insights about their own experiences along the way.
Postlude

Honoring my fidelity to the stories told here, I would be negligent if I didn't complete Aaron's story that opened this chapter. He continues to reflect on the experience of portraying and making meaning of his portrayal of Matt.

Eventually I broke down and got help. I started seeing a therapist. I was diagnosed with depression, and I started medication. Whether or not the chemical imbalance in my brain was brought on by the show or natural causes is up in the air, but I can't help [feeling that] it has something to do with it. I'm much better now. I'm happily acting again (and eating...and all that good stuff).

Moreover, he admonishes the entertainment media:

Granted, this had a large impact on me because I'm an actor and physically acted out the actions with my own two hands, but other forms of media and entertainment [impact the consumer] as well.

Aaron's experience of portraying Matt provides much of the inspiration for writing on this topic. His sharing of this story over the past several years has provided the two of us with hours of dialogue, a co-authored paper and presentation, and most importantly, has helped both of us to understand, from our own positioned perspectives, the visceral power that acting can have on who we become and how we view our experience. We have both grown through the experience of his shared story. It is my hope that those reading this research will be impacted in a similar way.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the previous chapter, I provided an introduction to the study, which intends to explore the sexual identity development process in actors, and the relationship between acting and the actor's sexual identity. In this chapter, I synthesize the literature that is germane to my examination of the research questions. The literature that informs this study represents scholarly work from adult education, theatre theory and pedagogy, psychology, and other social sciences that address identity or the mechanisms of identity development. Also, I draw upon theatre review and trade publications for their discussion of theatre as a way of knowing. These seemingly disparate fields merge in this chapter to set the stage for the research methodology and data analysis in subsequent chapters.

Setting the Context

Aaron, whose story opens Chapter One, relates a relatively common anecdote; actors often find personal meaning within the process of acting, or within the characters that they play. This study seeks to provide a framework within adult education through which to explore these anecdotes. Subsequently, this study may inform several fields of study: adult education, theatre education, psychology, and the social sciences. Aaron's story is one of sexual identity, and how he examined his identity differently as the result of playing a character. To frame sexual identity and its development, I will begin with a discussion of adult development, and present sexual identity development as one of many developmental tasks. After presenting a background on sexual identity development as a personal, biological, and social construct, I will select a model of development that is most relevant to the participants in my study.

Because the body is the vehicle through which my participants tell their stories, I will present a summary of the embodied knowledge literature in adult education. The body as a way
of knowing becomes paramount as actors describe their experiences of coming to understand sexual identity through their practice of acting. I will explore somatic knowing, movement as meaning-making, and the role of embodied gender, and provide a foundation upon which to present my participants' experiences of their bodies as a means of learning.

Because this is a study of actors and their sexual identities, I will then present a discussion of acting within the theatre, and the various theoretical orientations of theatre. I will specifically examine acting as a way of making meaning in light of the earlier discussions of embodied learning, the performance of gender, and the influences on sexuality. Finally, I will return to the research questions and set the stage for the research methodology in Chapter Three.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine the development of sexual identity in adult male actors in order to explore the relationship between acting and sexual identity, and the actors' processes of making meaning about that relationship. This study of actors and their sexual identity development processes is guided by the following three questions:

1. How does the actor perceive a relationship between acting and his or her sexual identity development?
2. How does acting influence an actor's self-knowledge, self-perception, and sexual identity?
3. How do actors make meaning of this evolving identity development process?

To begin examining the actors' identity development processes, I will frame identity development within the adult development literature in adult education.
Adult Development

Since the dawn of descriptive observation, theorists have attempted to find a common language to describe human growth and development. As an undergraduate psychology professor, I have taught a course in human growth and development for several semesters. My course is grounded in psychology, as that is the lens of my teaching. My colleagues in nursing provide a very different perspective on human development, while the sociologists and K-12 educators describe development very differently. The commonality of all studies of human development lies in three tasks charged to developmental theories: "(1) to describe changes within one or several areas of behavior, (2) to describe changes among several areas of behavior, and (3) to explain the course of development that has been described" (Miller, 1983, p. 5). Even these tasks assume an interrelatedness between biology, psychology, and the social experience.

To limit a discussion to adult development is a somewhat difficult task, as there are definitional issues in the term "adulthood". When does someone become an adult? There are legal definitions of adulthood (which are often inconsistent), there is biological maturity, and there are psychological milestones that indicate adulthood. Each of these definitions of adulthood also holds a cultural assumption as well, as social and psychological implications of adulthood differ across cultural groups (Clark & Cafferella, 1999). While a 20-year old college student may be financially dependent on his parents and living functionally as their child, a 17-year old in different circumstances may be living independently and functioning as an adult.

In psychology, Freud (1956) indicated that development ended at puberty in the genital period of development, while Erikson (1963) assumes that adulthood begins with the end of formal schooling. It is Erikson's convention that is most pervasive, and many theories assume
adulthood to begin at around the age of eighteen (Bee, 1996). Most theorists, however, recognize that this age is an approximation (Clark & Cafferella, 1999).

While defining adulthood provides the initial challenge to this discussion, delineating adult development is equally challenging. On the surface, adult development is change across time; however, the reality of adult development is not so tidy and easily described. Lerner (1998) describes development as a change that results from the interaction between heredity and social influences. Meacham (1997) summarizes development as an orderly and predictable process of change. Bee and Bjorkland (2004), however, assert that development is simultaneously a process of change and a process of stability. While some developmental tasks represent changes across time, others may represent more solid identification with some factor, such as values. Development can be both continuous and discontinuous; while values may develop across the lifespan, skills that one learns in childhood are often lost in later adulthood and old age (Dacey & Travers, 2002). For example, the development of fine motor skills and motor coordination are hallmark of early and middle childhood, while those skills often decline in later adulthood (Berk, 2013).

Within a discussion of development lies the assumption of normativity. Most developmental theories assume the acquisition of skills or the attainment of developmental milestones as the markers of development. This may reflect some bias within the developmental theories themselves, and remains a significant critique of the study of human development (Clark & Cafferella, 1999). As well, many theories of development are age-dependent. While age can provide a framework for development, chronological age alone cannot determine development (Dacey & Travers, 2002).
Within adult education, several typologies to describe adult development have emerged. These categories help to organize discussions of adult development, and provide a rough framework to understand the often overlapping theories of development. Following the work of Merriam, Cafferella, and Baumgartner (2007), I will organize my discussion of developmental theories into the following categories: biological, psychological, sociocultural, and integrative; I will provide a summary of each below.

**Biological Development**

Biology and physiological changes drive much of human development. As people mature, their biology allows for greater cognitive and motor development. In the study of childhood and adolescence, discussions of physical maturation are often viewed in a positive light as gains (progress toward developmental milestones), while in adulthood, biological changes are often framed as losses through age and overall decline (Clark & Cafferella, 1999). Bee and Bjorkland (2004) describe biological adult development as a process of aging characterized by physical decline due to changes on a cellular level. Certainly, physical changes in adulthood are apparent in visible aging and sensory loss (vision and hearing changes, for example), but there is little evidence of cognitive or intrapersonal changes linked directly to biology (Clark & Cafferella, 1999). Many of the cognitive and intrapersonal changes that appear in adulthood are better described using a psychological lens.

**Psychological Development**

Much of human development research relevant to adult education lies in the field of developmental psychology. A comparative examination of developmental theories in psychology yields results that are more disparate than they are similar. Many of the psychological theories of development are incomplete explanations of behavioral phenomena
and describe only one of many facets of the human experience (Green, 1989). Psychologists have defined development as a pre-determined or predictable progression of stages (Erikson, 1963; Freud, 1956), a process with an expected endpoint (Loevinger, 1976; Maslow, 1954), or a progression of higher understanding (Kohlberg, 1973). While each psychological model of development quantifies a response to the question of "what is development?", each is as well limited in scope.

In an attempt to compare and contrast the different models of psychological development, Green (1989) classifies theories within three paradigms of common principles. The endogenous paradigm includes theories whose primary developmental influences come from within the individual, often from unconscious drives or genetic principles. The exogenous paradigm includes theories whose primary developmental influences come from external factors, such as behaviorism and social cognitive theory. Finally, the constructivist theories attempt to describe development holistically, rather than determine causal influences on development. This paradigm includes Kohlberg's explanation of moral development and Piaget's genetic epistemology (Green, 1989).

Each of the theories within each of the paradigms offers only a partial explanation for human development, often with significant limitations associated with the theory. Kohlberg (1973) addresses the interaction between self and society, but overlooks physical maturation and hormonal changes as influences in development. Freud (1956), for example, limits development to end after puberty, while Erickson (1963) describes the individual's development independent of society and social norms.
**Sociocultural Models**

The sociocultural models seek to describe development as a relationship between the individual and his or her social world (Merriam, Cafferella, & Baumgartner, 2007), and examine the influence of social factors of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation among others. Two significant strands of study emerge within adult education in relationship to sociocultural development: the timing of life events within social roles, and the social construction of difference (Clark & Cafferella, 1999). Life events are age-linked in most societies; there are times within the lifespan at which it is culturally normed to have children, begin a career, or enter higher education. Ferraro (2001) provides a life trajectory model to describe how social roles shift over the lifespan, and how changes to roles impact the individual's self-concept. Neugarten (1976) links social roles and responsibilities to biological aging, drawing a parallel between physiology and social role development.

Influencing all areas of development, social constructions of race, gender, and sexual orientation are equally relevant to this discussion. Each facet of sociocultural identity influences the individual's developmental trajectory, and allows for a space in which to examine the individual's relationship with social influences. A person's race, for example, may influence biology, psychological supports, access to education, and overall developmental opportunity. People are, however, positioned socially as intersections of each facet of identity. No single sociocultural model of identity development can encompass all of the developmental influences on an individual. The integrative models attempt to address this intersection of influences.

**Integrative Theories**

The emerging integrative theories attempt to describe the combined influence of biology, sociocultural factors, and psychology. While these models represent emergent changes in the
study of development, each are as complex as the developmental experiences that they attempt to describe. Magnusson (1995, p 39) writes that "individuals do not develop in terms of single variables, but as total integrated systems". His theory is grounded in the assumptions that there is continuous interaction between biology, cognitive factors, and situational influences, and that this interaction is the force that drives development. While Magnusson views development through a more broad an inclusive lens, his theory offers little empirical study.

Development cannot happen on one trajectory without the others. It is the interplay of biology, psychology, and culture that allows a holistic growth in the individual. Therefore, I will espouse an integrative lens through which to view development in the context of this study, as I frame development as a means of learning, and in the selection of an integrative theoretical lens for the study.

**Adult Development as Learning**

Merriam and Clark (2006) inextricably link learning and development for adults. To suggest that development is merely a change over time is an oversimplification of a complex progression of learning. Drawing from the anecdotes "to live is to learn" and "experience is the best teacher", they connect the processes of learning and development as mutually indicative or reflective. Developmentally-dependent learning is often linked to life experience; Merriam and Clark (2006) evidence from a wide variety of adult education literature to support the link between learning and development. Jarvis (1992) echoes this link, finding that learning is the process of making meaning from developmental experiences.

Merriam and Clark (2006) summarize the link between development and adult learning as changes in cognitive development and personal changes (including perceptions of identity), and reflect those factors across a sociocultural context. In particular, they focus on how
development can facilitate emancipatory learning, or learning that promotes freedom from oppressive forces. Grannott (1998) emphasizes the parallel between learning and development as mutually indicative, where learning reflects development and development implies learning. For this study, I have chosen to adopt Merriam and Clark's (2006) framework of development as "change over time or change with age, meaning that change can involve increases or decreases, gains or losses, moving forward according to some normative understanding, or slipping backward" (p. 29). Essentially, identity is the fluid product of the development process. While they recognize that development is not always a positive or forward-moving phenomenon, contemporary notions of development in adult education hold that development implies positive change (Daloz, 1986). The ‘shadow side’ of development suggests that learning can be a mis-educative force, and that some experiences limit rather than foster further development or openness to experience (Jarvis, 1987).

Learning as Development-A Summary

Jarvis (1992) summarizes the relationship between experience and learning to suggest that "learning...is the process of transforming experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs" (p. 11). Every experience and the way in which the individual extracts meaning from the experience shapes the way that the individual develops over time. Adult educators have conceptualized the links between learning and development largely into two fields of study: cognitive development and personal change (Merriam & Clark, 2006). Because this study leans heavily on the affective domains of experience, I rely on the notion of identity through personal change, first in the social and psychological literature, then in adult education.
Identity Development

Lemme (1999) very succinctly defines identity as "a sense of what we believe in and where we are headed in life" (p. 84). The term identity is often overlooked in early psychology; there are disparate definitions in the term identity used throughout the psychology literature, and other terms (self-concept, self-schema, and others) are used interchangeably with identity. Terms to describe the self "invoke some of the oldest, most enduring, and yet perplexing themes in social psychology" (Bengston, Reedy, & Gordon, 1985, p. 546).

Jung (1959) used the term psyche to describe the integrated sum of the components of the personality. The psyche represents the interplay of those aspects of the personality of which we are conscious and those unconscious influences that drive behavior, thoughts, and feelings; the components of which we are aware and those of which we are unaware. In this sense, his psyche is perhaps more integrated than more contemporary notions of identity. Erikson (1968) presents the first mainstream psychological theory providing an operational definition of identity as created or constructed concept, based upon the expectations and perceptions of others, that is the sum or synthesis of all existing conceptions of oneself or perceptions of the self from others into one schema. While Erikson’s developmental model describes a process through which identity is formed as a critical task in his stagewise process, others have expanded up on the model to describe particular outcomes or a hierarchy of identity outcomes (Marcia, 1966). Where both Erikson and the neo-Eriksonians differ in their use of the term identity from Jung’s concept of psyche is twofold. Erikson’s task of identity formation (in contrast to role confusion) is expected to occur in late adolescence. His identity formation task is result of active exploration of roles and values during adolescence, which will cement into a resolved, integrated identity. Howard (1991) expands upon Erikson’s initial writings on identity by stating that identity is the life story
that we create in response to our own history, culture, and time, and is the influential framework of our adult lives. Erikson’s own description of this process, supplemented by the work of neo-Eriksonians, such as Howard (1991), Marcia (1966), Waterman (1982), and others, indicates that identity formation is an actively conscious process of exploring and defining one’s own value set.

In both the psychological literature and mainstream usage, the term identity has been used almost universally to describe an Eriksonian concept of identity. That is, one that is relatively developed by late adolescence, one that is somewhat impermeable once developed, and one that is the product of a conscious process. This differs sharply from Jung’s perspective on psyche, in which the psyche develops as ideas or concepts shift between the conscious and unconscious, with most of the processing happening through the unconscious structures. Most importantly, however, is that Jung’s developmental concept allows for identity formation to continue into adulthood, where Erikson and others pathologize an identity that continues to shift after late adolescence. Marcia (1966) describes four possible outcomes of identity formation (diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement), with only achievement, characterized by stability of the identity, being the healthy outcome.

Erikson's notion of identity, although often framed in psychology, is influenced by chronological age and social factors. His adolescent and adult stages are heavily governed by the relationship between the individual and others (Miller, 1983). His notion of identity in each stage of life is a transformation of the identity from earlier stages; his concept of identity is additive across the life span. The additive qualities of development are not, however, very systematic. Erikson's theory is highly descriptive in connecting several facets of development,
but he falls short in his failure to describe how each of those mechanisms is mutually influential (Miller, 1983).

Foundational to the contemporary definition of identity is the work of psychologists Carl Rogers (1961) and Abraham Maslow (1954). The humanistic psychologists (Rogers, Frankl, May, and Maslow, for example) generally agree that individuals are goal-directed, creative, and have a common desire to be happy (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Ellis, 1973; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1965). Humanism is generally defined by four common principles: human nature is generally good, freedom of thought and behavior, a drive to individuate to one’s fullest potential, and a concept of a holistic self (Elias & Merriam, 2005, Maslow, 1954; Pearson & Podeschi, 1999; Rogers, 1965). Each of these views (which some authors delineate differently) is briefly described below as an introduction to their application in adult education:

**Human Nature is Generally Good**

Sometimes criticized as an overly-optimistic view of human nature, this thought in humanism is more a response to the ideas that individuals are generally hedonistic and antisocial (in Freudian and Jungian psychology, for example), and the need for internal personality components (Freud’s triadic personality) or outside forces (such as a god or the environment) to maintain one’s goodness of thought and behavior (Elias & Merriam, 2005). This challenges the behaviorist notion that all behavior is learned, by applying a predisposition to the individual as inherently good.

**Freedom of Thought and Behavior**

A challenge to the behaviorist idea that all people (and their personalities) are products of their conditioned responses to their environment, the humanists introduced the notion that individuals have the capacity to contemplate their environment and be proactive rather than
reactive to influence their responses to stimuli (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Ellis, 1973; Rogers, 1965). The notion of reason blended with affect, underrepresented in both behaviorism and analytic psychology, becomes the impetus for autonomous behavior and decision-making. Again, this is not a rejection of either behaviorism or analytic personality theory; freedom of thought and behavior blends both philosophies in light of individuality and a drive to determine one’s own potential. For the individual, this occurs in a synergistic relationship with, not in spite of, influential stimuli in the environment (Pearson & Podeschi, 1999).

**Drive to Individuate and Self-Actualize**

The term *self-actualization*, coined by Maslow (1954), refers to a hierarchical relationship between the individual’s development and the fulfillment of his or her needs. A self-actualized individual has all of his or her basic needs (food, shelter, and safety) and intermediate needs (belonging, love, and esteem) met, and is able to live to his or her fullest potential. As a hierarchical structure, more complex needs (higher in the hierarchy) cannot be met until more basic needs are satisfied. Humanists believe that individuals have an inherent drive to self-actualize, which includes a sense of responsibility for one’s own development and the development of others. This implies that the process of living to one’s own fullest potential also leads individuals to work toward the improvement of humanity (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Maslow, 1954). To self-actualize, one might not need freedom from oppressive structures; however, one would be aware of his or her oppression.

**Holistic Sense of Self**

Like Freudian psychology, the humanist perspective includes a self that is the sum of its components. Humanists also draw on the behaviorist (and cognitive-behaviorist) view that the individual integrates her or his experiences into the personality. Where humanism differs from
these views is the idea of a rational and affective self, which can consciously decide how experience is integrated (Ellis, 1973), and the self as a force in the outside world as well as a personality component (Elias & Merriam, 2005). The goal of the self, in humanist psychology, is the betterment of the individual though self-actualization; the primary tools of this process are rational and affective perception and empathy toward others. By meeting our own basic needs, then working toward the improvement of the experiences of others, we become a fully functioning individual.

Each of these four guiding forces in humanism drives the formation of identity (Rogers, 1961). Understood through the language of humanist psychology, identity development becomes the sum of experiences driven by one's innate need to break free from oppressive forces or dominant ideology; the drive through which individuals realize their fullest potential outside of external social forces. This becomes relevant to the integrative lens of this study as it examines the ways in which sexual identity develops in response to both internal (psychological) and external (social) influences. In the next section, I will narrow the lens of identity development to sexual identity development. I will begin with a historical examination of sexual identity development to create a foundation and rationale for the model that I've selected.

**Sexual Identity**

With its disparate lenses, sexual identity is a complex and somewhat nebulous construct. While historical and contemporary understandings of sexual identity differ in their framing of sexual identity as an essentialist (nature) or constructionist (nurture) phenomenon, most discussions define sexual identity as synonymous with sexual orientation (Edwards & Brooks, 1999). LeVay and Baldwin (2009, p. 453) describe sexual identity as "the dimension of personality that describes the balance of our sexual attraction to the two sexes", a definition
focused on attraction rather than psychological constructs. A dichotomous definition of sexual orientation emerged in the later nineteenth century in response to the work of Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1886). Krafft-Ebing's most often cited work, *Psychopathia Sexualis (Sexual Psychopathy)*, bound the knowledge about sexuality to date in one volume, and defined sexuality as a biological process aimed at procreation. He regarded any non-procreative sex act or impulse as pathology, which he organized into four descriptive categories of neurosis: paradoxia, anesthesia, paraesthesia, and hyperesthesia. Paradoxia describes sexual impulses or activity at inappropriate times of development, such as in childhood or old age. Anesthesia and hyperesthesia are the states of having insufficient or overabundant sexual desire respectively, and paraesthesia describes a sexual desire that is directed or expressed in non-procreative ways (Krafft-Ebing, 1886). Examples of paraesthesia include sadism and masochism (terms popularized in response to Krafft-Ebing's work), paraphilias, and transvestic fetishism. As a non-procreative sexual impulse, homosexuality, a term also coined by Krafft-Ebing, also appears in his discussion of paraesthesia. A medical doctor, Krafft-Ebing framed paraesthesia as a cerebral (brain-based) problem, coining the term "inversion" to describe homosexual behavior as a difference in brain development during gestation.

Although contemporary discussions of sexual identity reject Krafft-Ebing's model of brain inversion, his work created the dichotomy that pervades the literature today--heterosexuality is 'normal' and other-than-heterosexuality is 'deviant'. While the notion of deviance has softened over time in the academic literature, the dichotomy persists, and even the models that normalize homosexuality reinforce this binary construct. Another psychiatrist, Sigmund Freud (1905) continued the discussion of sexual pathology, and was the first to frame sexuality as a core process of human development (Edwards & Brooks, 1999). Next, I will
describe the evolution of sexual identity development models, and position my study within the model that is most appropriate to describe my work.

**Sexual Identity Development Models**

Following the work of Krafft-Ebing (1886), Freud explored sexuality as one of the primary processes of life. His 'life force', or *libido*, has become synonymous with sex drive in vernacular discussions. Similar to earlier works, Freud viewed other-than-heterosexual orientations as aberrations of sexuality, but described them as psychological differences rather than physiological differences in brain development (Freud, 1905). His psychosexual model of human development positions sexuality at the core of the human experience, describing much of our social development as the emergence and resolution of various psychosexual crises, such as the Oedipal and Electra complexes (Freud, 1956). During the phallic stage of development, children develop sexual feelings for their opposite sex parent. Realizing that the same sex parent is an overwhelming competitor for the other parent's affection, the child sublimes his or her feelings into other activities. The successful resolution of the Oedipal complex in boys and Electra complex in girls reflects healthy (hetero)sexual development; homosexual desires are rooted in arrested development during the phallic stage (Edwards & Brooks, 1999; Freud 1905).

While Freud's psychosexual theories have received scrutiny by later researchers, his work reinforces the heteronormativity first described by Krafft-Ebing, and became the foundation for later ideas of sexual identity development as a movement from heterosexuality to the "other", reflecting what Rich as dubbed the "compulsory heterosexuality" of western culture (Rich, 1980, p. 631). Foucault (1970, xx) describes "the fundamental codes of culture--those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices--establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be
dealing, and within which he will be at home”. Compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity are two of those fundamental codes in contemporary culture.

Building from the medical work of Krafft-Ebing and the psychological foundations from Freud, later theorists have described a variety of models of sexual identity development, each model describing some triangular relationship between self, sexuality, and society (Brooks & Edwards, 1997). For ease of understanding, they can be broadly categorized as biological models, stagewise psychological models, and integrative lifespan models (Edwards & Brooks, 1999).

The biological models focus on physiological and endocrinological etiology of sexual orientation and identity, particularly examining gestational and postnatal brain development as they influence sexual identity. A literature review by Hill, Dawood, and Puts (2013) summarizes the biological model to include a multitude of correlational factors, such as fraternal birth order, prenatal hormonal changes, neuroanatomical differences, and genetic links for sexual orientation. They conclude that there are partially heritable traits for homosexuality, occasional gender nonconformity in childhood, and that these differences are found across cultural groups, and call for an interdisciplinary study of biological and sociological influences together to find holistic predictive factors for sexual orientation.

The biological models are wrought with debate over the question of choice--is sexual identity a choice or a biological determination (Bailey, 1995)? Most of the biological theorists are determinist in their theories, espousing the view that the biological influences on sexual orientation remove free will as an influence.

Social scientists and educators cite the psychological stagewise models more frequently than the biological models (Edwards & Brooks, 1999). Beginning in the sexual liberation
movement in the late 1960s, social scientists have attempted to frame sexual identity as a construct separate from sexual behavior. Initially, the psychological models, grounded in psychiatry, framed the LGB individual as fundamentally impaired (D'Augelli, 1994). The stagewise psychological models emerged as a means of describing the LGB person's departure from assumed heterosexuality. These models espouse a heteronormative approach and focus on the exceptional developmental process of becoming the 'other', or developing, embracing, and disclosing a non-heterosexual identity (D'Augelli, 1994). The contemporary stagewise models of sexual identity development are loosely modeled on Erikson's (1982) stagewise lifespan developmental model. Following Erikson, the stagewise models are constructed around a fundamental task to complete in each stage of development (Edwards & Brooks, 1999). As in most stagewise models, resolution of tasks in one stage is required before moving on to the next stage.

Vivienne Cass' (1979) stagewise model of sexual identity development emerged as the first model inclusive of both men and women, and the first to be grounded in empirical data (Edwards & Brooks, 1999). Cass proposes a six-stage model in which lesbian or gay adults begin to question their sexual identities with the question "Am I gay?" (identity confusion). Cass pathologizes the process by describing identity confusion as a state of inner turmoil, resulting in passage to identity comparison, the stage during which the individual compares himself or herself to others in a heteronormative context. Cass again pathologizes this stage by suggesting that social isolation is symptomatic of the stage. During identity tolerance, the emerging lesbian or gay individual finds support in others with similar identities. It is through the social group, in this stage, that the lesbian or gay individual finds solace in his or her identity (Cass, 1979; Cass 1984). Through that shift in attitude, the individual moves into identity acceptance, the stage
during which the individual affirms his or her status as a lesbian or gay individual.

Compartmentalization is characteristic in this stage; the individual often does not fully disclose his or her sexual identity to those around him or her, creating further pathology in the identity development process. The identity pride stage illustrates the perceived us/them dichotomy, in the individual's immersion into a lesbian and gay subculture, introjecting its values and norms. Cass (1979) characterizes this stage with a rejection of heterosexual norms and an avoidance of straight peers. The distress of identity pride is resolved in identity synthesis, characterized by an integration of sexual identity into a holistic sense of self.

While Cass' model receives praise for its inclusion of both gay men and women, and for its empirical roots, others have critiqued the model as outmoded. Kaufman and Johnson (2004) specifically critique the role of social influences as detrimental to the development of the individual. As social mores shift, attitudes toward lesbian and gay individuals become less divisive. The social homophobia undergirding Cass' model, initially published in 1979, is less problematic today, and is less influential in the development of the individual. Cohler and Michaels (2013) suggest that the cohort effect for the adults born at the time when Cass and others situated their studies of adults is significantly different, and those models reflect a dated attitude toward sexual identity. Non-heterosexual identities are more visible today than in the 1970s and 1980s, and are therefore more normative than the time at which the stagewise models emerged (Hostetler, 2013).

The foundational stagewise models, such as those proposed by Cass and her contemporaries (Fassinger, 1991; Troiden 1988) provide a linear means of understanding sexual identity development. They are largely based on empirical data with small N studies, and are retrospective; adults recount their experiences, which are categorized into the stages of
development (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Participants in these early studies were often clinical populations, those who had sought long-term psychological help in their adjustment processes (D'Augelli, 1994). In his work with adolescents and emerging adults, Savin-Williams (2006) decries the research methodology of early sexual orientation research as fundamentally flawed in its comparison of clinical populations of LGB individuals with normative data gleaned from the heterosexual population, particularly in terms of rates of substance abuse, mental illness, and suicide.

The stagewise models, like the Ericksonian models of development, are task-dependent, and require an individual to meet developmental milestones to signify passage between stages. Like the models of adult development, the stagewise model of sexual identity development imply static beginnings and endings of development; there is a notion of a fully mature sexual identity in each of the models. As well, each of the models implies behavioral changes as symptoms or signifiers of movement between the stages (D'Augelli, 1994). They place little emphasis on the role of sociocultural influences and primary relationships, whether romantic or familial (D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995). The narrow focus of these models, coupled with their limited chronological scope, led critics to illustrate other ways to understand the development of sexual identity. In a critique of the earlier models, D'Augelli (2012) describes a notion of sexual identity in a vacuum--sexual identity that was based on the urban, gay, sexually active man who did not live in a context of family, childhood, aging, and relationships. In the next section, I will describe D'Augelli's inclusive concept of lifespan development.

**Theoretical Framework--Lifespan Developmental Model**

Rather than a stagewise, task-dependent model, D'Augelli (1994) proposes a model that accounts for sexual identity as it is constructed through feelings and behaviors, relationships, and
social influences. Situating the experience of sexual identity within a holistic lifespan
development places less focus on sexual behavior or attraction, and greater focus on the whole
person with sexual identity being one facet of overall personhood. This model also stands apart
from the earlier models in that it accounts for bisexual development in addition to lesbian and
gay identities, creating a trichotomy in development.

D'Augelli (1994) presents his framework as a metatheory intended to both transcend the
limitations of the earlier models and enrich empirical investigations of sexual identity
development. This model is a best fit for my study specifically because it is a "life story
approach" (D'Augelli, 1994, p. 120). Specifically, he moves away from the notion of partial or
incomplete identities inherent in the stagewise models in favor of degrees of integration within
the identity structure. In other words, each of his processes occurs on a continuum independent
of the others, which is a significant shift from the earlier developmental models.

Earlier sexual identity development models, such as Cass (1979), are limited in their
discussion of intersectionality within identity. Sexual identity is assumed to be one of many
independent facets of the individual's identity. Drawing on earlier studies of human
development, D'Augelli addresses intersectionality in his discussion of identity by recognizing
that expression of LGB identity in varied aspects of life may be limited or squelched based on
other social conditions, such as race or religion. He frames the less-inclusive discussions of
sexual identity without regard to social context as "distorted" (p. 122) and overly simplistic.

The human development view of sexual identity development is grounded in the
following five tenets, which I will summarize (D'Augelli, 1994):

1. Development occurs across the lifespan: Through the entire lifespan, behavioral,
   emotional, psychological, and physiological development continues. While each of these
facets of development are intertwined, their relationships are not always causal. D'Augelli extrapolates this tenet to imply that sexual identity and affectional orientation are not necessarily static, and can shift in light of development in any of the areas noted above.

2. Development is responsive to environmental changes as well as biology. Sexual identity may emerge or shift as cognitive maturation occurs, or as the biological and social changes of adolescence occur. Specifically, he points to changes in sexual behavior and affectional orientations in the post-adolescent period as an effect of this plasticity; adolescents may conform socially through heterosexual behavior, particularly in the process of individuating from the family. Once social influences are less domineering, changes in sexual identity may emerge.

3. The human development model focuses on individual variances in development. This approach is non-normative; rather, this model provides a descriptive framework to illustrate individual experiences. This principle is perhaps the most significant tenet influencing its inclusion in this study. Rather than measuring development against a norm, this model seeks to describe individual experiences. As well, this facet of the model allows for sexual identity to occur on a continuum, rather than the traditional trichotomization of identity (gay, straight, and bisexual) found throughout the earlier models.

4. The human development perspective is not deterministic, and provides a space for the individual to chart his or her own developmental course. D'Augelli's view is that society is heteronormative, which is the sole reason that the 'other' models of identity need to exist. LGB socialization only occurs in a society of difference, but the individual has the
power to transcend heteronormativity. As the emphasis moves from *sexual identity* to *identity*, development becomes more normative. In other words, social institutions and personal identity are interdependent; as individual development becomes more normative in terms of sexual identity, the notion of difference becomes less apparent. D'Augelli reflects this principle to describe the shift away from heterosexism in society since the 1950s.

5. The human development model suggests that empirical research must occur in order to generalize the model across populations. Specifically, this research cannot simply study the individual, but must include contextual research. This framework calls for longitudinal study of LGB development. While the initial framework illustrates the dearth of empirical longitudinal studies at the time of publication, it has become the lens for significant lifespan development research in the subsequent 20 years.

**Processes of Development**

D'Augelli's (1994) model is not linear or stagewise, rather, he presents six independent processes of development, which can occur in a non-linear order and can repeat over the lifespan. Changing the nomenclature of stages to processes, D'Augelli explicitly implies fluidity of identity within his model. With the 'coming out' or disclosure to others situated as the central task of identity development, D'Augelli posits six processes of development: exiting a heterosexual identity, developing a personal LGB identity status, developing a LGB social status, becoming a LGB offspring, developing a LGB intimacy status, and entering a LGB community (D'Augelli, 1994). Exiting a heterosexual identity involves the dual processes of realizing and disclosing one's own non-heterosexual identity. This positions D'Augelli's theory as heavily influenced by both intrapersonal and interpersonal factors of interaction. The outcome of each
stage, rather than being readiness for subsequent development, is a greater understanding of one's own self-concept and a revised relationship with the social world.

One of the unique qualities of this model is that, in comparison to the stagewise models, an individual can revisit each process as life circumstances or social influences require; the processes are not regarded as having terminal points (Cooper, 2008). As changes occur within the family of origin—disclosure of sexual identity to the next generation, for example—an individual can revisit the family process and renegotiate both the relationship with the family and his or her own concept of identity.

Also unique to a lifespan-based model is the notion that a man or woman can participate more in one process than in the others. Since the entrance to a stage is not dependent on the completion of a preceding stage, an individual can, intentionally or not, focus more heavily on one process of development than the others (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). So, for example, someone may live a fully integrated social life as a gay or bisexual man without ever negotiating that identity with the family of origin. Earlier stagewise developmental models would position an individual who hasn't negotiated his identity with his family as having arrested in that stage of development.

In the next section, I will describe each of D'Augelli's processes of development in greater detail. The embracing of individuality inherent in this model precludes explicit behavioral description for each phase; however, each phase is characterized by specific traits or patterns.

**Exiting a heterosexual identity.** This process of change is characterized by the individual's self-realization that he or she is not heterosexual. From a sociocultural perspective, the presence of this stage reflects the compulsory heterosexuality pervasive in society (Bettinger,
Increasing awareness of difference in this stage leads, for some individuals, to a conscious and deliberate identification as other-than-heterosexual. This may be an organized self-exploration, or may be more vague for others. Often this stage is characterized by an evaluation of how much change the identity shift implies (D'Augelli, 1998). Identity development in this stage is dependent upon making initial disclosures of the revised sexual identity to others (Manera & Frank, 2014). Concealment of identity can complicate both physical and mental health and impact the ability to develop supportive relationships with others who can affirm the individual's sexual identity status (Burlew, Pulliam, & Grant, 2014).

**Developing a personal LGB identity status.** This stage represents the individual's acceptance that he or she is gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Often, this includes a purposeful examination of the social myths about what it means to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and finding one's place within those social constructs (D'Augelli, 1994). During this process, caricatures of what means to be a gay or lesbian person come to a critical consciousness for evaluation (Manera & Frank, 2014).

This process may occur in collaboration with others who can confirm what it means to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual, as sexual orientation is largely a social construct. Developing social relationships with LGB individuals is often formative in this phase. The individual may derive his or her notion of what it means to be a gay or lesbian person by comparing himself or herself to others who identify similarly to him or her (Manera & Frank, 2014). The individual often draws upon gendered notions of sexuality as described earlier in this chapter by Butler (1990), and may be influenced in positive or negative ways by social constructions of gender as he or she develops an identity status.
Developing a LGB social status. Because gay and bisexual men live in a heteronormative environment, they may face greater stigma based on their identity than their heterosexual peers (Meyer, 2003). Developing a social identity within an affirming LGB community allows for feelings of connectedness and alliance-building. This affirmative environment allows for positive identity development and a shift from tolerance of identity in favor of acceptance and integration. The development of a LGB social status is a process of mutual disclosure; as the individual self-discloses, so too must the significant others disclose their support or lack of support.

Becoming a LGB offspring. For many, the parents and family of origin hold significant importance in social relationships. Disclosure of a non-heterosexual orientation is often tense for both the individual and the family. Many families are able to renegotiate relationships with LGB offspring after disclosure. Some families may not experience turmoil in light of the disclosure, however, D'Augelli (1994) notes that this phase is a process of evaluating the relationship, despite possible outcomes. Williams (1998) illustrates that this phase is culture-bound, in that there are societies in which same-sex relationships are celebrated over heterosexuality.

Developing a LGB intimacy status. Because, in part, of a lack of significant role models in a heterosexist culture, developing intimate romantic relationships may be more difficult for the LGB individual. This may be further complicated by the ban on same-sex marriage in some states (Hill, 2008). Regardless of the social reinforcement of heterosexuality (D'Augelli, 1994), LGB individuals develop expectations of intimacy in their early relationships with people of the same sex.

Entering a LGB community. As the individual recognizes the shortcomings of a heterosexist dominant culture, he or she may choose to identify with an LGB community of
choice. As D'Augelli (1994, p. 328) notes, "To be lesbian, gay, or bisexual in the fullest sense--to have a meaningful identity--leads to a consciousness of the history of one's own oppression. It also, generally, leads to an appreciation of how the oppression continues, and a commitment to resisting it." Entering a LGB community often reflects this commitment to resisting oppression by joining together (socially, politically, or professionally) with others who share his or her commitment. Relevant to this study, the LGB individual may find a community of like-minded individuals within a community of theatre practice.

**Empirical Support for the Model**

A literature review using search terms such as "sexual identity", "development", "D'Augelli" and "sexuality" results in an exhaustive list of studies in community psychology and developmental psychology in which the lifespan developmental model of sexual identity development informs the research outcomes. Of particular note, however, is a dearth of applications of this model within the academic literature of adult education. Searches in specific journals, such as Adult Education Quarterly, yield few to no results for studies that address sexual identity development. There are some conceptual pieces, such as the work of Brooks & Edwards cited earlier, but in general, the mainstream adult education literature has overlooked sexual identity development as a way of learning. While one volume in New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education addresses heterosexism, no single article in that volume addresses the processes through which adults come to understand their sexual identities. So, I turn to related fields to find applications of this model.

Although when this model emerged in 1994, it was used to describe adult development, later studies have applied the lifespan developmental model to children and adolescents (D'Augelli & Patterson, 2001), emerging adults (Tillapaugh, 2013) aging adults (Muzacz &
Akinsulure-Smith, 2013) and established heterosexually married men in midlife who come out as gay or bisexual (Caraveo, 2012). Several recent studies link the process described by this model to mental wellness, implying that an uncomplicated identity development process indicates better mental health. Tillapaugh (2013), Scrimshaw, Siegel, Downing, and Parsons (2013), Cook (2013), and Wintersteen and Diamond (2013) all describe better mental health outcomes in individuals whose development of sexual identity is uncomplicated as described within D'Augelli's model. Others describe how this model can be applied in therapeutic interventions. Farmer, Welfare, and Burge (2013), Wintersteen and Diamond (2013), and Panchankis and Goldfried (2013) describe applications of this model for therapists to design clinical interventions for working with LGB clients.

**Critiques of the Model**

Although the lifespan developmental model proposed by D'Augelli (1994) stands out as much more comprehensive than the earlier models, others have offered critiques for the model. First published in 1994 to describe adult development, the model is now 21 years old. D'Augelli’s model stands as the foundation from which later models draw their roots, but it would be irresponsible to overlook the changed zeitgeist in the 21 years since D'Augelli first presented his model. While it was devised to describe the person as identity develops through a social milieu, some have offered that the greater sociopolitical landscape has shifted away from the heteronormativity of a generation ago (Hostetler 2013). Certainly this shift in the social milieu may inform how individuals interact with the processes of development in the model, however, I would suggest that the shifting landscape is less problematic than critics would assert. The lifespan developmental model considers the person-in-context and how the individual interacts with the social and cultural environment, but the model does not prescribe a given
social environment. In other words, the model provides a tabula rasa on which any given sociocultural environment can exist. D'Augelli (2012) takes up this issue in his discussion of the cohort effect within his model; he celebrates the changing social landscape and calls for further inclusion of sexual identity development studies in mainstream academia.

A significant critique of this model relevant to my study is its lack of attention to intersectionality, and how individuals of diverse backgrounds may experience identity development differently. While D'Augelli (1994, p. 122) suggests that a discussion of sexual identity with addressing other sociocultural influences would be "distorted", he doesn't take on the overwhelming task of addressing possible intersections of sexual identity with areas of difference like race, sex, and social class. Affiliation with subcultures of race and ethnicity, or the presence of a disability may impact how the individual situates himself or herself within sexual identity. Tillapaugh (2013) finds that the most significant limitation of the sexual identity development models (including the lifespan developmental model) is their failure to examine how the intersection of other diversity factors might influence one's own understanding of sexual identity. Because this is a significant limitation of the model, I will follow the example of Tillapaugh (2013) and will use a second identity descriptor for gauge how my participants create their holistic sense of identity. For this study, I have chosen to use the ADRESSING model from Hays (2001) to allow participants to self-identify the intersecting facets of their identities.

**Addressing the Critiques-ADRESSING Framework**

Counseling psychologist Pamela Hays (2001) provides an outline for allowing her clients to self-describe his or her own intersection of cultural influences. This framework emerged as a means of organizing the cultural identifications of her clients, and a way to graphically represent the intersectionality of their identities (Hays, 2001). This framework is explicitly not descriptive
of a process of identity development, rather, it represents a means of describing the individual's self-concept at the time of the interview (Hays, personal communication, 2014). The ADDRESSING framework has dual purposes in its therapeutic application, to provide the client to self-describe his or her identity, and to allow the therapist to examine his or how understanding of the client's identity, as well as his or her own biases about the implications of those identities (Hays, 1996).

This framework is not static or fixed; the individual's participation in each of the areas of diversity may change over time and context. The label is less important than the meaning of that label to the individual (Hays, 1996). In other words, the descriptive label of 'Latina' may have implications across different contexts or social situations, and may mean very different things to different Latina women. The framework is intended as an impetus for discussion rather than a means of generating labels. Hays' acronym ADDRESSING includes the following factors of identity: age, disability, religion, ethnicity (including race), socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, indigenous heritage, national origin, and gender. It is important to note that some publications use the acronym ADDRESSING, in which the two Ds represent developmental and acquired disabilities (as in Hays, 2001).

Hays work focused on counseling with minority groups, and she presents her framework from her position as a white woman. She is explicit in her application of this model from a position of majority, although she acknowledges that the framework is applicable in any therapeutic relationship (Hays, 1996; 2001). The model intends to outline broad influences on identity, and it helps to bridge the gap in the D'Augelli model, which doesn't address the intersections of other lenses of diversity. By understanding salient and fluid identities, the therapist can begin to understand how his or her client sees the world (Hays, 2001).
study, I adopt the ADRESSING model to begin a discussion with each participant about how he or she self-identifies, and how that identity influences his or her understanding of the world. Because this is a study of sexual identity, my focus will be on the language that the participant uses to self-describe his or her sexuality; however, I am mindful of Hays' advice that identities lie at the intersection of many factors, and that those factors are mutually influential.

**Summary of Theoretical Framework**

This study seeks to examine the experiences of actors as they create characters that may influence their own sexual identities. The study is grounded in adult development, and uses the lifespan sexual identity development model posited by D'Augelli (1994). As an integrative framework, the lifespan developmental model allows for a great deal of individuality between participants, and is illustrative rather than normative. It lacks, however, a means to describe the individual factors that may account for interpersonal differences in identity formation. To supplement the theoretical framework, I draw on the work of Hays (1996) and apply her ADRESSING model as an additional means of framing the participants' senses of self within the interview process.

The model proposed by D'Augelli offers a lens through which to frame the experiences of my participants as they develop their sexual identities in their unique social contexts. It is important in the framework of this study to provide a lens through which to view that social context. As D'Augelli contrasts same-sex sexual identity development against a heteronormative backdrop, I follow his example by using a social lens grounded in queer theory to contrast my participants' experiences against their heteronormative social environments. In the next section, I will explore queer theory and its influences on sexual identity development.
Queer Theory

The term *queer* appears in many uses throughout academic literature and in vernacular uses. In a general sense, *queer* describes all persons who do not fit into socially ascribed heterosexual orientations or identities (Bettinger, 2007) and accounts for fluidity and multiplicity in sexual identity. Politically, *queer* is a reclaimed term intended to include those who are traditionally excluded from mainstream definitions of sexuality, and to blur the traditional dichotomous notions of sexuality (Hill, 2011). Shalasko (2005) argues that “queer challenges the very idea of ‘normal,’ ... queer accepts neither its exclusion from the realm of normal..nor any attempt to recuperate it into the normal,” (p.124). Morris (1998) uses a bifurcated definition of queer to imply both a subject position (identity) and a politic (social movement). In her definition, Morris captures both the psychological and sociological faces of sexual identity, and provides a foundation for this study. These two facets of identity are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are interdependent.

Queer theory is a complex outgrowth of the mutually influential facets of sexual identity. Queer theory embodies a reappropriation of oppression in the politicization of sexual identity as an inclusive force and site of revolution (Morris, 2005). While many adult educators cite the roots of queer theory in the political liberations movements of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Bettinger, 2007; Grace, 2001; Hill, 2011), queer theory finds its roots in gender studies of the late 1970s (Pinar, 2003). Following the gender deconstruction work of Foucault, early queer theorists viewed binary sexualities as a political construction of hegemony, and began to question the heteronormative structure of mainstream society (Pinar, 2003). Hill (2011) views queer theory as an area of thought, field of inquiry, and means of action. The goal of queer
theory is to destabilize previously unquestioned notions of sexual identity and expression, and to create a discursive space for sexuality.

Queer theory in adult and higher education is often concerned with examining categories of oppression and the foundational power structure that supports this oppression (Morris, 1998). A queer politic challenges the status quo and examines how power is used to reinforce hegemony in a curriculum, institution, or educational movement. As an aesthetic, queer theory positions texts (in this case, performance art) as potentially radical in message, whether or not in intent.

Queer theory becomes relevant to this study in my examination of theatre as a vehicle of introspection and meaning-making. For Marcuse (1978), one of the most powerful means of introspection was artistic expression. Art, asserted Marcuse (1970), could provide an aesthetic value that could rebel against the dominant values.

The development of Art to nonobjective art, minimal art, antiart was a way toward the liberation of the subject, preparing it for a new objectworld instead of accepting and sublimating, beautifying the existing one, freeing mind and body for a new sensibility and sensitivity which can no longer tolerate a mutilated experience and a mutilated sensibility. (p.130)

In this sense, art can threaten the status quo when used as a liberatory force and means to make meaning. This is particularly relevant within the D'Augelli model, which frames sexual identity against a heteronormative backdrop. Marcuse stated that "the more immediately political the work of art, the more it reduces the power of estrangement and the radical, transcendent goals of change" (Marcuse, 1978, p. xii). Highly politicized art forms (Brechtian alienation-effect theatre described later in this chapter, for example) are less revolutionary, according to Marcuse (1978),
in the transparency of their politicization. Art intended for the masses is more revolutionary in its provision of a space for discussion.

The political becomes personal within the sociocultural and integrative models of identity development. Queer theory is grounded in the understanding that individual identity emerges through the individual's interaction with and liberation from oppression (Pinar, 2003). Continuing the parallel between learning and development, this notion of development through liberation is woven within the tenets of emancipatory education (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2003); at the core of these learning models is a revised understanding of social forces and how the individual interacts with or becomes liberated from those sociocultural influences. In this study, queer theory provides a means to interpret the sociopolitical backdrop on which my participant actors create the roles that they portray. Drawing on the example of Aaron, the social norms that provide Aaron's frame of reference to portray the homophobic character Matt can be interpreted through queer theory to better understand how those norms are reinforced through hegemony and demanded in the acting pedagogy to provide truth in performance.

Where the psychological models of identity describe the internal forces that influence sexual identity, queer theory provides a means to describe the sociopolitical backdrop through which sexual identity emerges. Bridging queer theory and the praxis of acting, Gilbert (1994) describes the body as the outward expression of gender and sex for the actor, implying that the characterization of sex or gender through the body has significant implications for the actor's own construction of sex and gender concepts. In the next section, I will briefly explore the academic understanding of gender as a performed construct.
Performance of Gender

Gender as a socially-ascribed construct that begins when parents and others assign gender assumptions to infants (Butler, 1993). Based on biological sex, a series of assumptions and attitudes about the infant begin to unfold. Because gender and sex are inextricably linked in this way, Judith Butler (1990) folds them together in her discussion of gender performance, with sex being what we are and gender being what we do. As well, many researchers in relevant fields consider sex and gender within the same discussion (Bosson, Taylor, & Prewitt-Freillino, 2006; Gilbert, 1994; Jones, 2003; Kirle, 2005; Knapp, 2006; Negron-Muntaner, 2000), similarly positioning one as the expression of the other. Here, I follow their example and present Butler's notions of gender performance as one way to link discussions of gender (particularly embodied gender) with my participants' stories of sexual identity development. Butler (1994) confronts the idea that gender performance is the interaction of the individual with his or her gender; rather, she asserts that gender performance represents the way in which the individual meets the socially-ascribed norms of gender. Gender, then, is a highly politicized social construct, and a construct with which there is great pressure to comply. Her notion of gender norms as compulsory derives from examples of social ostracization faced by those who fail to comply with gender norms.

Butler (1990) frames gender as an act--a repeated act of reinforcing social norms--which she labels as a "corporeal style", implying that it occurs through the body (p. 139). The performivity of gender is not, as the word might imply, a performance. Performance implies that gender is temporary and flexible. Rather, Butler provides illustrations of the subversive qualities of gender when it is mis-performed (1990, 1993). Drag, for example, is a subversive display of gender in which gender is intentionally emphasized as a unit of analysis; by openly confronting
gender normativity, the drag artist opens a space in which gender can be addressed. Not all drag acts in a subversive way, however. Salih (2002) illustrates examples from Butler's writings in which drag artists that perpetuate, rather than confront, gender norms by reinforcing the gendered dichotomy masculine/feminine. We can confront gender norms through the parody of drag and disrupt subversively the social constructs of gender "through radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (Butler, 1990, p. 148).

Butler (1993) provides an interesting link between her own work and queer politics through the theatre. It is theatre, she believes, that has the power to subvert gender norms in an accessible way to the audience to transform gender into a queer politic. Writing from the depths of the AIDS crisis of the early 1990s, she asserts, "an important set of histories might be told in which the increasing politicization of theatricality of queer is at stake. Such a history might include traditions of cross-dressing, drag balls, street walking, butch-femme spectacles, kiss-ins by Queer Nation; drag performance benefits for AIDS" (p. 233). She calls for theatre artists to disentangle the bind of gender norms in a political strategy similar to popular theatre in adult education (Bates, 1996). This echoes the assumption from Clum (1999) that gendered performance in mainstream theatre has the performative power to begin a politicized discussion around sexual identity and a queer agenda. One example of mainstream musical theatre that directly confronts gender norms is the current revival of Hedwig and the Angry Inch.

**Performance of Gender in Mainstream Theatre: An Illustration**

Perhaps no recent production confronts gender norms quite as directly as a show themed around a botched sex-change procedure, Hedwig and the Angry Inch. When East German-born Hedwig hopes to flee his homeland by marrying his American GI boyfriend, he attempts to have sex-reassignment surgery, which when fails, leaves him with ambiguous genitalia but an escape
from East Germany. The plot of Hedwig is groundbreaking in the sense that it blurs both biological sex and gender roles in a radical confrontation, as Butler (1993) would assert is a true subversion of gender.

American actor Neil Patrick Harris, well-established in the musical theatre community as an out gay man, took on the eponymous role in Hedwig when it revived on Broadway in 2013. Harris experienced a significant personal transformation in order to play Hedwig, purposefully losing a great deal of weight and changing his physique to appear more slight and feminine. He describes his transformation into playing a feminine role as somewhat refreshing after consistently playing straight roles. He had a "desire to not seem overly effeminate. Which, now that I'm playing overtly feminine and loving it, is kind of a stupid concern. I didn't know who I was in my body until I had lived for a while, and in those decades of uncertainty, I didn't want to appear, um, too girly. I'm trying to choose my words carefully because I don't want to disrespect people who are effeminate or girly" (Hiatt, 2014, p. 39). His transformation echoes Butler's (1990, 1993) gender performativity discussion described earlier in this chapter; the notion that a shift in biological sex also implies a significant outward expression of gender performance pervades his discussion of the transformation. Harris states that he has "always been aware of how he was presenting himself" (p. 39), and is acutely aware of how outward expression of gender is readily interpolated into a perception of sexuality.

Gender, in Butler's eyes, is constructed through language and enacted by the body. Without gendered language, there would be no means to reinforce gender roles. But it is through the body that individuals express gender, and therefore it is the body that becomes the unit of analysis for gender. Butler allegorizes the relationship between gender and the body throughout her writings. In discussions of gendered learning through the body, adult educators often lean
upon Butler’s work as foundational in their theories. Following that lead, in the next section, I will summarize the literature around embodied learning in adult education, first in a broad notion of learning through the body, then with specific applications to the practice of acting.

**Embodied Learning**

Each of us can likely remember a time that we’ve experienced a "gut feeling" that suggested to us intuitively that something was wrong. When I was a child, my mother often said that "mother's intuition" helped her to understand when her children were in distress. As a musician, I have come to recognize the tingly feeling that musical performance gives me; only recently have I begun to understand its connection to emotion and meaning-making. These familiar illustrations provide three examples of embodied knowing. The jargon of adult education uses disparate terms somatic and embodied learning to describe similar phenomena; the literature also distinguishes embodied knowing and embodied learning. This may reflect the privilege afforded to rational thought process as a reaction to somatic sensation in embodied learning, suggesting that there must be a cognitive processing of somatic information. This idea is reinforced by some researchers in the realm of embodied learning (Michelson, 1998).

Throughout this chapter, I follow Clark’s (2001) example of using the terms embodied knowing and embodied learning interchangeably.

From early in the history of education, learning through the body has been present in (or purposefully omitted from) academic discourse. Lawrence (2012) suggests that embodied knowledge is the first way of knowing that we experience as infants; we know emotions and sensations through the body well before we have the language to express or label them. Knowing and learning through the body are foundational in the experiences of psychological and emotional development (Lawrence, 2012). In 1637, philosopher Rene Descartes severed the
mind and body by positing that there is no link between spirit, body, and mind, and privileging the (rational) mind over somatic and spiritual experience. This placement of logic over intuition continues throughout the history of Western education until only recently.

Michelson (1996) calls to question the separation of mind and body by asserting that the body is the site of the production of knowledge; that is, much of what adults learn is learned through corporeal experience. She positions the body as a primary site of meaning-making, bridging the gap between somatic experience and learning; it is through the felt experience that adults make meaning. In particular, Michelson (1998) uses the example of gender roles and how gendered expression can be physically and emotionally repressing. Using the experiences of my participants, the physical reactions or emotions that they experience physically when bringing character to life can provide them with a space to make meaning of the oppressive forces in which that character lives (or in which the actor himself lives). This echoes Jung's psychological development theory referenced earlier in this chapter. Jung (1964) suggested that wisdom gathered through the body is held in the unconscious parts of our psyche. It is through becoming aware of the wisdom stored unconsciously that adults develop and individuate from repression.

Lawrence (2012) weaves the history of embodied learning through traditional learning theories, such as Bloom's taxonomy, and provides a model that helps to understand the integrated role of body-based learning. She situates the body at the foundation of her learning model, because somatic reactions are often fundamental in understanding experience. Take, for example, the somatic reaction of a startle response when we're surprised by a stimulus. We react physically first, before emotionally or cognitively processing why we're frightened. Then, emotional and cognitive processing round out our understanding of the experience, as we come
to understand that we've experienced a physical reaction to being startled, which elicits an emotion (fear) and a cognitive processing of the stimulus.

Lawrence's integration of the body as a way of knowing relies on awareness of the body, its processes, and its reactions. She and others point out that the privilege of mind over body has resulted in many adults being unaware of or, in Freiler's (2008, p.42) words, not being "in tune to the body". Awareness of the body, however, is foundational to the experience of actors and the craft of acting. Esch (2006) and Gilbert (1994) describe the actor's use of the body in performance and link performance through the body to potential identity development for the actor. Likewise, feminist acting pedagogues describe the performance of gender on stage in similar language as Butler's (1988) notion of gender performativity (Gainor, 2002; Russell, 2007; Steiger, 2011).

In adult education, there is a concentrated body of knowledge that helps to understand the role of the body for performance artists as they make meaning through their practice. In the next section, I will explore the literature pertaining to the body as a way that adults come to understand their experience of performance art, including theatre and dance.

**Embodied Learning in Performance Art as Adult Education**

Many performance artists use the body as their primary means of communication. Dancers, for example, communicate story and emotion through their bodies as the storytellers. Actors use the body to bring to life a character on the stage. Before the body, a character is a flat, two-dimensional idea represented by words on the page. Without the body, a character is imagined but unseen.

The body, then, is paramount in the development of character. Before the actor speaks a word in character, the audience has a notion of who that character is by the way that he or she
moves, the way that he or she emotes, and the way that he or she shares space with the other characters on stage. Similar to Butler's discussion of gender performance, actors building a character consider gender and sexual identity as they breathe life into characters on stage. In this section, I will first consider the literature in adult education related to embodiment in performance art. Then, I will draw examples from the theatre trade literature to support the conceptual work in adult education.

Snowber (2012, p. 53) describes movement as a "way of knowing" with which we are comfortable as children, but with which we are increasingly less aware as we move into adulthood. More importantly, she calls for the inclusion of movement as a strategy for meaning-making in postsecondary education settings. As my study is situated within musical theatre, it is important to consider the roles of dance and movement as well as the practice of acting in this discussion.

Snowber draws on the work of phenomenologist Sheets-Johnstone, whose work centers on thinking through movement. This is again relevant to the study of actors as they think as a character and make decisions on how that character will travel in time and space on the stage. She calls the reader to consider the connection between dance and emotion, and how each of these can be connected to meaning-making. Further, she describes movement as a way to open a liminal space in which we can consider deeper personal questions and meaning. "Our lives are a dance in progress, as we are informed, formed, and transformed in the rich palette of lived experience. Dance is the invitation to reclaim an embodied inspiration--the entrance to our knowing that is filled with a lifetime of mystery and magic" (Snowber, 2012, p. 58). Dance is both a way of knowing and a means to tap into other ways of knowing that may be overlooked without attention to the kinesthetic ways of knowing (Stinson, 1995).
Butterwick and Selman (2012) draw attention to theatre as a powerful process to connect mind, body, and emotions, tapping into several ways of knowing simultaneously. They illustrate theatre as an embodied pedagogy, drawing peripherally from mainstream theatre literature, but relying predominately on the popular theatre literature in adult education. They examine embodied theatre processes as a transformative influence in critical reflection and building community by helping to level problematic power differences, such as the performance of politicized gender. Drawing on the work of Butler described earlier in this chapter, they position theatrical gender performance as a politicized way of understanding the power afforded to gender roles. The use of embodied theatre, they posit, is a way of looking outward at structures of power and oppression while also looking inward to draw attention to our own experience of that power. They provide illustrations of their own work in theatre-as-pedagogy in the adult education setting and call for more attention to the use of embodied learning strategies in the field of adult education.

Similarly, Lawrence and Butterwick (2007) examine the use of popular theatre as a way of examining oppression. They address popular theatre strategies as a way of acting out or embodying oppression in order to bring powerful feelings to conscious awareness and imagine alternate perspectives.

As Butterwick and Selman (2012, p. 64) note, "through participating in theatre experiences, the muted mind becomes embodied and sometimes the body finds voice, or perhaps the separate mind finally becomes the audience to the embodied intelligence". In the language of this study, it is through the embodiment of character in theatre that actors may tap into what their body knows that may not be readily accessible to the conscious mind. In the theatre trade literature, this is a theme that often appears around the performance of culture, sexual identity,
and gender. While I address these issues elsewhere in this chapter, I present them here briefly as well to connect the adult education literature back to the practice of acting.

In her introduction to a journal volume devoted to the embodied experience of acting, Graham (2002) points to the body as the site of performance of gender, ethnicity, and our place in the world (social class). She calls for an examination of the social body that is no longer privileged to theatre and academia, but for greater awareness of popular understanding of how the body serves as a way of knowing. Gallagher (2002) draws specifically on the work of Boal, whose theatre pedagogy is described later in this chapter, in understanding how the performance of gender can be transformative in the actor's own understanding of gender and gendered expression. Her work with a heterogeneous group of young women in devised theatre explores how gender intersects with other aspects of positionality; specifically, she examines the role of embodied theatre as a way to draw attention to positionality by recreating it as a unit of introspection.

Specific to embodiment of sexual identity, Gilbert (1994) explores the way that the actor's body becomes the outward symbol of gender and sexual identity on stage. He describes the body as a way of understanding sexual identity in terms of oppression and liberation that echo Judith Butler's discussion of gender through a feminist lens. That is, he deconstructs the male body as both a gendered and sexual representation, and examines the experience of sexual identity through the body as it relates to notions of masculinity and femininity. Masculine is heterosexual, and therefore the ideal, while traits that suggest an other-than-heterosexual identity are less desirable. The male actor on display with his body as the vehicle to communicate sexual identity must embody gender and sexuality in a particular way to communicate character to the audience; however, there is value placed on masculinity on stage in a heteronormative society.
Similarly, Bosson, Taylor, and Prewitt-Freillino (2006) describe the double-bind of actors who play gay male characters on stage as they embody the character for the audience, while they struggle with the stigma of playing a character who is physically less masculine. These actors often report identity misclassification, or the assumption that the (heterosexual) actor is gay because of the role that he plays. The discomfort with perceived identity misclassification often impacts the actor's comfort with embodying his character in a particular way. It is this discomfort, however, that I would argue opens the liminal spaces for contemplation around sexual identity, as I will address later in this chapter in my discussion of acting philosophies.

In this chapter, I have heretofore presented a discussions of identity development, the performance of gender, and embodied ways of knowing. These bodies of knowledge intersect in our understanding of sexual identity, and ways of defining or describing sexual identity development. I have illustrated these concepts intermittently with examples from the discourses of both adult education and theatre. It is important, however, to more vividly set the context for this study by providing a brief summary of different perspectives on acting. In particular, I will discuss examples of theatre as described in the adult education literature. Then, I will frame theatre as a pedagogy of performance, which sets the stage for the last section of this review, acting as a way of knowing.

**Perspectives on Acting**

Philosophies of acting are as disparate as the roles that actors play; there are myriad schools of thought used to frame the art of acting. Bartow (2006) suggests that acting is a value-laden art, and the way that an actor approaches his or her craft is illustrative of his or her belief system; the actors values and his or her craft are mutually influential. A detailed discussion of the acting philosophies common in musical theatre is outside the scope of this study, as this
study does not examine the way in which acting perspectives influence the experience of the participant. However, there is a common thread woven between acting philosophies that is relevant to this study. Acting is an interpretive art; actors must learn to understand the world around them (and the world within their text) in order to bring their characters to life.

Many acting philosophies address this interpretive facet of acting directly, while others explicitly overlook the relationship between the portrayal of character and the actor's own understanding of his or her world. Where the actor often receives specific instructions for both words and actions from the playwright, he or she must find his or her own interpretation within himself or herself (Kahan, 1985).

Perhaps the greatest debate in acting and actor training is the question of emotion—should the actor feel the emotions that he or she portrays? Most acting pedagogies vary on the level in which the actor is involved in the emotions. Some, like Stanislavsky's (1936) Method Acting, guide the actor to feel the emotions as the character experiences them, and to react to those emotions in a realistic manner. Others, such as Brecht's Epic theory (Lewis, 1958) suggest that the actor distance himself or herself from the personal emotion, but to communicate with the character through personal empathy for the character's emotions. Others, like Meyerhold, break the actor's communication down into a series of movements on stage, and focus on the biomechanics of movement and the link between emotion and movement (Harrop, 1992).

While the Method persists as the most prevalent school of acting in the United States (Bartow, 2006; Kahan, 1985), it has also been decried as damaging to both the actor and the theatre (Richardson, 1988; Russell, 2007). Where all of these strategies overlap, however, is their positioning of the actor in a contemplative space where critical reflection may occur. It is those liminal spaces of growth that may help foster the processes of development as described by
D'Augelli (1994), while saturation in oppressive messages may result in a lack of growth or a regression (D'Augelli, 1991; Freire, 1970; hooks, 2003; Giroux, 1997). The safety of depersonalization in performance theatre allows for difficult conflicts and dangerous issues to be addressed in what Bhabha (1994) has called a third space, a space in which the past does not determine the future, and can be interpreted in terms of what it was and what it might have been. It is these liminal spaces, I propose, that allow the actor to become more vulnerable and empathically intuitive to the people and social settings around them. It is their attention to and critical reflection on emotion that allows actors to be more intuitive than most; it is this intuition that facilitates development, particularly in the understanding of cultural norms (Russell, 2008).

While acting allows the actor to become more vulnerable to and in touch with emotions, theatre is a communal activity. Actors, then, work in collaboration with others in an empathic art form. The collective meaning-making experienced by actors is perhaps best understood to adult educators when theatre is framed as a community of practice.

**Theatre as a Community of Practice**

The reader who has participated in theatre will be readily familiar with the camaraderie, mutual support, and interpersonal connection within their theatre experiences. Theatre "families" are sites in which actors find support, friendship, and social networking. Framed within adult learning, theatre can become site of collaborative inquiry in which adults find a synergy in their learning processes and develop mutually beneficial learning relationships. Collaborative inquiry "is democratic, honors multiple ways of knowing, meets conditions widely held to be necessary for free and open discourse, links learning to lived experience, values action, and is often emancipatory in its intent" (Yorks & Kasl, 2002, p. 92). Collaborative inquiry in its adult
education context is a purposeful strategy through which groups of learners reflect upon experiential learning to collaboratively make meaning of experience (Yorks & Kasl, 2002a).

While Popular Theatre, or theatre geared specifically toward social change could readily be framed as a site of collaborative inquiry, this study does not purport to frame mainstream theatre as a site of purposeful meaning making. Rather, I suggest that theatre can be an unintentional community of practice in which like-minded individuals come together, and through their shared experiences, find ways in which they can understand their own experiences. The vulnerability of emotion in acting, coupled with the collaborative exploration of personal emotion and social context, facilitates a shared meaning-making experience between actors working together. D'Augelli's (1994) model of identity development relies heavily upon the individual's situation in a community. The construct of collaborative inquiry provides that community and serves nicely to link D'Augelli's framework into the discourse of adult education.

Theatre as a community of practice is only one lens through which to frame theatre as an influential force in adult education and adult learning. The academic discourse of adult education explicitly addresses theatre as a way of making meaning as a performance pedagogy. In the next section, I will briefly address theatre as a performance pedagogy, specifically illustrating theatre within the adult education context.

**Acting as Adult Teaching and Learning**

There are several subsets of theatre intended for to spark change or critical reflection. Some focus on the implications for the audience as passive recipients of a social critique, while others demand engagement and interaction between actor, audience, and social message. While some strategies focus on the act of performance, others focus on portraying a social message.
**Critical performance pedagogy.** Critical performance pedagogy is situated within the performance itself and politicizes the act of performance (Denzin, 2010). The purpose of critical performance pedagogy is to 'act out' systems of oppression, creating a space in which to draw attention to and discuss those systems. Critical performance pedagogy (CPP) is distinct from autoethnography in that the goal of CPP is to arise a critical consciousness toward systems of oppression and empower consumers to examine and react to oppression.

Performance provides an embodies and enlivens the subject matter, creating an interactive means of kinetically "doing" or describing the content. "Performance provides individuals with an experiential, communicative tool to express what might otherwise be inexpressible" (Howard, 2004, p. 219). It decenters power and draws on emotive appeals to help individuals recognize social problems. CPP encompasses the values and folkways of the audience and uses those values, in performance *with*, not *for*, the audience, to create a participatory consciousness or understanding of social issues (Denzin, 2009). Moving beyond the superficial presentation of problems and solutions, CPP honors the perceived victims of oppression and draws attention to the underlying systems of power that oppress them.

Howard (2004) illustrates the critical power of performance for the performer as it provides a space to "view their behaviors, (re)shape their identities, and consider the cultural implications of [their performances]" (p. 225), even when the performers' perceptions of the message were not the same as the audience's perspectives. In other words, independent of the audience's understanding of the performance, the performer himself or herself carries a potentially transformative capacity to react to the performance. For both audience and performer, CPP can both illustrate the issue and illuminate a means of critiquing it (Howard & Ferrier, 2009).
Critical performance pedagogy can be present in virtually any performance-based media: theatre, television, film, radio broadcast, dance, studio art, and journalism (Denzin, 2010; Denzin, 2009; Garoian, 1999; Howard, 2004; Howard & Ferrier 2009). The common strand between these varied media is the propensity to embody cultural messages and provide a space in which they are critically examined.

**Performance art as a critical pedagogy.** For Marcuse (1970, 1978), all art and artistic expression holds the power to rebel against dominant culture. Art that is overtly political holds less value for rebellion, while art meant for the masses has the subtlety to influence greater change.

Steiger (2011) positions theatre, particularly actor training, as a politically-motivated critical pedagogy, citing acting pedagogy as an examination of bodies and how bodies are used to portray character. She builds on Wallace's (2008) essay "On Writing as Transgression" to frame acting as a critical pedagogy to examine politics, economics, and culture, using the body as the unit of analysis. Wallace (2008) critiques mainstream theatre as a privileging pedagogy that places whiteness, heterosexuality, and maleness as favored positions, and suggests that traditional acting pedagogies discourage the examination of resistance as limiting to creativity. Steiger (2011) suggests that it is through resistance that creativity emerges. She draws on the works of Paulo Freire in calling for a theatre that is interactive and critical; an acting pedagogy in which audience and actor work together to make meaning. Her case study examines actor training and the experience of this critical pedagogy on the actor, sharing stories of how students experienced the character development as an opportunity to examine their own experiences. One student stated that "it's kind of like being your own dramaturg" (p. 29), suggesting that he or she
had examined (as a dramaturg would) the social, cultural, or historical influences of his own life story.

The power of performance is well-understood in therapeutic contexts. In my work as a therapist, I have witnessed the power of performative therapies as a means of providing critical introspection and transformative change. The therapeutic traditions of Moreno (1959) and his followers in the realm of psychodrama have documented the value of performance therapies in their propensity to experience and communicate problems in a safe, often depersonalized way, and to create the impetus for change. Theatre as a vehicle to propagate social messages similarly depersonalizes emotionally-laden topics and creates an emotionally safe space in which to critique them.

Armstrong (2005) draws the foundational parallel between performance pedagogy and mainstream theatre in her deconstruction of performance pedagogy in the language of actors. She approaches the theatrical strategies of character development and improvisation as a performance pedagogy and examines the process to identify ways in which the performance of character develops discursive spaces. Armstrong focuses on the performance pedagogy of Lois Weaver for her attention to "preserving the individuality of the actors' voices...while critiquing dominant culture" (p 202.) Through Weaver's pedagogy, Armstrong identifies ways in which character development and improvisation can open dialogue and foster coalitions rather than replicating dominant structures of division.

Howard (2004) situates theatre as a form of critical performance pedagogy in its capacity to foster critical understanding through performance. She draws heavily from the work of Augusto Boal (1979) and others to describe the ways in which theatrical performance can convey oppressive social structures and spark a resistance. Similarly, Denzin (2009) illustrates the
resistance pedagogies of Boal and others through which performers mock, parody, or reproduce for critique social issues for critical consciousness-raising.

**Grotowski and the Poor Theatre.** Pioneered by Jerzy Grotowski, the concept of Poor Theatre stands in stark contrast to mainstream acting traditions. An early follower of Stanislavsky, Grotowski held several critiques of the Method tradition, and through his teaching, developed a pedagogy in which many of the illusory facets of contemporary theatre were stripped from performance to expose the fundamental particles or components of theatre (Swed, 2004). In rejection of the traditions of verisimilitude, which led to elaborate sets and costumes to ‘set the stage’ for performance, Grotowski employed a minimalist approach to production, using few, if any, costumes and set pieces (Schechner, 2008). He recognized that within traditional theatre, the ritualistic functions of theatre as ‘art-as vehicle’ could not be replicated, and sought to bring innovation to the craft through focus on the actor and action (Wylam, 2008). Theatre becomes not representation, but ritual, drawing on a blend of cultural archetypes and the personal experiences of the actor, intended to both draw from and impact the performer. In his pedagogy, Grotowski draws not from the dominant ideology to aim for belief-in-practice, as Stanislavsky, but from the lived experience of the performer and his or her relationship with his or her culture, and in the process, aims to create a lived truth in performance, rather than an illusion of others’ experiences (Grotowski, 1980; Schechner, 2008).

As a resistance pedagogy, the Poor Theatre represents an introspective opportunity for the actor to explore his or her own experiences and how they influence the art of acting. Rather than focusing on the text, the unit of analysis in Poor Theatre is the actor. Poor Theatre is a pedagogy relevant to this study in that it foregrounds the psychological experiences of the actor as he creates his art. Similarly, there are movements of resistance theatre used as pedagogical
strategies in formal and informal adult learning settings. In the next section, I will address those types of theatre that are specific to adult education.

**Resistance Theatre Movements in Adult Education.** There are overlapping movements in theatre and adult education in which theatre is used as a primary pedagogy to spark social change. Bates (1996) delineates four movements in which the adult education field has engaged theatre as a pedagogy: theatre for education, theatre for development, theatre for conscientization, and popular theatre. Theatre for education has the primary goal of disseminating information, and learners are passive recipients of the information. There is no goal toward social or collective action in theatre for education. Theatre for development, on the other hand, begins to engage participants in solving their own problems. The nature of the problems (and a menu of solutions) is determined by the producers and presenters of the medium, which maintains an authoritarian tone in theatre for development. Building from Freire’s concepts of social action, theatre for conscientization is a means of providing group analysis of social problems by helping participants to understand the social structures that impact their experiences of their problems. Critics of theatre for conscientization maintain that while this medium helps to promote discussion and awareness, there is only a weak focus on continued collective social action.

In contrast, popular theatre builds upon the tenets of the other three modalities, adding a drive to transform dialogue into social action. The goal of popular theatre is to build conscientization and provide the necessary tools, skills, or linkages to initiate social change (Labelle, 1987). This type of theatre differs from the others in that the problem is identified from within the participants. Although a facilitator is often engaged to guide the process, he or she is a collaborator, not a leader, and facilitates discussion and the exploration of solutions,
maintaining a focus on the needs and motivations of the participants. The expected outcome of popular theatre is social change, and participants are encouraged to use the tools they have gathered in the process to continue the movement for change after the event (Bates, 1996).

**Forum Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed.** Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 2006) and Forum Theatre (Newman, 2006) are terms used interchangeably in adult education to describe the pedagogical theatre medium conceived by Augusto Boal in the 1960s. Picher (2007) specifies that Forum Theatre is one of several applications of Theatre of the Oppressed. Popular in Latin America, this pedagogy has been implemented worldwide to engage groups in collective social action with the primary goal of sparking and sustaining social change. In Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), participants reject political neutrality in favor of action to change oppressive power structures and transform cultural norms (Picher, 2007). TO is founded on six basic tenets: (a) that as human beings, we are artists capable of transforming our surroundings, (b) we all play roles in our lives and engage in our environment as actors, so we are all ‘theatre’, (c) it is the collective responsibility of society to engage around consciousness and dialogue, (d) there is a poverty of ethics in a capitalist society that limits our development to full potential as individuals and as a society, (e) there is a hegemonic power structure in society, and participants in it internalize that ideology, and (f) fulfilling our desires is a transformative act (Picher, 2007). Similar to Bhabha’s (1994) notion of a “third space”, TO allows participants to examine their quotidian roles, customs, and practices in an accessible, safe environment in which previously unexamined solutions can be played out interactively.

Although TO is widely varied in application, there are four major techniques underlying each of the applications: invisible theatre, image theatre, forum theatre, and legislative theatre (Picher, 2007). *Invisible theatre* is a form of public pedagogy in which theatre ‘emerges’ in vivo
to stimulate dialogue among participant/observers. One contemporary example of this strategy is
the anticonsumerism theatre of Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping (Sandlin,
2007). *Image theatre* employs the body, nonverbal imagery, and problem-solving to bring
awareness to internalize oppression. *Forum theatre* is a strategy rooted in Brazilian social justice
movements, and uses participants’ suggestions of problems and solution to explore alternative
solutions. The audience members become participants in forum theatre by positing alternative
solutions and joining into the problem solving discussion (Newman, 2006; Picher, 2007).
Usually geared toward problems of power and hierarchy, forum theatre allows participants to use
creative ways of knowing to explore new means of confronting oppression. *Legislative theatre*
moves forum theatre into a more political arena, encouraging groups to participate in the law-
making and public policy processes that impact their communities (Picher, 2007).

Each of these strategies focus on acting as a means of adult teaching and learning, but
focus on the audience as the learner. One of the gaps in the literature that this study seeks to
bridge is the virtual absence of the actor from this process. Nearly all discussion of theatre as an
educative tool in the field of adult education focuses on the impact that acting has on the
audience. This study seeks to examine the experience of the actor, and how his craft influences
his understanding of identity. To situate acting as a way of knowing, as it will later emerge in
the data, I would like to draw one final illustration from musical theatre. One of the most
relevant of the rock musicals for this discussion is *The Rocky Horror Show*.

**A Culminating Example-The Rocky Horror Show**

Opening in 1973, *The Rocky Horror Show* remains a cult classic on stage and in film
today. Combining the contemporaneous emergence of pulp fiction and science fiction television
and movie shows with an allegory drawing from references to The Wizard of Oz, *The Rocky
*Horror Show* represents the voice of a sexual revolution (Knapp, 2006). *Rocky Horror* draws upon (and overturns) the traditional notions of masculinity and femininity to portray sexual identity by blurring the lines of gender and sexual orientation. It provides a voyeuristic look into the sexualized *other* through a fantasy world in which characters Brad and Janet are "good kids gone wrong" are seduced both by the gender-bending Frank and by Rocky, the monster Frank created to meet his own sexual needs (Knapp, 2006). The dream world in which their sexual seduction happens is a portrayal of ambiguous and androgynous sexuality. The boundaries of heterosexuality are unclear, with the focus being on a liberation from sexual repression rather than the discovery of a particular identity. Sexual liberation through cross-gendered experimentation is a theme that appears in several American productions of the same era—*Cabaret* in 1966 and *Pippin* in 1972, for example. These examples illustrate the position espoused by Clum (1999), in which LGB characters are emphasized through crossdressing, androgyny, or otherwise problematizing their sexual identities. These examples echo the radical deconstruction of gender as espoused by Butler (1993), and provide a means for confronting social norms and creating discursive spaces around gender and sexuality.

In the literature of adult education, this echoes the sentiments of Guy (2007) and Giroux (2002) who suggest that characters of a minority status are often portrayed in a way that will reinforce stereotypic traits expected by members of the majority culture. In other words, LGB character portrayal should reinforce dominant culture stereotypes. For the actor, this may reinforce the stereotype, and provide limited opportunity to find one's own voice in character portrayal. As Russell (2007) and others assert, this oppression may cause the internalization of dominant culture narratives and influence how both personal and cultural identities form (Clum, 1999; Knapp, 2006). The internalization of harmful cultural narratives may negatively impact
development, as it reinforces the narratives that the individual strives to overcome (D'Augelli, 1994).

Finally, the plot of Rocky illustrates the liberation that can occur when individuals, here Brad and Janet, come together with others in a community of knowing and learning, in which they can become vulnerable and question their core values. Similarly, this literature review suggests that the actors portraying Brad and Janet may experience a similarly liberating experience; an experience echoed by two participants’ stories in Chapter Four. It is the immersion of Brad and Janet in that liberating space that allows them to know and understand their sexual identities; it is also the actors' immersion in the community of practice that provides a space to know and understand as well. This illustration holds significant implications for the research questions addressed by this study. In the concluding section of this chapter, I return to the research questions and integrate the literature in response to those questions.

**Implications for the Research Questions**

Those who were trained as actors are familiar with the scenario illustrated by lyricist Edward Kleban’s line from A Chorus Line (1979), in which an acting teacher encourages his student to “be a table, be a sportscar…ice cream cone”. Actors constantly are called upon to portray a new, temporary identity. They combine our personal and social identities with that of the character, using our own experience of emotions, intuition, and spiritual history to create the character. Susan Russell (2007) speaks to this process as having implications both for actors’ portrayals of characters and the actors’ cultural identities. She points out that traditional schools of acting have rooted themselves in culturally-defined power structures and a reflection of unconscious stifling of the identity of the actor himself or herself. Thus, she advocates for a new
method of actor training in which the actor can engage in a more diverse cultural conversation with the text and create a more personalized enactment of physical and creative interpretation.

This conflict between identity and training is also applied to vocal training for actors as an embodied experience, rather than focusing on the mechanics of speech and searching for the internal justifications for character found in traditional actor training (Watson, 2003). This exploration of the influence of actor training on identity is perhaps exemplified in Walsh-Bowers’ (2006) discussion of the influence of dramaturgical metaphor on the identity development of the actor. Applying Goffman’s (1956) sociological model of social acting (portraying ‘roles’ in our daily lives), Walsh-Bowers looks at the balance between observing, connecting and performing selves in the acting literature, and the actors placement in an intermediary space between the character’s identity and their own. He suggests that actors must internalize fluid personal boundaries in their art, and consequently, they have the propensity to do the same in their personal identities. This allows them to be more open to potentially transformative experiences in their exploration of characters and the fusion of self and character. This study rests on the assumption that actors are aware of or can become aware of the phenomenon that Walsh-Bowers describes--that actors can be aware of the space between acting and the self, and can navigate the interrelationship between acting and one's own identity.

This study is grounded in adult development with the assumption that there is a link between the acting and adult identity development. By examining the situation of the actor within the communities of theatre and acting, one can extrapolate the synergy of these communities work to place the actor in a space that safely facilitates identity development; while the community of theatre creates safety and support, acting itself opens the liminal spaces for critical reflection. As critical reflection occurs, the actor can examine the factors that have
shaped his or her identity; he or she is not a product of the acting process (as asserted by Russell, 2007, for example), but acting can be a means for liberation.

Through this review, I illustrate that acting may provide the reflective space needed to progress toward a LGB identity as defined by D'Augelli (1994). For example, how might an actor playing Brad or Janet in *The Rocky Horror Show* experience a sexual liberation through the portrayal of Brad's or Janet's sexual exploration? Or, how might that portrayal, if handled differently, produce shame for the actor and stifle sexual identity development?

Throughout the first two chapters of this study, I illustrate this question with the story of Aaron, and the significant impact that the role of Matt in *DOG SEES GOD* has for him. Matt's homophobia impacted Aaron to the point of clinical depression. Enacting Matt was too ego dystonic for Aaron, and he was emotionally and physically impacted in a significant way.

The theatre review literature and trade publications provide countless descriptions of the portrayal of sexual identity in American theatre, often with speculations about the impact that these portrayals may have for spectators. While some studies describe the impact of character portrayal on ideas of sexual orientation for the actor (Bosson, Taylor, & Prewitt-Freillino, 2006; Gilbert, 1994), to date, there has been no study grounded in adult education to explore this phenomenon. Further, none of the studies published to date have bridged the gap between discussions of sexual orientation portrayal in theatre and the lifespan sexual identity development model described by D'Augelli (1994). This study stands alone in bringing together two disparate fields of study, while also using the actor as the unit of analysis.

In the next chapter, I will revisit Clark and Rossiter's (2007) notions of theatre as narrative and describe a study in which I will gather the stories of actors, and in partnership with
the participant, make meaning of those stories to illustrate ways in which character development
can guide reflection on the structures of power that he or she intends to portray.
CHAPTER THREE

Acting is the process of telling a story by developing and embodying a character who interacts with other characters’ stories. This process demands an introspective approach from the actor in order to breathe his or her own life into the character, often leading to an exploration of the actor’s own perspectives and experiences. The purpose of this narrative study was to examine the experiences of actors to determine how their participation in acting might have influenced their understandings of their own identities. This study investigated learning and meaning making at the intersection of identity development and the practice of acting.

I will begin this chapter with a brief description of qualitative research and will then describe the narrative approach to qualitative research methods. I will then position myself as the researcher in this paradigm and describe the relevance of my experience to my study. Finally, I will describe the study itself, the participants, data collection methods, analysis, and the measures taken to ensure reliability of the data.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

Qualitative research methods are used to generate rich, detailed data from a small participant population. Often used to explore particular experiences of a focused sample of human participants, qualitative research methodologies derive primarily from the social sciences and are useful to explore the lived experiences of participants in research (Patton, 2002). In this section, I will review the major tenets of qualitative research and relate them to the purpose of this study.

Rather than describing causal or predictive relationships, qualitative research methods seek to investigate the meaning of a studied phenomenon to those who it impacts (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). This implies that rather than attempting to generalize the
impact of a phenomenon on a population, qualitative data seek to uncover the many realities of
the social world from the perspective of a particular group of research participants in their own
process of deriving meaning. Qualitative research does not espouse a positivist perspective on
research, but maintains a more focused constructivist approach on the lived experience of a
smaller population.

Qualitative data may be collected in vivo, within the setting or population being studied
(Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Patton, 2002). This naturalistic approach allows the researcher to
study phenomena as they occur, rather than attempting to affect change on a population (Lincoln
& Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). In other words, the researcher is involved actively in the research
process, without the positivist assumption of neutrality and invisibility in the process (Patton,
2002). This project includes specific safeguards to examine the subjectivity of the researcher
and his research, described later in this chapter.

The primary purpose of qualitative research is to understand the experience of an
individual or group, and how individuals interpret their experiences. Merriam (2002) states that
"the key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially
constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (p. 3); that is, it is the perspective of
the individual participant upon which the qualitative researcher makes meaning.

In contrast with those engaged in other types of research, qualitative researchers are, at
times, directly engaged with the participants they study through their fieldwork. Engagement in
the research process allows the researcher to explore the lived experiences of the participants
while collecting data, and to explore idiosyncratic responses and triangulate his or her data set as
it is being collected (Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Patton, 2002). This provides one of the unique
qualities of qualitative research—the capacity to clarify and further explore the data as they are
collected—through the use of the researcher as the primary tool or active instrument of the data collection process (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Research is inherently value-bound (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), and qualitative practitioners recognize the unique perspective afforded to their research through their participation in it, in the sense that the researcher is visible to the participants when data are collection (Hendry, 2007; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). In order to control for the role of the researcher, I explored my potential biases before the study began (Lutrell, 2010), monitored my role in the study throughout the data collection process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and ensured that the story shared here is accurately told through the voice of the participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clark & Rossiter, 2006; Hendry, 2007; Reissman, 1993). I describe the safeguards specific to this project later in this chapter.

Different research methodologies often reflect the philosophical underpinnings and assumptions of their respective studies (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln, 2011). These philosophies shape how the researcher formulates his or her research problems and questions, and how he or she views knowledge and its construction through the research. In this study, I espoused a transformative framework (Creswell, 2013) for its assumption that knowledge is power-laden and can empower the participant in the research. This type of qualitative research has an agenda to address hegemony and provide an opportunity for the participant to learn through the research in which he or she participates.

This study sought to explore and describe how participants' engagement in acting might influence the development of their own identities. This experience was interpreted differently by each participant, and the data generated are the interpretation and meaning-making process for each individual rather than a specific, measurable variable.
A Narrative Research Design

Qualitative inquiry draws from many theoretical traditions; each historically rooted in a discipline of study, and seeks to answer specific questions about the research population (Patton, 2002). One approach to qualitative research, narrative inquiry, focuses on the participants’ descriptions of an experience, and explores what their stories reveal about the experience from which they came. Narrative inquiry is rooted in the idea that our lives are constructed of stories, and we understand our lived experiences through those stories. It examines the stories of a person or group, and “provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it” (Patton, 2002, p. 115), offering a “translucent window into cultural and social meanings” (p. 116). Several guiding assumptions distinguish narrative inquiry from other methods of qualitative research. First, the focus on narrative inquiry is on the research participant, and how he or she tells the story or perceives the event or phenomenon being described. Narrative, as a living perspective, is an active process, and the reader must recognize the perspective of the narrator. In her discussion of the art of the narrative, Clark emphasizes the delivery of the narrative, particularly "the power inherent within the structure of narrative, the choice of language, the very way things are said and not said, to convey meaning as forcefully as the content" (Clark & Rossiter, 2007, p. 8). Narratives are stories in context, and the context and experience of the individual telling the story influences what is shared and how the story is told. Finally, narratives are also shared through the lens of the researcher, and his or her interpretation or perspective on the story also influences the final product of narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005). Narrative research attends to both the spoken word and the emotionality, multiple meanings, and vulnerability of the research participant (Bochner, 2001). Actors, by their training, focus on the delivery and conveyance of messages, the emotionality behind the message, and the motivation
that drives the message; actors live in subtext. This methodology was familiar and comfortable, and mirrors the acting process, as remarked by some participants.

**What Distinguishes Narrative Research?**

Comparing narrative research to other strategies for collecting qualitative data, Hopkins (2009) distinguishes narrative research as the most powerful strategy to give voice to a marginalized group or person. She suggests that telling personal narratives gives voice to both the topic and the storyteller in a way that other research methodologies fall short. This aspect of narrative research privileges it as the ideal methodology for my study, and reflects Creswell's (2013) assertion that transformative methodologies can empower marginalized individuals and groups. I illustrate this in my study by collecting narratives from participants who may not have otherwise found a space to overtly tell their stories (although I believe their stories are told indirectly through their craft). Adult educators Clark and Rossiter (2007) frame narrative as a primary means of meaning-making: "we make sense of our experience, day by day and across the lifespan, by putting it into story form" (p. 3). Also, narrative research can be subversive in its empowerment of the stories and the storytellers that confront a dominant narrative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This potential for confrontation of the dominant narrative provides support for using this research method in this study. When conducting narrative research, "the interview is a negotiated text, a site where power, gender, race and class intersect" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 47), and becomes a space for critically examining these facets of experience. The narrative method provides a space for the research participant to give voice to stories about their life experiences that may counter the dominant narrative structure.

Chase (2010), in her overview of the history of narrative research, points to significant contributions of narrative in the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s as a means of
providing voice to previously under-represented stories and identifying counternarratives in which individuals (particularly women in the feminist movement) storied their own lives. She demonstrates that narrative research will focus on the self within cultural contexts, creating space for a critical examination of the ways in which those contexts influence the narrative and the meaning-making process.

Merriam and Clark (2006) link narrative as an essential tool for describing identity, viewing identity as a continuously-constructed narrative, creating the story of one's self and one's experiences. They draw on both modernist and postmodern structures of identity as unitary and fluid to support the link between identity development and narrative (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Merriam & Clark, 2006).

**Approaches to Narrative Research**

There are five approaches to collecting narratives (Chase, 2005). The psychological approach focuses on the relationship between the stories an individual tells and their psychosocial development, while others espouse a sociological approach, which focuses on the contexts or cultures in which stories emerge. A third, contextual approach focuses on stories of specific facets of the individual’s life-in-context. The ethnographic approach focuses on the relationship between the individual and his or her culture or context, and autoethnographic narratives are told from the researcher’s perspective.

For the purposes of this study, Chase's (2005) psychological approach seems the most appropriate model for collecting narratives. This study focuses on the stories of actors and how their experiences as actors have shaped their own life stories. Relationships between their craft and their identity become the units of analysis, and the rich data generated through their recollections will reflect the intersections between the characters' experiences and their own.
Although the narratives contained here are person-in-context stories, the focus of the narratives in this study is on psychological development and the experience with the individual as the unit of analysis. I have focused, therefore, on the psychological approach as defined by Chase.

As a play describes the life and times of the character, the personal narratives describe the lives of the participants. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that narratives should not situate stories in the past as the subjects have been, but as vital stories of becoming; the action taking precedence over a rooted history. Participants in this study have the stories of their own development and how it may have been informed by experiences without necessarily situating the narrative within a cultural context. As well, the transformative paradigm of this research suggests that the telling of the story could provide the impetus for psychosocial development.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe an approach to narrative inquiry that sets the stage to examine personal narratives through a psychological lens. Their approach positions the storyteller, as in fictional stories, to create setting, plot, and mis-en-scène; through this approach, the narrative brings to life a problem, conflict, or struggle through representations of character (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Kenyon and Randall (1997) position the researcher as an empathic storylistener who can assist in a three-stage re-storying process with the participant. These stages, telling, reading, and retelling, allow the individual to construct their story, critically examine it, and re-create the story as they begin to make sense of the experience. By actively engaging the participant in the storying and re-storying process, the researcher aims to guide the narrative in order to better explore the emerging themes and patterns. The researcher analyzes data in the form of these themes and patterns and, together with the participant, reconstitutes the story. The researcher becomes, in a sense, a co-narrator in the re-storying processes he or she negotiates with the participant on the researcher's means of retelling the story (Clandinin &
This negotiation determines which aspects of the original story become the focus for the written story (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002) and reflects the facets of the story that have been the most influential for the participant (Creswell, 2013).

Drawing on Kenyon and Randall’s (1997) three-stage process for restorying a narrative, Clark and Rossiter (2007) describe the narrative process as one of becoming the story, rather than telling the story. In a play, actors draw on cues from the plot and setting to infer the experiences and motivations of the character. In this research process, the participants recalled and examined their own life stories in much the same process, to explore how their involvement in the performance arts has shaped their life story and the role that their training and development as actors has influenced the adult they have become.

**Dealing with the Critiques of Narrative Research**

The inner subjectivity of narrative and the co-creation of a story between the researcher and participant, while lending a unique benefit to the depth and vividness of narrative research, may also present the strongest critique of the methodology. While narrative research seeks to give authentic voice to the participant, the process of breaking a narrative into a series of events, patterns, or themes may act to erase part of the lived experience (Hendry, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explicitly describe the renegotiation of the story throughout the analytic process. While they assert that this process seeks to emphasize themes and relationships within the narrative, there could be a loss of authenticity as the researcher’s voice becomes interwoven with those of the participants. These themes and relationships are also reflected socially, or compared to the stories of others or broader social concerns or movements (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).
The role of the researcher in the restorying process can be framed through the collaborative relationship that she or he has with the narrator. Chase (2005) describes these relationships as voices, and categorizes them as **authoritative, supportive, or interactive**, each differing in the balance between the narrator’s and researcher’s voices. Each of these methods privileges that researcher’s voice in a different way, and differently influences the final narrative product. The authoritative voice shines in narratives derived from "how and what questions" (Chase, 2010, p. 222). Although a cursory examination of this voice may suggest that the researcher's voice is over-represented, Chase makes the case for her work through this lens as being particularly influential in identifying grand narratives in hegemonic discourse, as they bring to light sociocultural influences in the everyday world that may be un-challenged by the narrator. Conversely, the supportive voice relies more heavily on the voice of the narrator, and is common in performance of life stories using the "I" pronoun (Chase, 2010). This strategy allows for greater authenticity to the voice of the participant but provides less space for critical analysis of the narrative. The interactive voice represents a complex intersubjectivity between the participants' and researcher's voices, and allows the researcher to position himself or herself within the narrative. This creates a mutual vulnerability between the researcher and participant, and gives voice to the mutuality of the relationship between the two (Chase, 2010). For this study, the interactive voice proved to be the most appropriate type of interaction between me as the interviewer and my participants. I was transparent in my own experiences with the performing arts and how art has shaped my identity; my emic position was likely relevant in the co-construction of the narrative. Clark & Rossiter (2007) specifically draw a link between theatre and narrative, providing several examples of how theatre and narrative are similar media for storytelling. Because theatre is enacted storytelling, narrative is likely a natural and
comfortable medium through which to engage actors. There remains, however, a caveat that the final product of the research is a reconstitution through the voice of the researcher of the narrative. Here, I have controlled for that somewhat by using the participants' exact words, to share the stories as each participants related them to me.

Clark and Rossiter (2007) draw on the multidisciplinary works of several other researchers in their overall analysis of narrative construction. They point to interpretation as a necessary facet of understanding narrative; a sequence of events alone cannot bear meaning without interpretation. It can, in fact, be this process that draws attention to some underlying meaning to the narrative for the teller.

**Background of the Researcher**

This study was driven primarily by my own love for and lifelong involvement in musical theatre and my professional interest in identity development as a behavioral sciences professor. Since I first appeared on the musical theatre stage as a child, I have been enamored with the process of breaking through the fourth wall of the stage and moving the audience at the most personal levels. Only as an adult and in off-stage production and direction roles have I begun to realize the power of theatre to break through our own walls as individuals and to influence how our acting craft can shape who we become and how we view the world. In that, this research was fueled, in part, by personal exploration.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the ways in which the adult education and theatre education literature, as well as theatre review and trade literature, describe the experience of theatre as a site of learning and a community of practice. The literature in Chapter Two describes opportunities for actors to learn through collaboration with each other and in understanding their own physical bodies. The gap between these experiences and identity development remains
unbridged. One purpose of this study is to bridge the gap between this body of knowledge and the scant literature examining the experiences of actors through their own stories.

The narrative approach to this study draws on my love of theatre as well. Theatre is story-in-motion. Acting is the art of bringing a story to life and integrating ourselves into someone else’s story. Actors thrive in stories, and live to tell them. For an actor studying other actors, the tenets of narrative inquiry are the most natural approach to foster a relationship with participants, elicit their stories, and analyze the data. The use of narratives allows the actor-participant to approach his or her story as he or she would a character, creating a safe space in which the story can be shared in a manner comfortable and familiar to the actor. Clark and Rossiter (2007) describe narrative as a way of knowing, and draw the parallel between theatre and narrative. This methodology draws on what is familiar to the participants and creates a space in which the participants can engage in critical reflection and learning. Clark (1999) describes the significant learning that can happen through the telling of a personal narrative; Hammack and Cohler (2011) apply this specifically to identity development in gay men and lesbian women. In particular, they posit that narrative can assist in the meaning-making process as the individual navigates and negotiates between social and intrapersonal influences on identity.

My own involvement with the theatre allowed me to more readily identify participants for the study and provided us with common language and set of experiences. The impact of being a member of the group being studied may perhaps have led research participants to talk more freely based on our common backgrounds. This relationship between the researcher and participants, I believe, provided a richer, more detailed set of stories (Chase, 2005).
Riessman (1991) addresses the researcher’s role in the process as both a source of enrichment and a possible source of bias. My participation in the theatre certainly drove the direction of my research, the areas that I chose to explore with participants, and my presupposed notions of the outcomes. It is a dual-edged sword in that the emic perspective that allowed me to foster relationships and find commonalities with research participant may have also blinded me to perspectives that did not fit my expectations. Denzin (1970) asserts that social research must be situated in the reality that is under analysis, while pointing out that observers from the inside may often overlook contradictory findings inadvertently. Several of the safeguards described later helped to ensure the dependability of the data, but it is important that I address transparency in my role as both researcher and theatre artist.

From the outset of participant identification and selection, I self-identified as both an artist and student-researcher. I shared my own background story as an individual who "grew up" in the arts; while I primarily identify as a musician, not an actor, I have experiences on the stage that lend familiarity to the experience. Having trained in acting during my undergraduate study, I shared common experiences that became impetuses for discussion, or to affirm or reassure participants as they explored their own stories.

I am a counselor by profession; interviewing skills are the primary modality of my practical communication. Without intent to deceive, I did not always share this information with participants freely. While I believe my background in counseling facilitated communication, I worried that my identification as a counselor may blur the lines between interviewing and therapy, should an emotionally-laden discussion emerge. My role as the researcher in this setting was limited to engaging in discussion to collect data, but not to process issues of emotional stress with participants.
Participant Selection

For the purposes of this study, I selected 9 participants from a purposeful sample. Purposeful sampling, or selecting case intentionally to represent the phenomenon being described, allows for the in-depth exploration of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). I used the following criteria to select a representative purposeful sample:

1. All of my participants were aged 25 or older. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) posit that an individual must be of an adequate chronological and developmental age to engage in the reflective work described in this study. By eliminating participants who were younger than 25 years old, I hoped that the selected participants were developmentally appropriate for the study.

2. All of my participants were men. While the theoretical framework for this study, D'Augelli's (1994) lifespan developmental model, explicitly addresses the identities of men and women, the experiences of female participants in early iterations of this study proved to be quite disparate from the experiences of men. By focusing more closely on the experiences of male participants, I can more vividly illustrate their similarities in-group. In Chapter 6, I make the case for a study exclusive to female participants.

3. Participants were required to have had training as actors, formally or informally. Often, amateur actors are trained in vivo, rather than receiving formal training in their craft, being specifically trained for roles as they emerge, rather than attending school for training. Each of the actors in this study was trained in some professional capacity, with all but one having studied theatre in college.

4. Because this study focuses on narratives as living stories-in-progress, I engaged only participants who were currently or recently engaged in the art of acting. For selection in
this study, participants needed to have been engaged in theatre work in the most recent year prior to the interview. As well, I selected only participants who had been engaged in theatre for at least 5 years. Most of my participants were actively engaged in acting at the time of the interview, and their engagement in acting without exception began in childhood.

5. To ensure a rich and vivid data set, and a more holistic view of actors, I made an effort to select a culturally heterogeneous set of participants. The participants in this study vary by age, adult socioeconomic status, race, and ethnic identity. I address the demographic make-up of the participant pool more specifically in my discussion of the limitations of the scope of this study in Chapter 6.

6. Participants in this study were all sex and gender concordant, and identified as cisgender. The theoretical framework used in this study does not account readily for transsexual or transgender identities. This did result in the exclusion of one potential participant from the study; she agreed to participate in a follow-up study at a later date.

7. With the exception of Aaron, with whom I was acquainted prior to the study, I recruited participants exclusively through social media. I posted announcements on my personal Facebook page, and on the Facebook pages of alumni groups in my undergraduate and graduate schools' theatre departments. Several of my friends in the theatre and professional colleagues promoted my posts and made personal connections to friends who they thought may be interested in participating. Two of the participants, Ted and Michael, responded to my call for participants on theatre alumni message boards; the remaining participants are the friends of my friends and colleagues.
8. In addition to the initial purposeful sampling of participants, I employed a chain sampling strategy to seek additional participants based on the recommendations of those with whom I initially spoke about the study. This yielded no additional participants.

9. After the first social media contacts, I contacted participants by email directly to provide more information about the study, the expectations placed on participants, and the assurances of privacy.

**Data Collection**

Qualitative researchers compile data through a variety of collection methods, some shared across research paradigms (surveys and interviews) and others unique to a research paradigm (as participant-researchers in action research, for example) (Cresswell, 2003). Specific to narrative research, Czarniawska (2004) describes three strategies through which to collect data: recording spontaneous incidents, eliciting stories through interviews, and collecting stories after the fact from third-party sources. For this study, interviews provided the most direct and purposeful source of narratives. I utilized semi-structured interviews, combining a standardized set of questions with opportunities to probe and explore particular areas of interest. This provided some uniformity to the interviews while allowing the participant to explore his own narrative within the interview (Patton, 2002). I found that I relied heavily on my counseling skills to both ask appropriate follow-up questions and to track the narrative as the participant shared his story.

Participants who screened as eligible for the study as described in the criteria above participated in semi-structured interviews designed to explore both their experiences in the theatre and the grand theme of sexual identity development described in the literature in Chapter 2. These interviews began with questions about the participants' participation in theatre; I
intentionally chose to begin with our shared theatre experiences to build rapport. Later, I asked questions about the participants' coming out stories, and used follow-up questions geared to probe the specific processes described by D'Augelli (1994) in his model, and the relationship between those processes and the participants' acting experiences. Appendix A contains a comprehensive list of interview questions used to begin the discussion with my participants.

Interview settings varied based on the availability of space and the comfort of the participant. I conducted interviews in four locations (Baltimore, New York City, Chicago, and Central New Jersey); the specific interview settings varied based on the location and availability of space. The interviews in New York City took place in rented office spaces in Manhattan, while the Chicago Public Library offered their meeting rooms free of charge for my interviews. Most of the interviews in Baltimore took place in my office at the college where I am employed; one participant, Sean, chose to meet in a conference room in his apartment building. Andy was the only interviewee who suggested that we meet in his home.

The interviews varied in time somewhat, but each lasted about two hours. None of the participants chose to take a break during the interview. One of my primary concerns was climate-setting during the interview, and I hoped to help the participants feel at ease in telling their stories on their own terms by conveying receptive listening (Chase, 2005; Patton, 2002).

The informal structure of the interview provided a balance of power between me as the researcher and the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Researchers who develop a collaborative relationship and espouse a participatory relationship in the interview process glean more rich data than those who structure their interviews as question and answer sessions. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) approach allows the research participant to guide the interview process within a loose framework to "tell their stories their own way" (p. 111). Following
Andersen and Jack (1991), I focused on the process and interaction in the interview, rather than focusing on a specific set of questions.

Allowing the participant the power to tell his own story with supportive follow up questions created an interview structure that was highly variable from participant to participant, but facilitated more intimate and information-rich data than a structured and authoritative interview. Compared to other qualitative strategies, interviews provide greater depth and are especially helpful when the information sought is very personal or emotionally-loaded (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). By establishing rapport and using an encouraging interview style, I allowed the participant to navigate his story himself, and arrive at the more personal and emotion topics on his time and terms.

To protect their privacy, participants were offered the opportunity to select pseudonyms by which they would be identified throughout this study. Aaron and Michael are known here by pseudonyms, while the remaining participants have chosen to use their given names. While I've chosen at times to obscure personal details about the participants to protect their privacy or the privacy of others, none of the participants explicitly asked that his personal identifying information be changed. One participant, Michael, asked at one point to stop audio recording the interview to share a story privately; we stopped recording for about two minutes while he shared that story.

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by an independent, professional transcriptionist. We used secure, password-protected electronic resources to transmit the recordings and transcripts online, to further protect the privacy of the participants and the integrity of the data.
While the primary data source in this study was the set of interview transcripts, the use of interviews alone and the separation of interviews from other data collection strategies would result in an artificial, fragmented, and narrowly-scoped study. In addition to the interviews, I employed field notes to record objective observations during the interviews and subjective feelings immediately following each interview. As well, I added a second set of notes as I listened to the interview recordings. Each set of notes appeared in a different color for organization by time. While the objective field notes helped in data analysis, the subjective notes provided a space to reflect upon my own role in the process, explore potential biases, and critique my interviewing skills (Cresswell, 2013; Moen, 2006, Patton, 2002).

The initial interviews, with subsequent field notes and journaling, provided only the first steps in data collection. Inherent in the narrative inquiry is collaboration between the interviewee and researcher during data analysis. Because the data from the initial interview were not organized in a linear narrative, the interview data were merely an initial text to which participants added and removed further data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Patton, 2002). In the next section, I will describe the participants' and interviewers' roles in the analytic process.

**Data Analysis**

The first step in data analysis required me to compare the transcripts to the recordings. While I employed a professional transcriptionist to provide verbatim transcripts, sometimes it was difficult for her to accurately hear or identify words; this was particularly true of acting jargon and discussions of specific shows and characters. I employed an early member check by allowing the participants to verify the content of the transcripts prior to analysis.

After annotating my subjective and objective notes into the corrected and verified transcripts, I returned to the three-dimensional narrative analytic model described by Clandinin
and Connelly (2000) to provide a framework for initial analysis. Looking first at interaction, situation, and continuity, I was able to ask follow-up questions to round out any areas of the narratives that seemed to be missing. As I began to move toward continuity in the stories, I realized that continuity and chronology are distinct and disparate concepts. My initial attempts to tell stories chronologically resulted in uninteresting and discontinuous stories; I settled on organizing continuous stories that, in some cases, appear to be written without regard to chronology. The result, as my participants and I agreed, was a more readable product that we could more readily analyze thematically. As well, the three dimensions of analysis set the stage for the areas of each participant's story that he positioned in the foreground.

A coding strategy described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) that begins with examining characters, simple plotlines, settings, and sources of tension provided the first level of the analytic process. While some researchers advocate for computer coding strategies, I preferred to work with my participants to identify emerging themes using a manual coding process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pillow, 2002). The initial coding of characters, plotlines, settings, and tensions provided an impetus for discussion and follow-up questions for the participants. As well, the observations that I documented in my field notes became especially relevant as I recalled changes in body language and eye contact that might reveal areas of tension. It was around the exploration of tension that I realized that rich data was contained in what my participants chose to say and especially what they chose not to share. My field notes and the ex post facto memories of the participants provided a more rich layer of information and analysis as we worked together in this stage.

The participants' next readings of the interim text provided them another opportunity to find meaning in the story, particularly around social interactions. For example, Andy shared a
lot about his relationship with his wife during our interview and subsequent conversations. It was later, however, that we talked a bit about how she might have come to understand their relationship in light of her own experiences and perspectives. In this case, the collaborative analytic process triggered a discussion of greater depth and the consideration of alternate perspectives in his story. His story, in this case, found a different structure as we integrated that theme. Loosely guided by me as the researcher, the stories in Chapter Four become renegotiated and retold, with the final result being a collaborative effort between the participants and me.

One significant area of discussion around the presentation of the stories centered around the grammar and vocabulary presented in the original drafts. To provide a true and accurate portrayal of the interview, as well as to provide authentic voice to my participants, the first several drafts that participants reviewed were presented to them in their exact words, including pauses, hesitations, and slang. Several participants asked that their language be portrayed in a less conversational manner for greater readability. In Chapter Four, I maintain a somewhat conversational telling of the stories, but in a slightly more organized prose than the original transcripts. I have chosen, however, to leave the bulk of the participants' language intact, including use of slang and profanity. To whitewash the stories, I believe, also de-emphasizes important points that the participants make and removes their authentic voices from the narrative.

As one might expect, some participants were more active than others in this process; the stories of those participants shifted more significantly from the original transcript than others. Some participants chose to be very active in the process and provided feedback on several drafts of the stories. One participant offered very little to the analytic process. Another limited his feedback to a critique of the writing style used in the verbatim transcript, and asked that a few statements be removed because he did not remember saying them.
The narrative model used here to fashion the stories presented in Chapter Four is somewhat complex and multifaceted. Figure 1 below illustrates a graphic representation of the model used for data analysis in this study and summarizes the process described above. Each descending arrow in this graphic represents an interaction between the participant and the researcher.

Figure 1: Data Analysis Process

I've chosen here to present the narratives using a linear, rather than a thematic approach. This afforded my participants and I the opportunity to organize the restoryed narrative somewhat chronologically (although not always), with a focus on highlighting issues of tension and conflict. The narratives analyzed in this way present the reader with a foregrounded focus on plot tension and resolution, and provides greater authenticity to the narrative, as it is a
reorganization rather than an interpretation of the original (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). The resultant narratives provide only one level of the analysis in this study. In a sense, the narratives themselves became the final data set on which a second layer of thematic analysis took place. In the next section, I will describe the analysis that I present in Chapter Five.

**Thematic Analysis**

As an additional layer of analysis for the narratives presented in Chapter Four, I used a constant comparative analysis to identify cross-case commonalities (Creswell, 2013; Glasser, 1965). The cross-case comparison methodology allowed me to explore how common threads were woven throughout the story. Using the restoryed narratives as the final field text, I read the narratives to identify themes as they emerged. I coded examples within the narrative text using a simple manual color coding, searching for themes within the stories. Within each story, I used the participants' statements, observations, and descriptions as data to support the common themes, presenting data that both illustrated the cross-case commonalities and explained the unique experiences of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As I interpreted the data across broad themes, it became necessary at times to refine or restate themes as units of analysis. I attended to Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, and Coleman (2000), who urge the researcher to be both attentive and tentative in this process—attentive to the messages in the data, but tentative in assigning categories and themes. I remained somewhat flexible in refining themes, as each theme emerged differently within each participant's story.

I present the findings here in two chapters. In Chapter Four, I present the stories of the participants in the participants' authentic voices. Each of their stories stand alone as that participant's reflective testimony to the power of acting to impact his identity development. The themes that emerged in those stories as we highlighted them together in the restorying process
set the stage for Chapter Five, which offers an analysis of the themes and offers unity within the
diversity of the participants. This second interpretation of the narratives seeks to demonstrate the
trustworthiness of the data, as it provides some weight to the similarity of each story. In the next
section, I discuss additional steps that I took to ensure that the data presented here are
trustworthy.

**Trustworthiness of the Data**

As I collected interview data, I maintained the recordings and transcripts in a secure and
confidential location. All of the electronic files, both static and transmitted, have been password-
protected; all of the paper files, my field notes and annotated texts, have been stored securely.
During the data analysis process, I have taken several steps to ensure that I am presenting
accurate representations of the participants' stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the
role of the researcher in shaping the participants' narratives and advocate for a strong relationship
between the researchers and participants to ensure for the collection and analysis of the most
accurate data possible.

In my research methodology, the data verification process is inherent in the analysis, as
the participants and researcher examine the text drafts at each stage. While this presents a
strength in the verification of the data, this aspect of narrative inquiry is perhaps one of the
strongest critiques as well. Some critics believe that the role of the researcher in restorying the
narrative collaboratively erases part of the lived experience of the participant (Hendry, 2007).
Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explicitly describe the renegotiation of the story throughout the
analytic process. While that they assert that the process seeks to emphasize themes and
relationships in the narrative, there may be a loss of authenticity as the researcher's voice
becomes interwoven with the voices of the participants. This is evident in my study as I point
out earlier in this chapter that I do change some of the language used by my participants to ensure readability.

Conversely, Clark and Rossiter (2007) view this process as one in which themes can be uncovered to create meaning of lived experience--the criterion of measure is not in the events themselves, but in the assessment and interpretation of those events. The events cannot stand alone to create meaning; some interpretation is required. Narrative is the process of creating meaning from the sequences of events that we experience (Clark & Rossiter, 2006).

These themes and relationships are also interjected socially, or compared to the stories of others or broader social concerns or movements (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This process, however, becomes imperative as narratives become vehicles for reflection and change. The researcher's guidance around attending to the structure of the narrative, themes and patterns previously unnoticed, and the power of the words spoken or left unspoken, allows the participant to uncover meanings within his or her own narrative (Clark & Rossiter, 2007). Safeguards to establish trustworthiness to the meaning of the narrative include collaboration with the participant, careful transcription of the story, and frequent member checks, or verification that the narrative is authentic (Hendry, 2007; Reissman, 1993).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) advocate for a unique set of verification criteria for narrative inquiry. They remove the validity, reliability, and generalizability advocated in other forms of research in favor of transparency, verisimilitude, transferability, and authenticity (Clark & Rossiter, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Reissman, 1993). In the next several sections, I describe the safeguards through which I ensure transparency, verisimilitude, transferability, and authenticity.

Transparency
Transparency is the need for the researcher to be open about his or her biases and assumptions about the research and the research participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My own situation within the world of theatre and my own training provide inherent biases and assumptions that influence the types of questions I asked and the areas in which I chose to focus both the interview and the interpretation of data. As I shared in Chapter One, this research is driven by several assumptions held by the researcher. I have made every effort to be open about those assumptions and biases throughout the research process, beginning with the research design, but especially when working through the data analysis and story negotiation processes. To further ensure transparency in the research, I engaged in personal reflective journaling to explore and document personal impressions, assumptions, and possible biases throughout the process. I used the model for reflexive writing suggested by Luttrell (2010) to identify my presumptions and beliefs about my research topic (and subsequently, my participants), designing interview questions and participant selection, and analyzing the data. Her exercises are grounded in the understanding that qualitative research is a highly personal methodology for the researcher, and that the researcher's participation in the data is inevitable. Her structured journaling model helped me to be aware of my assumptions and maintain transparency in my research.

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**Verisimilitude**

Just as the actor employs verisimilitude to ensure that his or her product is recognizable through the audience's eyes, a researcher must also ensure that there is truth behind his or her research. This rests on the authentic voices of both researcher and participant, and the use of triangulation to support different data sources in the same method (i.e. the same themes emerge in multiple interviews) to ensure that the narrative interpretation is realistic and representative of the scenario being described (Patton, 2002). Clark and Rossiter (2006) describe this as "narrative intelligibility" (p. 24) and set the expectation that a narrative is to some extent recognizable to the reader within reasonable social conventions.
To ensure verisimilitude, I have used member checks, in which the participants read their narratives several times to ensure accuracy and truthfulness to the story. As well, the appearance of ubiquitous themes across all of the data ensures verisimilitude.

**Transferability**

Transferability is the notion that, in a similar context, similar data would be derived (Patton, 2002). Again, this is ensured through triangulation of the data within the same method and further supported by the internal congruence of the themes emerging between the individual interviews. The extrapolation of data into similar circumstances, or making thoughtful recommendations for future applications of similar phenomena also lends to the transferability of the data. Unlike generalizability, narrative data need not be transferrable to have authenticity. Narrative data are expected to be unique to the population described (Patton, 2002). In this study, the appearance of ubiquitous themes across the data without significant outlying themes suggests transferability (Patton, 2002).

**Authenticity**

Several researchers point to the undesired outcome of narrative inquiry as a story told through the voice of the researcher (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000; Hendry, 2007; Reissman, 1993). The data analysis methods described above, as advocated by Chase (2005) and Clandinin and Connolly (2000) seek to maintain truth in the research, perhaps more so than other methods, by incorporating the participant in the analytic process. Collaboration between the researcher and participant at every step of the process maintains authenticity to the intention of the participant as narrator of his or her own story. Narrative inquiries may not uncover *truth* in the same sense that the word implies in other sciences. That is, the focus of authenticity in this study does not imply a factual recollection of events. Rather, authenticity in this study implies truth to
the story told by the participant. The reader should recognize that stories are interpretive retellings of events and are subject to the assumptions of the teller and reader alike (Clark & Rossiter, 2006; Riessman, 1993)

In this study, I have ensured authenticity both through member checks and collaborative writing with the participants. Each participant has had several opportunities both to verify the authenticity of my writing and to weave his own authentic voice throughout the narratives.

**Project-Specific Safeguards**

Unique to narrative research, the participants in this study have been co-researchers in the analytic process and influenced the data from collection to the final drafts of this report. Because of this relationship between researcher, participant, and data, verification is a natural component of the process of analyzing data. Additional safeguards included guidance from the dissertation committee and chairperson to ensure integrity in the data collection and analysis.

This research utilized human participants, and was therefore regulated by the Pennsylvania State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects. Guidelines from the IRB include the protection of research participants from coercion and deception in the research process, ensuring informed consent in the process, and protecting confidentiality. At the onset of the screening process, every potential participant was asked to read and sign an informed consent agreement to participate in research, delineating the safeguards that are in place, and the responsibility of the researcher to maintain a safe experience for him.

Because of the highly personal nature of sexual identity and other issues discussed in interviews, it was an unlikely possibility that painful issues may have arisen in the interview process or afterward. While unlikely that harm would evolve in this research process, I put into
place safeguards to ensure the emotional safety of the research. I allowed the participants to steer conversations into more emotionally-laden subjects, and reminded the participants that they could stop the discussion at any time. As a licensed counselor with more than 10 years of experience in clinical settings, I assumed the ethical responsibility to ensure the emotional safety of my participants, and was prepared to provide follow-up referrals for support services if indicated (Andersen & Jack, 1991; Patton, 2002).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology that I used in this study. This narrative inquiry used interviews as the primary data set, with the participants acting as co-researchers in the data analysis. The participants' unique roles as collaborators helped to support several of the measures I used to ensure the accuracy of the data.
CHAPTER FOUR

Through this study, I seek to understand the ways in which acting informs actors' understandings of sexual identity. The narrative methodology aimed to illustrate how actors understand the relationship between their practice and their sexual identities. As Clark and Rossiter (2007) suggest, the narrative methodology itself may have brought to light some of that understanding as the actors told their stories.

This chapter contains the stories gleaned from semi-structured interviews, co-constructed with each participant. While at times I interject a thought or impression, these stories represent the tales woven for me by the participants. Considering Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) treatment of voice in the research text, I've chosen to present these stories as they were told to me, using the participant's voice and language, and told from the participant's first-person perspective. For ease of reading, I will briefly introduce each story in regular type, then present the participant's words in italic type. I intentionally allow this chapter to be told by the participants, because interjecting my analysis in their stories might privilege my voice over theirs. In Chapter Five, I will organize these events, as described by the participants, in relationship to my theoretical model to provide a thematic analysis and weave together the common threads in their stories.

I have chosen here not to present the participants in the same order in which I met them; however, I include their stories in the order that flowed most naturally. This is not intended to privilege any one participant over another, but lends nicely to the flow of this chapter and will inform the constant comparative analysis in Chapter Five.
Everyone in Theatre Gets to Be Someone Else

When I set out on the journey of interviewing gay and bisexual men who participate in musical theatre, the last place I imagined this journey would take me was a military installation. However, one warm July day, I found myself at the security gate of an Air Force base waiting to meet Andy. Andy is a 36 year old white male who self-identifies as bisexual or omni-sexual. His dark blond hair is cut in a style that unmistakably indicates his work in the military; this is reinforced by the Air Force uniform and boots that he wears when we meet. Andy grew up in a working class community in South Baltimore. He is the father of one infant child, with one more on the way. Andy is unique compared to the other participants in that he is the only man who is in a primary heterosexual relationship; he and his wife have been married nearly 10 years. The intersecting trajectories of his acting, military career, and sexual identity have taken him on a path across the globe, with a world of experiences that he eagerly shared with me across the kitchen table in his home on the military base.

We grew up poor in South Baltimore, and there just weren’t a lot of other gay people around. But, of course, we came from an artistic family. My parents were always artistic. They were insistent that I do something, so I played the flute. Before I played the flute, I played the baritone. So playing instruments was always sort of in the picture. I can’t say that one led directly to the other, other than the fact that my family has simply always been an artistically supportive family. Anything that dealt with creation was highly, highly encouraged.

I fell into acting before my teenage years. When I was 11 years old, I went to the Phantom of the Opera on Broadway with my sister; it was her big Christmas present and it was honestly easier to take me there than to find a babysitter for the entire day. I was sort of angry that I was being drug [sic] to this horrible thing and so far out of anything that I wanted to do.
Three hours later, I emerged in love. I just...I was [enraptured] even as an 11 year old. The music was beautiful, the story was compelling. There were themes at work that I didn't really understand but I could sort of get the gist of. There was an almost supernatural flair to it. I would come to realize that going to a play isn't enough.

I was in my first show less than a year later, still 11 years old, a stupid little show called Plain and Fancy, about the Amish. I was a young boy who could remember my lines, and I think that was a big draw. I didn't really have much acting ability, and I certainly had no vocal training, but I could remember my lines.

Plain and Fancy has a larger cast, and we did not have dressing rooms. We had one big open space with a lot of people changing their clothes, and to an 11 year old, that's a very interesting situation. I can say that was my first sort of experience in that situation that didn't conform to the norms of society that I had learned. You know, you go to a pool, and you've got a men's room and a women's room, and yet here are these people, a big group of people, and no one seemed to care. There are people walking around in their underwear and men wearing makeup, and just nobody seemed to care. Being in theatre, I do feel like I got exposed to sexuality earlier. Not in an inappropriate 'let's call the cops' kinda way, but in a 'I saw naked people in the flesh' kinda way. I touched boobies and I touched penises earlier than other people did. I don't know if that's an advantage or disadvantage, but it certainly got me into the world earlier. I did not have sex early though. I did not lose my virginity until I was 17, and that was with a girl. I didn't actually lose my virginity to a male until college.

I could say that there's a lot of sexual activity that happens in the theatre. Of course, we used to get big chuckles out of the jocks. "Oh, you're in theatre and you play the flute...you're gay". And I'm all like "yeah, I hang out with a bunch of chicks half-naked, and you shower with
dudes. Who's the more gay of us?" I took acting in high school because it was an easy credit. Then, when I transferred to another high school, I took it again for another easy credit. I tried to take acting lessons when I went to college--that was sort of one of the early signs of my abject and utter failure at college. UMBC (University of Maryland, Baltimore County) makes you audition to get into the acting courses. With 8 years of experience and more credits than I could count, I really felt that I was probably something special. I found out very quickly that oh no, I was not! As a matter of fact, I was pretty darn miserable. I started taking other theatre classes to fill in. I took a costuming class, which I found I actually did have a talent for. I was offered a job at the Maryland Stage Company, which I took for one season. And that was it for my professional theatre career because at that point, I realized the tragic, tragic mistake of turning your hobby into a job. It wasn't fun anymore. The whole point of theatre for me was that it was this fun escape into a magical fairyland where you got to play make believe. As soon as that became a job, there was pressure and there was expectation. I suddenly saw it as not fun anymore.

One of the things I love about theatre is that everyone in theatre gets to be someone else. And for people who are not sure who they are at the beginning, it's good to be in a place where no one expects you to necessarily be one thing from the beginning. I got to play Brad in Rocky Horror, you know, the virgin male, and that was fun. There are several times in my career where I've done Rocky--sort of falling in line--because Rocky is always full of people who share that open-minded touching, playing, being in each other's space in a playful manner that doesn't have to mean anything else. Rocky Horror has always had a special place in my heart. It's sort of the show for deviants, and as a deviant, you know maybe that's OK. Maybe it's OK to have a safe space where you can just be. I would say my blossoming is very much like Brad's. You
know, he starts off in a prudish, regimented mindset and ends up swingin' with the best of 'em. Theatre has been a huge piece of that for me. I had my first girlfriend through the theatre; I had my first boyfriend through the theatre. In college, I was very confused about who I was and what I was looking for. I found my support group through the theatre.

We had a group at UMBC called the Rainbow Alliance. They had this self-help circle...a group therapy event where you just sit around and talk. One day, I came and I felt the need to express myself to the group. I said, "my problem is that I am absolutely attracted to guys sometimes. I'm always attracted to women, but I'm sometimes attracted to guys. Like what the hell does that make me? If I date a guy once a year but 5 women throughout the year, can I really legitimately call myself 'bi'? Am I some weird hybrid? Am I just someone who's open-minded enough not to know the difference?" One of them turned to me and said, "does it matter? Like really, in your heart, does it matter that you know exactly what you are, or can you just be you? Can you just be who you are, a person who likes 7/10 women and 3/10 men? That's OK. There are no police that are going to come and arrest you if you can't fill out the form correctly, you know. Just be whoever you are." And I thought, "Wow, that's amazing!" That's what I needed to hear right there and then. There were these things that didn't make sense to me. I never understood why you would intentionally cut off half the population. You sit there and say "love is hard; love is hard to find." Why on God's green earth would you cut yourself off from this amazing thing that people go their whole lives looking for just because of the 'wobbly bits'? I think that sorta defined it for me, and in the end, I settled on bisexual. The most appropriate term might actually be "omni-sexual". I don't know. Because the actual physical bits were simply never that important to me. I was far more concerned with whether there was a
connection...whether the person was fun and flirty. Whether they had a penis or not was so far down the scale that it just never, ever mattered.

When I was in college, I felt like the time had finally come. My mother went through a divorce. Actually, it was her second divorce. For a time, we were living with just her and me in the house. And during that time, we became very close. And one of the things that we agreed upon was that there would be no secrets between us--not ever. That's why my mother knows all the embarrassing things. So I went to the Rainbow Alliance. I brought it up in our group, and I said "I need advice. Tell me. What do I do? How do I handle this?" And those guys, those kids were great. They sort of stepped me through [the process]. They gave me all this fantastic advice, which I followed, by the way. We went to lunch somewhere, and finally got around to the whole "Ma, you know I really...I need you to just hear me and not, you know, freak out and everything, but I...I...I'm bi." And my mother gave me this side-eyed look and she said, "Do you really think I didn't know that? Like do you think it's possible we've lived together all these years and that wasn't just exceedingly obvious?" So it turns out all of my stress was for absolutely nothing. She wasn't going to bring it up as a mother; she didn't think it was her place to bring it up. But she always knew, and she didn't care. Once again, I felt like the king of the world, so coming out to the world wasn't important as long as my mother didn't care. That was the piece ... that was the piece that worried me.

The idea of identity was sort of in the background, just not solid. Just very amorphous, very kind of 'whatever is in the now is right'. So if I was dating a woman at the time, I would identify as clearly hetero, and if I was dating a man at the time I would identify as clearly gay. That sort of persisted through college, although college was more, for lack of a better term, hedonistic. And there were lots of reasons I didn't stick with college, but the partying probably
had a lot to do with it. I had a lot of sex and did a lot of drugs. Once again, that's just the open environment and I think that has a lot to do with finally being around people who were just as open minded as I was. So that was college.

Then I joined the military. I joined under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell". I knew going in that I was going to have to take this piece and I was going to have to package it up in a box and I was going to put it on a shelf and just not touch it for four years. I couldn't do it. You know, that's part of accepting the role of being Air Force Guy #312. When I joined the military, I thought that was going to be the greatest acting role I had ever taken on. At the time, I was trying to escape my life and I was looking for an escape vector, and I thought "I can do this. I can just play this role for four years...this buys me four years to figure out exactly what I want to do."

But when you take a piece of yourself and you stick it in the back room and you refuse to acknowledge it, it doesn't go away. It gets larger and larger and larger until it's banging on the door demanding to be addressed. So for me, that took about three years...three years before it really came to the forefront and would not be ignored. By this time I was living in Japan and there was an interesting dynamic going on. I still focused on "only date women, only date women, only date women", except the problem was that I am living on this teeny tiny base in the very northern sector of Japan, and there were no women. The American girls were outnumbered about 10 to 1 on the base and simple supply and demand actions were in place and said you had to be of a certain stature and pay them the respect they wanted. (It's an obscene term, but we used to [call it] GPS, or Golden Pussy Syndrome). I could not deal with that, so that was just out. The Japanese women culturally were very accessible. The problem is that Japanese women are subservient to Japanese men. And a lot of them they wanted to date American men because the American men would not expect them to be subservient, but once again if you look at everything
in terms of scales instead of absolutes and you’d say that the Japanese men were dominant at a 10 and they were subservient to as a 1 and your real goal was to meet as being equals out of 5. And if I were to date a Japanese girl at a 5, she would put herself at a 3, which was more dominant than she could be with her Japanese partner but she wouldn’t and couldn’t go toe to toe with me. I have a large personality. In any mate I have ever had in my entire life my one defining characteristic has never been male or female or fat or skinny or long hair or short hair ... it’s always been strength of personality. You gotta go eye to eye, you gotta go toe to toe. If we’re at a party and I shake my empty beer can at you, and you bring me a new one, we’re done. I need to shake my empty beer can at you and have you say, "yeah, that’s great, get me another one too." You know, that’s how I operate. Because if I don’t have somebody to keep me in check, I’m just going to go all over you and that’s good for me and that’s not good for anybody else. So there were no American girls and there were no Japanese girls. And I couldn’t date men. And so I ended up dating married women. And that’s not a good thing, but that’s what happened. I started not immediately and not with malicious intent but a thing came around where you know I would be hanging out with so and so through my association with the theater group or through something else and then their husband would go away for 6 months or a year and they would be lonely and I would be lonely and then stuff would happen.

It was also in Japan through the theater group that I ran into my first sort of organized group of gay men in the military who met up on a regular basis to be comfortable and gay with each other. You know, still understanding that if this really got out that they were done. When I came in, my contract still had the questions “Are you gay?” “Are you bisexual?” on the contract. And what they would do is they would take the contract, put it in front of you, take a black magic marker, and line through those two questions, and that’s not really the same thing
as not having the questions on there. That’s saying we really want to know, but right now the law keeps us from asking. So, and if you want to keep your job, you keep your mouth shut. And yet here was this group of people that didn’t keep their mouth shut. And they went to a local town you know two towns over and they actually went to a gay bar that was a hangout. And they sang karaoke and you know, you learn really quickly that you know if you had the strength of fortitude to get up and sing one Ricky Martin song for the crowd of Japanese businessmen, you wouldn’t have to buy another drink all night. They wanted the company of American men, and I don’t even mean that as a euphemism for anything. You know, talking, flirting, fun... And even during the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell days in the Air Force, you didn’t have agents going into the bars actively seeking out people to get out. You know, those days were over a decade ago, long before I came in... or two decades ago... long before I came in. But it was still very unusual for me to have this experience of having people be open, and that let me be open. So my only avenues for love while I was in Japan 5 years were married women or gay men. And so that kind of became my back and forth. Those who know me best say that I went to Japan as sort of a mixed up kid and 5 years later I came back as a young man, and I think that that is probably apt. I went as far away from my home as I could possibly get on the planet to figure out who I was. And somewhere in those 5 years, I came to accept – right or wrong – you know, appropriate or not appropriate, this is just the person that I am and I have to be okay with that. If I’m not okay with that, then I’m just going to go insane. It was in Japan that I re-enlisted for the first time. As I said, I had been in for 3 years before I got to Japan and then it was time to shit or get off the pot, and it was part of being there and part of becoming comfortable with who I am said not only can I be comfortable with who I am but I can be comfortable with who I am and be in the military. Like it doesn’t have to be one or the other... I can stop playing the role of Soldier #312 and I can
just be Andy. I can be Andy who also happens to be in the military but has gay friends and dates guys occasionally and is in shows whenever possible, and all of that can exist all at the same time, and that’s when sort of all of the different me’s started coming together and saying okay, well fair enough.

I was in Japan for 5 years, then they finally got tired of me and made me leave. I was actually stationed here at this base. It was during that time period just after I got home from Japan that I met my wife Lory, also heavily involved in theatre. As a matter of fact, she was in a show with my sister at the time, and my sister had called me up and said "I’ve got this person I want you to meet," and then I met the woman who would become my wife; after the one date, it was done. It was sealed. Never looking back – never anything else.

The problem is I had all this stuff coming from Japan--the married women, everything else. She had a bunch of stuff getting out of a bad relationship. I was in Baltimore for one week visiting home between the time I had gotten home and when I had to show up here in New Jersey and start work; that was my leave. I had a week. And what was supposed to be a ‘one date and forget it’ very quickly, in the span of three days became, "oh my God...there might be something real here." And so we sat down at the end of our third date--you know, the classic third date when everybody’s supposed to have sex--and what we did instead is decide very quickly if this was going somewhere or not. So, I'm just going to put everything out on the table. Absolutely everything...all my baggage, all my damage, all my everything. And I [wanted her] to do the same. If either one of us needed to veto, that was the time to do it. We veto, we walk away, and everyone's happy. And we spent, oh God, 5 hours just putting everything out there...this is my sexuality, these are my feelings toward monogamy and what it means to be in a relationship.
This is how far I'm willing to go in terms of society's views on a relationship. Because if we didn't line up, then it's best we knew it then.

Well, shockingly, 99% of it lined up, and the 1% that didn't line up fell squarely in the "don't care" category, and six months later, she was living with me here in New Jersey. Coming out to Lory was easy. She came to join me here at McGuire where we stayed for 3 years, after which the wanderlust took over. My assignments have always been driven by a wanderlust. I discovered that once I left my home, Baltimore, that there is this huge incredible world out there and that Baltimore is just a teeny, tiny pocket of it. I strapped on my shoes and went to Turkey for a year. There, I was engaged in murder mysteries [parties] and local community theater because there really wasn't anything else. From Turkey we went to Germany. We spent 3 years in Germany. That's where we had our most fun in musicals.

The area is the Kaiserslautern Military Community (KMC), and the name of the group was KMC On Stage. That was the one that was actually funded by the DOD, with a huge budget and a regular schedule and a professional environment. People who really were dedicated to doing it ... it just made me so happy to be in that world again.

I am an exceedingly mediocre actor, but I throw my heart into it...so I don't get the leads. And that's fine. I get the supporting roles. So, in the Sound of Music, I get to be Uncle Max, and in Beauty and the Beast, I get to be Cogsworth. In The Producers, I got to be Hitler. That was fun because it was the first time somebody had pointed to me and said "you're loud enough and large enough to carry what amounts to a fairly leading role"...it was nice to have somebody finally say "you can do it and we believe you can do it."

When I was in Fiddler on the Roof, I played a Russian soldier--another supporting role. Now being Russian soldiers, we wore uniforms. Uniforms are by definition uniform – they all
look the same. One of my good friends played another Russian soldier. His wife was smokin’ hot. Smokin’ hot. Dedicated devoted to each other. I loved these guys ... loved them to hate them. These were guys that could simply do no wrong. Like if you wanted to fence, they would tell you about how they won regional fencing championship. And if you wanted to do poetry, they would bring out a journal of all the poems they had written. Not malicious ... it’s just ... they were good at everything. You know if you went on leave and said "I’m going to study Swahilian rain dances", they're like "wow you know it’s funny our uncle does that and he taught us last summer." Dammit! But never malicious. It would be so easy to hate these guys if they were arrogant or obnoxious and they just weren’t. They were beautiful people who were good at everything and just too lovey-dovey to stay mad at; a caricature almost of what a couple is supposed to be. Anyway, so he and I are Russian soldiers... and we’re roughly the same build. And one day we’re sitting there talking to each other face to face and I feel these hands come up behind me and sort of latch onto my chest, so I kind of went up and cupped the hands in mine and he’s looking at me sort of giving me the cockeye and I kind of sort of nodded over my shoulder and mouthed "is it her?". He kind of looked up over my shoulder and said "yep, it sure is". And we probably stood there for I don’t know 5 minutes, 10 minutes and I was sharing this bubble and this is what I mean when I talk about personal space and touching bodies without it necessarily being sexual. She wasn’t touching my wobbly bits; I wasn’t touching her wobbly bits, but we were in each other’s bubble and sharing air, sharing space with her husband right in front of us laughing and enjoying that I’m-part-of-this bubble. Right up until the time when one of our cohorts came up, kind of did a double take, tapped her on the shoulder and said "you know you’ve got the wrong soldier, right?"
Anyway, the point of that story is that’s what I’m talking about in terms of physicality. You know, it wasn’t weird. It wasn’t awkward to have his wife embracing me. And it’s not because they weren’t attractive sexual people and quite frankly there was a night and stuff happened but it wasn’t that night and it wasn’t because of that event... it was just being around other people who were okay with having you be in their bubble. I am really honestly in my heart of hearts convinced that the world would be a better place if more people could be comfortable sharing their bubble with other people. It doesn’t have to mean sort of what society says it means. It can be platonic, it can be innocent, it can be two humans that are simply touching each other. And that’s okay. And I wish more people felt like that. I had it in the theater... so there’s the connection.

I wish every mother and father in this theater would go home tonight and make a speech to their teenagers
   And say, “Kids: be free, no guilt.
   Be whoever you are, do whatever you want to do,
   just as long as you don't hurt anybody, right?”

-HAIR
For Me, It's all about Storytelling

Michael's story stands out from the rest because his coming out is the most recent. A 25 year old white male actor living and working in the New York theatre scene, Michael only began to identify as bisexual a few months ago. His tall slender frame, boyish looks, and tousled dark brown hair belie any attempt to hide his wholesome Midwestern upbringing. He grew up in a suburban community with two parents who were working professionals. While he was "never closed off to the idea" of dating a man, Michael seriously dated women throughout college and into adulthood. His coming out story is intricately woven in relationships: relationships with his family, with his friends and colleagues, and with his friend-turned-partner.

I've always been one of those kids who loved telling stories, and I think as a kid I loved being the center of attention. I very quickly figured out how to tell a story, how to keep people's attention, how to make people laugh. For me, it's all about storytelling. My friends still know if I say, "alright guys, I have to tell you what happened to me today," they all know to sit down because it's going to be a full-blown fucking production. That's always been a part of my life. Even just telling stories to my parents when I was a kid...these elaborate (many times falsified) stories. In certain terms, I guess I've always been acting; I've always been telling stories. But it wasn't until junior high that I really started putting that up on a stage.

I grew up outside of a large Midwestern city, in the suburbs, very middle class. But I was also surrounded by the lower class of the city and people from the nicer areas. So I feel like I experienced a lot of walks of life growing up. I graduated with probably about 800 people in my class. It was probably the most racially diverse group of people that I've ever been around. Even now, in New York. I just grew up with everyone. I feel like I got to experience a lot of walks of life living there. I grew up with both of my parents still married and I am a middle
child. I still talk to my mom almost every day, and my dad maybe once a week on the phone. I'm very close with them both.

My brothers and I were all two grades apart in school growing up. We're not very close, but (rolling his eyes) you know, growing up, I had a very tumultuous relationship with my older brother. Classic middle child syndrome! It always seemed like the two of them got along really well, and I didn't get along with either of them. As we grew up, I feel like we have a pretty good relationship now. We don't talk on the phone for hours on end, but I'd say we have a pretty solid relationship.

I was a gymnast when I was a small, small child into my pre-teen years. The last couple of years, I was just half-assing it. I didn't want to do it anymore. You know, I think maybe I was going through a bout of depression, but I quit gymnastics and I wasn't doing anything. I remember we all went to a job fair that our school was putting on; there were all these stations and you could go see what it's like to be an engineer, to be a chef...all these things and there wasn't anything I wanted to do. It all sounded boring to me. I remember on the way home, my mom was so mad at us, and you could just tell she was disappointed in us. She said “you guys have no interests. None of these things interest you. Make them interest you. What are you going to do with your lives if you were just surrounded by all these different professions and you don't want to do any of them?”

Around the same time, I was in my first play, which was called Melanie and the Trashcan Troll. I starred as the Trashcan Troll. I was maybe 12. We had to perform it for the whole school a couple times and then for our parents. I was just an awkward kid running around the stage yelling. I don't know...it just kind of seemed like that was my...that was where I fit. That was what I wanted to do. My family was entirely supportive, which I almost fault them for. I
mean like what were you thinking letting me go into this field? I say that kind of jokingly, but I remember having a conversation with my mom when I was maybe 13 years old, and I was doing school plays, and kind of getting into it. In school, we had this stupid assignment about our dream college, and I wasn't taking it seriously. I said "I want to be an actor and I want to go to Julliard, and I want to train classically. I want to be a Shakespearean actor." I remember her replying to me, "Michael, I love ya, but you have no chance". It wasn't malicious, there was nothing mean about it. She saw I was kinda joking about it--my mom is nothing but supportive, so we were just joking about it.

Then, she saw how much time I was investing in my acting classes and voice lessons, auditioning for summer programs. She saw the bouts of success I was experiencing, and I think we both realized at the same time that, oh, maybe I can go into this. I remember in junior high, having the counselors from the high school come in and give us a list of all the classes that you can take when you’re in high school. There was a chart in the back where you could fill out the classes you wanted. At the time, I was singing in a show choir at the community college for students in junior high school. There was also a college show choir group, and my life’s goal was to sing in that group. So my goal was to be in the show choir at this community college, go there for two years and then I don’t what I thought I was going to do after. I don’t know if I thought maybe I was going to eat it those two years and then transfer somewhere to finish my bachelor’s degree. I don’t think I knew what I was doing. I don’t think I actually had a plan; I just knew that I wanted to be a part of this group. When I was in junior high, we got these packets to choose classes for high school, and I remember filling it out and thinking, “Okay, well maybe I could you know I could start out, maybe if I audition I could get into the lowest choir and I could do that for 2 years and show them that even if I don’t have the talent I could move
into this one junior year and maybe if I’m really lucky and train hard enough, maybe I could make it into this top choir by my senior year.” I went to audition for these choirs, and immediately was placed into choir 3 – the one I had hoped that I would be in by my senior year. And thought, ”oh my gosh! This choir director must be high to let me in this group.” I have no idea how that happened. And then I went to audition for the musical and was immediately cast as one of the leads. I think throughout that year, throughout doing the show, throughout being in that choir, I think I kind of realized that okay maybe I need to give myself a little more credit. Maybe this is something that could seriously do for a living. Maybe this doesn’t just have to be a hobby, and so throughout that and then throughout my high school years and taking voice lessons outside of that and dance classes I started thinking maybe this is something that I want to go into. At the end of my sophomore year beginning of my junior year I decided to audition for BFA programs in musical theater.

I only auditioned for four schools; I had two top choices and two fallback schools. I got into all of them, and I was also offered spots in three other schools [for] which I didn’t audition. So then all that it really became just the decision of ”do I want to go to this school that is really highly ranked, or this other school where, when I auditioned there, I just felt like talking to that faculty, I felt like they got me.” I felt like this voice program is really what I need right now. So I decided to go to that school, and now 8 years later, I have never regretted it. It was the best decision of my life.

[The faculty at my school] very much became my mentors. Especially at that age when you’re 18 and leaving home for the first time, to have those people in my corner and talking me through everything. This was essentially my career, so to be able to invest that energy into it with
these people, I was grateful to have those faculty members. You have to try really hard not to bond with those people, not to create very special connections.

In musical theatre, there are conservatories where you are not in a university setting. And then there are universities where you study musical theatre and you also take the general education courses, where you're surrounded by the people who we lovingly refer to as the GP--the general population of normal people who are not actors, who are not artists. It was amazing because as lucky as I was with the group of people with whom I went to school, we also had normal lives outside of the program. We still talked about politics, about pop culture, about the football team. It didn't feel like the program was our lives. We still got to go to parties and make connections with people who had nothing to do with theatre.

My group of friends...I have a group of maybe 6 or 7 really, really close friends. We went to school together. They are my best friends. I mean my classmates in college are still my best friends in the entire world. Some of them are gay men, some of them are straight men, some of them are straight women. I feel like we all have that kind of relationship where there aren't really any walls up. We can talk about stuff without feeling self-conscious about it. Over the years, we've all talked about sexuality and who we're dating at the time.

The conversation [about my sexuality] did come up, and I always said "I'm not closed off to the idea of dating a man, but you know right now I have feelings for this woman, or I'm dating this woman, and so then when I did have these feelings for the man I'm currently dating, I remember telling [my roommate] that I think I have feelings for this man. He said "that's awesome! What are you going to do about it?" He was the one who I kind of talked to about everything as it was happening.
I wouldn't have identified as bisexual as a teenager. I didn't really identify as bisexual until I started having feelings for this man. I mean, I always knew that having feelings for a man would be a possibility, but to be honest, I didn't really ever see it happening. I think for a while as a teenager, I didn't want it to happen, but later, it's not that I didn't want it to happen, but I had those feelings for women and I didn't for men at the time. So if someone would have asked me, I probably would not have said that I was bisexual.

There was this one moment when he was at my house for dinner. We were just friends (and we were probably a little drunk), and at this one moment he was talking to my family and I kind of thought to myself "this really feels like I'm bringing a date home. This is strange." And after he left, I wondered "do I have feelings for him?". Over a couple of days or couple of weeks, I realized I did. But it wasn't really until then that I would've considered myself to be bisexual. Then there was this birthday party coming up, and I was going to be bringing my boyfriend to it. This was all within the same month. As I saw each of my group of friends, I just kind of said "oh, so by the way, I'm dating someone, it's this guy and..." In our friends, it's just not as strange of an occurrence so nobody was surprised. They were just seemed super happy for me and said "awesome, we can't wait to meet him!"

When I told my family about it, it didn't feel like it was this big thing that I had to sit them down and tell them "I have something big to tell you." I grew up in a family where I just wasn't nervous to tell them. They had already met my boyfriend when we were just friends, and a couple months later we started dating. I was talking to my mom on the phone [about my older brother's wedding later in the summer] and told her I'm bringing my boyfriend because we're dating. She just immediately said "you are? Oh my gosh!" It was not really a big deal at all. She told my dad, and my dad sent me an email saying, "Hey, talked to your mom. Just wanted to
let you know I love you and I'm proud of you. Can't wait for the wedding. Can't wait to meet him again.” It was...I guess I'm lucky that I grew up in a family where it just wasn't that big of a deal.

Being in theatre as an 18 or 19 year old, when you're surrounded by friends, some of whom identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual...however they identify, that often becomes a point of conversation. I don't think I've ever played a role where the character's bisexuality or homosexuality was an important part of the plot; I've never done a love scene with a man or anything like that. I've played certain characters where the story has nothing to do with their sexuality, but they happen to be gay or bisexual. There was this one show where my character could have been interested in this guy, and one of the other characters said that they guy was straight. Then my character said "so is spaghetti until it gets hot and wet." That was the only reference in the entire show. It's funny, but I didn't feel like that influenced anything about my character, except for that one little moment because nothing else in that show dealt with his love life.

I've had several experiences where, because of certain aspects of the scene or of a character, I've found myself talking to the director, and all of the sudden it was about sex. And not that the scene wasn't about sex, but all of the sudden we were going into such great detail. Not that I'm not comfortable talking about those things...I certainly don't consider myself to be a prude. It seems like it's a recurring theme in my life too. It's a fine line because as actors, we are expected to delve into these situations, and these feelings that are not usually talked about. Theatre...a play is about a day when something extraordinary occurs. It's’ not about the day that nothing really happens, because who cares, that's what we experience every day! Every play, every musical, is about the time something extraordinary occurs. And in that, there is a lot of
stuff that you don't deal with every day. So there have been experiences where I have to talk about a character's sexuality, or what they're doing in bed, what they're doing with their significant other...just things about their sex life that absolutely inform this character. I feel it's very important to what is happening on stage telling the story. But then there's a fine line in how much talking about it is too much. And you know that's difficult because for different actors, that line is in different places. You have to figure out where that line is for your relationship with that director. There have certainly been times when I feel like that line maybe hasn't been clear enough, or the person with whom I'm having this conversation has kind of overstepped that line. When does it stop being professional? [At this point, Michael shared an example that we've agreed to redact from this study]

There's a saying that one of my professors used to say that I love. "Your acting training is for when your instincts fail." I can think of a few instances where there is one character...one show, where my instincts just kicked in and I felt like I understood what I was doing. I understood what was happening around me. There have been a few instances where I felt like I was working hard just to get half the same result. To me, we're up there playing make believe. It doesn't have to be serious even when it's a serious subject matter or serious character. That's just not the type of actor I am.

I remember there was a role I was doing; I was going through a breakup, and it was one of those weird personal experiences where I don't know what the hell is wrong with me. I don't know why this one was so difficult. But it seemed like, at the time, all my energy was focused on this breakup. So, I remember I was doing a show at the time where it dealt with similar issues of what was happening in my personal life. I don't know that I would say that it was embodying the character that really helped me to analyze what was going happening, but I found myself going
through the script, marking my beats, and kind of going through the character's objectives. Then, without realizing it, I was thinking about it in terms of my own life and what was happening to me. OK, does anything about this mirror what's happening with this breakup? How does the way he deals with it...is that going to help me? Now, several years later, I don't know if that was beneficial or if that was actually harmful. But I do remember, I certainly remember associating it with the aspects of my personal life that it seemed to mirror.

I did a production of RENT; I wouldn't say the character or the show stayed with me, but going through that night after night, it takes a certain amount of vulnerability that is not easy to just drop into. You feel a little drained in a certain way. I wouldn't say...I've certainly never gone through a depression because I was playing a depressing character. It's not like because I was doing RENT, I go home and drink a fifth of vodka every night. Some of these Method actors...it impacts them that much. I've never experienced that. But if that's what works for them, more power to them!

You always said how lucky you were that we were all friends. But it was us, baby; we were the lucky ones.

-RENT

Michael, like most of my participants, ended his storytelling with the statement "I'm sorry that these parts of my life aren't more interesting; that I don't have more to contribute." What I think is most interesting about his story is that it is unfolding every day. Because Michael is now in the process of shifting, in D'Augelli's (1994) terms, out of a heterosexual identity, Michael's story is a work in progress.
I Was in Theatre--'Gay' Came with the Territory

Like Michael, Lee has recently experienced some significant life shifts. Lee is a white male in his early 40s who, although he was a career actor in his earlier adulthood, is now working in a non-acting profession. His shorter stature lends a little more youth to his appearance than his age would suggest, but his tidy appearance suggests a regimented, orderly personality. He's at a different time and place in his identity development compared to the other participants in this study; Lee has recently become a parent. Lee will tie this life shift, along with others, into his acting experiences while he tells his story.

I am the youngest of three, and I am the only boy. That explains a lot! So I have two wonderful older sisters, five and ten years older than me. There were never true sibling rivalries because 5 years at that time is a pretty big stretch, and 10...good grief! The middle child and I are great, wonderful, couldn't ask for a better sister...but there's just...there is a spark that she and I miss compared to my older sister, who I adore! She walks on water; I just love her so much! It's not a surprise where I get my musical ability from. I'm the only one who sings; that's the other odd thing. One sister dances, mom danced and played piano, one sister draws.

My musical career started when I was in 3rd grade. I started as an instrumentalist, a trumpet player. Just as something to pass the time, my parents thought it would be good for me. I started as an instrumentalist, and then at some point I realized I liked being on the stage rather than underneath of it in the pit orchestra.

Since the 3rd grade, I had private lessons and as I progressed and got better, my instructors got more and more elaborate and worth. All the way through high school that's what I did. I picked up theatre and voice along the way, but it was always based in trumpet, jazz, concert, classical, marching. Everything a trumpet could do, I was a part of in some way, shape,
or form. The marching band aspect of it took a huge hold...it was with a group of people, it was
different music every time. We were in public. I was moving. The football field was always a
stage, right? I guess if you want to think of it that way. And that turned into a lifelong career.
In my senior year, I joined a drum and bugle corps out of state. Back then, they were called the
Garfield Cadets. It was just amazing! I hated it and loved it all at the same time. Each person
kind of had their own strengths and weaknesses, and my strength ended up being marching for
some reason. My exactness of it all, which maybe later turned into the reason why I was
relatively successful in dance and placement on stage, and how I interacted. Who knows? It just
all goes together sort of...I never really thought about it.

My first acting experience was in grade school, grade 8, and a teacher who I adored said
"you would be good on stage", or however they perceived me. I believe the show was Annie Get
Your Gun. I wanted to do the lead role, but it had already been cast with a friend of mine, so I
figured I would go hang out with Chris, it’ll be great! Then my first true audition where I got up
and had to do something by myself in front of a panel of people was my 9th grade high school
musical. I got cast in Grease as a singing, speaking main character.

After high school came college, and I applied to a couple different colleges. Towson
offered a scholarship, so that was a no-brainer. For me it was close enough to Mom and Dad,
but far enough away that they could never just randomly show up and knock on my dorm door.

I have a music degree from Towson, and at that time, they did not promote musical
theatre at the time. I pushed the envelope (with one other person); I was the first male ever to
sing a Broadway song in his junior and senior recital. We had to take care of the all the Italian,
the German, the French, and the English which had to be done first. They would only allow the
Broadway stuff at the end, after the “real” recital was over. I had moved out of trumpet and into
voice through the college years, which helped lead me also into stage work, but I was the first one to do Broadway or musical theatre style music in a recital. I did not like standing, arm on the grand piano, and singing for two hours. That drove me crazy! I hated it, and my mentor knew I hated it!

And then there was the college theatre group, and they didn’t do any musical theatre either really. They only did straight plays. All this odd, random stuff. So there was nothing in between. The closest thing was opera. I loved doing opera, which then obviously fit into musical theatre. I could move around, I could be myself; I could be a character, I could be something! You really couldn’t try anything new with your right hand on the piano just standing there in a tux looking light a deer in headlights. But I got to move around...movement has always been big. I like movement. I hate stagnant things!

And it was interesting, because when we did the classical works that were recital-type, they wanted all of your effort to be in your voice, but I thought my voice wasn’t all of me...my body...shouldn’t I have to be able to feel this? And, if I’m having a feeling, shouldn’t my body react in some way?

I was going to clubs in DC by the time I was in high school and early college. I learned I loved being a club kid. It was the lights, and the sounds, and the theatre, and the dress ups, and the movement---it was just amazing! I had a great group of friends in college between UMBC and Towson; we were a good little group. But I would go to these clubs and I could just be me and I remember going, ”Wow, where are all you other people? You’re not in my town!” Let me tell you, and I lived in a small town and there were two other people in my high school who I knew were gay.
I came home late one day. I decided, I had been out to a DC bar...doing everything you
could do at a DC bar in those days...and I made the adult decision--a mature decision--to stay. I
had my own car in DC, I probably wasn't in any condition to drive. And I decided to stay
because I had this amazing offer from a guy who seemed to like me. And, so I got home late, and
I remember my mother waiting for me at the end of the stairwell in her nightgown or fuzzy
slippers or whatever...going basically "where the hell have you been?" I was like, "what's the
problem?" I thought I was an adult...probably 20 or 21. I was in college. It was summertime.
She was kind of like "wait 'til your father gets home." Sure enough, she called; Dad had to come
home from work. We had a little heart to heart, and he asked if I thought I was gay. I said, "I
don't THINK I am...I know I am." Dad is an amazing man. So I never feared for my life, I just
didn't want to tell him. I didn't think it was necessary. What I struggled with was "why did I have
to say anything?" It didn't make sense to me that I had to identify myself as gay. I was just me.
Why is me and gay any different than me and white, or me and brown hair, or me and boy? I
didn't understand the difference. I don't go around calling you straight; why do you have to call
me gay? That makes no sense to me. And still to this day...it doesn't really...but I can remember
having the conversation with him. I can remember him telling me, "fine". Cool as a cucumber.
I can remember him telling me it was only between us. He did not reprimand me, he did not love
me any less. He did not make me feel like less of a person, less of a boy. But, I do remember him
telling me "your mother never need know about this". I was like "you got it!" I mean...he didn't
want me to flaunt it, which I had no intention of doing. He didn't want to hear about it. He
didn't want to know about it. There was no repercussion for coming out to my dad at that time.

It was years later, after college...I thought "now, this is stupid." I don't know, maybe I
grew up or something. I got on the telephone, I called my mom, I called my sisters, I was like "if
you haven't noticed, I'm gay." Everyone was like "oh!", as in "we kinda knew" or "no big deal." So I think I fared well, because I have heard horror stories. Not as well as one of my friends. I swear...his parents became like the president and fundraising coordinators for PFLAG. And his mom was knitting a rainbow blanket. So, how did that happen? He, I think, was an exception. I assumed I was normal in how it all came out. Not only do you hear about adult men and what they went through, but now you hear about young children in schools and colleges on TV. For God’s sake, people are killing themselves. So I think I’m blessed, if you want to use that word, that it didn't go worse for me.

I knew I was gay at a young age, with zero knowledge about what anybody else was. I was conscious that there had to be other people like me, but I was also conscious that I had no idea where they were. With the exception of the two guys next door who were just as happy to mess around as I was. So, in that respect, I didn’t see myself as different. The next door boys like doing it, doesn’t the guy down the block like doing it? You know, it wasn’t a big thing. Little did I know, I was maybe naïve, that this was not the norm, or how boys shouldn’t be exploring their bodies with other boys. But they did it; they didn’t mind. I know now as an adult that they were doing it for slightly different reasons.

It really wasn’t until high school that I knew of other gay people...there were two people, in high school, a boy and a girl, but they were outsiders, which kind of put me off a little bit. Well, no one really liked them, because they don’t understand them. And we’re in the middle of bumfuck nowhere, it seemed like at the time. There were more cornfields than there were roads. They kept to themselves probably because they also knew they were gay. They were a year or two older than me.
I was in music, I was in theatre. “Gay” came with the territory, sort of. And in high school, at least in my high school, the guys who were in chorus, marching band, jazz band, show choir...I wasn’t a taboo to them. The stigmatism [sic] is that if you’re in music, somebody who’s gay will also be present. It just happened to be me. Since then, a couple of people have come out as gay, and that was amazing. I always wonder, “Why weren’t you gay then? I wouldn’t have felt so alone.” I didn’t feel alone as in “oh, I’m so alone and I’m going to go kill myself”, but it drove me to want to get out. I just wanted to get out and see other people because I’m sure if I ran into enough people, I would find other people like me. And that’s how I did it in college. I just wanted to meet as many people like me and it worked. So that’s it...walking across campus, being in musical theatre or sitting next to another guy who’s gay because he’s 4 years older and he’s cool with it. It was like "Wow...can I talk to you? Pick your brain? What is it like to be 22 and gay?”

Music and theatre were always the buffer for me; that playground in which it was OK for me to be gay. I know there are other people in sports or whatever it was, but music and musical theatre have allowed me a space where it was OK, even with the straight people. It was OK to be gay...now, I never shoved it down anyone’s throat, but I could've said "hey girl" in theatre and no one would have batted an eye. "Hey girl" in chemistry class in school, that would have been a no-no. But it gave me the comfort and safe space to be gay. It allowed me to do some exploration.

I was very gay. I was firmly gay. I was not exploring. I was not trying to find my way into Pinkville. I was a little older. I had a little thicker skin. If something didn't go right, or the track star pushed me up against the locker, I would say to myself that's OK, because I have band,
I have play practice to go to next. Music and theatre have just given me a safe place, and I think it worked out well for me.

So, when I got to college it was my first time that I had a true boyfriend--someone who wanted to be with me and supposedly just me for an extended period of time. So, when I got to Towson, my first real boyfriend sought me out. I don't know why. You can't write Hallmark cards like this. I found out this story later, but I'm in my dorm room, and I get a knock on the door. I open the door, and here's this... what I thought was this beautiful, short, dark-haired guy. People aren't usually shorter than me, and he was shorter than me, and in shape. He kind of invited himself into my room. And, later, I found out he sought me out. That relationship is when the world sort of opened up. Because he sought me out, all of his friends knew I existed before I knew they existed. So when I joined their group of friends, male, female, gay, straight, it was exactly how I hoped it would be. I found out later that he had been searching for ME. He had seen me walk across campus and he went from person to person to person to figure out what major I was. He took time to go to the music hall and said "do you know this person?" randomly to people. Low and behold, he ran into someone who knew which dorm I lived in, and he went door to door to find me! I just think that's the coolest thing ever! And for the first time, having been sexual with other guys, I can remember for the first time being downright nervous. I thought I was worldly. I thought I knew a lot. I opened the door and he was there, and I was instantly a dumb kid who didn't know what to do, what to say, how to act.

So that's my first real boyfriend. It didn't end well, unfortunately, but for that period of time, it was one of the most elating experiences I've had in my life. He was adorable! And his
friends were nice. That's what started the "let's not sit here; let's go experience what it's like to be gay and straight, male and female, young and old...let's go experience all of that". It altered my life in a positive way. It altered how I carried myself for a long time. Because I wanted to a part of that world. And there was some dress up involved when going to the clubs. Not in girl's clothes, but there was some dress up involved. Back in that time period, The Cure was in, so boys wore the eyeliner and the hair and the outfits. I could explore with zero concern. I mean, I wouldn't dress like that now unless I was doing a show. But to be out in public...it's one of the things that attracted me to New York. It's all walks of life, and no one bats an eye.

After college, dinner theatre became important. I was able to get cast, so I did that for a while, then I just picked up, took some money, and I went and lived in New York for about 5 years. And there, I was able to do tours and cruises and be a working actor. When I wasn't working, I did wait tables. People come and go in theatre, and they're used to it. So when I got a job that took me out of the country, I said "here's my 4-day notice because I'm leaving", and I went. Then I came back to Baltimore for a while. But when I went back to New York for a little bit of time, it just seemed different. I had either grown or aged or something. I wanted to be a Broadway star, but then I realized with a real job that I get a steady paycheck, health benefits, vacation time off; I got a car, and I got my own place, and all the sudden it just made sense. Rather than living out of a suitcase, I can live out of my own darn apartment, right? I don't know, maybe I grew up.

Some things I really like about theatre---you get to change...leave life behind, and even if you're going to go see a show, it's probably a different show than the one you’re doing. It's not always the same. That was one of the things that was hard in New York. When you got a long
contract, it was the same. I can't imagine how people do shows for years and years and years. That was a little challenging sometimes because I wanted variety.

I was cast a couple months ago in Annie as Warbucks. I'm like "ok, it's Warbucks...two-dimensional. It's a very cartoonish character. But as you get into the script and as you start really reading it...it became evident that this character was kind of my life. I didn't want children. I didn't expect to have children. And there's this one particular song, they wrote it into the show later in the 90s, that is key to the role, and I can intimately relate to what the character says. Usually you just go through the dialogue and the script with a song and make it pretty or make it powerful, and you do it for the audience. But this became intimate because it was exactly my life having a small child I didn’t necessarily seek to have.

The song is placed just before Warbucks gives Annie the new locket and tells Annie that he wants to adopt her, and he second-guesses why he's doing this at all. For the first time, with this song, you actually hear what Warbucks is thinking, and for the first time you hear that it may not be what he wants or that he likes or he'll be good at it. Suddenly, the character just has a much bigger depth to it. He questions himself why he would change anything for this little girl. When we got our little girl, I can remember asking “are we sure about this? This is going to alter everything.” And it has, for better and for worse. So that song is my life.

We have this little girl now, and she brings as much wonder and light and amazement as she does “what the hell have I done?” questions. I think that every day. There's a moment where I go "oh my God, she's so amazing, she's so wonderful", and there's some period in the day when I say "what the hell did you do this for?” So that's why the Warbucks character is so powerful to me. It truly is my life.

"Life's overflowing. Why should I change a thing? Love how it's going. Got the world on a string.
Why disturb the peace? Why not let things be?
Why risk getting close? Close just isn't me.
I'd say I'm happy. Why am I tempting fate?
Who needs more happy? Anyway, it's too late.
Who needs the clatter that a little girl would bring?
Why change a blessed thing?"

-ANNIE

Lee and I talked for well over two hours the first time that we met. Having both majored in music at the same university as undergraduates, we shared stories about our common experiences there. We quickly realized that we both studied with the same voice teacher. Lee and I have worked in the same theatres, and have a common circle of friends, but somehow, we had never met. Aaron, on the other hand, is someone with whom I have collaborated on theatre projects in the past. You'll recognize his story from Chapter One, where he sets the stage for this study by illustrating his experience in Dog Sees God.
I Got to Deal with My Problem Without Dealing with My Problem

Aaron is a 25 year old white male actor who is living and working in New York. As a teen his parents’ plans for him to become an actor drove his career trajectory toward a conservatory, where he earned a BFA in musical theatre. He grew up in the Baltimore area as the middle child of three, living with two working professional parents. Aaron describes himself, rather unenthusiastically, as "trying to be a professional actor" and contemplated career changes throughout college and once he moved to New York. His curly, brown hair and dimpled smile reinforce the boyish charm reflected in his story.

I had been in band and chorus in school. I was actually in All-County Chorus and Peabody Children’s Chorus outside of school. It was OK, but it was not really like I wanted to be doing that. I did it because my parents said "oh, you’re good at this, you should go and try it," which they did because my elementary school chorus teacher told them it would be a good idea. That’s kind of how I got started, but I never really cared. I was much more into sports. I played hockey, I played lacrosse, I was on the swim team. I played a ton of video games...probably more than I should. [Theatre] just wasn’t something that any of my friends did. It was not something I knew anything about and it wasn’t anything I was really interested in before I started doing it.

My mom signed me up for the middle school’s drama club. There were a lot of snow days that year and the scheduling got really mixed up, so I used that as an excuse not to show up. And then I showed up one day and they had given my part away. I also did my first show in middle school, Godspell. I was Lamar, who sings All Good Gifts. I was 12 in a cast of high schoolers. When the show happened, and it was at the church that I went to at the time, all of the sudden I got a lot of attention. Everyone said "oh, you were so great, that was so
impressive...nobody else can do that!” I feel like that was pretty much the first time in my life that I got recognition for doing something that was really special. I mean, in pretty much every area of my life, I was just OK. I was the middle ranking of my hockey team, I wasn't a starter. I didn't start on the lacrosse team. I didn't have that many friends; I kinda hung out with the weird kids at school. I got teased a lot, mostly because I put myself in a position to by standing up for the other kids. It meant a lot to me, especially coming from my parents, having people be impressed and make me feel special instead of just normal.

When I was in high school, we did Merrily We Roll Along, and I was Frank. It was a really big deal for me because it was my first lead. It was my first time doing something like that. So, reading the script, I started drawing a lot of similarities to my life. The three main characters were cast with me, my best friend at the time, Dustin, and his best friend, Jenny, who I also hung out with a lot. The show was kind of about the breaking up of their friendship, the deteriorating of that friendship and we were, all three of us, kind of going through the same thing. We were in junior year. I was really, really close with Dustin for a long time. We had met just before high school through All-State Chorus and we had been really tight and then all of the sudden junior year he started kind of pushing me away a little bit; we were kind of drifting apart. He was much more into the party scene. He hung out with the stoner kids. He was going out to these parties at night that I was not only not very comfortable going to but also wasn’t invited to, so you know, I didn’t even really have the opportunity. But he was just kind of hanging out with a different crowd, and I kind of got upset about it. I ... I felt like I was losing my grasp on something that I had worked really, really hard to maintain. He wasn’t trying at all. And at the time when I read the script, to me I felt more like Charlie because Frank is the one that’s like going into movie business and started composing scores for these big Hollywood films and
Charlie is the one at home who is like "I really want to help you keep working on shows but I want to get back to you know focusing on the work not focusing on money. I want to keep our partnership and our friendship alive." And I felt like THAT, and it seemed to me that Dustin was kind of going off and going into the more material world that I just was not comfortable being a part of. Then as the show went on and as we kind of got a little bit more into the characters and everything, I mean I was in high school so I wasn’t really like IN the character or anything because I didn’t know what that meant. I didn’t know that was a thing. Regardless, if you spend enough time with a show, you learn new things about it and you draw your own connections whether it’s conscious or subconscious. As we were going along, I started filling in blanks in the script with my own problems and my own perception of the way that things were in my life. Frank makes a lot of bad choices in the show, but it doesn’t really ever talk about why and so for me, it was "oh he’s doing this because he feels lonely or he feels like he’s got this pressure on him that he has to succeed." I guess that’s part of why I liked it so much was because I kind of got to deal with my problem without dealing with my problem. I dealt with Dustin dumping me as a friend through the show, which really my character is dumping him as a friend, which felt good to me. Not good, but like it felt like I was more OK with it because of that.

I had a couple of crushes in high school; Dustin was one of them. But it wasn't until my senior year of high school that I really liked this one kid that I was in a show with, and he was totally flirting with me back really, really hard, even though he claims not to be gay. Homecoming was coming up, and I'm supposed to be asking a girl, but I would really rather go with Brian. What do I do? So I didn't do anything...I didn't say anything to anybody. I ruminated on what I was thinking and crushing on this guy in the dark recesses of my mind. He would make these weird gay jokes by pretending to be gay. He would come up and hug me or
hang on me. I would always laugh and say "cut it out, that's weird," when really I was thinking "no, don't stop!" So I finally decided that I need to talk to somebody because it was eating me up, and I didn't know how to deal with it. So I told my friend, Katherine. I wrote this really long Facebook message to her, terrified that she wasn't going to be OK with it, terrified that she was going to make fun of me and tell everybody in the school. But she didn't. She was great. She helped me out a lot.

At the end of the year, we were in a show together, and we went to a cast party at a restaurant. Under the table, I started holding his hand, and he didn't pull away. I held his hand through the entire meal, and no one saw anything. Toward the end, he kind of leaned his head on my shoulder, and I thought, "wow, this is really going well". We didn't really talk about it, and then at graduation, I wrote him this really, really long note [about my feelings]. He replied "cool, but I'm not gay," and that was the end of it. I was kind of upset about it, and Katherine set me up with my first boyfriend. He was an attractive guy, and he was nice and funny, I guess. But, in retrospect, I was never really that much into it. He was my first boyfriend, he was an option. He was the only option that I knew of, so I went with it. We went out to dinner, we went to a movie, I had my first kiss. I was a giddy schoolgirl.

That summer, I was in my first ever community theatre show. There was a guy in the cast who happened to be a gay guy and we got along pretty well. We were pretty good friends and started talking; I leaned on him a lot. I kind of unloaded a lot of things that I was dealing with that I hadn't told many other people. I didn't really know what I was doing, but it didn't really matter. So, we got to talking...then talking led to flirting...then flirting led to us hooking up. It was excellent. It was absolutely fantastic. I was extremely inexperienced, but it was the first time I had hooked up with someone who knew what they were doing. But I did feel a little guilty...in
my head I had ingrained that that's not the way relationships are supposed to go. So, things got weird. We still kept in touch. I actually still credit most of me being able to accept being gay to him. He talked me through pretty much everything. He was my role model in a lot of ways because he was OK with himself and that made it OK for me to be OK with myself.

I wasn't out to my parents at the time. When we hooked up, I think we got carried away. It was unprotected. With me being as inexperienced as I was, I kind of freaked out. I thought "oh, God, I need to go get tested." So I was getting a physical for college, and I requested to get an HIV test. My mom looked at the tests that my doctor had ordered after my physical. I knew that she would see it, and that she would ask me about it. I didn't know how to tell her any other way, so that was how I let her ask me about my sexuality and my sexual activity. So, that's how I came out to her, by showing her that I was getting an HIV test, which was probably not the nicest thing to do to her, but whatever. That's also how my dad found out. I was still really embarrassed; I couldn't really talk about it.

College was a fresh start, so I thought maybe I could test the waters a bit. In my mind, nobody knew me there. Being a musical theatre major, I'm with a lot of other gay gays. So I decided that I was going to tell people that I was bi, which is not true at all. Not even a little bit. But that's what I started telling people. So I told the people who would become my best friends in college, and within a few days, we were walking down the street after a party and they said "Aaron, you're not bi, are you?". They had figured that I wasn't, and they were totally cool with that. They teased me a little about it, which honestly helped so much...they were comfortable enough to tease me about it, and that made me feel normal. I felt like I was allowed to just be me. I didn't have to be Gay (with a capital G) and wave a rainbow flag around, but I also didn't
have to be straight. I could be me, a regular guy who likes video games and sports, who happens
to have sex with guys. That’s all I really wanted to be, and I was allowed to be that.

Unfortunately, I felt more ostracized than anything in musical theatre for being gay.
Musical theatre is about big personalities, because that’s what the shows are all about. They’re
about really big people who have really big dreams and put on really big dance numbers; these
super-sequined, glamorous version of life that don’t really exist...except for the people who are in
musical theatre and try really hard to be that. So, people were really put off by the fact that I
was gay and didn’t know who Liza Minelli was, I had never worn a dance belt, I didn’t go to gay
clubs, I hadn’t had a ton of sex. I didn’t speak with a [lisp] or call other guys "girl" or know
what “fierce” meant. That’s just so not me. And people didn’t know how to put a label on me,
because that’s what musical theatre really is...there are so many labels you have to fit under.
You’re a leading man or a comic actor, you’re a baritone or a tenor, you’re a dancer or a singer.
There are these black-and-white labels, and I’m a gray as you get. And so people didn’t know
how to talk to me. I feel so uncomfortable with theatre people in general, and I know that’s a
really big blanket statement, but I don’t fit in with them, and they don’t want to try to fit in with
me, because I don’t fit their labels. So I guess that’s why I don’t have the sense of community that
other people find in theatre.

I didn’t really fit in my with my group of friends in college, which was where I really
connected with Matt in DOG SEES GOD. Matt was the popular kid; he’s the guy that everybody
is afraid of so they pretend to like him so they don’t get in his line of fire. He’s big, he’s
aggressive, he’s homophobic to a fault. When he doesn’t get what he wants, he goes out of his
way to make other people pay for it.
When I got that role and some of my classmates didn't, they got jealous and that made me feel great. When we did the show, the reactions I got out of the audience were audible, which is kind of rare for me, and THAT was fantastic. I was just like "people care...people are paying attention to me...I'm more than that proverbial speck of dust [in a reference to Seussical, the Musical], I'm important for a little bit." But, on the other hand, he's a bad person. The biggest reaction always came in the scene where I came in to kill Beethoven. I didn't even have to say anything. I stepped into the light and there was an audible gasp. People were saying "oh, shit! I know what's going to happen." I did my job as an actor; people were kinda scared of me. My mere presence carries a little weight. When I was doing it, in the moment, it was great. Then, five seconds later, after all was said and done and Beethoven's fingers got crushed in the piano, I would run backstage and punch a wall and cry uncontrollably because I felt like such shit.

I saw a lot of that character in myself, because I kept so much of myself hidden...I had admitted to myself and to some other people that I was gay, but I hadn't entirely accepted it. I kinda figured out that Matt was really in the closet and was a vulgar bully to compensate for that. I could still see small stuff that I did on a regular basis, because of the bullying, and thought, "you know, if I have this much of this character in me, who's to say that I'm not going to do something like he does. It's not impossible. It's not entirely fiction; it's reality. It's me. I picture myself as this good guy who tries to be nice to everybody and tries to help people out and wouldn't hurt a fly, but here I am looking at myself with all these terrible, terrible things that I am doing...it's scary!" I don't know...it's hard to put into words.

When the show is over, I try to just forget about the character. I mean, probably, some of it sticks. That's not true. I know some of it sticks with me. But I don't think about it anymore. I
don't make an effort to keep that alive. It's just whatever is going to happen is going to happen and I am who I am from that point forward.

Maintain in your heart all that makes you who you truly are.

-DOG SEES GOD

Aaron's story stands out to me in that he was the most deeply affected by a particular character. As you can read throughout this study, Aaron's relationship with the character Matt was a painful, yet formative one, as it helped him to frame and transcend the bullying that he had experienced. Similarly, Sean found some escape from bullying in his childhood through the theatre.
I Don't Think I Am Who I Am Without Theatre Training

I was fortunate enough to meet Sean through a colleague, and to catch him during a rare moment when he was sitting still. Sean is animated in conversation, which reflects the animation in his life. Sean moves frenetically within his seat, illustrating his story with his hands while we talk. His piercing eyes suggest that there is some truth to his intuitive sense; they appear to see well below the surface of his gaze. When we met, he was holding down a day job, working an additional job in arts administration, and acting in several out of state projects. He's a 28 year old white male actor who recently relocated to Baltimore with his partner of almost four years.

I grew up young; my parents divorced when I was 4. My mother, a bartender, never graduated from high school, and my father never finished college. Through theatre, I developed a strong sense of what a mother should be, and my mom was not that. She always loved me; she was never neglectful, but she wasn't like a 'mom'. She wouldn't check my grades, and I often had to find my own rides to get places, because she would work all night and sleep all day. I was pissed. This was not acceptable! My grandmother--my mother's mother--took over that motherly role. Sadly, she died when I was a junior in high school. She was 50-something and had cancer because she smoked. So again, I was without that motherly thing that I wanted. My mother and I...ugh...we just clashed! I remember I was working in the supermarket, and there was a girl there who I became friendly with. Her mom was the manager of the supermarket. She was very sweet, and started to recognize when I needed a ride, or she would come to see my shows and support me. She always wanted more kids. One day I got into a fight with my mother...I think I told her to get AIDS and die or something...and I moved out. I called Karen, who was this woman at the store; she picked me up and I moved into her home, and I lived there through the end of high school and college. That's where I went home to during college. For a while, it was
really hard navigating the balance between Karen and my biological family, and figuring out "who is mom?" And then navigating that familial issue on the other side, because Karen had a husband and a daughter already. Now here I am, so the tensions between me and the biological daughter were definitely there. Fuck...what do I do?

When I grew older, I realized that my mother was doing the best she could do...not making excuses, but understanding that there are things that you understand at 28 that you don't understand when you're younger. Looking back, I actually love my mother. Now, I get it. But it was a struggle having Karen, who I call "mom"; I guess I have two moms! What the fuck does that even mean? The presence of one doesn't negate the presence of the other. They both have benefits and provide me with the things I need in my life that the other can't provide. So that's a beautiful thing...and that's where I am with that now.

My brother is very loyal to my mother and has stayed with her. He lived with her and went to school locally. He's four years younger than me and never graduated from college. [He] had one year left and still hasn't finished. He bartends, like my mother, and was wrapped up into that scene and lifestyle. He has had trouble with the law and drugs, and is a complete mess of a person. So that's my family!

I think maybe I was in chorus in elementary school, or played the clarinet or recorder. I'm sure I must have done something stupid like that in middle school. My mom put me in theatre, I guess as something you have kids do. Which is interesting, because I don't necessarily think she did [it] with this great intention of "my child needs this and deserves it." Honestly, that's OK...I get it now. Sometimes, I think for her, it was a matter of, "I just need him to do something and be away, so I know he is being taken care of and somebody's watching him when I can't." So I wonder now that you asked that question, actually....how much of it was necessity
versus "I just want to give my kid exposure to different things." I wonder about the correlation between that family setting and theatre, because I feel like those are some big risky things to say "I'm moving out of my mother's home with somebody who I don't know very well", or abandoning certain aspects of that traditional familial structure because I felt like I had a familial structure in theatre. So, it's a little bit of family therapy there in theatre with the families you create.

My first show was at a theatre in New Jersey. It was Pippi Longstocking, and I was the chorus leader. I thought I was the shit because I was the leader of the chorus, which is basically like the first loser. But when you're 11, you have no idea what that means. I do remember...it's so funny now that you asked me to think about that...I remember seeing another actor get a paycheck and I thought, "oh, this is something that's real". I mean, at eleven, you're not thinking, "oh God, I can do this for a living", but I was probably thinking, "some people will give me money to get a video game or candy", whatever it is when you're 11. But I saw that this isn't just fun and games. I really invested in it, and my mother saw that, and then put me into community theatre.

There were small community theatres in town that needed kids for shows. I was in the eighth grade the first time I got my first big role. It was Bye Bye, Birdie, and I was Mr. McAfee, which is the role you put every gay person into. But, that's where it started. I was enamored with the idea that, "oh, my goodness...this is theatre!" The acting, the excitement, the praise, the ceremony around it! The family gets together, you go out to dinner, you get gifts, you do the show. There are accolades. You also meet a group of people where you feel included...we're all doing something together. We are cast members and there's this familial thing that happens.
I did shows throughout high school and at the same time performing in community theatre, and decided that never in my mind was I going to college for anything other than theatre. I felt like I was having moderate success in my small town in New Jersey, and I couldn’t wait to get out of high school. The college application process came, and I wound up going to the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, which I absolutely loved! That was a four-year BFA program. I definitely was not going to do a BA where there is more focus on studies. I was never bad at school, but I never cared enough about school. I was more concerned with, "when’s rehearsal? What do I have to do to get a doctor's note to be out of gym class?"

So I went to school for theatre for 4 years. There weren’t many Gen Ed classes that you had to take, so 5 days a week I was dancing, singing, acting, researching, performing, and rehearsing! It’s all built in. Then, when I was a senior, I had this moment of "fuck my life! What am I going to do?" I felt like I couldn't move to New York...what if I didn't make it right away? How would I live? How would I survive? Student loans were starting to come due. So, I said, "I'll go to grad school and I'll really be the shit". I applied and got into Emerson in Boston. I started to feel like I didn’t have a real degree, like a BFA in theatre wasn’t good enough, but if I got a master's in education, people would take me seriously.

I went to Emerson and loved every second of it! It just opened my eyes about arts education and about the way you could use arts in communities and programs. I was performing the whole time, doing student shows and performing outside of college while getting an education degree.

I've always been drawn to LGBT work, gay rights, and pride festivals, especially at Emerson, where I really learned how arts can be integrated into communities and societies and used to create legislation. Augusto Boal is a huge practitioner who used theatre almost in a
form of psychodrama to suss out who the oppressors are and where they are systemically. Then we can go ahead and make laws to prevent that from happening to people. I fell in love with that work—what are we doing to help impact and change society?

It's hard to balance. I'm definitely somebody who's always been split in the theatre world, somebody who wants to be a performer, but wants to be an activist. Somebody who wants to be a performer, but wants to do arts administration or teach. Somebody who wants to live the lifestyle of an actor, but also not have to worry about income. I've always been split around what I am and what I want...it's like I'm doing all of this to try and suss out exactly what I value and what I want to move going forward.

When [grad school] was over, one of my professors asked “why are you not getting an MFA in acting?” I applied to MFA programs and moved to New York. I figured if I got into an MFA program, then I could move to New York. I'll have a set calendar, I'll have a social circle. So I went to the New School for Drama and was miserable. I hated every second of it. It was a repeat of what I had done in my BFA program. After the first year, I decided it was not going to work out for me, so I hit the road and tried to actually do it in practice. I was cast at a few equity houses and did rep seasons there. I had performances in cabarets in New York, too, while working full time.

While I was in Boston, I started working for Apple part-time, and I also worked for them in New York part-time. When I left New School for Drama, a position opened up in Apple's HR, and I convinced someone to give me a job there. So, I was doing onboard recruiting for Apple in their West 14th St. store, working full time, and dating Frank, who is my partner...currently. He was in grad school at Columbia in the Teacher's College at the time. He was applying for jobs after school and one was in Baltimore. I was praying, "please don't get the job", because I was
in New York, and auditioning, and living with my two best friends and working at Apple. Loving the lifestyle that was there. But he got the job, and there was a dialogue between us, "are we going to move in together or are we not?" We had been together for 3 years at that point. I remember coming down here to help him find an apartment, and that's when it felt like it was becoming real.

So, against the advice of many others, I decided I was going to move to Baltimore, which meant leaving the apartment I loved in Brooklyn, leaving my best friends, moving away from my family. I had to give up my role at Apple and take a demotion there and move to Baltimore under the guise that it would be beneficial for me, not only because I love Frank and we're living here, but because I will be able to audition more. Or I can take less paying gigs that are going to offer EMC points, because my financial obligations would be different if I lived with Frank and lived here. So yeah, why not?

I still work for Apple; that's my full-time gainful employment with good benefits and all that kind of stuff. But, I've made work...the work I want to have...I've been able to make happen here. I've been able to perform for pay (I mean stipends). I've worked since I moved here [9 months ago], and I'm actually booked [for the next 6 months]. I will not have a moment when I'm not in a show, which is a great success for me! I was working with a company kind of as an interim Executive Director, Iron Crow, and doing some consulting there as they restructured, then assumed the role of Executive Director. It's work that is not paid, but work that I want to be work, if that makes sense.

It's interesting...I feel that there are two schools of theatre that actors subscribe to...one is "I'm playing a character that I'm creating from nothing". That isn't me. It's a creationist kind of theory. And there are others who subscribe to the idea that "no, I am who I am, and that's
what we have to work”...anything else would be fictitious or false, or people would sense the non-genuine nature of that. And so I’m just tasked with living truthfully in circumstances I have never lived in before.

I subscribe to more the second...I’m less of a creationist. I’m in an upcoming production of The Civil War. I’ve never been to the Civil War, clearly, I’ve never been in the Army, so what does that mean? The only think I will change is my sexuality. Which is fascinating, because I feel like that is a definitive requirement, whereas everything else I feel is not a definitive requirement. I mean, if I were straight, I would just show up and do the soldier role. Because it takes place in the context of a very specific time period in a very expected sexual orientation, I have to now change to match that.

That means a different timbre in the voice...it’s lower in the register, movements are going to be restricted, or heavier, or less flamboyant. This is terrible...I think of it as removing some of what I consider to be the class and sophistication and the flare that I love about myself that isn't accepted in heterosexual society. So I have to rough it up a bit. There are a whole bunch of stereotypes about gay and straight there, aren’t there?

I have to do lots of work vocally to not sound so gay. That's my own ghosts and demons about being gay and the vocal quality. I went to this workshop about how gay men who go on job interviews for straight men, and if they're perceived as sounding gay, they were less likely to get the job, which I thought was fascinating. And that exists in the theatre world, too. It BLOWS MY MIND that in this industry, straight people are playing gay roles. But, very rarely, and even if they can do it successfully, a known gay man will not be cast in a heterosexual role.
When I go into an audition, I definitely don't act straight, but I have the awareness that I might need to tone down, or diminish, or hide...which is awful. It's so awful! Because we don't cast anymore about ability to act or transform. It's dichotomous to my view of theatre.

Straight actors don't ever have to do that, even if they're auditioning for a gay role. They just get to go in and be themselves and audition. Whereas gay actors, at least myself, I have to go in and say "ok, what are the roles in the season? Do I need to be taken seriously in terms of whether or not I can play straight?" It's like you have to prove that you can play straight in the audition. A straight man doesn't have to prove that he can play gay...they just assume anybody can take on the mannerisms of being gay.

It's hard! I feel like I'm able to see it through a systemic lens...from this acceptance of what a man can be and what a man cannot be, and what society places on masculinity and femininity. And then it comes down to sexuality, and because it's something that, even to this day, we don't understand...so we have to pull from models that are already in existence. So, we draw from ideas that gays are like girls and straights are like men. It creates the sense that the only way to be commercially successful in theatre is to be heterosexual. When I'm in an audition and I see somebody who looks like me, who is talented and attractive and straight, I think, "fuck! I'm screwed! I'm not getting cast because I'm gay, even if I think I'm as attractive or as talented. He's straight, he's got something I may never have unless I either work harder to learn what straight-acting is, or I'm able to cover or mask it", or I just don't give a shit and I accept character roles, which is kind of like where gay actors end up. "Oh, you're gay? You're the funny one."

I'm trained in the Meisner technique, and I so passionately believe in that technique. But that technique is so personal and so disturbing and so awful and so broad, because it deals with
breaking down the social barriers and defenses that we have in order to then know "OK, in this scene, this is grief...I know what grief is in my life; now I have a way into this scene." Being able, when you're performing, to go directly into whatever that state of grief is. There are multiple ways of getting there, but for me, it's just an understanding that something happens through that training physiologically that just puts me back into that place again, because I understand what that is now. So, that process was very uncomfortable, but I just had this natural abandon to trust the process.

I was in this class one time, and we had to complete an impossible task, only to get interrupted by somebody knocking on the door...you've got this sense of urgency and time and all these things are compounded. I remember being naked in class, having to hide from a parent who is going to abuse me, so I'm wrapping myself in belts so he can't get to my genitalia in front of a class who I'm also friends with. It was so emotionallycharged...I was crying. I remember, after class thinking "what the fuck?" I just destroyed part of my emotional psyche to then be able to know what fear is. Whenever I need fear, I have a sense of where it lives, if that makes sense.

My own story is not so dramatic; I feel like, in the world of being gay, if you don't have a tearful story, then you didn't really have a coming out story. I don't really have a coming out story, but I also have this awful memory of my childhood. I can't get there...I don't remember the details and specifics. I wish I could go back with the understanding of "try to remember this shit". Maybe it's something in me [that made me block it out].

There's just a story I've been telling, I don't know how true it is about my coming out story. I just didn't have this dramatic coming out story...my uncle is gay. They knew about gay before I was even born. They thought I was gay when I was fuckin' wearing my grandmother's slippers and wanted to play with her nightgown and purse. It wasn't a surprise to anyone.
Middle school was miserable. I was tormented even though I said I wasn’t gay. They would tease me, call my home, leave messages...it was awful. Middle school was a nightmare. In high school, people figured out, "OK, we get it...he's gay. He just didn’t say anything." It was during my sophomore year of high school when I came out; I was 15. I finally decided, "no, I'm gay...this is crazy...why am I hiding this?” I think I told my grandmother first, my mother's mother. It came up, and she said, "I know and I love you." It was just never a big to-do. And then I told my mother. She said, "I know", and asked if I wanted to see [a therapist]...not to change me, but she wanted to provide support.

Ugh...telling my father...I refused to tell my father for a very long time. That was the scariest. I waited until we were on vacation. My whole dad's side of the family went on vacation to Hilton Head Island, and I remember telling him in the hotel room. He was just so hurt, because he knew he was the last one to know. My whole coming out story, the drama of it, surrounds the devastation of who I told when, and my family feeling like I couldn't speak to them. Each of them asked, "why didn't you tell me first? What did I do wrong?"

I grew up in West Jersey, so I was never in an environment where I had to hide. That was all self-imposed from what I saw from media or news or my own fears and naïveté around what being gay meant. I was never in an environment where I felt unsafe. I feel like I had communities that would accept gay. Theatre just happened to be the one that was most visible because that's where there were the most gays who were out. I didn't have to find a community; I was already part of one and had their support, whereas I think people who are gay and don't do theatre and live in Wichita, Kansas struggle with finding their community.

Sexuality is such a part of theatre! It's ingrained in the beauty and the history of theatre. When you see all of the photos and archives, it's Judy Garland and other stars, all lipstick and
tits out in the mirror, and it’s glamorous. We do makeup, we do hair, we do...so much of the physical body is what plays into casting...plays into the psychology of who we think the person is. We're constantly creating imagery around the human body. If I'm going to go for Broadway, I need to go to the gym...I need to have a 6-pack. You go see a Broadway show and you see all the chorus boys and they're all jacked and ripped and everything. Even the marketing is more geared toward sexuality. Look at Hedwig...or Chicago. I mean, it's all sex, it's all dance expressing the sexuality.

That carries over into my experience of theatre. When I'm going to a dance rehearsal, I'm going to make sure that my ass looks good, that I'm wearing tight little pants, that my hair is coiffed even though I'm going to be sweating it off in a minute. There's a sense that you're always being watched or looked at. You can't just go to a dance rehearsal looking like shit because you're going to be there with the director and the choreographer, who might cast you for something else. There is a social aspect to theatre and getting more work, so if someone finds you attractive, you have a higher chance of getting booked for another gig. It's so in there! I don't think people could deny that sexuality exists in theater at all times. Even in dance, the way we've constructed the body to move through the language of dance is to show off the body in its most beautiful way. You know? I don't know...maybe I'm oversexed.

I don't think I am who I am without theatre training...as a gay man or just as a man in the world. I think the theatre training is what allowed me to construct who I am and my outlook. It was always accepted to be outspoken and vocal and brazen. You have a playing ground of what you can do and say and feel. This is who I am. So much of who I am is borrowed from other people I've met or known in theatre and created this person. I tell myself it's Sean.
My final thought is a simple but might one.
It is the obligation that we have been given.
   It is to not turn out the same.
It is to grow, to accomplish, to change the world.
   -Merrily We Roll Along
We're So Dialed in to Our Emotions

Jon and Sean are two of the three self-identified activist actors in my group of participants, but with very different experiences. Where each is particularly interested in LGBT activist theatre, Jon, a 25 year old Latino man, describes a dual interest in gender and sexual identity as well as ethnic difference in the theatre. Jon's caramel complexion and pronounced cheekbones undeniably illustrate his Latino heritage. His dark brown eyes are watchful when we meet, but light up with his tremendous smile. He moves with a grace that reflects his training as a dancer. Jon alternates the use of "Latino", "Hispanic" and "Mexican" to describe his identity, which we discussed during process of writing his story from the interview transcript.

When I questioned his use of what I (through my white male lens) viewed as disparate language, he explained, "I am full Mexican. However, my household wasn't raised on Spanish. My grandmother is the only one who spoke Spanish. We basically have filtered in some customs of Mexican heritage but primarily are, for lack of a better phrase, Americanized. When it comes to acting I usually just use the language of Latino actor. I'm obviously not muck of a stickler [for language]." But, Jon's Mexican heritage does play a significant role in his acting training and experience, as well as in his work as a director and choreographer. For Jon, his heritage is both a personal identity and a social responsibility.

I actually started in figure skating. When I was younger, that's what I wanted to do. I did that from [age] 8 to 12. When you get to that age, they start training you for the Olympics, because that's what you do. And you know, I think I only wanted to be a figure skater because I saw Grease on Ice when it came to town. How awful is that? I'm sure it wasn't awful, but I loved it. And I feel like that's the only reason why I wanted to do it. When it started getting serious, I realized I didn't want to do that.
From there, I started to do dance, and did that all through high school. During my sophomore year of high school, I suffered an injury and wasn’t able to dance. I was injured in the middle of a performance, and it was embarrassing for me, so I kind of shied away from dance. I auditioned for the school play, because I felt like I had to do something. This was my sophomore year, and I did the school play, and realized, "Oh, I really like this, actually". At that age, I wanted to do everything, so after I did a straight play, I gravitated toward musicals.

I used to write a lot too as a teenager...poems and stories...and I guess I always kind of told stories. When I married that idea with dance, it was like "oh, I have the experience of this...use this." When I went to college for musical theatre, I found myself doing a lot of choreography. I eventually changed my concentration from musical theatre performance to direction and choreography. Nevertheless, I still performed, keeping in the back of my head "OK, I'm going to pick up as much as I can from this director and this choreographer, how they work, what I like, what I don't like." In the long run, you're a storyteller and you're either able to tell a good story or you're not.

I came out to my mom when I was 15. She was cleaning the bathroom, and we were fighting because she wanted to know who I was hanging out with. She didn't like this friend of mine because she thought this girl was a bad influence. I had ditched dance classes to hang out with her...she was bi and running around with a girl...her and this other guy, who I was seeing. My mom knew it...she so knew it. I came home, and she was cleaning the bathroom, and she asked, "who were you with?" I told her who, and she argued about not liking the girl. I said "yeah, well she gets me, because I am like her." And that was that. After that, things were fine. She met the boy, and after that, I thought "well, I guess I have to tell everyone else." But I didn't
want to. I didn't want to run around saying it. So, I told the one cousin I knew who would tell everyone else, and she did.

Over the next couple of months, at family parties, the aunts, uncles, and cousins came up to me, "So, how are you doing? Are you doing a show? Oh, what show? That's good. Well, if you ever want to bring someone around, that's fine." Even if I brought a friend home who was someone I was not seeing, they were so welcoming. I said, "No...oh God...No! Jeez!"

I went to school on the south side of Chicago. People got stabbed at my school occasionally; I think maybe two out of the four years I was there. Yeah, and there were some gunfights at the train station sometimes. But, as many people are surprised to find out, I was out in high school and never had any problems. Never. I did musicals. Everyone knew that, and everyone knew me because I did the musicals. So I was out in high school and it was OK. No one ever asked about it. Whether people just assumed or whatever...I was a dancer in musicals and so that was probably a dead giveaway to some people.

I went to Columbia College in Chicago. It was great...it really was! I wanted to go to NYU or University of Michigan, because before I found out that I really like choreography and directing, I just wanted to be a performer. I thought I'd have to be on Broadway...that's what you do. So when I didn't get into any of the conservatories that I applied to, Columbia was here, and I had a lot of teachers I'd had as a teenager. As much as I hated my first semester, because I thought "this isn't right, this isn't what I'm supposed to do," I suddenly found that there were so many amazing professors there. If I went to a conservatory, I would never have been able to explore. I would have just performed, 9 to 5, and that's what you do for four years. A friend of mine had a joke that Columbia is the school for regional theatre; you go to Columbia because so
many of the professors work here and there. I have to say that the first couple of theatre jobs I got were because of professors that I'd known.

I was the musical theatre program assistant for a year on campus, which got me close to a lot of the professors. Because I'd developed this love for choreography and directing and wanted to assist, I would literally run up and down the hall knocking at doors once they announced the season because I wanted to get in [to assist the artistic team]. When I didn't know if I should change my major to directing, they were very realistic. There was never sugar-coating of any kind, which was really cool to me. So thankfully, I was able to get experience with the faculty and was pretty successful.

I was actually only on stage in 2 shows in college. I was in Floyd Collins and I played Jewell Estes, which was cool for me because it takes place in Kentucky. In the real world, I would never be in that musical because I am Latino. I cannot feasibly be on stage and be believed to be living in Kentucky in the 1920s; it just isn't likely. So that was really great for me...it was a really great experience. The director worked a lot with viewpoints, which I something I hadn't heard about, and was the craziest, dumbest excuse for wasting time. I wanted to know, "where am I standing? What counts? What number am I on? How long do I have from here to here?" But once I gave in to that, I put viewpoints into my little bag [of directing tools]. And then I got to be in Victor Victoria, which was really fun, because I finally got to be in the ensemble. It was a good dance show, which Columbia doesn't do often. It was nice to be in something fun for a change. Those were the only two roles that I did...not that I didn't get anything, I just didn't audition for anything because I was assisting directors and choreographers. But I have to say that those two roles were cool and eye-opening. I go back to Floyd Collins because I would never be in that show. Victor Victoria, I suppose I could be.
Granted, it was the 30s in Paris, so not likely. but maybe I could make it work. In Victor Victoria, I got to do two of the numbers in drag, which I had never done before. That was really cool...it was something I had always kind of laughed at and put down. I thought it was just frivolous, then I did it and I thought, "this is awesome! This is so awesome, this world."

Funny as it may sound, one of the roles that hit most close to home was the Lion in The Wizard of Oz...just because of that whole striving to get something. I kind of always had that. Every time I tell people I was in The Wizard of Oz, they guess "oh, you were the Scarecrow? No. Oh, the Tin Man? No. Oh, you were...the Lion? That's weird." And I think that has to do with physical looks. Sure, that's how people would peg me, and that's just my personality...the Scarecrow. I have to say, doing the Wizard of Oz...it is what it is, but doing that show, I actually took it very seriously and created this iconic character. I took things that I liked from the movie, then kind of created this scrappy version of the Lion, who was probably a little gayer than normal, and I had a lot of fun with it. And my best, best friend played Dorothy, so it was really cool to have that be the capper of my senior year.

The Lion wants to be the king, and everyone says, "no, you're not; you're just a joke. That's cute...but just stay where you're more comfortable." I'm experiencing that with choreography. I approach people and say, "I want to choreograph your show," laugh at me, saying, "how old are you? You're a baby. You can be IN the show, but you can't choreograph the show." Well, why can't I? It's pretty frustrating, but I think it helps in the long run because it keeps me never sitting back. I always feel the need to catch up on something. I think it comes from people saying "no". So I've kind of developed this 'watch me' mentality. Like "you wanna play that game?"
Recently, I did this original musical called Hey Dancin’. It was a spoof on an 80s dance show, and it was very funny. I knew the director, and he asked me to come in for it. It was fun, but they were casting a very small cast with core characters. They cast me as Shane, who was the...the character description said “the knuckle-headed jock”. I thought...well..no, that's not usually what I'm pegged as. And so during the process, not only were the writers in the room and changing things, but I was trying to be this butch dude.

Finally, one of the book writers pulled me aside and asked me about the character, and I replied with these generic answers about the character’s life. He said "you know, in the original show, we cast a really tall buff dude to play this role." Oh well, that's great! That's reassuring! He said, "yeah, but he couldn't dance. He had two left feet". That threw me...was I supposed to be a bad dancer? "No, we went with you for a reason." That's all he said.

And so the next morning, we all got this email, this new song that we had to learn for that night's rehearsal. There was a verse for me, and it was my character quietly professing his love for the flamboyant out gay character off to the side as people are celebrating during the finale. And then it clicked and it all came together. I think they all knew that I was struggling.

However, after the whole process, I realized...and I was a little mad at myself that I didn't realize that I should have just focused on what I could bring to that, not fitting the mold of this character. So, it was this whole struggle for me to try to be this super-straight butch jock who I don’t look like.

It's always been a struggle for me to embody being physical. I am always pegged for a dancer in shows. I don't usually audition for lead roles; I audition for ensemble roles. However, it's always....I'm standing in the room and there are these very tall, built guys who totally mess up their dance calls, and you know, I killed it. Then they make the cuts, and I'm out the door.
Seriously? What it comes down to, and studying choreography, I found myself doing it...but when you're doing a certain show, you want to be diverse as possible, but if the show calls for 4 boys and 4 girls, you want them to be pretty similar in height, weight, and physique. When I'm the choreographer, I get that, I understand that, and it's what you do. Because at the end of the day, you're trying to tell a story and put on a good show. But, on the other side, it's like, "I could be up there...I could literally do everything those people are doing," but it's the physicality. It's the look, and I think it's always a struggle. It's not detrimental to my living, but it's definitely a problem. It came through in finding that role [Shane], because I was trying to do...I was trying to gain 180 pounds in my mind.

I sure wish it wasn't like that, but when you do the classic shows, the iconic ones, the ones with the big ensembles, yeah, they all have to look the same, they have to be the same height and the same weight, they all have to be in perfect precision. If you're looking at this line of people and everyone's leg is over their head, and you have the person on the end who is halfway there, that's a problem. There are so many awesome people who could be up there with that line but they're too short...I guess it's just the nature of the beast with musical theatre.

[One time, I was working on casting a show] and these four guys were vying for the same role, a baseball player. We had the tall blond white guy who was very handsome, very capable of doing the role, and then we got this short, stocky, maybe not as handsome Asian guy, and they both nailed their callback. It was great! I'm serving as the choreographer on the show, and I had this burning desire...we had to go with the Asian guy. At the end of the day, the director didn't. She didn't want to because that's not what she saw, and that's fine, because you have to think of the person he's playing opposite, and whether or not they look good together. But I wanted it to work out for him so badly! When I thought about it, I think it's for me being Latino,
there's this unspoken desire to see someone who's different doing something really awesome.  

From my upbringing...I grew up on the south side of Chicago. There were a lot of Latino people who don't have the chances I was lucky enough to have because my parents were supportive in everything. So, I was lucky in that sense. I know so many people that I used to dance with or figure skate with or who did shows with me, and they stopped pursuing [those activities] because they couldn't afford it. They couldn't go to school. They ended up getting pregnant.

I'm not saying or assuming that everyone who's white has money and opportunity, however, I think sometimes that when you have an Asian or Hispanic who comes to audition and they don't have the same technique or platform to perform from, it's because they haven't had the same classes and opportunities. When I am choosing people for callbacks, I sometimes find myself saying "there's a lot of white people here. I'm going to call back these two guys...black guys, and this Asian, and this Hispanic." I don't know if I feel obligated to do that because if I don't do that, I'm doing something wrong, because we need to start this dialogue and we need more ethnic people in the theatre.

I had a huge discussion with a friend who was complaining about how they've recently been producing on Broadway things like all African-American casts of Tennessee Williams plays. She said "I don't know why they have to do that. It doesn't make any sense to me." I look at it this way...you have these really, really great plays...why would you do them the same all the time. They're not taking Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and setting it in Vietnam and casting all Asian people--that's not what they're doing. They're still going along with the intention of the play and the playwright and the themes. That's all there. They're just putting different people in the roles and seeing how much that shakes things up. She said, "well, what about Streetcar Named Desire? It says that he [Stanley]is Polish in the text. What do you have to say about that?"
Yeah, I guess that’s weird. That’s different, because it’s in the text. Miss Saigon, it’s in the text. Oklahoma, it’s in the text. That’s not adhering to the original intention. But I wholeheartedly support doing a Cat on a Hot Tin Roof with an all African-American cast. I think that’s great. That adds a whole different element to the show and connects to a completely different group of people.

Theatre is great because there are so many different kinds of people. I know so many people who came out because of theatre, because it’s such a welcoming place. For me, I was already there, and I think that my whole thing with coming into theatre and finding it so welcoming is because I was injured and theatre was a place to flex my creative muscle. So, I think it was a different type of ‘coming out’. It wasn’t a sexual thing, because I knew that already. It was finding a group of people who thought like me in terms of creating something, and it didn’t hurt that a lot of them were gay too, or girls who loved being around us. So yeah, I was slightly different, however, being around those kinds of people, I think you’re able to experience, have more physical connections with people you know, versus coming out and not being in theatre.

My very, very good best friend, I’m still best friends with him, we did theatre in high school and randomly dated one summer. For him, it was the first experience with a guy he’d ever had. So for him, doing stuff in theatre was his...that helped him come out. I don’t think you get to those feelings when you don’t do theatre, when you’re not literally talking about your emotions all the time, playing emotions all the time. It’s this crazy hot-bed of people who are doing a show and being affected by its themes...the showmances happen because you think you like each other when you spend 20 minutes in the dressing room with each other because you’re both offstage at the same time. We’re so dialed in to our emotions, and analyzing our emotions
that we start using that abnormal muscle and we tap into something that normal people avoid thinking about on some level. They don’t want to talk about it, or they don’t know how.

I know some people who did the musicals in high school because they're gay. They weren't particularly good at it, and they're not doing it now. But they did it because they saw these people, they knew us, and we were so inviting. So they put on the costumes and got on stage and sang and danced with us, but they were able to explore stuff with other people, just coming out and not feeling like the only person, you know?

Everyone deserves a chance to fly.
-Wicked

Compared to the stories shared here so far, Jon's is unique in that he examines the physicality of being a gay man as that identity intersects with the physicality of his Mexican ethnicity. I found an interesting contrast between Jon and Ted's stories, in that both described the significant role of movement and physicality as it related to their sexual identities. While Jon has a slight build and appears young for his age, Ted has a larger build and, as a younger actor, always portrayed older characters. Their stories are remarkably similar for two actors who are separated by nearly thirty years and several hundred miles.
I Do Think, In the Beginning, Theatre Was Something for Me to Hide In

Ted and I share more than a name. We attended the same undergraduate university, and he came to participate in this study after he responded to an online social media post in a group for graduates of the theatre department at that school. Ted is a white male in his late forties. I remember that, during our first interview, Ted mentioned his physicality several times, suggesting that his larger size and booming, operatic voice hindered his participation in musical theatre. At the same time, he described himself as "light on my feet" and as a person who came to appreciate dance at a young age. Similar to my juxtaposition of Jon's and Ted's stories here, I remember thinking when we met that Ted presented an interesting juxtaposition of someone who describes himself with a physically assuming presence but who is actually quite soft-spoken. His assuming stature and facial hair give him an overt masculinity, but his aggressive appearance quickly fades into a gentle, welcoming demeanor as we begin to talk about his early experiences.

One of the things I loved about being involved in theatre was the strong sense of family. I have two older sisters who are 15 and 16 years older than me, so I basically grew up as an only child and the baby of the family. By the time I came around, my parents had that attitude of "kids will be fine," so I was left to my own devices in a lot of ways. Not that I had a severely dysfunctional family, but we all did things separately from early on. Getting involved in theatre, that was one of the things that I loved the most; all of the sudden, you have this family. I love that feeling because I did not have a strong sense of family in the family that I grew up in as far as a traditional nuclear family. We didn't eat dinner at the table. We didn't organize trips too much, but theatre was a big part of our celebrations. Definitely birthdays, anniversaries, things like that.
My mother grew up in backwoods Louisiana, and was raised in a Santeria sort of faith. My father became a Hare Krishna later in life. I grew up in a small Catholic school, so I have a really broad background religiously and spiritually. My father was a Coast Guard captain, so he was away for eight months out of the year. I didn't have a very good male role model, so I think everything about my growing up had a much more feminine bend to it. I knew how to cook really early, I loved baking, and I loved doing that sort of stuff. The majority of my friends, even when I was small, were girls. I didn't have much of a relationship with the guys growing up. I think my whole frame of reference was just more feminine.

Then, as I got into high school, that was something to be teased about and picked on for. Once I discovered theatre, and because I did look older and I did look just bigger and stronger, it gave me a way to sort of experiment with, "well, how do I do this guy thing? How do I act more male? How do I act more butch?" The roles I was chosen for helped me out with that a lot. My start in musical theatre was in high school. I had done a lot of singing before that, but my start was in Godspell at my Catholic school. I played John/Judas [Traditionally, in Godspell, the actor playing John the Baptist also plays Judas in the second act]. I went to a small Catholic school, so I was one of a small handful that were actually willing to do the theatre thing. I was discovered by one of the teachers who learned that I sang a lot and thought "let's get him involved." Before that, I hadn't had much theatre experience as far as memorizing lines and getting up and doing a show. I had always done solos as a choir person and things like that.

At my school, we had no music program. We didn't really have a theatre program, but one of the teachers had started a drama club. My father is an engineer, and I had a math brain; it was also just assumed that I was going to follow in his footsteps. Once I discovered theatre, my track completely changed. And there was something great about this challenge...the fact that
I could go to college for this and I hadn't really studied it. It was very exciting to me to be faced with the challenge of going to school with people who have done this for half their lives already. I've never been one to turn down challenges.

I think one of the things I didn't expect...it was a bit of a shock to realize that there is and there should be a lot of training involved in this. Of course, growing up in this area, the first thing you run into is a voice teacher who says that you have a Baltimore accent (and you say "no I don't"). Running into situations like that and realizing that this is really hard work getting rid of something you didn't realize you had. Training vocally, it was tough to get myself into the practice room and do the work that I needed to do. On top of that, I did have this struggle to catch up musically with so many people that were so much further ahead of me. I did...I put my nose to the grindstone really early on.

When I went to Towson, there was certainly a lot more exposure to gay people than in high school...certainly more so for the men. Although when I went to Towson, there was a very large lesbian contingent...Towson was so big into women's studies, and that sort of crepted into the theatre program as well, just opening up to more lesbian writers and that sort of thing.

I was at Towson at a time that they were piecing together this movement aspect [of the program] to explore how movement connects you to emotionality. I still have a really great relationship with the teacher I had in that, and there were a lot of breakthroughs for myself...because of movement and accessing emotion. I do think, in the beginning, theatre was something for me to hide in. Part of that, I think, was being gay. I'm a big guy...I've had a beard since I was 15. I've always played fathers, uncles, priests...that sort of character...typically masculine characters. I think initially theatre was one of those ways I could sort of butch it up a
little bit and have the opportunity to hide this thing that, when I was in school in the late 70s and early 80s, it was still really taboo at that time.

I've always been a big guy, and I grew up being told that I should play football and I should do stuff like that. I guess there was a rebellious nature that was like "I'm not going to do that." I was very light on my feet; I did things growing up like square dancing in elementary school. I happened to have a music teacher who was very much into square dancing and teaching us other things like that, and I happened to be one of the guys that was a really good mover.

I think exploring movement helped me get more grounded. That was one of the things that came up. I found out that with the lightness of foot that I had, that it also connected with some things like being good at making decisions. One of the things we worked on a lot with me was just being able to get really grounded to the earth. Once I got a handle on that, it really opened up the door to a whole bunch of other things, which sexuality definitely was one of those. I definitely knew I was gay early on, but acting on it sexually, I was definitely a late bloomer as far as that's concerned. I do think going through movement classes, and just being more grounded and more centered in my pelvis all this sudden awakened this whole thing that was like "wow, what do I do with this?"

In that atmosphere, it was incredibly supportive. When you're doing work like that and you're with a whole group of people that are revealing these sides of themselves...even if you said the most horrible thing, people were there to support you. I think there as a lot about that experience and once again like this family I didn't necessarily have. It's not that I had a cold family, but I grew up in a very Germanic type of family, where there's not much sense of humor, not much emotion, there's not much hugging. So, the opportunity to express yourself and feel
good about it, or not feel shameful about showing it. I didn't grow up in a very demonstrative family, so theatre definitely helped that happen, and I was able to learn to be more demonstrative and show people that I cared about them.

Taking that and interacting with others on the stage, being sensitive to the give and take of the relationship on stage, interestingly enough, I think that's what made me a better listener. There's definitely a point in actor training where it is no longer about learning lines and spitting back out, but learning your lines, saying them, hearing what the other person says back to you, and it changes what your intention is going to be. That give and take is definitely an important part of becoming a stronger actor and stronger performer.

I graduated with a dual degree in music and theatre. I was told that because I looked older but was still in my 20s, that it was going to be 20 years before I was able to really start working as an actor. Ironically, what I found at first was that, because of my look, I fell into classical theatre quite quickly and quite readily. I did a lot of classical theatre, but I always had a musical bend, so I started working in operas. Today, it's a bit more difficult to find the time, but I've done a couple of things. I still actively do costuming, I'm an active singer, and I still do a lot of solo work. I've sort of pulled away from doing things in the professional end and evolved back into more community theatre. There's a little less stress and a little more joy associated with it when it isn't your paycheck.

I miss it a lot...when I first became a nurse, it was impossible to do theatre. I was an oncology nurse for years and years, and the emotional involvement in that made theatre totally inaccessible for me as a performer. But, in the last five years, I've pulled away from that sort of nursing, and almost immediately I was back in a choir, then back in a show. One of the most difficult transitions for me when I left theatre for nursing was the switch from that very liberal
theatre family where you could be out and who you could be yourself with...and I sort of went back into the closet a little bit. It took me like 2 or 3 years when I became a nurse to talk to my colleagues about my partner and that sort of thing. There's just a certain comfort level between people that have worked in theatre that are like your family, you know?

I hate to say this, but there was a lot about theatre as far as performing...you know, as out as I was with my friends in theatre, one of the things that I learned in theatre was how to cover things up. I got really good at being in the closet. One of the things I've had to work on is that being in theatre, I learned to become a really good liar. I am in recovery; I did have a very bad drug problem for a while. I think that I learned how to lie like that allowed me to cover that up for a really long time. I'm sure it connects to my sexuality in some way.

It was much, much easier to come out to my theatre friends, but it took me a long time to come out to my family. Even though I know I've overheard conversations between my parents wondering if I was gay or not, it was still difficult to come out to them. I came out to my father first because, like I said, he went from this life of being a Coast Guard captain to being a Hare Krishna. I knew that he was just more open in general. My mother...it was sort of a deathbed experience. My mother was dying of cancer at the same time that I was becoming a nurse. I guess because I was extremely close with my mother that I just felt there was sort of this unspoken thing, but for some reason there was this need at the end of her life to acknowledge it. I guess more than anything there was a need to assure her that I was going to be OK.

I recently got engaged, and that's sort of been the time that I've come out with my sisters. I'm still not quite sure how the accepted or...I still get a lot of awkward "what do we refer to him as...?" "My fiancé." That sort of thing. But it was definitely [coming out to my] friends first, then the workplace was really easy because it was professional theatre. I guess if you work in
theatre, you are open enough...I guess it's more that you're in a study of the nature of
humankind, and you know that other kinds of people exist out there. But not everyone thinks the
way that you do.

"Things are seldom what they seem,
skim milk masquerades as cream.
Highlows pass as patent leathers,
jackdaws strut in peacocks' feathers."
-HMS Pinafore

In Ted's story, he refers to his theatre cohort as his "family" and refers very infrequently
to his family of origin. It was clear, however, that he cared very deeply for his mother, as his
body language shifted to appear more reminiscent when he talked about his mother's death.

Similarly, Dan's body language changed to reflect the heavy burden of emotion that he
carries around the loss of his mother, and the regret that he was not able to come out to his
mother before her death.
**But When I'm Performing, It's an Emotional Escape**

Dan and I met through a mutual friend early on in the participant recruitment process. Dan was the first participant I interviewed, and we joked afterward that neither of us really knew what to expect from the process. When we met, I was immediately taken by Dan's colossal smile, which filled the room as we talked. Of the participants I interviewed, Dan was the most cosmopolitan in appearance. His stylish clothing and coiffed blond hair have a worldly appearance, which is a sharp contrast to his small-town roots in central Pennsylvania. He's a 28 year old white male who has lived in New York City for a number of years. As we talked for a couple of hours, we realized that we shared so many common experiences, many of them being rooted in growing up in Irish-Catholic families heavily influenced by our grandparents. At the end of the interview, Dan remarked that one of his dream roles is the very role that provided the impetus for this study about 5 years ago, Mark in Altar Boyz, a role that subtly suggests that the character is resolving his sexual identity in light of strong Catholic values.

_I was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania, but moved to Kutztown when I was 4. So, I really grew up in Kutztown and went to school there. It's very rural. I grew up on a hill in the middle of nowhere. The town itself is very small...small-minded people. I haven't been back since I graduated. My dad moved, so I'll probably never go back, honestly._

_I'm also adopted, so maybe we should throw that in there too. I was adopted when I was a baby, through a Catholic adoption agency. They don't tell you anything, there's no medical history given, just "here's your baby." My brother was adopted too, but from a different family. I always knew, it wasn't something they had to tell me one day. I never felt any kind of emptiness really, because I had such a loving family and supportive family. That was my family, you know. I think now that I'm getting older, I think about it more. [My birth parents] had requirements for_
the adoptive parents. One of them was that I be somehow involved in music. My dad was a drummer in a band...he's a big old hippie...so my birth parents must be involved in music somehow, and they wanted that to be part of my life.

My mom started me with piano lessons when I was 5. She drove me to every single piano, voice, and dance lesson that I ever had, and she was the one that told me to audition for my first show when I was 10. She was a huge influence on me as far as pursuing music and all that. We were really close.

There was a dinner theatre in Kutztown that was really close by. It had recently opened, and they were doing The Sound of Music. I was around the age to be one of the kids, so my mom said I should audition. When she told me I should audition...I sang in my room all the time...but that option had never really crossed my mind. I remember praying with my mom before we auditioned, and she said "we're not going to pray that you get the part; we're just going to pray that you do your best." I got the part and I was kind of hooked after that. I did shows there every summer until I was 15 or 16.

There was a guy in the show that taught tap, so I started taking tap lessons from him. His sister taught ballet, jazz, and musical theatre dance, so I started with her. I only took dance, though, up until high school. It was hard to balance everything. My voice teacher...I started taking voice lessons at about the same time...he was very serious about district chorus and being involved in competitive singing, so that took up a lot of my time.

I remember one summer there was this guy in the show...I was 14, and he was 21...so a little bit of an age gap there. He was very flirtatious the entire summer, and I actually had my very first kiss ever with him. It was in the movie theatre, in the middle of the public bathroom. Anyone could have walked in. I had never kissed anyone before. It was very abrupt, and
jarring; there wasn't a lot of time or consideration for my feelings. I was shaking afterwards, and it kind of messed me up for a little bit at least. So I just shut that whole idea out of my head for a couple years and started high school.

I went to Catholic schools from 4th grade until 10th grade, in the Allentown area, then in my last 2 years of high school, I switched back to Kutztown High School. When I was younger, my parents felt like I was a little further along, so they wanted to put me in Catholic school to help progress my education. I ended up leaving Catholic school because...one of the reasons was because I wanted to come out, and I felt like in Catholic school, they kind of had the authority to tell you certain lifestyles are not OK. So, also, there was a better music program...my voice teacher was the choir director at the public high school. So for both of those reasons, I wanted to switch.

I had told maybe a few friends at my old school at the end of my sophomore year. The first person I told...it was a girl who everyone was kind of hoping that we would start dating. I think I took her to some dance or something and everyone thought we were going out. I felt like I couldn't lie to her; I couldn't lead her on to thinking that this is going to be something. So I told her. I cried, because I didn't know what was going to happen, but she was a sweetheart.

Around the same time, I was learning how to drive...I had the car in reverse instead of drive, and I stepped on the gas in the middle of a parking lot. My dad got really mad and...it was more like a disappointed kind of conversation...and I got really upset. I think I was crying. I believe I was. "I don't think you're going to support me in everything!" He basically said, "I'll support you no matter what, and don't think that I don't know." So, I never actually said the words to him, but he said "I know, and I still love you." And that was it. I told my grandmother
a few weeks after that, and it was the same kind of thing. That was a relief, because I wasn’t sure...My grandmother was all Irish Catholic, like said the Rosary every single day.

My mom passed away when I was 16...maybe we should come back to that, because that was...I never told her that I was gay. There was so much going on family-wise. For a while, it was really hard. My dad never dated anyone else besides my mom. They met in high school; he went to an all-boys Catholic school, and she went to an all-girls Catholic school. They got married and that was it. Then, when she passed away, it was hard.

I definitely feel like being on stage and playing other people was definitely an escape. I wasn't at home, you know. I was performing and everyone thought I was great, and I could be around other gay people and making friends doing what I loved. I mean, I would say in high school, after my mom died, there were a lot of hard times financially. My grandmother lost her husband pretty quickly after my mom died, and she kind of went nuts for a little bit...so every time I had to leave for a voice lesson or play rehearsal or band practice, it was like freedom. It was...I just had to think about that...what I was doing at that moment.

I went back to Kutztown for 11th and 12th grade, and as soon as I stepped foot in that high school for 11th grade, I said, "I'm gay...this is who I am." It was like a fresh start. I told my brother in the car driving to my first day of school going to public school, "by the way, if anyone asks or says anything, I am gay, so I don't want you to defend me and say that I'm not, because I am." And he said, "I know". He's a year and a half younger, and he has always had my back. We're complete opposites. He's like this big guy, he played football, and didn't really ever care about school too much. If anyone ever gave me any kind of trouble, he was always ready to beat somebody up.
I was really brave. I have to give myself credit for that. There were a lot of redneck kind of people at that school that I'm sure had never met a gay person in their lives. I remember this group of guys at lunch were like, "are you gay?" and I just said, "yeah". I know I heard them laughing or whatever, but I was very bold. I wore pink shirts, jeans with holes all over them. I was almost making an example of myself like, "I'm the only gay person in this high school. I am a good guy. I am a nice guy. I want to show you it doesn't really matter...either you like me or you don't."

I still keep in touch with a few of the girls I was friends with, but to them, I feel like I'm still the token gay guy. Like they refer to me as "my gay friend", not just "my friend Dan". It's like you were the gay guy, so that's what you are. They never judged me for it, but that was who I was to them. I haven't been back since I graduated, so we just text every once in a while.

The summer after graduation, I had a serving job to save up money, and then I went to the University of Hartford in Connecticut. Mostly everyone I graduated with stayed in the area, but I needed to see the world, and experience real life. The Hartt School was intense! I had 8:30 class every day and it went all day. The great thing about Hartt is that they were constantly doing some kind of production, so every semester I was doing something. I was in class all day long, and then I'd have rehearsals from like 7:00 until 10:30 every night. Even on the weekend, I had class. We had rehearsals on Saturdays and then Sunday was my Master Class. So I was in school every single day.

I did On the Town, I did Tommy, I did How to Succeed. I got to do some straight plays, which was actually one of my favorite things to do in school because I felt like I learned so much more about acting doing that. You're not thinking about...there are no music rehearsals...I did Twelfth Night, Much Ado, Caucasian Chalk Circle, A Man of No Importance...a lot of different
ones. In college, I was more of a character actor, so any part that was like an old, crazy guy, they'd say "Oh, Dan...". So I played a lot of parts where I had to become older, wear a beard, gray my hair, act crazy...

I played the priest in A Man of No Importance. That was interesting because I grew up with that...I went to school, I went to church every single Sunday, so playing that was interesting. The play itself kind of revolves around this man who is gay, and he is struggling with his identity because of the Catholic/Irish thing. The priest was very traditional, but he had a heart, and he was very comforting to the man who was struggling with his identity. I could definitely relate to the religion thing, and the struggle between gay and Catholic.

My freshman and sophomore years were very...way more self-discovery outside of class and school. I got a job as a shot boy at a club and I had to wear underwear and people put money down my pants, you know, going up to me and saying very flattering or creepy comments. I never got to experience that kind of stuff at home, so when I went to school and I was away from my family, it was like...now I'm just going to do everything I want, and I'm going to work at a club, and I'm going to go out and meet people and hook up with them and all that crazy stuff.

Then, junior year, I was dating someone serious. We were together for a year and a half, until I graduated, and we were really serious. So it was a range from in the beginning of college trying to experience as much as I could all at once, to trying to have a real boyfriend and focus on that.

As soon as I graduated, I did The Wedding Singer at a playhouse called TriArts in Connecticut. There were some classmates of mine in that production as well. Then I moved to New York in the fall with three girls who were in my class. I did a few small things when I moved; I was auditioning every day when I moved here, and I wasn't really concerned with
working too much. I just wanted to perform...you know, I was still full of that passion and energy. I did a reading of a new show, and then I did a small tour of Miracle on 34th Street. Then, I booked Disney Cruise Line and left for nine months doing that. I had a 4-month break in between and did another one.

When I came back, I started working right away because I didn’t want to blow through all the money I’d saved. I started working and I wasn’t concentrating on auditioning all that much. I have been getting more into playing lately...I play piano, and I’ve been doing that a lot. I give coachings for my friends, I’ve accompanied a few shows in the city. I’m kind of thinking outside the box as I get older.

I just got really lucky with doing Disney Cruise Line when I graduated, and I didn’t experience a lot of the open calls. I was performing, making money, and traveling. And now that they haven’t called me back, I need to make money somehow. So I have been serving in restaurants and catering and doing all of the horrible survival jobs. But now, I don’t know how much longer I can do those kind of jobs. It's so...soul...it's soul-sucking.

There was a time in the past few months that I was considering getting a normal job. I was typing up my real-person resumé and I was considering becoming a flight attendant. I was thinking about doing admissions at a university so I would have a steady paycheck and health insurance. But, then I feel like...I'm 26...I'm still young enough that it's not too late, and I feel like that fire is starting back up inside me to go audition. I can do this. This is what I know.

I'm a very strong person. You know, I had to deal with...as soon as I was born, not knowing who my birth parents were, and going through an identity thing with the Catholic church. I can't knock my parents for raising me in that environment, because I feel like not everyone in that community is judgmental. I have met wonderful people and all my
teachers...I've learned a lot from them. But when I'm performing, it's like an emotional escape. I can set all that other stuff aside for a couple of hours and just be in the moment.

“Oh, if life were made of moments, even now and then a bad one. But if life were only moments, then you’d never know you had one.”

-Into the Woods

Dan was kind enough to welcome me into some memories that were not always pleasant, and at times painful to remember. The happy memories of his mother and her support for his art were at times overshadowed by the sadness of her death. It appeared that the Catholic church has been, at times in Dan's life, a great source of support, while at other times, it has been a source of strife. Similiarly, for Aundra, the church has played a dual role in his search for identity.
And It Was Basically My Story that I Got to Play

Aundra is a 31 year old African-American actor (who jokes that he's on his 3rd attempt at being 29) who lives and works in New York. He has dark brown eyes, close-cropped hair, and the expressive eyes and facial expressions of an actor. While he appeared at first to be soft-spoken, he became more animated as we talked. When we met, he had just returned from a stint in Atlanta where the show on which he was working on had been touring. Aundra was quick to level the judgments that I had made about his show being an activist piece, which led me to question some of my own assumptions about the overlap of activist and mainstream theatre.

I was born in Jersey, and lived there until I was 7. Then, I moved to Colorado and lived there for 12 years. I went to school in Philly from there, and moved to Georgia after...my parents moved to Georgia after my sophomore year in college, so after graduating, I went down there for a few years, then moved up to New York after that. I'm the oldest of three; I have a sister who is 5 years younger and a brother who is 6 years younger than me. Because I'm 5 and 6 years older than them, growing up, there was a distance because I was always older and they were closer, going to school together and all that jazz, so I was kind of the odd man out. Now, with my sister, we're closer and hanging out more. I notice that I'm enjoying her company now that we're adults and she's not picking on me or driving me crazy or whatever. My brother, I still don't talk to him all that frequently, but when we are together, like a family vacation or something like that, we get along really well and have a good time.

I first started acting...I remember back in elementary school doing a few productions at the school. I remember this sort of musical revue thing we were doing. I remember I did this little dance number to Singing in the Rain with an umbrella. I had to jump up and click my heels. That's the first thing I remember acting-wise.
I didn't do much of it in middle school, then in high school, toward the end of freshman year, we were picking classes for the upcoming year. I was struggling to come up with an elective, and a friend of mine suggested I join the vagabond theatre. So I agreed to do it. We all signed up and started doing it the following year. They did traveling shows, maybe 4 or 5 throughout the year, and we would go to elementary schools to perform them. You had to audition for roles in each show. I didn't want to audition for the first one, so they cast me as the cow. Basically, I just went on stage and mooed and shook around a little bit, then walked off stage. After that I was like, "fuck this! I'm not being the cow again!", so then I started auditioning for the pieces.

I guess I really started realizing that I was gay around middle school. You know, there were guys I had crushes on. I grew up in the church and while it wasn't really...I never really remember hearing any anti-gay messages from my church or parents or anything, but I guess it always felt like this taboo. I guess in high school it was the same thing. There were guys that I worked with in the theatre group that were outwardly gay and open about it. I was always a little envious that they were able to be comfortable in who they were.

So, I went off to college and was basically living the same lifestyle I was living back home. Went to church, all that stuff. There weren't any people...I didn't associate with any people I knew were gay at the time. When I was in college, I was primarily in the gospel choir. I did a little more dance. I was also in a Latin dance group there. I was a little more focused on music and dance there in school.

I actually went to school for business, because it was the logical thing to do. So I did that...hated it. After my sophomore year, I was just so miserable, and my parents had moved to Georgia, so I decided to take a semester off, which actually turned into a year. When I went back
home, I really found myself struggling with it a lot. I was ordering books off the internet about being gay and Christian, and reading them in secret and all that jazz. Movies off Netflix...I remember I rented Brokeback Mountain...they came in those red envelopes at the time. Usually, I would be home early enough before my parents to get the movie and take them. I remember one day I came home and the movie was opened; it wasn't Brokeback Mountain...it was some other gay movie. I remember panicking, "oh, my God! I don't know who saw it!" Nothing was ever said about it.

I also looked online a little about like reparative therapy type stuff, and I joined up with this messaging board. It felt like, "OK, we can help you through this, so you don't have to feel this way." They set me up with an individual counselor, and we were emailing back and forth. He suggested that we should chat on the phone and sent me his phone number. I felt like "this is getting too personal...too close...can't deal with it," so I ended it.

The first person I came out to was this girl that...I went on a singing, performing arts tour with this Christian group and there was a girl I met there. She and I were really close. And I remember calling her, it was April 1st, April Fool's Day, and I basically came out to her. It was funny the words that I used. I said to her, "So...you know how guys in theatre tend to be...?", and she said, "dramatic?" No, not quite...but I told her I was gay and she was cool with it. I guess for the next few years, probably the next 4 to 5 years, coming out to people was a challenge.

I was entertaining the idea of going to school for theatre down in Georgia. I was actually going to audition for AMDA up here in New York, sort of waffling back and forth. Some older friends of my parents said "oh, you're already going to such a great school...you're almost done...why don't you stick it out?" I took their advice and stuck it out. The next two years were pretty good, but yeah...I guess it's another one of those turning points that I didn't take...damn it!
I think I lived down in Atlanta for about 4 more years then moved up to New York. I was kind of doing my own thing and I finally decided, "hey, I'm in New York. I'm paying my own bills. I don't have to answer to Mom and Dad, so I'm going to go off and do my thing." I went to this gay meet up group for 20 year olds, and I met this guy who I started dating. Broke up a while later and I was devastated. I just needed to get out of the city, so I went to Jersey and stayed with my aunt. We were at Walmart, and I wanted to get a teddy bear. She asked me, "you're a grown-ass man...why do you want a teddy bear?" So I got the bear and we went home. Later, she was on the phone with my mother and my mother asked to speak with me. She asked, "baby, who's the teddy bear replacing?" "Nobody, I just wanted a teddy bear! Leave me alone!"

So I went back up to New York the next day, and she called me that evening. "I'm your mother, and I feel like you can talk to me and be open." I kind of felt what was coming next, and was like "alright, bring it on!" She said, "your aunt thinks you might be questioning your sexuality." I said, "nope, I'm not. I'm not questioning. I'm gay." She said, "OK," and that she would let me tell the rest of my family--my brother, my sister, my dad. "I'll let you do that on your own time."

After the phone call, I felt good...relieved. Then, the next day, I was at work and my mom called and asked, "so, how would you feel if I told your sister?" I said it would be OK, and she replied, "good, because I was talking to her and..." Thanks, Mom! So, basically, my mom did the rest of the leg work for me, which is good. And they have been supportive and receptive. My current boyfriend has met my family...they're great.

As an actor, I've played a lot of gay characters. One particular one that I remember...we were doing one-acts back in high school. I don't remember the particular character, but the character I was playing was a more flamboyant gay guy. I remember I was performing with a
girl, and he wore a scarf and would flip the scarf around. I had a lot of fun doing it. The audience loved it! We were laughing and all that jazz. There was another show shortly thereafter that I auditioned for...the character was gay. I was talking to my aunt one time and she asked why I always get the gay characters. I wasn't out at the time. I went to the director and turned down the role. "I just don't want to represent that; I don't want to do that sort of thing." I don't think anybody ever knew why; I never told anybody. But, it was a comedic gay character...flamboyant and effeminate...that's the go-to stereotype.

I worked for an educational theatre for about 4 years. We did some things publicly where we were trying to make people aware of domestic violence. We were very progressive in teaching young people about safe sex...it wasn't abstinence only...it was "you have options...here are your options."

In working for this theatre, I did a show, and actually, my character's name was Andre. In that theatre, we would play the age of the kids that we were performing for. So, this was a high school show, and Andre was struggling with coming out. He had a monologue in there about being afraid to tell his friend, how his parents were religious...just struggling with the situation. And it was basically my story that I got to play. Somebody else had written it years before I joined the theatre. So that, I thought, was very personal just because it was me in that respect. It was interesting. I really felt that it was easier to play him because I had those experiences. As part of the theatre that I was in, we would stay in character after the performance and the kids would have a chance to talk back to us. I remember frequently after giving the monologue where Andre says that he's gay and he's afraid to come out, you'd hear snickers from the kids like "Oh my God, he's a fag!" It would be hard because, it's like...you
know, if it's another show, if it's another character, the audience's reaction is not about me, it's about the character. But in this case, it's about the character and it's about me.

I remember one time after the performance, our company manager came to me and asked what it was like standing up on stage and hearing people boo and snicker after that. "It's hard to hear and it's frustrating, because it's not only me hearing this. It's all the other kids who are in the audience who are...they're trying to hide or they're not hiding or whatever, and they're hearing their peers' reactions." I guess that's the most powerful role I've done in the sense that because now I'm able to educate these kids on this experience, and while they never know that it's my experience, I'm answering their questions afterword and saying, "I'm not checking out the other guys in the locker room...I'm not going to hit on all my friends..." and all that.

I was 24, so playing a 17 year old, I made him a little more youthful. A lot of the schools we were performing in were more urban environments, so I wanted him to be a little hipper than...that makes me sound really old...make him more like the kids we were performing in front of. So, dress-wise, walking-wise, interacting with the co-stars on stage.

I consider myself able to pass, if you will. Most people don't assume I'm gay. Even the guys I've dated..."you're gay, right? Like, are you sure?" So, with Andre, I didn't feel like I had to butch up for him or change in that way. I tend to be cast in the nice guy roles. But, even the nice guys have a scene, if it's a fully developed show, where they're an asshole at some point. I enjoy getting to play that...that's why I chose to become an actor, because you get to explore these different facets of other people and yourself. I think we all have a myriad of characteristics, just at different levels. If I get to play an asshole, I get to ramp up my asshole-ness!
The show I'm in now, it's called B-Boy Blues, and it's based off a series of novels written by James Earl Hardy. He started maybe 20 or 25 years ago writing them. It's basically a black gay love story; he saw a void in black gay stories and decided to fill the void, and it became a very influential set of works in novel format. We've been taking it to different cities over the past year and a half and gotten a great response. People read the books and they helped them come out, and now they are able to re-live all those emotions.

I would say that this is different [than other gay love stories] because of the cultural differences that are in it. The character that I play is a corporate type, grew up around a lot of white people, that sort of thing. Education-wise and all that, he's well-off, so he's part of mainstream culture, if you will. The character that he falls in love with is a little more ghetto, a little more urban. It comes from a different cultural perspective. So, you have the black layer, the racist layer, and then you have the intercultural layer that's all being dealt with and worked out in the show. So that's why I would say it's a black gay love story. It's a story that anybody else can relate to, but James wrote for that missing voice in the sphere, and it's focused on a black gay audience.

It's a shame...I actually didn't find B-Boy Blues when I was going through that experience. I remember there were a couple others...I can't remember their names, but the characters were white characters who were struggling with coming out, and that's what I found. I grew up mainly around white people, so the "Black Experience" was foreign to me. Up until I went to college, I was pretty much the only Black kid or one of few Black kids in my school. I would imagine that someone who came from the Black Experience probably wouldn't have picked up those books in the first place, because it would have been like, "fuck these white gay guys! They live in a lily white world, and what struggles are they dealing with?" So much of the
media is represented as being white; I guess it would almost be a throw-away. That's the void that B-Boy Blues is trying to fill, to represent that missing voice.

When you're in theatre, it's such a safe space, not only for being gay, but for being whatever. I think as actors and performers, the whole idea is to be vulnerable, be able to create, be able to have fun, and play. That's impossible if you're in an environment where everything is judgmental. By its nature, theatre is welcoming. Even when I was in high school and in the closet, I didn't feel that there was a judgment there from those friends of mine. If I had had the courage to come out, and I wish I had, I would have been completely safe. They would have loved me just the same, and it would have been amazing.

When I'm acting and performing, I feel a lot more confident in life. I was just talking to my boyfriend at dinner the other night and explaining, "I haven't felt this good in a while now. I feel powerful, like no matter what other shit is going on, whether it be relationships, finances, family, whatever...if I'm doing what I love doing, then I feel like I can conquer, fix, work through all of those things." It's given me that empowerment.

I'm confident and go with who I am. Take it or leave it. When you're up on stage and being vulnerable and you have worked, rehearsed, and had to be vulnerable, it doesn't have to be for a gay character, you're just putting it out there in front of people, then it's like "fuckin' take it or leave it...accept me for who I am."

Take me for what I am, who I was meant to be.
And if you give a damn, take me or leave me.

-RENT

For Aundra, theatre has given him confidence and a safe space to become vulnerable. It's through that vulnerability that he is able to explore who he is and who he is becoming in the space provided to him by his characters. The narratives presented here represent the stories told
by the participants, in their own words, and crafted in collaboration with the researcher. For the most part, participants have made minor edits, but have not significantly changed the stories that they told initially. Each story stands alone in its own right, and is given the space in this chapter to describe the unique experience of each participant.

In Chapter 5, I will re-organize these experiences by theme, and through a simple thematic analysis, describe the commonalities that are interwoven through the experiences of these nine actors.
CHAPTER FIVE

In this study, I have explored how the practice of acting may provide some insight to actors in their understandings of their own sexual identities. In the previous chapter, my participants share their stories in a (mostly) chronological order. Chapter Four provides an introduction to each participant, in which his voice and story combine to describe the relationship between his identity and his acting craft. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note, the reduction of a collection of narratives down to common themes both creates a different type of document and shifts the participant into a less active role. In this chapter, I provide my analysis of the collection of stories using a cross-case presentation to describe both the commonalities between the stories and the unique facets of each participant's experience within those commonalities (Glasser, 1965; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I have built this chapter around the initial thematic analysis that emerged in the restorying process in Chapter Four, as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and provide detailed examples to illustrate each of the themes. Those themes and their supporting subthemes are illustrated in Figure 2 below. Later, I will demonstrate how those themes link to the theoretical framework of this study by illustrating connections between the themes and the processes within D'Augelli's (1994) lifespan developmental model: exiting a heterosexual identity, developing a LGBT personal identity status, developing a LGBT social identity, becoming a LGBT offspring, developing a LGBT intimacy status, and entering a LGBT community. Each of the four themes derived from the narratives in Chapter Four supports D'Augelli's work and provides a space for discussion around his model.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes:</th>
<th>Relevant Subthemes:</th>
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| Theatre Can Be a Safe Space | 1. Theatre is a welcoming space  
2. Theatre helps us to recognize feelings of "otherness"  
3. Acting helps us become vulnerable |
| Relationships with Others within Acting | 1. Theatre provides a support network  
2. Mentoring relationships in theatre  
3. Acting influences intimate relationships  
4. Actors’ relationships with their families |
| Acting as an Embodied Experience | 1. Performance of gender  
2. Movement through acting  
3. Acting with the voice |
| Acting as a Political Stance | 1. Recognizing power and positionality  
2. Acting as activism |

Figure 2: Themes in the Narratives

**Theatre Can Be a Safe Space**

Invariably, participants in this study found a safe space in theatre. Whether illustrated through Michael's assertion that theatre was where he belonged personally, or Andy's illustration of theatre as the safe place for misfits, participants framed theatre as a safe space for them on their journey through identity development. Within this theme, there are three broad illustrations that appeared in the participants' narratives: theatre as a welcoming place, acting as a means of recognizing feelings of otherness, and the vulnerability of acting.

**Everyone is Welcome in Theatre**

Several participants described theatre as a safe place for everyone, and a place where they could be themselves. With only one exception, participants in this study described an openness of perspective within the theatre community. Aundra used the word "safe" to describe the emotional environment of theatre. Some, like Jon, described this trait as "welcoming" as he described his own coming into theatre after his skating injury. Later, he also used the word "inviting" as he explained his views as an insider looking out at newcomers to theatre:
I know some people who did the musicals in high school because they're gay. They weren't particularly good at it, and they're not doing it now. But they did it because they saw these people, they knew us, and we were so inviting. So they put on the costumes and got on stage and sang and danced with us, but they were able to explore stuff with other people, just coming out and not feeling like the only person.

Sean uses very similar language when he describes his theatre circle as a "group of people where you feel included." A common theme within these stories is that theatre is a place where people of all walks of life can come together with a sense of belonging that transcends simple camaraderie. Theatre is a place where all of the misfits fit in.

Similarly, Michael credits the diversity of his circle of friends with being one of the factors that influenced his comfort in finding support within the acting community. "[My] classmates in college are still my best friends in the entire world. Some of them are gay men, some of them are straight men, some of them are straight women. I feel like we all have that kind of relationship where there aren't really any walls up. We can talk about stuff without feeling self-conscious about it."

Andy calls theatre his "safe space" for "deviants", a word that he uses playfully. In one of our many follow-up discussions after we met, Andy compared the openness in theatre to what he calls the proverbial "chicken/egg debate".

I think people find themselves drawn to theatre for any number of reasons. Some are open minded from the get-go and looking for others of a similar take. Some are looking for an escape. Some started doing it in high school because it seemed easier than track. Once you find your way in, though, you are exposed to a great number of experiences you wouldn’t otherwise. Not only do you get to see and be close to a great number of … shall we say “alternative” lifestyles, but you may be asked to immerse yourself into the mindset of a polygamist, or a preacher, or gay man, or all three at once. The only way to do that without resorting to base stereotyping is to get to get to know a polygamist, or a preacher, or a gay man. You get inside their head and try to understand why they would behave in a certain way. Once you’ve discovered why a person might act the way they do, it becomes much harder to dismiss those actions out of hand. Therefore, I would imagine that regardless of what drew you to theatre in the first place, the more time you spent in it, the more accepting you would be of people with alternative relationship views (Andy, personal communication, October 9, 2014).
Also for Andy is a recurring theme of openness on a physical level. From his first experience of backstage dressing rooms, Andy has always enjoyed the physical openness of theatre. He describes his draw to The Rocky Horror Show, "Rocky is always full of people who share that open-minded touching, playing, being in each other's space in a playful manner." At the end of his narrative, he comes back to the idea that "the world would be a better place if more people could be comfortable sharing their bubble with other people."

Andy weaves this theme of openness throughout his narrative, particularly in the sense of openness to experience. It was his theatre friends who helped him to understand that he can be who he is. Andy sees theatre as the vehicle through which much of his identity exploration occurred, and that this happened through the social support that he found in the theatre.

Like Andy, Lee found his primary support in the openness of mindset among musical theatre people. He relates, "I know there are other people in sports...but music and musical theatre have allowed me a space where it was OK, even with the straight people. It was OK to be gay...Music and theatre have just given me a safe place, and I think it worked out well for me."

As illustrated here, the diversity and openness within the community of actors was framed by most participants as a welcoming influence. Some of the participants suggested that it was the openness to diversity that allowed them to become aware of and explore their feelings of otherness in terms of sexual identity.

**Recognizing Feelings of Otherness**

While some stated that they always knew that they were gay or bisexual, others experienced an awakening of their non-heterosexual identities in adulthood. Michael, for example, states that he wouldn't have considered himself bisexual as a teenager. "I always knew
that having feelings for a man would be a possibility, but to be honest, I didn't really ever see it happening." Similarly, Ted considers himself to be a "late bloomer" in terms of his sexual identity, although he implies this from a perspective of sexual activity, not feelings. Regardless of the age at which it occurred, acting or participation in a community of theatre was almost invariably influential in the personal narratives of coming out for my participants.

Aaron, for example, describes his earliest recognitions of crushes on boys happening in the context of theatre. While he tells the story of Dustin, his co-star in Merrily We Roll Along, he intimates that the plot of the show parallels his relationship with Dustin, stating that Dustin "dumped him" in a similar way that Frank and Charlie end their relationship in Merrily. Aaron's next crush is also on a boy with whom he is involved in theatre, and it is through the theatre activity that he comes to know this boy and recognize his feelings as a crush. Aaron also made his first disclosure to his friend Katherine, with whom he was involved in theatre.

For Aundra, his initial awareness of his gay identity is inextricably linked to his participation in theatre. He describes his first awareness of his gay feelings as being in middle school; like Aaron, linked to crushes that he had on other boys. The first gay friends that he identified were also participants in theatre, and he quips that he was "always a little envious that they were able to be comfortable in who they were." Similarly, Andy, who states that "in college, I was very confused about who I was and what I was looking for," found solace in theatre as an outlet for sorting out those feelings.

Sean, Jon, and Dan share similar experiences of early disclosure of their burgeoning gay identities as being linked to their participation in theatre. For each one, his or her participation in the theatrical arts led to an assumption that he was gay during high school. Each decided around age 15 to stop hiding his gay identity from himself, peers, and family. Although the process
unfolded differently for each, they share the similarity of following the assumption that he was gay based on his participation in theatre. Lee succinctly asserts the point that, in high school theatre, "'gay' came with the territory, sort of...it wasn't a taboo to them...the [stigma] is that if you're in music, somebody who's gay will also be present. It just happened to be me." Jon affirms that by recalling that, "No one ever asked about it. Whether people just assumed or whatever...I was a dancer in musicals, so that was probably a dead giveaway to some people."

For Andy, theatre has been a long-standing source of stability for him, both in his sexual identity development and in maintaining an emotional home base in his travels around the world. This is perhaps best reflected in his experience in Japan, where he was stationed in the Air Force. When he joined the military under the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy, Andy says, "I knew going in that I was going to have to take this piece and I was going to have to package it up in a box and I was going to put it on a shelf and just not touch it for four years." It was in Japan that his sexual identity refused to be ignored and came to the forefront. It was through his participation in theatre that he found an outlet to explore his sexual identity with others. It was through his initial relationships with others in theatre that he was able to "...just be Andy. I can be Andy who also happens to be in the military but has gay friends and dates guys occasionally and is in shows whenever possible, and all of that can exist at the same time. And that's when all of the different me's started coming together."

Several of the participants in this study describe the relationship between theatre and identity shift in this context, in that acting allowed them to explore their non-heterosexual identity as the "other", to see how different it was from their present sense of self. Jon, for example, describes how he was able to experiment with drag as an expression of identity. "That was really cool---it was something I had always kind of laughed at...I thought it was just
frivolous, then I did it and thought 'this is awesome'." Aundra also describes the opportunity afforded to him in theatre to explore a more flamboyant demeanor through acting, relating the story of playing a flamboyant character. "We were doing one-acts back in high school...I was playing a more flamboyant gay guy...he wore a scarf and would flip the scarf around. I had a lot of fun doing it."

This comparison was not always cathartic, however. Later, Aundra recalls that he passed up an opportunity to play a "flamboyant and effeminate" gay character, saying that he didn't want to play that sort of character over and over. For Aundra and others in this study, that sense of otherness and the exploration of identity and emotion were tied to an ubiquitous sense of vulnerability in acting. The safety of exploration within the welcoming community of actors contributed to an openness to vulnerability inherent in both the craft of acting and the community of actors. In the next section, my participants illustrate their experiences of vulnerability as they inform sexual identity.

**Acting Makes Us Vulnerable**

Aundra draws connects the idea of openness to another theme in the narratives, vulnerability. He draws the parallel with the following statement:

> When you're in theatre, it's such a safe space, not only for being gay, but for being whatever. I think as actors and performers, the whole idea is to be vulnerable, be able to create, be able to have fun and play. That's impossible if you're in an environment where everything is judgmental. By its nature, theatre is welcoming...If I had had the courage to come out [in high school theatre], and I wish I had, I would have been completely safe. They would have loved me just the same, and it would have been amazing.

Aundra goes on to describe the vulnerability that he experiences as a performer, and draws connections to ways in which that vulnerability influences his off-stage life. Likewise, Ted connects the support network that he found in theatre to a sense of vulnerability. When studying emotionality through movement, which Ted described as influential in his development,
he talked about the theatre community as being "supportive". "When you're doing work like that, and you're with a whole group of people that are revealing these sides of themselves...even if you said the most horrible thing, people were there to support you."

Sean vividly illustrates an example of how his actor training has made him vulnerable. As an acting student, he was trained in techniques that bring about emotional vulnerability in order to have ready access to emotions on stage. One example that he illustrates was an uncomfortable means to find access to the fear response:

I was in this class one time, and we had to complete an impossible task, only to get interrupted by somebody knocking on the door...you've got this sense of urgency and time and all these things are compounded. I remember being naked in class, having to hide from a parent who is going to abuse me, so I'm wrapping myself in belts so he can't get to my genitalia in front of a class who I'm also friends with. It was so emotionally-charged...I was crying. I remember, after class thinking "what the fuck?" I just destroyed part of my emotional psyche to then be able to know what fear is. Whenever I need fear, I have a sense of where it lives, if that makes sense.

Sean's story illustrates the foundational connection between the body and emotion described by Lawrence (2012); the body and its somatic responses are the primary means of understanding emotion. Sean reacted physically first to the scenario that he enacted. He felt "charged" and he was crying; only later did he process both the emotion that he experienced and what it implied for his understanding of himself. It was through that vulnerability in his practice of acting that he was able to connect with and understand that strong emotion. Michael echoes the sentiment of vulnerability when he talks about access to emotions:

I did a production of RENT; I wouldn't say the character or the show stayed with me, but going through that night after night, it takes a certain amount of vulnerability that is not easy to just drop into. You feel a little drained in a certain way. I wouldn't say...I've certainly never gone through a depression because I was playing a depressing character. It's not like because I was doing RENT, I go home and drink a fifth of vodka every night. Some of these Method actors...it impacts them that much.
Sean's and Michael's examples illustrate how they were made vulnerable through their actor training. The vulnerability of emotions within the acting community may create a space that is more readily accepting of others, but it certainly also creates a space in which emotions become a focus of awareness and discussion. The vulnerability of emotions, in some cases, led to problematic developmental experiences for some of the participants. In the next section, I will illustrate how the vulnerability of theatre put some of the participants in precarious situations through their development.

**The Shadow Side of Vulnerability - Theatre as an Unsafe Space**

While most participants framed theatre as a place where it was generally safe, both physically and emotionally, others shared experiences in which theatre was not necessarily a safe space for them. Andy, for example, talked several times about having been exposed to adult situations (nudity, for example) beyond what may have been developmentally appropriate to his age. As well, Michael shared an example in which he was made to feel uncomfortable by a conversation he had with an older director when he was an adolescent:

I've had several experiences where, because of certain aspects of the scene or of a character, I've found myself talking to the director, and all of the sudden it was about sex. And not that the scene wasn't about sex, but all of the sudden we were going into such great detail. Not that I'm not comfortable talking about those things...I certainly don't consider myself to be a prude. It seems like it's a recurring theme in my life too. It's a fine line because as actors, we are expected to delve into these situations, and these feelings that are not usually talked about.

Both Dan and Aaron shared stories about how they, as teenagers, had intimate encounters with older adult men. While Dan shared a kiss with a man in a movie theatre, Aaron's sexual experience was more involved and ongoing. He describes mixed feelings about his relationship with this man:

...then talking led to flirting...then flirting led to us hooking up. It was excellent...I was extremely inexperienced, but it was the first time that I had hooked up with someone who
knew what they were doing. But I did feel a little guilty...so things got weird. We still kept in touch. I actually still credit most of me being able to accept being gay to him.

While Aaron and Andy each frame their experiences of sexual exploration through the theatre as a facet of the safe space within the theatre, others may frame these experiences as developmentally detrimental, as Michael and Dan did. However the participants framed their experiences retrospectively, these examples begin to illustrate another emergent theme in the narratives. Several of the participants in this study discussed the role of acting in the relationships that they experienced, both within and outside of theatre. In the next section, I will explore this theme as it was presented by the participants.

**Relationships with Others within Acting**

Without exception, each of the participants in this study described the formative influence that acting had on his relationships with others, whether the relationships were romantic, familial, friendly, or mentoring. For each participant, acting played a significant role in the formation and maintenance of relationships, particularly when navigating the slippery slope of identity development and disclosure of sexual identity.

**Developing a Support Network**

Each of the participants, in his own way, found some solace and support during his coming out within the theatre community. For some, theatre became the primary support network, while for others, the theatre community was only supportive in the initial stages. Andy very explicitly states that he found a community of support in theatre. From his initial exposure to theatre at 11 years old backstage during *Plain and Fancy*, Andy knew that theatre was where he would find his support network. As he moved through college, where his identity development was evolving rapidly, he found his support group in theatre. When he moved to Japan in the Air Force, and later in Turkey and Germany, he found support in his theatre group.
Involvement in theatre is a recurring theme in Andy's life, particularly at times of significant life transitions (changing high schools, starting college, leaving college, moving in the military). Several times, he reiterates that "I found my support in theatre".

Michael wove this theme into his narrative several times as he talked about his close-knit circle of theatre friends. They were his closest friends in college and continue to be today. These friends were his initial support system in the coming-out process, and he knew from the beginning that they could be a source of support. "Being in theatre as an 18 or 19 year old, when you're surrounded by friends, some of whom identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual...that often becomes a point of conversation." He feels that, with his theatre friends, there are looser boundaries for discussion. "We can talk about stuff without feeling self-conscious about it," and often the topic turns to sexuality and sexual identity.

Jon didn't view theatre as an outlet for his own sexual coming out, but describes theatre as an "inviting" place for those who are looking to explore that facet of their identities. "I know some people who did the musicals in high school because they're gay...they did it because they saw these people, they knew us, and we were so inviting...they were able to explore stuff with other people, just coming out and not feeling like the only person." Ted similarly described a "welcome wagon" feeling from the out lesbian, gay, and bisexual members of his college theatre department and felt that the college theatre program was his first exposure to out gay people.

Similarly, Andy found solace in his identity struggle through theatre. It was through the theatre department in college (and subsequently through the LGBT support group) that he found his first connection to people who understood his identity struggle. He called his college experience an "open environment, and I think that had a lot to do with finally being around people who were just as open minded as I was."
Because Michael has had a more linear trajectory of adult life experience, his support network has remained the same. Unlike Andy, Michael transitioned from high school to college and his adult career with fewer significant moves. Michael describes his circle of friends who he met during his conservatory study:

My group of friends...I have a group of maybe six or seven really, really close friends. We went to school together. They are my best friends. I mean my classmates in college are still my best friends in the entire world. Some of them are gay men, some of them are straight men, some of them are straight women. I feel like we all have that kind of relationship where there aren't really any walls up.

When Michael did begin to recognize that he had feelings for one of his male friends, it was his friends from school to whom he turned for support. Because Michael's coming out is so recent, I can only surmise that, given the nature of his enduring friendships, this group will continue to be his primary network of support through whom he develops his social identity. It's an ongoing process for Michael, and one that, as D'Augelli (1994) notes, can change over time.

Similar to Michael's story, Dan and Jon also illustrate that their friends in theatre are their primary circle of friends and their enduring support network, while Ted illustrates this point from the perspective of leaving a support network.

One of the most difficult transitions for me when I left theatre for nursing was the switch from that very liberal theatre family where you could be out and who you could be yourself with...and I sort of went back into the closet a bit. It took me like 2 or 3 years when I became a nurse to talk to my colleagues about my partner.

For Ted, the support that he finds in his theatre community of practice is most evident when he isn't engaged in theatre. He later related that when he returned to theatre after a hiatus, he found again that community that he calls "incredibly supportive". Ted and others regard their theatre support community as a second family. It's his story that is most illustrative of this comparison.
While some feel that they find support in the relationships that they find in theatre, others feel less apt to fit in. Aaron continues a somewhat contradictory story about friendships that he forged in his theatre circle.

Being a musical theatre major, I'm with a lot of other gay guys....so I told people who would become my best friends in college [that I was bi], and within a few days, we were walking down the street after a party and they said "Aaron, you're not bi, are you?" They had figured that I wasn't, and they were totally cool with that. They teased me a little about it, which honestly helped so much...they were comfortable enough to tease me about it, and that made me feel normal.

Later, though, he tells a different story about his support network in musical theatre:

Unfortunately, I felt more ostracized than anything in musical theatre for being gay. Musical theatre is about big personalities, because that's what the shows are all about. They're about really big people who have really big dreams and put on really big dance numbers; these super-sequined, glamorous version of life that don't really exist...except for the people who are in musical theatre and try really hard to be that. So, people were really put off by the fact that I was gay and didn't know who Liza Minelli was, I had never worn a dance belt, I didn't go to gay clubs, I hadn't had a ton of sex. I didn't speak with a [lisp] or call other guys "girl" or know what "fierce" meant. That's just so not me. And people didn't know how to put a label on me, because that's what musical theatre really is...there are so many labels you have to fit under. You're a leading man or a comic actor, you're a baritone or a tenor, you're a dancer or a singer. There are these black-and-white labels, and I'm a gray as you get. And so people didn't know how to talk to me. I feel so uncomfortable with theatre people in general, and I know that's a really big blanket statement, but I don't fit in with them, and they don't want to try to fit in with me, because I don't fit their labels. So I guess that's why I don't have the sense of community that other people find in theatre.

Where Aaron felt that he initially found a community of support, that support didn't work out to be unconditional for him; he attributes that conditional acceptance as being connected to the way in which he did or did not meet the stereotypes that others had for both gay men and for theatre people. This is a stark contrast compared to the remaining participants, who described particular traits of acceptance and openness in the theatre community.

For many of the participants in this study, that community of support led to the development of mentoring relationships. Many of the mentoring relationships began when the
participants were in later adolescence or early adulthood and have continued for many years. In the next section, I will continue the relationship theme and explore the role of mentoring relationships for these participants.

**Mentors within Acting**

Mentors in the educational setting can be one of the primary sources of support in normalizing the sexual identity development experience for a gay or bisexual man (Luke & Goodrich, 2014; Lark & Croteau 1998). Several of the participants in this study point to their mentors as influential sources of emotional support, both in their careers and in their identity development processes.

Michael described a "special connection" with his faculty mentors. He attributes the close relationship that he had with them to his age and the nature of his theatre training:

"Especially at that age, when you're 18 and leaving home for the first time, to have those people in my corner and talking me through everything...I was grateful to have those faculty members."

He stated that he chose his school based on the initial interactions that he had with his faculty members, and that working with them was the "best decision of his life."

Dan changed schools to have a closer working relationship with his voice teacher in high school, and describes a similarly close relationship with his faculty mentors in college. Dan also found informal mentors in the theatre from early on, when he began taking dance lessons with an adult who he met in his first dinner theatre experience. Jon also found that his professors in school were influential as role models, and in that they provided him frank feedback on his performance and development as a professional. Jon, Michael, and Ted have each maintained long-term mentoring relationships with their theatre faculty members from college, and each regards their mentors as influential in their development. Jon and Michael each stated that their
mentors were influential in their career development and in securing job opportunities as professional performers.

Michael and Aaron describe relationships or interactions with mentors that crossed boundaries into more personal territory. For Michael, this was not a physical relationship, but a conversation in which he felt that his mentor crossed a boundary. He intimates that "there's a fine line in how much talking about [sex] is too much", and that there have been times that he has felt that discussions of characters' sexualities have crossed that boundary.

Aaron's example is more physical, when he "hooked up" with a man with whom he had a mentoring relationship in theatre. He described mixed feelings about the incident:

We were pretty good friends...I leaned on him a lot. I kind of unloaded a lot of things that I was dealing with and that I hadn't told many other people...then talking led to flirting...then flirting led to us hooking up. It was excellent...I was extremely inexperienced, but it was the first time that I had hooked up with someone who knew what they were doing. But I did feel a little guilty...so things got weird. We still kept in touch. I actually still credit most of me being able to accept being gay to him. He talked me through pretty much everything. He was my role model in a lot of ways because he was OK with himself, and that made it OK for me to be OK with myself.

While Aaron framed this relationship as positive and beneficial, others may be less comfortable with this experience, as related by Dan's story of a similar incident, in which a much older castmate kissed him. He felt "jarred" by the abrupt kiss, and it led to him turning attention away from his emerging gay identity for a period of time. What for Aaron was a positive experience, Dan describes as harmful to his development. The difference lies in each man's perception of the event; Aaron describes his incident as occurring with someone who he believes acted with sensitivity to his feelings, where Dan stated that there was little regard for his feelings when that man kissed him.
While each of these incidents was a fleeting encounter with others in the theatre, several participants spoke of more intimate emotional and sexual relationships that developed through the theatre. In the next section, I will share the participants' stories of dating, hooking up, and "showmances".

**Intimate Relationships**

Several talked about showmances as fleeting romantic relationships that fit neatly within the time boundaries of the current production. Sean, Jon, Aaron, and Andy all described having what Jon calls "showmances" early on in their theatre experiences. Jon attributes them to the access to emotions and vulnerability in theatre, coupled with the quantity of time spent together in rehearsals and productions. Others talked about showmances as purely physical relationships, as illustrated by this anonymous quote from one participant: "I had little showmances, and I think when you do theatre in a company setting, you definitely pick people, like 'I'm going to be fucking him for the summer,' but nothing was ever withstanding or lasting in the theatre." In a sense, theatre provided some participants a playground through which to explore their intimacy needs. Some discovered, however, that their partners could not be actors.

Sean and Jon both explicitly said that they didn't feel that they could be in serious relationships with other actors. For Sean, there's too much competition between actors, and he doesn't want to bring that dynamic into his personal relationships. He feels that he couldn't "deal with [his] own insecurities around who's the more talented one in the relationship." Also, he felt that as an artist, he is often the more "fun, flirty, and exciting" person in his dating relationships, and felt that there was only room for one person with that large of a personality in a dating relationship.
Jon echoed many of Sean's concerns that dating other actors could foster too much unhealthy competition in the relationship. He went further to explain that actors are too emotionally analytical and that dating relationships between actors can become parallels for acting itself. He describes how on first dates, he finds himself responding to the man he's dating as he would a scene partner, analyzing his body language and affect. He feels that there would be too much empathy in a situation where two actors dated. Jon jokingly shared that this is why people say actors are so overly-dramatic in social settings, and remarks that when his friends start dating other actors, he will ask "Oh God, are you ready for that drama?"

One commonality that I find particularly interesting in this discussion of emotionality and the analysis of emotion as it relates to intimate relationships is that two of the participants are in romantic relationships with psychologists, and drew a parallel between their partners analysis of emotion and their own. While Ted felt that his fiancé's background in psychology put them on an equal footing in terms of emotional connection, Sean did not describe his partner in the same way. He feels that there's a benefit to his partner being disconnected from the theatre, but compares his own connection to emotionality as being more intuitive than his partner's.

Andy has a different perspectives on the sexualized nature of relationships in theatre. For Andy, his first exposure to sexuality in general occurred as an 11 year old actor in communal changing rooms. He stated:

There are people walking around in their underwear and men wearing makeup, and just nobody seemed to care. Being in theatre, I do feel like I got exposed to sexuality earlier. Not in an inappropriate "let's call the cops" kinda way, but in a "I saw naked people in the flesh kinda way. I touched boobies and I touched penises earlier than other people did. I don't know if that's an advantage or a disadvantage, but it certainly got me into the world earlier.
Andy asserts, as does Sean, that there's a lot of sexual energy and activity in theatre. For several of the participants, their first sexual experiences are tied to theatre. Some of them described these experiences on the record, others shared these experiences privately.

These initial experiences were not always positive. Three of the participants (Dan, Michael, and Aaron) describe the shadow side of initial relationship building through theatre. For Dan, one of the first people to whom he disclosed his identity was a young adult, seven years older than Dan. "I remember one summer, there was this guy in the show...he was very flirtatious the entire summer, and I actually had my very first kiss ever with him." For Dan, this was not a positive experience. "It was very abrupt and jarring; there wasn't a lot of time or consideration for my feelings...it kind of messed me up for a little bit." Similarly, Aaron had an early sexual experience with someone who he met in the theatre, although Aaron was a couple of years older at the time than Dan was. He described mixed feelings about the event. "It was absolutely fantastic...it was the first time I had hooked up with someone who knew what they were doing. But I did feel a little guilty...in my head, I had ingrained that that's not the way relationships are supposed to go." But, the event led to unpleasant consequences for Aaron, in that it led to him coming out to his parents earlier than he had planned.

Michael, in the context of sexualized discussions, described examples in which he was made to feel uncomfortable talking about overtly sexual topics in theatre that seemed to go beyond what was necessary for the rehearsal. "You have to figure out where that line is for your relationship with that director. There have certainly been times when I feel like that line maybe hadn't been clear enough, or the person with whom I'm having this conversation has kind of overstepped that line". Michael did illustrate examples of this off the record in subsequent discussions, but prefers that those stories remain confidential.
For each of the participants, acting played an influential role in the formation of both friendships and romantic or sexual relationships. As well, acting influenced their relationships with their families of origin and, for some, became a family of choice. In the next section, I will illustrate the role of acting on familial relationships through my participants' narratives.

**Actors’ Relationships with their Families**

For each of the participants, theatre informed or influenced the relationship that he had with his family of origin, particularly around the disclosure of sexual identity. Five of the participants (Andy, Lee, Sean, Ted, Dan, and Aundra) in this study explained that their parents already knew that he was gay or bisexual prior to his disclosure to them. In large part, the participants in this study don't directly relate their coming out to the family to their participation in theatre; rather that theatre was a confidence-building force in their lives that may have indirectly contributed to their coming out to their parents. One notable exception is Andy's experience. Andy described an overwhelming sense of anxiety around his disclosure to his mother. His support network in college shepherded him through this process, giving him strategies to use and assuaging his fears. "[T]hose kids were great! They sort of steered me through the process. They gave me all this fantastic advice."

Aaron, Sean, and Dan each came to acting between the ages of 10 and 12, and each at the influence of his parents; specifically, each names his mother as the primary influence that pushed him toward theatre. Each family had different reasons for urging their son to pursue acting. Sean's mother, for example, needed for him to be supervised in a structured activity while she worked long hours. Aaron's parents followed the recommendation of a teacher and began his theatre training; he has continued it to please his parents, even when he wanted to quit. Dan's mother passed away when he was 16 years old. He smiled affectionately when he talked about
her, and it reminded me several times that she always unconditionally supported his engagement in the arts.

There was a dinner theatre in Kutztown that was really close by. It had recently opened, and they were doing The Sound of Music. I was around the age to be one of the kids, so my mom said I should audition. When she told me I should audition...I sang in my room all the time...but that option had never really crossed my mind. I remember praying with my mom before we auditioned, and she said "we're not going to pray that you get the part; we're just going to pray that you do your best." I got the part and I was kind of hooked after that.

When Dan's mother passed away, his family had a difficult period of adjustment. It was theatre that allowed Dan an escape from the stress of the hard times in his family. While acting was a comforting force for Dan individually, several of the participants also spoke of acting as an influential force in bringing the family together.

Aaron, on the other hand, came out to his family following a sexual experience that occurred with one of his theatre mentors. His coming out to his family was complicated by the fact that it occurred in a crisis situation.

When we hooked up, I think we got carried away. It was unprotected. With me being as inexperienced as I was, I kind of freaked out. I thought "oh, God, I need to go get tested." So I was getting a physical for college, and I requested to get an HIV test. My mom looked at the tests that my doctor had ordered after my physical. I knew that she would see it, and that she would ask me about it. I didn't know how to tell her any other way, so that was how I let her ask me about my sexuality and my sexual activity. So, that's how I came out to her, by showing her that I was getting an HIV test, which was probably not the nicest thing to do to her, but whatever. That's also how my dad found out. I was still really embarrassed, I couldn't really talk about it.

More representative of this group of participants is Aundra's description of empowerment, and how theatre helps him to feel ready to face challenges or difficult situations. When I'm acting and performing, I feel a lot more confident in life. I was just talking to my boyfriend at dinner the other night and explaining, "I haven't felt this good in a while now. I feel powerful, like no matter what other shit is going on, whether it be relationships, finances, family,
whatever...if I'm doing what I love doing, then I feel like I can conquer, fix, work through all of those things.” It’s given me that empowerment. I’m confident and go with who I am. Take it or leave it. When you’re up on stage and being vulnerable and you have worked, rehearsed, and had to be vulnerable, it doesn’t have to be for a gay character, you’re just putting it out there in front of people, then it’s like “fuckin’ take it or leave it...accept me for who I am.”

This sense of confidence gleaned from participation in theatre is a common thread in each of the participants’ stories. Each in his own way describes theatre as a confidence building influence, and that sense of confidence can be an contributing factor to disclosing to the family (Walters, 2013). The confidence underlying disclosure to the family, framed by my participants as directly related to their participation in acting, is an illustration of the liberatory power of theatre.

In summary, acting has been influential in the relationship development of all of the participants in this study. They have described theatre as an influence on friendships, mentoring relationships, romance, and family relationships. Within each of those themes, the participants related their acting as influential in terms of sexual identity development and disclosure.

Another theme that emerged within the narratives was acting as an embodied experience. Several of the participants talked about embodied acting as a way of knowing and experiencing their worldview, particularly around sexual identity. In the next section, I will explore the theme of acting as an embodied experience.

**Acting as an Embodied Experience**

Acting is the embodied performance of a story, in which the body becomes what Gilbert (1994) has called the "sign-vehicle" for the actor (p. 477). Clark and Rossiter (2007) draw the parallel between theatre and narrative knowing in their discussion of theatre as an embodied
storytelling. For the participants in this study, acting as an embodied experience was a common thread between the narratives. Within their stories, several relevant themes emerged: theatre as the performance of gender, movement as a way of knowing, the role of intuition, and the relationship between the voice and the body. In the next section, examples from the participants' narratives illustrate these themes.

**Performance of Gender**

For many of the participants, acting provided a means to confront internalized myths or preconceived notions of what it mean to be a gay or bisexual person. We see this illustrated in Aundra's fear of being labeled as a gay actor when he was consistently cast in gay roles, as well as Sean's conflict about how to alter his voice and Jon's struggle to physicalize a "butch" character. Many of the participants illustrated this theme within the performance of gender or the physical reinforcement of gender norms.

Sean describes a similar anxiety when he auditions opposite a straight male actor (or one who appears to be heterosexual). "When I'm in an audition and I see somebody who looks like me, who is talented and attractive and straight, I think, "fuck! I'm screwed!...he's straight, he's got something I may never have unless...I'm able to cover or mask it." As an activist actor, Sean is acutely aware of the systemic problem of gendered acting and the value placed by society on heteronormity. Conversely, Ted describes his experience of being cast in traditionally "butch" roles because of his more masculine and assuming physical presence. He specifically states that he hasn't traditionally played gay characters because he presents as more masculine. Ted also stated that theatre and actor training helped him to pass as heterosexual and enjoy heterosexual privilege. "I think initially, theatre was one of those ways I could sort of butch it up a little bit and have the opportunity to hide this thing that, when I was in school in the late 70s and early
80s, it was really taboo at that time." Ted and Sean describe the same phenomenon from different angles; Sean perceives that his more stereotyped gay physical being is less valued in theatre, where Ted enjoys the privilege of passing into more masculine role because theatre gives him the space to experiment with embodied gender.

Lee appeared to be strongly opinionated about the performance of gender off-stage. He emphatically stated several times that he believed that men should act in a masculine way and conform to traditional gendered stereotypes. He illustrates this in a description of an acting colleague, "I think somebody just tell him, he's got a pair of balls. Be a guy first who happens to be gay."

Interestingly, several of the participants described experiences of being offered comedic supporting roles, because those roles are often portrayed as gay men or by gay male actors. Sean relates, "I just don't give a shit and I accept character roles, which is where gay actors end up. Oh, you're gay? You're the funny one." Aundra described the role that he turned down as "a comedic gay character...flamboyant and effeminate," adding that that is the "go-to stereotype".

Aundra described times in which he has struggled with the process of embodying a character because of the portrayal of gender, however, he has also talked about this as a liberating experience.

As an actor, I've played a lot of gay characters. One particular one that I remember...we were doing one-acts back in high school. I don't remember the particular character, but the character I was playing was a more flamboyant gay guy. I remember I was performing with a girl, and he wore a scarf and would flip the scarf around. I had a lot of fun doing it. The audience loved it! We were laughing and all that jazz.

Similar to Aundra's story, Jon experimented with gender roles through the performance of drag in his theatre experience. While he doesn't describe drag in terms of a gender exploration, he states:
Victor Victoria, I suppose I could be [cast in, because of my Mexican heritage]. Granted, it was the 30s in Paris, so not likely. but maybe I could make it work. In Victor Victoria, I got to do two of the numbers in drag, which I had never done before. That was really cool...it was something I had always kind of laughed at and put down. I thought it was just frivolous, then I did it and I thought, "this is awesome! This is so awesome, this world."

With acting as an embodied art form, much of the communication on stage between actors and between actors and the audience occurs through movement. Unique to musical theatre actors, this includes movement in song and dancing. In the next section, I will describe the experiences of my participants through movement.

**Movement**

Embodied movement was a common theme in many of the participants' narratives. While some felt that movement benefitted them in terms of connection to emotion and expression, others framed movement as a problematic factor in their experience of theatre.

Ted, in particular, felt that movement through theatre was a way in which he connected with emotion. "I think movement helped me get more grounded...once I got a handle on that, it really opened up the door to a bunch of other things, which sexuality definitely was one of those." It was through movement studies that Ted was able to connect with aspects of his emotionality and identity of which he was unaware. "...and there were a lot of breakthroughs for myself...because of movement and accessing emotions." He attributes his connection to emotionality to his movement studies in theatre.

For Lee, movement is an essential aspect of self-exploration and expression. He expressed his frustration with music performance in contrast to theatre, "I did not like standing, arm on the grand piano, and singing for two hours. That drove me crazy...I loved doing opera...I could move around, I could be myself, I could be a character." Where Ted feels that he connected to emotion through movement, Lee described movement as the expression of emotion.
"...When we did the classical works...they wanted all of your effort to be in your voice. But I thought my voice wasn't all of me...my body...shouldn't I have to be able to feel this? And if I'm having a feeling, shouldn't my body react in some way?" In that statement, Lee describes the draw of theatre for him, and his rationale for performing in musical theatre rather than traditional vocal music settings.

Andy draws heavily upon movement in his discussion of identity and emotionality. For Andy, movement seems to be less about connecting to emotions and more about connecting with others. Sharing physical and emotional space on stage in performance and rehearsal is an integral component of the acting process and connects the performers through emotion to the text in a way that doesn't happen in static performance. Several times in our interview and in subsequent discussions, Andy talks about "sharing a bubble" of space with his fellow actors, both on and off stage, "being in each other's space in a playful manner" as a way to explore sexuality and understand sexual identity.

The only participant who identifies as a dancer first, Jon understands the link between movement and emotion, and talked at length about his experience of dance as both a performer and a choreographer. For Jon, dance is a means to tell a story, and he positions himself as a storyteller through his choreography. It became apparent, though, as Jon was telling his story, that his relationship with movement is part of his personal narrative. Jon describes his struggle to move through the character of Shane because he was trying to physicalize and dance as a character with whom he felt in opposition; Shane was not compatible with his understanding of Jon and who he was as a person. The exploration of movement becomes the telling of a personal story, and for Jon, that often comes back to an examination of his physical body and how it fits into mainstream theatre.
On another level, Jon's movement studies have also led him to critique privileging dichotomies in mainstream theatre. Through movement, Jon talked about both ethnicity and physique as limiting factors for actors. But, he goes further to talk about social class and the privilege afforded by money, and the opportunities that financial security brings. "I think sometimes when you have [a person of minority status], and they don't have the same technique or platform to perform from, it's because they haven't had the same classes or opportunities." So, for Jon, movement involves an exploration of both sexual identity and the intersections of other facets of identity in personal and social constructs.

**Voice**

One participant talked specifically about the embodiment of his voice in the context of acting. For Sean, much of the conflict about embodiment of characters lies in his voice. "I have to do lots of work vocally to not sound so gay," he related during our interview. He explained that he aims for a voice of a different timbre and one that is lower in pitch. He lamented that changing his voice removes "some of what I consider to be the class and sophistication and flare that I love about myself that isn't accepted in heterosexual society." When he described this, Sean's demeanor and voice changed from upbeat and animated to more serious and affected; this is an issue that holds significant emotion for him. Sean weaves this theme throughout his discussion of both voice and body, and as an activist, he situates it as a systemic problem to be addressed within the theatre industry.

Less directly, both Aaron and Lee talked about the voice and speech patterns as a problematic way of outwardly portraying sexual identity. Each of them decried men who talk in a more effeminate voice and speech patterns. Aaron felt that he didn't fit in with his musical theatre friends because his voice and speech pattern don't fit gay stereotypes. He recalls,
I didn't speak with a [lisp] or call other guys "girl" or know what "fierce" meant. That's just so not me. And people didn't know how to put a label on me, because that's what musical theatre really is...there are so many labels you have to fit under.

**Acting as a Political Stance**

Sean, Jon, and Aundra each identify as activist actors; each in a slightly different way.

While Aundra has worked in activist theatre settings, he doesn't frame his current work in that way. Sean is the Executive Director of an activist queer theatre group that seeks to confront dominant narratives and celebrate diversity. He explains,

I've always been drawn to LGBT work, gay rights, and pride festivals, especially at Emerson, where I really learned how arts can be integrated into communities and societies and used to create legislation. Augusto Boal is a huge practitioner who used theatre almost in a form of psychodrama to suss out who the oppressors are and where they are systemically. Then we can go ahead and make laws to prevent that from happening to people. I fell in love with that work--what are we doing to help impact and change society?

He feels, however, that he sometimes gets stuck between performance and activism in his work.

It's hard to balance. I'm definitely somebody who's always been split in the theatre world, somebody who wants to be a performer, but wants to be an activist. Somebody who wants to be a performer, but wants to do arts administration or teach. Somebody who wants to live the lifestyle of an actor, but also not have to worry about income. I've always been split around what I am and what I want...it's like I'm doing all of this to try and suss out exactly what I value and what I want to move going forward.

Jon, on the other hand, works exclusively in mainstream theatre settings but views his work as activist because of his attention to the marginalized voices in mainstream settings. He is keenly aware of how mainstream theatre supports hegemony and marginalizes minority voices in the theatre. He attributes his awareness to the influence of both his identities as a gay man and as Latino, as well as growing up in a poor community. He recognizes the privilege afforded to the
cultural majority, as well as the roles that money and opportunity may play in forwarding one's theatre career.

In our first interview, Jon deconstructed mainstream theatre casting and the way in which privilege can unduly influence casting. He explored the relationship between the story and the actor, and ways in which casting reflects the dominant narrative. Intentionality in acting and verisimilitude on stage require that, in Jon's example, Stanley Kowalski in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* be a white, masculine (heterosexual), Polish man, in much the same way that Sean's portrayal of a Civil War soldier requires him to portray a heterosexual character. Subversion from those preconceived notions begins a dialogue about why those presuppositions are in place, and how they marginalize people of diverse identities, both in the audience and on stage. Jon illustrates from his own example:

I was in Floyd Collins and I played Jewell Estes, which was cool for me because it takes place in Kentucky. In the real world, I would never be in that musical because I am Latino. I cannot feasibly be on stage and be believed to be living in Kentucky in the 1920s; it just isn't likely. So that was really great for me...it was a really great experience.

Jon describes how his minority status influences his actions when he is in a position of power, such as in the casting process:

[One time, I was working on casting a show] and these four guys were vying for the same role, a baseball player. We had the tall blond white guy who was very handsome, very capable of doing the role, and then we got this short, stocky, maybe not as handsome Asian guy, and they both nailed their callback. It was great! I'm serving as the choreographer on the show, and I had this burning desire...we had to go with the Asian guy. At the end of the day, the director didn't. She didn't want to because that's not what she saw, and that's fine, because you have to think of the person he's playing opposite, and whether or not they look good together. But I wanted it to work out for him so badly! When I thought about it, I think it's for me being Latino, there's this unspoken desire to see someone who's different doing something really awesome.

In this instance, it was Jon's experience as a person of an ethnic minority that led him to advocate for a more broad view of the casting process and the consideration of people of other
ethnicities in the theatre. For Jon and others in this study, acting is a means of exploring political views and pursuing activism through art. This serves the dual purposes of clarifying one's own values and communicating them with others.

Aundra weaves a similar story of the character Andre, who he portrayed in an educational theatre setting. During Andre's monologue, he talks about coming out of the closet. Aundra remembers that members of the audience audibly reacted to this monologue, often in a negative way.

And it was basically my story that I got to play...So that, I thought, was very personal just because it was me in that respect. It was interesting. I really felt that it was easier to play him because I had those experiences. As part of the theatre that I was in, we would stay in character after the performance and the kids would have a chance to talk back to us. I remember frequently after giving the monologue where Andre says that he's gay and he's afraid to come out, you'd hear snickers from the kids like "Oh my God, he's a fag!" It would be hard because, it's like...you know, if it's another show, if it's another character, the audience's reaction is not about me, it's about the character. But in this case, it's about the character and it's about me.

I remember one time after the performance, our company manager came to me and asked what it was like standing up on stage and hearing people boo and snicker after that. "It's hard to hear and it's frustrating, because it's not only me hearing this. It's all the other kids who are in the audience who are...they're trying to hide or they're not hiding or whatever, and they're hearing their peers' reactions." I guess that's the most powerful role I've done in the sense that because now I'm able to educate these kids on this experience...

For Aundra, understanding Andre gave him the space to reflect upon the social inequities around his own identity in a depersonalized way. While the educational theatre aimed to provide a space for the audience to reflect and discuss the character Andre's experience, the setting also created the space for Aundra to introspect around his own social identity.

In a similar way, some actors reflect upon their acting training as an influential force in exploring social norms and finding his own place in the social world. Whether intentional, as in activist theatre training, or serendipitous, acting has facilitated this process in several of the participants.
So far, in this chapter, I have summarized and illustrated the themes that emerged in the comparative analysis process: theatre can be a safe space, acting as a means of understanding relationships, acting as an embodied experience, and acting as a political stance. For the individual participants in this study, each theme manifested differently; however, the common threads remain as a means to illustrate the themes.

Because this study rests on the theoretical framework presented by D'Augelli (1994), it is essential to draw parallels between the data presented in the narrative and comparative analyses and the processes outlined in the lifespan developmental model. In the next section, I will address the overlap between these constructs.

**Connections to the Theoretical Framework**

Returning to the D'Augelli (1994) model that frames this study, each of the themes presented in Chapter Five interconnect with the processes in D'Augelli's model in sometimes overlapping ways. In Figure 3, I illustrate the relationships between the themes in my participants' narratives and the processes in D'Augelli's model.
The process of exiting a heterosexual identity is not an isolated event, but a "lifelong process" of coming out as a non-heterosexual person (D'Augelli, 1994, p. 326). The tasks in this process are two-fold: to recognize one's own feelings as non-heterosexual, and to begin the process of disclosing those feelings to others. In a sense, this stage represents the 'coming out' process as the term is used in the vernacular; this is a coming-out to one's self, followed by an initial coming out to others. For participants in this study, theatre informed this process by helping them to explore their feelings of otherness and mitigating their initial disclosures of sexual identity; those early disclosures often occurred in the context of a circle of support within the theatre.

Compared to the other five processes in D'Augelli's model, the experiences described by my participants were most richly illustrative of the process of developing a personal identity.
status as a gay or bisexual man. This is perhaps because this is the process in which acceptance of one's LGB identity is the unit of analysis; this is a process constructed around accepting one's own LGB identity, developing a stability in that identity, and confronting the internalized myths that one might have about what it means to be a gay or bisexual person. Because sexual identity is socially constructed (D'Augelli, 1994b; 1998), this process often occurs in concert with others who can affirm the individual's identity as a gay or bisexual person. In some cases, this may be characterized by reaching out to other gay or bisexual individuals; other times, it is finding a community of support that assuages the individual's feelings of uncertainty.

For participants in this study, this was most evident in their confrontation of the internalized myths of sex and gender that occurred in the acting process. The themes of embodied gender and movement, for example, demonstrate the gender exploration and conflict resolution that acting facilitated for the participants.

D'Augelli (1994, p. 326) notes that where tolerance of sexual identity "is indeed harmful...in that it subtly reinforces societal interest in lesbian, gay, and bisexual invisibility", an affirmative social network is one that consistently and actively supports the individual's gay or bisexual identity. This process is different than the initial disclosures in that it is an enduring lifelong process of identifying and understanding the social network's true reactions to the gay or bisexual identity. These reactions are fluid and may change based on situations, as many gay and bisexual men note that their support network may shift when he begins dating. D'Augelli posits that, in this process, the task of "coming out" is twofold: the individual is continuing his or her process of disclosure, while members of his or her support network must come out as allies.
Each participant in this study talks about the support network that he or she has found within theatre. Some very enthusiastically label theatre as their primary support network. Some talk about theatre as a family of choice in comparison to the family of origin. Others talk about theatre more tentatively, at times providing a supportive network of people while also causing some discord. Many participants described their theatre mentors as a primary support network. Further, some described the specific traits found within the community of theatre that makes a network of support more likely to find or accessible within theatre.

For D'Augelli (1994), developing an intimacy status as a gay or bisexual man is the most complex of his six processes. Illustrating the example of how society has historically constructed a heterosexist view of relationships, he points to the dearth of role models of committed relationships between same-sex couples. One could certainly argue that much has changed in the visibility of same-sex relationships in the twenty years since the publication of his model, and contemporary applications of this model do point to an increased social acceptance and visibility of same-sex couples in our culture (Manera & Frank, 2014). However, the notion remains that because there is more ambiguity of norms in same-sex coupling, the two tasks within this process, achieving an intimate relationship and the emergence of norms within that relationship are more complicated or purposeful than in opposite-sex intimate relationships.

D'Augelli (1994) posited that the process of becoming a gay or bisexual offspring often involved a disruption in the parent-child relationship, followed by a reintegration into the family, with the goal of developing an affirmative network of support in the family. Later, he presented four possible outcomes of the disclosure process, in which he described relationships as "loving open", "loving denial", "resentful denial" and "hostile recognition" (D'Augelli, 2005). He characterized this process through two tasks, disclosure to the family and the development of a
positive relationship with the family. The positive relationship, he believes, is one in which the family is affirmative of the gay or bisexual identity, not merely tolerant of it.

The participants in this study overwhelmingly described positive relationships with their families of origin. The two who had some difficult transition periods with their families did, however, describe their participation in theatre as a force that brought the family together. Several also described their families as a motivating factor for their participation in theatre.

The strength of the familial bond can be a predicting factor in understanding how the family adapts to developmental transitions (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2013). So, the strength of the existing bond in the family may be influential in how the family integrates a family member’s coming out.

Participants in this study described theatre as a way of coming to relate to their families, and that theatre was a way that the family would celebrate special occasions and strengthen their bonds. As well, most of the participants described their families as their primary influences to begin acting or continue acting. Finally, acting, for some, mitigated the process of disclosing their sexual identities to their families.

Several of my participants quipped that theatre itself is a gay and bisexual community; certainly theatre people are often affirming and supportive to gay and bisexual individuals. Throughout their narratives, gleaned from interviews and subsequent discussions, my participants talked about finding a community of other gay and bisexual people within their community of practice. Of those who studied theatre in college (everyone except for Aundra was involved in their college theatre programs), each participant without fail referred to his circle of college friends as being predominately gay or bisexual men and heterosexual women. Three participants (Andy, Aaron, and Dan) talked of finding a gay or bisexual community of friends in
theatre before college as well. In D'Augelli’s model (1994), however, entering a gay or bisexual community implies more than developing a circle of friends. In this model, D'Augelli supposes that the identity development process involves commitment to social and political action as well. Each participant, in his own way, has come to understand this facet of identity development, in part, through his acting experience.

Summary

This chapter presents a second analysis of the data derived through the narrative and comparative analytic processes. In this chapter, I pull the common threads from the participants' stories within four broad themes: theatre can be a safe space, relationships through acting, acting as an embodied experience, and acting as a political stance. Finally, I weave those threads within the processes outlined in the theoretical framework. In the concluding chapter, I will relate those themes and processes back to the literature of adult education.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of acting in influencing the sexual identities of actors, and to explore the ways in which actors perceive this process. When I set out to interview the actors who joined me in this journey, I never could have imagined that their narratives would so explicitly align with areas of study within the adult education literature. In this final chapter, I will summarize the salient points of discussion within the data and project several implications for this research in the areas of adult education, acting pedagogy, arts education, and developmental psychology. Then, I will describe the limitations of this study, and suggest ways in which future research can bridge those gaps. Throughout this process, I had to remind myself to stay within the scope of my study, as every conversation I had with a participant suggested an area of future research. I will end this chapter by summarizing those areas of future research, and I will end with a personal reflection on the process of writing this study.

Conclusions

This study simultaneously supported earlier research in adult education, theatre and arts education, and the study of adult development, while supplementing those areas of study with new insights into the role of acting in understanding and making meaning of sexual identity. In this final chapter, I will return to the areas of adult education most relevant to the discussion of the narratives, and summarize the implications of these findings within each area of study.

Performance of Gender

Gender and sexuality, although distinct constructs, are inextricably linked. While in the behavioral sciences, my field of practice, we seek to distinguish between sex, sexuality, and gender, vernacular discussions of these constructs often overlap. In the theatre trade literature,
authors address these topics within the same discussion more often than not (Bosson, Taylor, & Prewitt-Freillino, 2006; Gilbert, 1994; Jones, 2003; Kirle, 2005; Knapp, 2006; Negron-Muntaner, 2000). This is perhaps reflective of Gilbert's (1994) supposition that, within acting, the body is the vehicle through which the actor portrays character. If an actor seeks to portray sexual identity, it is through gender that he performs that trait. Clum (1999) addresses this phenomenon directly in nearly identical language to that used by Butler (1990) in her description of gender performance. Gender is, for Butler, a stylized reinforcement of social norms through the body. There is a social expectation of masculinity and femininity. Gender can be mis-performed in a subversive rejection of gender norms in a politicized performance; however, there is generally pressure to support hegemony though gendered performance.

In adult education, Butterwick and Selman (2012) draw on the foundational literature from Butler and her understanding of gendered performance as an application of theatre within adult education. Their parallels between gender performativity as a politic and the use of gendered performance in theatre is foundational to understanding the link between the influence of gender and sexual identity within this study. Just as, in their study, the performance of gender in theatre provides a space to examine power and positionality, for the actors in this study, the performance of gender in mainstream theatre provides a similar impetus for reflection.

For most of the participants in this study, the relationship between gender performance, both on-stage and off, and sexual identity was palpable in our discussions. Whether it was Aundra's experimentation with his sexual identity through the exaggerated hyperfemininity of a gay male character, or Sean's anxiety about how he will read physically to auditors, the relationship between sexual identity and performed gender was relevant within the narrative of each participant. For some, the issue of gender was taken to task as a problematic conflict within
sexual identity development. Aaron didn't feel that he fit in with his college classmates because he didn't physicalize gender in the same way that they did. Lee vehemently rejected feminine stereotypes and admonished gay men to "be men". For Ted, there was a constant dialogue about his body type, and how that impacted the perception of his sexual identity and the roles that he played on stage. Whether the performance of gender was regarded in a positive or negative way, it was present in each narrative.

The omnipresence of issues of performed gender throughout the narratives of the participants in this study suggests that there might be a relationship between gendered performance and sexual identity development for actors. Gilbert (1994) and Bosson, Taylor, and Prewitt-Freillino (2006) draw this link for actors in terms of how they perceive their bodies and their movement on stage, and the relationship between character portrayal and audience perception of the actor's identity. This relationship integrates the work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993), who connects perceptions of gender and gendered language to the body, and frames the performance of gender as a politic.

In Chapter Two, I illustrated the link between Butler's politicized performance of gender as a means to subvert the norm in my discussion of Neil Patrick Harris and his personal struggle with the role of Hedwig. However, the link between this anecdotal experience, common between many actors, including those who share their narrative in this study, and adult sexual identity development theories has not emerged in the adult education academe. This study provides a fundamental link in the discourse of adult education between the performance of gender and sexual identity development.

As I note in Chapter Two, and as shared by the participants in this study, the performance of gender and the experience of the body are closely linked in the human experience. This is
particularly true for those who use their bodies to tell stories as actors and dancers. In the next section, I will address the role of the body as a site for learning as it emerged in this study.

**Embodied Learning**

The ubiquitous theme of knowing through the body emerged within each participant’s narrative in some way. While some participants were very comfortable within their bodies and found some benefit to the relationship between the self and the body, developed through acting in musical theatre, others were at times in opposition with their bodies. For some, the relationship with the body was an uneasy truce negotiated in both a psychological context and within the social setting of acting.

Regardless, the body holds great power for learning and knowing, both as an acting tool and as an indicator of development. As Lawrence (2012) illustrates, the body is a person’s foundational way of knowing; before language and cognition, we have sensation and reflex. Integrating the literature surrounding embodied acting and embodied knowing, the narratives contained here illustrate that actors, through their practice, intensify their relationship with their bodies. Not only are they more aware of their bodies as the tool of their craft, but they may also be more responsive to their bodies as a way of knowing. Graham (2002) and Gallagher (2002), in their discussions of the embodied experience of acting, position the body as the site of performance of the human situation (race, class, and gender for example). The participants in this study described the performance of embodied character as foundational to their craft, while also finding meaning in that performance for their own identities. Whether that meaning was positive, as in Lee's empowerment through movement in vocal performance, or limiting, as in Jon's and Sean's perceptions of social judgment around their bodies, each participant described the body as a way of understanding his experience in the world. For most, understanding of
sexual identity emerged through the body as a liberatory experience, supporting Gallagher's (2002) notion of the body as a transformative space for the actor.

In a sense, the actors' narratives shared here echo Butterwick and Selman's (2012, p. 64) statement describing theatre in adult education: "Through participating in theatre experiences, the muted mind becomes embodied and sometimes the body finds voice, or perhaps the separate mind finally becomes the audience to embodied intelligence". This study helps to bridge the link between theatre in adult education with the experience of mainstream actors, while deepening the connection between the embodied knowing and the experiences of performance artists. This calls into question the role of acting as a way of knowing in its own right, which I will explore in the next section.

**Acting as a Way of Knowing**

As I listened to my participants' stories, I immediately realized that each of these men understands his world and his experience through his identity as an actor. Many have built their lives around acting. Even those who are not career actors positioned their acting identities first, and derived many of their core beliefs and values as actors. Ted, who left the theatre for a number of years, described his return to the theatre with a gleam in his eye as one might have when describing a return home after a long journey. Acting is foundational to each of these men's understandings of who they are and how to navigate the world. The experience of gender, embodied experience, sexual exploration and understanding, and the creation of a family of friends or support network were illustrative themes in each of these narratives. Acting is a pervasive influence on the identities of these participants, and could perhaps be framed as a way of knowing. Drawing from the often cited theory of intelligence presented by Howard Gardner (1983), acting is a practice that combines several of Gardner's ways of understanding the world.
into one. The musical theatre actor moves his body through space, in concert with others, while understanding emotion, employing words, reflecting music, and conveying plot. For the men in this study, acting was not a job or an episodic performance; acting is a way of interacting the world and informed all other areas of life. Acting was present not only in sexual identity and its corollaries, like romantic relationships and political activism, but was foundational in the creation of friendships, career and educational choices, and the formation of personal identity. Acting is foremost in the experience of these men as an influential force in who they are and how they understand the world, and can be framed as a way of knowing in the language of adult development.

Implications of the Study

As a multidisciplinary study, this research carries implications to inform each of the fields of practice from which it draws: adult education, theatre education, and psychology. I will now summarize the implications of this study as they impact several of those fields.

Adult Learning


This study offers a possible bridge between acting as a politic and the experiences of mainstream actors. It suggests a parallel between the intentional education in popular theatre and the incidental learning that occurs in actors in mainstream theatre. Moreover, this study deepens
the discussion of acting as a tool for learning and as a way of knowing by combining the social experience of the actor as a person-in-context with the psychological experience of identity. This study seeks to understand the experience of acting as a means of understanding sexual identity within the social context and illustrates how acting influences how the actor perceives himself.

The implications for this study in the area of adult learning are significant. The experiences of these actors create a vocabulary in adult education to explain the mutually-informative relationship between acting and sexual identity, and position the actor in the powerful position of a person empowered to explore identity. As I note in Chapter Two, sexual identity is neither static nor independent of other facets of identity. This study, therefore, begins an exploration of the role of acting within the intersections of sexual identity with other ways of self-identifying, such as race and gender. Those areas of identity emerge within the stories shared here, but are outside the scope of this narrative inquiry.

In adult education and therapies aimed at understanding sexual identity or understanding the somatic experience, acting might be a useful tool to move beyond the verbal ways of learning. Following the work of Butterwick and Selman (2012) and others, the same strategies used to empower communities in popular theatre might also be purposeful in guiding difficult negotiations between the self and sexual identity. While Moreno (1959) and others have long advocated for acting as a therapeutic teaching tool, this study suggests that acting holds more pervasive influence than situational applications of psychodrama or drama therapy; rather, this study suggests that acting may hold an empowering (or perhaps disempowering) influence on identity in way much more global way than situational therapies.
Adult Development

Adult development frames an understanding of the narratives described here as life stories. The D'Augelli (1994) model, which positions sexual identity within adult development, illustrates sexual identity as one of the many overlapping facets of development across the lifespan. This study, with its examples of development situated within the narratives, holds significant implications for the study of adult development.

Considering the D'Augelli model as an illustration of development, this study provides a lens to understand sexual identity development within a broader context of adult education. To date, there are limited practical applications of sexual identity models within the discourse of adult education. This study provides a foundational perspective on the role of acting and participation in theatre as they may inform adult development. Within this study, the narratives illustrate transferrable themes that can enhance an understanding of adult development for actors.

Further, this study bridges several disparate areas of discussion and demonstrates their interconnectedness within a lens of adult development. From this study, further research can create foundations in understanding the role of embodiment, gender performance, and sexual identity on the overall developmental process. These areas of discussion have not been linked in the context of adult development in earlier research; this study provides a foundational link between these areas of practice as they intersect within adult development.

Acting Pedagogies

The implication of the power of acting is significant, particularly when describing the influential power of arts educators situated in a position to shape identity. Acting teachers and directors are often the arbiters of hegemony within acting pedagogies and performance. Drawing from the participants' descriptions here of acting as a pervasive way of knowing and learning, I
surmise that the acting coaches and teachers hold significant influence in the perception of identity. Many of my participants described close and intense relationships with mentors within the theatre. Some, like Jon, Dan, and Michael, described their mentors as individuals with an almost parental influence on their maturation into adults.

This study, then, hold significant implications for the pedagogy of acting. First and foremost, the themes identified within these narratives suggest that young adult actors look to their mentors for guidance and support in finding their way in the world, both personally and professionally. As Jon, Dan, and Michael demonstrate, the mentoring relationship can hold significant power and influence. With that power, however, comes great responsibility and potential for harm. Aaron and Michael each shared stories of how that power can be misused by mentors whose actions could be construed as predation. Acting teachers and directors must be attentive to and responsible with the power and influence that they hold. Having some understanding of D'Augelli’s model and its processes would benefit mentors within theatre programs. This study may forge the path for a foundational text for acting mentors to understand one facet of adult development with strategies to address the needs of actors as they come to understand sexual identity.

Acting is an emotional process--an art practiced with emotional vulnerability and through a personal experience of embodiment. As Sean points out, one facet of contemporary acting pedagogies relies on the lived experience of emotion in order to create pathways to access those emotions on demand. Acting pedagogues, then, hold great responsibility to create emotionally safe spaces in which the acting experience can facilitate development in a positive way, rather than creating sites of oppression. There are countless examples in the literature in which the emotionality of acting is damaging to the psyche of the actor; Aaron's story in Chapter One
illustrates this phenomenon. Acting directors and teachers must be attentive to the performative emotionality of acting training and create safe spaces in which those experiences can be processed and transcended.

This study suggests that acting teachers hold significant power to influence the actor's sense of self. Russell (2007) describes this influence in the context of her critique of the Method pedagogy as dangerously influential in reinforcing sexist and patriarchal hegemony, however, the discourse in adult education universally frames the positive influence of theatre on learning. Theatre, as understood through the lens of this study, is a double-edged sword. Acting has the power to be a positive developmental influence, or can be limiting if the individual is steeped in a pedagogy of oppression. In a sense, acting can be understood in a similar vein as the admonishments of hooks (2003) and Giroux (1997), who suggest that oppressive social climates result in either stagnation or regression in development. The implication within this frame of reference suggests that acting pedagogues have the power to inform development and should be mindful in the exercise of that power. Understanding the relationship between identity formation and acting should influence the way in which acting pedagogies operate to provide a transformative and liberatory space for growth.

**Developmental Psychology**

The symbiosis between acting and identity holds significant implications for an understanding of the developmental psychology lens employed in this study. In particular, these narratives provide a novel frame through which to view the lifespan developmental model of sexual identity development. Grounded in developmental psychology, most applications of this model describe how individuals within different contexts navigate the processes of development framed within the model. This study is somewhat different in that it describes a mutually
influential relationship between acting and development. While the narrative design of this study does not suggest a causal relationship between acting and development, this study is unique in its exploration of how the context informs the processes of development.

There are myriad illustrations of identity development in the academic literature; I am particularly familiar as a practitioner with the therapeutic understanding of the D'Augelli model. Despite its status as a model now more than 20 years old, D'Augelli's (1994) work remains foundational in a psychological understanding of sexual identity development in a social context.

This study, in its narrative exploration of the model, presents an application of D'Augelli's theory heretofore unexplored. While novel in its approach, this study is not without its limitations in scope and application. In the next section, I will explore those limitations and offer insights for further exploration.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

The narrative methodology allows the researcher and his or her participants to explore a phenomenon in great detail within a small participant pool. While I present an argument in Chapter Three for the most effective design for this study, the design is not infallible and presents some limitations in scope and breadth. In this section, I will discuss some limitations that I identified within this study, and I will briefly discuss how those limitations offer opportunities for future research in the field of adult education.

**Male Cisgender Participant Pool**

In the original conception of this study, my participant pool included a culturally diverse group of both men and women. As a psychology professor, I had some reservation about including both men and women in the study, because I surmised that their experiences of identity development would be quite different socially and culturally. When I began to talk with female
actors about their experiences of sexual identity, of coming out, and of participation in a community of actors, I realized quickly that I had underestimated the level to which their stories would differ from those of men. As a result, I chose to focus on the narratives of the nine men in this study, and to address the need for a similar study of women's experiences as an area of further research.

Although D'Augelli (1994) asserts that his model describes equally well the experiences of men and women, the experiences of women in this particular study did not fit neatly into the descriptive phases of his model. To accurately give voice to the narratives of female actors, a similar study could focus only on a diverse pool of women, perhaps using a feminist lens.

As I recruited participants for this study, I was approached by a transwoman, born biologically male, who identified as other than heterosexual, and wanted to tell her story. Because the D'Augelli (1994) model does not address transgender orientations, I had to exclude that woman from participating. However, as an activist artist and transperson, I recognize that she has an important story to tell. A similar study, using an inclusive lens for transgender identities, could more fairly give voice to her story and to the stories of other trans actors who find their homes in communities of theatre.

Other Critiques of the Model

Aside from limiting the participant pool to male, cisgender participants, the D'Augelli (1994) model presented some limitations for this study. D'Augelli's model was originally published in 1994 and has remained unaltered since that time. At the time of publication, 20 years before the data collection phase of this study, LGB individuals in the United States faced legal discrimination in employment, housing, and civil marriage rights at both the federal and state levels of government. The 1994 zeitgeist was one of discrimination and stigmatization of
gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. While some might argue that this discrimination persists 20 years later, there is an undeniable improvement in the legal and social protections of LGB people today. Given the changed social milieu in which LGB individuals process through identity development, the D'Augelli model may be somewhat dated, particularly in its treatment of social stigma, political action, and family rejection. D'Augelli (2012) peripherally addresses this issue by calling for further inclusion of sexual identity issues in mainstream academia, but does not directly address this critique by offering a shift in his model.

The D'Augelli model assumes that individuals begin their sexual identity development as heterosexual or that they have an outward assumptive heterosexual identity. This is reflected in the first process of his model, exiting heterosexual identity. Three of the participants in this study never assumed themselves to be heterosexual, although some did report that they were assumed to be heterosexual by others until told otherwise. This is perhaps a reflection of Rich's (1980) notion of compulsory heterosexuality. D'Augelli's (1994) model is somewhat limiting in that it fails to address the how the identity development process might differ for those who are never assumed to be heterosexual. Further comparative exploration of this issue might illustrate rich differences between the experiences of those who transition from assumptive heterosexuality and those whose identities are never assumed to be heterosexual.

In a related critique, D'Augelli (1994) presents a linear, one-way process of identity development from heterosexuality to non-heterosexuality. While this is problematic primarily because it further reinforces the notion of gay-as-other, it also limits the fluidity of sexual identity that appears in post-structural writings about sexuality (Tisdell, 2006).

Perhaps the most significant shortcoming of the D'Augelli model that limited this study is D'Augelli's relative inattention to the role of intersectionality in shaping sexual identity
development. In his original presentation of the model, D'Augelli (1994) positions the model as contextual, and he recognizes that there is a mutually-influential relationship between sexual identity and other facets of sociocultural identity. In the time and place in which D'Augelli conceived his model, it stood alone as the sole framework that acknowledged culture as an influence on sexual identity. Despite his acknowledgement of intersectionality, D'Augelli fails to discuss in a practical way how sexual identity might intersect with factors such as race, social class, (dis)ability, religion, and gender. While I address this limitation in making the case for the ADRESSING model (Hays, 2001), it is important to note that intersectionality appeared throughout the data in this study. Several of the participants discussed the role of religion in understanding sexual identity, and two of the participants discussed at length the influence of racial or cultural identity on their understandings of sexual identity. D'Augelli (1994) falls short in providing a practical framework to understand these intersections.

Each of these critiques (limitation to cisgender development, unidirectional movement in identity, and a lack of attention to intersectionality) suggests that the D'Augelli (1994) model is rooted in a modernist attitude, in which categories are distinct and fixed. A revision to the model through a postmodern lens might allow for a more fluid understanding of bidirectional sexual identity development; in particular, the notion that sexual identity can fluctuate across time and that sexual identity is inextricably linked with other facets of development in mutually-influential ways. This study provides a foundation on which to revise D'Augelli's model to illustrate the role of intersectionality in a postmodern context.

While D'Augelli's (1994) model presents some inherent limitations to the study, it remains the foundational lifespan developmental model upon which most sexual identity studies draw. The benefits of this model, outlined in the literature review, far outweigh the limitations.
Further research may illustrate how the model could adapt to support a contemporary view of sexual identity, but it is likely that this model will continue to provide a solid foundation upon which sexual identity research will build.

**Underrepresentation of Cultural Diversity**

Although I sought, through purposeful sampling strategies, to identify a culturally diverse pool of participants, there are some limitations in this participant set in terms of cultural diversity. Of the 9 men who shared their stories in this study, 7 were white. Aundra identifies as Black and Jon as Mexican. The participants ranged in age from 25 to 49 at the time of the interviews, with 5 participants in their 20s, 2 in their 30s, and 2 in their 40s.

Of the 9 participants in this study, 7 identified as gay, with Michael identifying as bisexual and Andy self-describing as omni-sexual. My discussions with my participants did not detail the rationale behind the way that they self-identify. My focus was on their stories, and if they described the process by which they came to label their identities emerged, I shared it within the narratives in Chapter Four. It is interesting to note that only Michael and Andy, the two participants who did not identify as gay, shared that process in great detail. Although the lifespan developmental model from D'Augelli (1994) addresses both same-sex orientations and bisexuality, the construct of bisexual identification may be more complex than this model suggests. A more detailed comparison of gay men against bisexual men is outside the scope of this study, but would provide an enlightening follow-up study.

Of my 9 participants, 6 reported that their parents were married during the participants' childhoods and continue to be married. Dan shared within his story that he lost his mother during his teenage years, while Andy and Sean each shared that growing up in a single-parent
family was formative to his notion of identity. Each participant shared that he continues to have a relationship with his family of origin in adulthood.

Each of my participants attended college; only one did not complete college. Seven of the participants attended college to study theatre; Lee graduated with a music degree and Aundra graduated with a degree in business. Four of those participants attended highly-selective conservatory programs for musical theatre.

It is possible that both the family makeup and opportunity to attend college reflects a privilege that could influence the sociocultural experience of sexual identity and its formation. While two of my participants reported growing up in poor families or neighborhoods, this participant pool is overwhelmingly middle-class and above. It is outside the scope of this study to address socioeconomic status, as D'Augelli (1994) does not address this in his model, which served as the framework for my study. However, future studies could examine how the experience of privilege influences sexual identity development within this population.

Other Lenses of Adult Education

At the outset of this study, I struggled to identify a theoretical lens that would address all of the questions that I hoped to answer, and would fit well with a narrative research design. Drawing on the notion from Rossiter and Clark (2007) that theatre is the embodiment of narrative, a narrative research design was, in my mind, absolutely necessary for a study of the development of actors.

The lifespan developmental model used to frame this study is grounded in developmental psychology; in the nomenclature of adult development theories, it is one of the integrative models of adult development, as it addresses psychological factors within a social context (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). It is rooted in a psychological model of humanism
in its notion of striving to work within the social framework to develop to one's potential. Despite addressing individual development against a sociocultural backdrop, the D'Augelli model is not explicitly critical in its examination of the social context in which individuals live. This model does not address the idea of theatre as a critical pedagogy, a notion present in the adult education work of Bates (1996), who summarizes the applications of theatre as a critical pedagogy in adult education, of Butterwick and Selman (2012), who apply theatre as an embodied way of understanding criticality, and of Clark and Rossiter (2007), who espouse the link between theatre and critical narratives.

The link between critical pedagogy and theatre is longstanding in adult education, with the unit of change resting with the audience; theatre is used as a persuasive tool for the audience. The narratives generated in this study suggest that the practice of theatre also brings about a critical mindset for the performer, and the art of acting itself can be liberating. The theoretical lens used in this study does not provide a vocabulary to describe this phenomenon, but a study framing acting as a critical performance pedagogy might address how acting could work to change the oppressive forces recognized by the actor rather than acting in deference to them (Denzin, 2010).

The critical reflection inherent in acting is a powerful force. Several of the participants, each in his own way, suggested that actors are more critically reflective than others. Whether it was Sean's suggestion that actors are better in touch with their intuition, or Aundra's idea that actors are more in tune with their own feelings, most of the narratives here purport that actors engage in a great deal of critical reflection. I suggest that this may be a direct result of their training to intuit and emote. It stands to reason that actors, with their focus on critical reflection, may be able to describe their growth experiences in the language of transformative learning.
Transformative learning theory rests on a foundation of critical reflection as a means to examine core beliefs and experience shifts in perspective based on experience. This study, with its roots in adult development theory, examines learning and change through a different lens, and measures change differently. A re-examination of the narratives here through a lens of transformative learning may offer pedagogues a new application for that theory.

No single study can comprehensively address a complex phenomenon like sexual identity. As Chase (2010) suggests, a primary purpose of narrative research is to give liberatory voice to a population that may not otherwise be heard. While it is outside the scope of this study to address sexual identity development in its entirety, the narratives shared here offer significant insight into the relationship between acting and sexual identity development.

Reflections on the Study

As I share throughout this volume, this study is one that is very personally meaningful to me. While my own experiences are not included in this study, my personal hermeneutic frames my motivation to study the sexual identity development of actors, and is the lens through which I frame the study and examine the data. As Clark and Rossiter (2007) suggest, the narrative methodology can be a process of development itself; as the individual reflects on his or her own narrative, a reflective process of meaning-making occurs. I would suggest that the intensely personal process of collaborating with the participants in this study has provided a reflective space for meaning-making on my own.

Within these nine stories, I hear a similarity that transcends the participants’ times, places, and cohorts. Many of the common threads and themes in the collected narratives are similar to my own. The true validity to this study, for me, is the resonance of my own personal journey of identity development as I have come to understand it through the stories of my nine participants.
The significant learning process for me has come through the stories of these participants as they have brought words to my own story that I might not otherwise have understood.

As a counselor and educator, this study has influenced how I understand and view sexual identity. While on the surface, this study provides a new understanding of the sexual identity development process and a practical illustration through which to understand the process, this study also provides me with a revised hermeneutic through which I understand the human experience. This revised lens will impact how I teach sexual identity in the classroom and how I approach sexual identity development within clinical settings. In particular, the shortcomings that I identified in the D'Augelli model will shift my treatment of sexual identity development from a positivist, linear process to one that is more inclusive and fluid. His lack of practical attention to intersectionality leads me to focus more on the role of culture in the development of sexual identity. It is my hope that through my teaching and further research, I will be able to build upon D'Augelli’s model in a practical way to better illustrate the intersection of sexual identity with other facets of identity.

As I began to write this final chapter, my reflections were bittersweet. Naturally, I am thrilled to be nearing the end of this phase of my educational journey, and to attain this significant milestone in my life. The implications are significant; this study culminates a 20 year journey in higher education for me. Certainly, though, this is not the end of my educational journey, but the opening of the proverbial new window.

This study represents the end of a journey that I began in the summer of 2007, when I began my doctoral studies. Starting with a quantitative research methods class, I felt certain that I would determine my research interest early in the process, collect data, complete a few statistical measures, and graduate quickly. The end result of my doctoral process couldn't be
farther from that original plan. My journey has been circuitous at best, frustrating at moments, and fraught with anxiety at its worst. While in the end I feel that I have added significant insight to this niche of study, I believe that the personal journey has been the true gem in this process. In many ways this experience has felt futile, for I have, in essence, spent the past several years researching a phenomenon that to me and to my participants feels like common sense. It is the power of narrative research to share stories and to give voice to tales that might not otherwise have been told that is the greatest reward of this journey.

As I reach the last few pages of this study, I contemplate my own role in the process that I've described through my participants. Although I have acted and identify as a theatre artist, I don't self-identify as an actor. My involvement in musical theatre has been predominately as a musician and director; I have been involved in arts management and leadership for many years. Why, then, did I choose to focus on actors?

It is my engagement with the arts, and especially with my fellow artists, that sparked this journey. As I shared in Chapter One, it was specifically my friendship with one of the participants in this study, and his tumultuous journey through sexual identity development that led me to ask the vital questions embedded within this study. The stories contained here are true, and with each conversation with my participants, I was reminded of story after story, either of my own, or of my dear friends with whom I have worked in the theatre. Each of those stories begged to be told; it was a careful negotiation to focus on the nine stories contained here and to ask the others to wait. In a sense, this study may have ended, but the stories have only just begun.

As my participants’ stories each end with a representative quotation, I struggled to find a quote to represent my own story. I quickly realized, however, that this is not my story to tell.
This is a story woven collaboratively by nine very generous men with whom I had the honor of laughing, crying, celebrating, and mourning; men whose stories were remarkably similar despite differences in time and place. They allowed me, for a short time, to see the world through their eyes, both individually and collectively. To them, I express my gratitude with a quote from author Jacob Nordby:

Blessed are the weird people:
poets, misfits, writers
mystics, painters, troubadours
for they teach us to see the world through different eyes.
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