Witnessing Stories: The Transformative Impact of Witnessing Performed Lived Experience Within the Context of Family Life Education

Shea M. Wood

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By: Shea Wood

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_____ Chair
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_____ External Examiner
Dr. N. Sajnani

_____ External to Program
Dr. A. Hamalian

_____ Examiner
Dr. R. Reilly

_____ Examiner
Dr. M. D'Amico

_____ Examiner
Dr. M. Sussman

_____ Thesis Supervisor
Dr. B. Harnden

Approved by: _____
Dr. K. Schmitt, Graduate Program Director

March 24, 2017

_____
Dr. P. Wood-Adams
Dean of Graduate Studies

ABSTRACT

Witnessing Stories: The Transformative Impact of Witnessing Performed Lived Experience Within the Context of Family Life Education

Shea M. Wood, Ph.D.

Concordia University, 2017

This study examined how theatre and performances based on lived experience can be used as a tool within family life education (FLE) and foster transformative learning in the witness. FLE is a type of adult education that aims to provide individuals and families with knowledge, skills, and resources to assist them in living healthy lives and addressing the challenges that affect families throughout the lifespan. Transformation can be initiated in FLE programs when the learning methodologies encourage personal, critical reflection and emotional engagement. Therefore the goal of this research was to explore the elements that could be included in performances based on lived experience to evoke emotion and foster personal/critical reflection in the witness.

This qualitative research utilized a grounded theory approach to collect and systematically analyze data to construct theory grounded in the data. Specifically, this study involved presenting a performance piece based on the lived experience of being a child in a family struggling with alcoholism, and collecting data from the witnesses in order to gain insight into the human experience of witnessing this performance piece based on lived experience, and the elements of the performance that witnesses identified as important and useful in fostering transformation. The results of this study generated recommendations for the creation of performances to be used within adult learning, applications to the context of FLE, and possibilities for future research.

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A number of people kept me nourished so that I not only survived this experience, but also grew through it. My family has shown their unwavering support in subtle and substantial ways. They gave me strength through this process by reminding me to occasionally come up for air, while pushing me to dive a bit deeper. Jason Butler contributed so much to my work and life as a colleague and friend. He read the things I put in front of him, listened while I bumbled around the insights, inspirations, and frustrations that I encountered, and offered me questions and feedback with patience and respect. Under Ryan O'Callaghan's loving and reflective gaze, I found confidence and came to see my

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I have always been fascinated by the concept of witnessing. Sitting in Professor Jennifer Stephenson's class at Queen's University while completing an undergraduate degree, I would ponder the relationship that existed between an audience and the characters, the different worlds that were existing simultaneously, and what possibilities existed for blurring the lines between those worlds. This interest of mine moved out of the classroom, into my personal notebooks in the form of diagrams and theories, and then found its way into the real world. I began extending the questions I had in relation to theatre out into the experiences of everyday life. What happens in the body and mind when we witness a profound event? We take in information, we feel emotions, and memories of our own experience are triggered. I began to ask myself: What if this event is a piece of theatre, and it can be designed to serve a certain purpose, create a particular experience, trigger certain emotions, and connect with specific kinds of personal memories? What kind of learning do we take away from these experiences? For over a decade this curiosity sat inside of me as I trained in theatre and as a drama therapist, and as I had my own formative experiences of witnessing.

During my Master's degree, and in the years since, I have been involved in a project entitled You Arrive developed by Bonnie Harnden. You Arrive is a piece of performance autoethnography that follows one woman's experience in her therapist's office as she unravels the effects of early trauma while it simultaneously illustrates the theories and experiences that guide her therapist's work and interventions. Performing in this piece and participating in the talk-back

sessions following the performance, I was reminded of the powerful effect that theatre can have on the witness. People I had never met before wept, telling me that I did not understand the gift I had given them; the gift of understanding the self, their childhood, their parents, the people they love, the people they work with, and the people in the world around them. I have had both students and working professionals express that the performance made all of the theory they have been learning throughout their training digestible, clear, concise, and meaningful. We performed this show all over North America in a variety of contexts. While responses varied slightly from group to group, I continued to hear the same feedback over and over again: the performance made them think, feel, and reflect. I was inspired by my involvement in You Arrive to ask two new questions: What are the "active ingredients" or elements of these performances that help to bring about this experience? How can performances be used to help people with the challenges that they face in family life?

What I learned from my work with You Arrive is that the discussion following the performance seemed to be very important in helping audience members connect to other witnesses, share their personal connections, and process what they had watched and experienced. The benefits of group discussion and two-way learning were also evident in the therapeutic and educational groups that I had facilitated. I began to wonder how these types of performances could be integrated into support groups or family education groups to be used in cooperation with other techniques—including group discussion—to help individuals with the challenges they are facing in their day-to-day lives.

Finally, I decided it was time to ask these questions out loud. It was time to engage and really struggle with these questions in order to produce new theory that could advance the knowledge we have of how performance-based techniques can be used to support and educate families. It is possible that the results of this

research could be applied to many fields that utilize performance and arts-based strategies, including adult education (educational theatre, creative teaching pedagogy), drama therapy, and other forms of applied theatre.

This research is a part of who I am; it is constructed through my own perspective and is shaped by the questions I have been asking for many years. Despite the momentum I bring into this research, I also carry a substantial amount of genuine curiosity, and it is my hope that this research will produce theory and knowledge that will help many struggling families around the world.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Reviewing literature related to the topic of investigation can help to delimit a research problem, identify new areas of inquiry, and provide "a framework for relating new findings to previous findings in the discussion section of a dissertation" (Randolph, 2009, p. 1) in order to establish how the new findings advance previous theory and research. When conducting research rooted in grounded theory, Corbin and Strauss (2015) assure researchers that it is not necessary to review all literature in the area of study before beginning the inquiry. It is impossible to anticipate all relevant concepts that will be derived from the data, and it is important that researchers are not so submerged in the literature that they are no longer open to the possibilities of what they might find through the process of engaging in the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

This interdisciplinary research is informed by and relates to a variety of different fields, and it was necessary to synthesize existing literature in order to establish a basic understanding of the relationships that might exist between such areas as family life education, transformative learning, theatre and performance studies, witnessing and spectatorship, and observational learning. When writing the initial proposal for this research, I conducted a preliminary literature review

that brought together theory in these areas to provide a rationale for the research questions being developed. Within this initial exploration and synthesis of literature, there was no attempt to identify all concepts that might be found in the data that would be collected for the study or create a coding framework that would be used for analysis. At the conclusion of the study, more literature was consulted that related to the concepts and findings that emerged from the analysis, and this additional theory was integrated into the literature review. When writing about the findings of a study, incorporating literature "not only demonstrates scholarship but also allows for extending, validating, and refining knowledge in a field" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 51). Therefore the purpose of this literature review is to provide a foundation for asking questions in this area of study, which will be investigated using a grounded theory approach, and to help situate the findings in the field within which this knowledge will be used to inform practice.

This literature review focuses on synthesizing theory, though some study findings have been integrated into the review to further the understanding of theory in practical settings. Randolph (2009) claims that "a theoretical review is appropriate if, for example, the dissertation aims to advance new theory" (p. 3), which is the aim of this grounded theory research. Sources that contained relevant theory or research findings were included in the review, coming mostly from North America—though some European sources were used as well—and were limited to sources written in English. An attempt has been made to conduct an extensive rather than an exhaustive review, and it can be assumed that there are other sources related to the topic that were not found and included in this review.

Fostering Transformation Through Family Life Education

Family Life Education

The *family* is not easily defined and can take a variety of forms, but it always involves complex relationships between individuals who feel connected in

some way. Within these relationships we develop and learn; we can often feel supported and loved but it is also possible to feel underappreciated and neglected. Being part of a family can involve taking on important roles and responsibilities and, in order to competently fill these roles and better understand the dynamics and qualities of these relationships, it is necessary to learn about family life. How we educate individuals about family life has developed over time, moving from the informal contexts of everyday living, and learning from the preceding generation, to structured instruction (Lewis-Rowley, Brasher, Moss, Duncan, & Stiles, 1993). Generally, the purpose of family life education (FLE) is to enrich and strengthen individual and family wellbeing (Thomas & Arcus, 1992). This goal is based on the rationale that it is important to help families deal with problems, prevent problems, and develop potentials (Arcus, Schvaneveldt, & Moss, 1993). Offering FLE programs "provides individuals and families the opportunity to enhance their lives by making available the knowledge and skills needed for effective family living" (Darling & Turkki, 2009, p. 15). Programs aimed at educating for family life can be found in a variety of contexts, including—but certainly not limited to—community centers, churches, hospitals, rehabilitation clinics, and organizations aimed at supporting families through specific situations (for example, Military Family Resources Centers and the LGBTQ Parenting Network). FLE is a type of adult education, as the groups are usually facilitated with adult participants, and groups can cover such general topics as sexuality, relationships and marriage, parent education, and offer support for different situations and challenges that families face.

When facilitating FLE programs for adults, the educator's role is to support and enable participants' ability to learn, transform, and change. Despite the focus and the content of the group, FLE participants are seeking transformation: a behavioral change, increased understanding, and/or the acquisition of a skill set in order to function more successfully in family life or

face upcoming challenges. Exploring how transformation is understood within the context of adult education may help to develop an understanding of how transformative learning can be facilitated in the FLE environment using theatre and performance.

Transformative Learning

There are many models and approaches to learning and education that have been used to build curriculum and develop pedagogical/andragogical perspectives. In the 1990's a constructivist approach—in which the learner constructs their knowledge through engaging with the social world—began to replace the previously dominating positivist view that learning was transmitted from teacher to student (Jackson, 2007). *Transformative learning* is based in a constructivist perspective (Fisher-Yoshida, Geller, & Schapiro, 2009), where the learner is an active agent in his/her learning. While some FLE is based in an instrumental/technical paradigm, which focuses on the teaching of methods and skills, programs based primarily on the interpretive paradigm prioritize participants' knowledge based on their own life experiences (Morgaine, 1992). It is the interpretive approach to FLE that is consistent with the goals of transformative learning. Originally articulated by Mezirow (1990, 1991, 2000) and expanded on by many others since, transformative learning provides a concrete foundation on which to build a relationship between performance and FLE.

Mezirow's view of transformative learning can be understood as a process through which one critically reflects on and transforms the assumptions that influence one's frames of reference and resulting values, beliefs, and perspectives (Fisher-Yoshida, et al., 2009). The transformation process begins with the recognition that there are ideas and beliefs that are not consistent with our frames of reference, and there are alternate ways of understanding, which may provide

new insights (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006). Through constructive discourse with others, one may critically reflect on one's own foundational assumptions and move through a process of attempting to validate a new belief structure, eventually coping with the anxiety involved in actually changing one's own beliefs and taking action based on the shifted perspective (Mezirow, 2000). Essentially, according to Mezirow (2000), perspectives and habits of mind are transformed and, in turn, produce opinions and beliefs to guide action that are more appropriate and justified. When the adult learner is confronted with an important experience or dilemma, it can lead to critical reflection and set this transformation process into motion.

Since this original perspective of transformative learning was put forth by Mezirow, other authors have made contributions to the development of a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of transformative learning (Dirkx, 2006). Mezirow's original theory of transformation being purely a function of cognitive processes virtually excluded the human dimensions of emotion, creativity, imagination, and spirituality, and other authors have begun to bring these elements into the discussion of transformative learning (Dirkx, 2001, 2006, 2008; Lawrence, 2008; Yorks & Kasl, 2002, 2006).

Emotions are an integral part of how people interpret and make meaning of events in their day-to-day lives and, according to Dirkx (2001), emotions serve as the foundation for meaningful and personally significant learning. Mezirow (2000), while focusing on rational-cognitive processes, has also acknowledged that there are strong affective dimensions of transformation. When the adult learner experiences and expresses emotion within the learning environment, an aspect of the self is externalized (Dirkx, 2001, 2006). An opportunity then exists to create a dialogue with this aspect of the self that is seeking expression through feeling, possibly developing an altered relationship with this part of the self. Working with different aspects of the self that are brought forth in the feeling

experience and affective expression within the learning environment can lead to the development of self-knowledge and bring about transformation (Dirkx, 2001, 2006). Staying with the emotion rather than avoiding it, and fully experiencing the emotion, can provide the opportunity for deeper learning and growth (Lawrence, 2008). Yorks and Kasl (2006) believe that feelings should be evoked intentionally and engaged within the educational environment when the goal is to foster transformative learning.

As pointed out by Grabove (1997), these two distinct stances on transformative learning commonly discussed in the field of adult education—the cognitive and emotional approaches—are clearly interconnected. Yorks and Kasl (2006) define transformative learning as "a wholistic change in how a person both affectively experiences and conceptually frames his or her experience of the world when pursuing learning that is personally developmental, socially controversial, or requires personal or social healing" (pp. 45-46). This definition represents the move toward recognizing both the affective and cognitive components, and in turn the holistic nature, of transformation. For the purpose of this research, *transformative learning* will be defined as a shift in belief, perspective, or understanding that influences behavior brought about by emotional engagement and critical reflection. While this is a simplified definition of a complex learning and change process, it does take into account the established theory in the field of adult education in connection to transformative learning, and will suffice as the operational definition for this research.

There are a wide variety of methods used to facilitate learning, transformation, and change in FLE. It is important to consider whether the chosen methods fit the objectives of the program (Duncan & Goddard, 2005), and if the methods are appropriate for the intended audience in terms of age, ethnic group, family type, and gender (Hughes, 1994). In addition, learning styles and developmental needs and abilities must be taken into account when selecting

methods. Hughes (1994) believes that "a well developed program should probably utilize a variety of teaching activities and formats (e.g., structured activities and unstructured discussion) to accommodate a wide variety of learning styles that may be encountered" (p. 76). A typical FLE session would be based on a central topic and usually include the presentation of some evidence-based information, an activity/exercise that helps participants to engage with and explore the topic, and group discussions to share experiences, encourage two-way learning, integrate new knowledge, and apply session content to one's personal life. Duncan and Goddard (2005) list over 17 different methods that could be used within a FLE program and the benefits of using each method. Such methods include group discussions, stories and personal narratives, role-playing, and the use of many different kinds of audio-visual tools. Arts-based methods are commonly cited as useful tools in fostering adult learning (Brookfield, 1995), but the role of theatre and performance in facilitating transformation and change within the context of FLE has not been articulated in the literature.

This research aims to investigate the potential of performance to be used as a tool in FLE to initiate the process of transformative learning in the participants when used in concert with other experiential methods. Part of the rationale for this research is based on theatre's ability to simulate cognition and bring up an emotional response (this will be discussed in more depth below), two of the essential components of transformative learning.

Ways of Knowing

Guided by John Heron's (1992) conceptualization of whole-person epistemology, Yorks and Kasl (2002, 2006) present the concept of *ways of knowing* in the context of adult education. Acknowledging that there is more than one way to understand and make meaning of information and experience, these authors discuss how utilizing these ways of knowing can facilitate meaningful

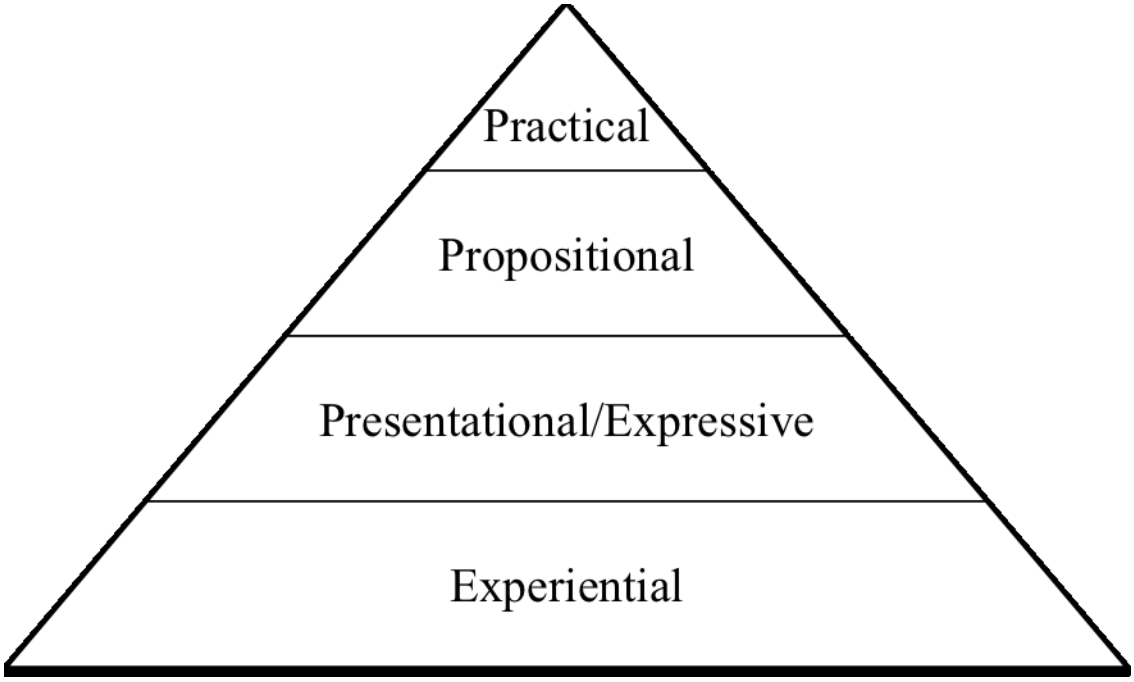

Figure 1. **John Heron's conceptualization of Ways of Knowing adapted from Yorks & Kasl's (2002) representation of Heron's figures.**

learning experiences for the adult learner. Heron proposes that there are four ways of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical (See Figure 1). *Propositional knowing*—conceptual and intellectual understanding—is most often the focus of traditional education, and *practical knowing*, or the demonstration of some skill, has often been considered the goal of training-centered adult education (including instrumental/technical FLE programs). Yorks and Kasl (2002, 2006) argue that both *experiential* and *presentational* (which they have renamed *expressive*) ways of knowing are equally as important in whole-person transformative learning.

Experiential knowing is at the foundation of all other ways of knowing (each way of knowing is dependent upon and draws from those below it in the diagram), and is often subconscious in nature (Heron, 1992 as cited in Yorks & Kasl, 2006). This visceral type of knowing is the site of emotion, empathy, and

intuition. As mentioned above, emotion has an important role in fostering transformative learning. While our emotions affect our way of living in, engaging with, and perceiving the world, due to the subliminal and primitive quality of experiential knowing, this way of knowing can be difficult to access within the learning environment (Davis-manigaulte, Yorks & Kasl, 2006). Davis-manigaulte, Yorks and Kasl (2006) believe that the adult learner can gain an awareness of experiential, emotional knowing through working with expressive processes in the learning encounter, recognizing the value of creative/expressive tools in adult learning environments. The presentational/expressive way of knowing "is evident in our intuitive grasp of imaginal patterns as expressed in various forms of artistic expression" (Yorks & Kasl, 2006, p. 48). This way of knowing is accessed and expressed through arts-based methods, including movement, music, colour, plastic arts, story, and drama (Heron, 1992 as cited in Yorks & Kasl, 2006). Yorks and Kasl (2006) insist that expressive ways of knowing have four important functions in transformative learning: (a) they create the foundation for holistic learning, (b) they "provide empathetic connections for learning-within-relationship" (p. 52), (c) they evoke personal experience and, (d) they provide access to feeling and emotion. These elements of learning made possible by utilizing creative approaches to access experiential and expressive ways of knowing will be discussed more in connection to the results of this study.

While other common teaching methods used within FLE, including lecturettes and group activities, can allow adults to engage their propositional and practical ways of knowing, theatre and performance have the ability to access expressive and experiential ways of knowing that, when used in combination with other methods, may foster holistic transformation in the FLE participant. Without the addition of arts-based methods—including carefully designed and executed performance pieces—adult education in the context of FLE does not access all ways of knowing and, in turn, foster holistic transformation in the learner.

Theatre and Performance

The Witness

The audience has always been central to the definition of theatre. Peter Brook (1968) claimed that all that is required for an act of theatre to take place is for a man to walk through an empty space while someone else is watching him. Jerzy Grotowski (1968) believed that theatre is "what takes place between spectator and actor" (p. 32). Despite how important and central the audience is to the existence of theatre, there are few academic publications and little research that directly and exclusively explores the experience of theatre audiences (Balme, 2008; Freshwater, 2009; Ginters, 2010; Prendergast, 2008). *The Audience Studies Reader*, edited by Brooker and Jermyn (2003), does not contain a single essay devoted to exploring the spectator's experience in a live theatrical event, and most of the books addressing the role of the audience, and analyzing theories of spectatorship, are in the field of media, communications, and film (Freshwater, 2009).

One theory connected to linguistic communication that has been used to understand the experience of the audience in both theatre and film is *semiotics*, which examines the encoding and decoding process that occurs when an individual (spectator) is presented with a constant flow of symbols or messages (Olsen, 2002). Jackson (2007) points out that in applying this method of analysis to theatre, semioticians are

> failing to recognize adequately the ways in which theatre comprises a live, *two-way* communication process, that audiences may not just interpret differently from night to night (or indeed from individual to individual) but that may actually *influence* performance – a characteristic unique to live performance. (p. 13)

Although some theories of spectatorship in film and literature can be applied to theatre, the live theatrical event requires a different kind of analysis, one that considers the impact of witnessing a real individual who exists in the same time and space as the spectator. This two-way relationship that occurs in theatre is also a central feature of family life education groups and constructivist adult learning, and will be explored in more depth through this research.

Before Susan Bennett's book *Theatre Audiences* (1997), there was little focus on theatre audiences, and while this book demonstrates the evolving role of audiences within different historical and cultural contexts, it generally treats an audience as a mass. In addition to other reasons for shying away from audience research that looks at the individual experience of witnessing, Balme (2008) claims that studying the audience is simply difficult:

> To study the spectator individually or collectively implies a shift from interpreting an aesthetic object to studying the cognitive and emotional responses of actual human beings. This is the field of empirical psychology and sociology, and most theatre scholars do not possess this kind of scholarly background and training. (pp. 34-35)

Indeed, to fully understand the impact that theatre can have on the audience, the experience needs to be analyzed through a variety of perspectives, and these different approaches to spectatorship only begin to provide a clear picture of how a witness can be moved, educated, and transformed through theatre.

Schechner (2003) discusses two types of audiences that may witness live events: accidental and integral audiences. *Accidental* audiences go to "see the show" (Schechner, 2003, p. 220); they are attending because they want to, and often have less knowledge or familiarity of the content or context of what they are witnessing. *Integral* audience members attend an event because they have to, or because it holds a special significance for them (Schechner, 2003). This may

include the family and friends of the creators of a performance piece, or individuals of the same marginalized community that created or are included in the performance. According to Schechner (2003), while the accidental audience may pay closer attention to the event, the integral audience is "necessary to accomplish the work of the show" (p. 220).

So far, the terms *spectator*, *audience*, and *witness* have all been used interchangeably to describe the individual or group of individuals who observe the performative event. Certain authors have outlined a distinction between these terms (see Balme, 2008) and identified the areas of study that are concerned with either the individual (spectator) or group (audience) experience of witnessing. The term *witness* will commonly be used in this paper to describe the role of audience members in theatre, because "witnessing is an act of presence and testimony, of authentication and memory-making, of evidence and seeing" (Prendergast, 2008, p. 95). This term implicates the audience as being active in the theatrical process, and necessary, even if not actually participating in creating the drama. Whether attending the performance as initially part of an *accidental* or *integral* audience (Schechner, 2003), a witness is integral to the theatrical event (Prendergast, 2008).

The Impact of Theatre on the Witness

What is the impact that theatre has on the witness? It is hard to be sure given that, in essence, "we have yet to step up to the challenge of addressing the question of what we really know about what theatre does for those who witness, watch, or participate" (Freshwater, 2009, p. 74). There is a difference between the intended impact and the actual experienced impact, the latter being something that is rarely investigated by theaters, production companies, and scholars. This section will largely address the intended impact of theatre with the

acknowledgement that a goal of this research is to understand the actual impact that a specific form of theatre can have on the witness.

The effect of theatre will be largely based on what form of theatre is being witnessed, and the goal or intent of the performance. Political theatre and theatre for social change (Boal, 1979) aims to give a voice to oppressed groups of people and mobilize communities in making changes in oppressive political, social, or cultural structures. Theatre-in-Education (TIE) is a form of theatre created with the intention of didactically educating the audience, and was initially developed in England in the early 1950s for use within local schools (Stuttaford et al., 2006). Although TIE was originally developed for use with children (Cooper, 2004), theatre has since be used to educate people in a variety of settings, including adult education (Davis-manigaulte, Yorks, & Kasl, 2006), moral and health education (Ball, 1994; Winston, 1999, 2005), and other non-formal educational settings (Taylor, 2008). The main goal of therapeutic theatre is to provide an opportunity for a group of individuals to explore the issues that are relevant to that specific group through the creation and performance of a theatre piece (Emunah, 2015). Those involved in the creation of therapeutic theatre are commonly considered part of a specific "group", which is often marginalized, and the performance may "offer a sense of creative mastery and achievement, even victory" (Emunah, 2015, p. 72). The experience of creating and performing the theatre piece can often result in a therapeutic group experience for those involved (Andersen-Warren, 1995), and the performances can bring a new awareness about this community/group to the audience. Research-based theatre performances are focused on gathering, analyzing, and presenting data about what it means to be human in a certain social, political, or cultural context (Ackroyd & O'Toole, 2010), and the presentation of this work can serve a variety of purposes, including education, emancipation, or social change. Finally, mainstream or aesthetic theatre primarily aims to entertain. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the

ways theatre is being used in order to bring about a certain experience for the actor/participants or the witness, rather a demonstration of the breadth of applications for theatre and the associated goals of the work. The term *applied theatre* is often used as "a useful umbrella term…for finding links and connections for all of us committed to the power of theatre in making a difference in the human life span" (Taylor, 2006, p. 93). All of these theatrical forms described above involve bringing individuals into a shared space in connection with one another to have an experience through the arts.

Learning in relationship. Yorks and Kasl (2006) discuss the importance and benefits of learning-within-relationship, and claim that empathy is essential in order to learn through a connection with others. It appears that "humans are neurologically endowed for the capacity of mutual knowing, understanding, and feeling" (Berrol, 2006, p. 313). Neurological research on the macaque monkey (Gallese, Fadiga, Fogassi, & Rizzolatti, 1996) has shed light on what we now call mirror neurons and how these neural circuits could be imperative to the process of witnessing and learning from others. When *observing* the action of another, there is an automatic activation of the same neural mechanism as is triggered when personally *executing* an action (see Gallese et al., 1996). As described by Molnar-Szakacs (2011), mirror neurons encode the actions, intentions, and emotions of another without a differential boundary between self and other. Thus, a first-person experience of emotions and sensations can occur when witnessing the actions, sensations, and emotions of others (Gallese, 2006). It seems that "mirror networks may mediate and facilitate many of the psychological processes involved in empathy" (McConachie, 2008, p. 73). While there has been some critique on applying the findings related to the role of mirror neurons to humans (Dinstein, Thomas, Behrmann, & Heeger, 2008; Hickok, 2008), it is clear that there is some neural connection that occurs when witnessing emotion and action being displayed by another. Therefore, when we learn in connection with others—

and potentially through witnessing a character/performer in a performance—it may be possible to take in the other's experience and learning as our own, and the opportunities to be transformed may be increased when we emotionally and empathically connect with the experience of those we are witnessing. As clearly articulated by Lawrence (2008), "tapping in to the deep well of emotion generated by participating in artistic processes as creator or witness and collectively examining the meaning of those emotional experiences can help us to envision alternative realities for a more promising future" (p. 75).

Mezirow (2000) stresses the importance of *discourse* in transformative learning, which refers to the specific use of dialogue for the purpose of exploring a common understanding, and assessing the justification of a belief or meaning of an experience. It involves interaction with another, indicating that learning in relationship is important, and the dialogue that transpires can have a transformative impact on those involved in the discourse. Mezirow doesn't limit discourse to a verbal conversation, and he claims that discourse can "include interaction within a group or between two persons, including a reader and an author or a viewer and an artist" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 14). Therefore, the witnessing of an arts-based experience or performance can be considered a dialogue in which all involved are exploring a shared understanding of the self and the world. When the adult learner is confronted through witnessing theatre with the experiences and beliefs of others and encouraged to consider and evaluate their own beliefs, values, and choices through artistic discourse, personal transformation may be initiated.

Emotion and cognition. One concept that has been widely discussed throughout theatre history as an impact of theatre on the witness is *catharsis*. Since the Greeks first questioned what kind of effect theatre has on the audience (if any), Aristotle's concept of catharsis has been central in theatre and performance theory (Balme, 2008). Aristotle's view of catharsis was based on the

impact of witnessing a tragedy (as a specific genre of theatre), which he believed "had a positive psychodynamic effect on the spectator who was effectively purged of potentially dangerous emotions" (Balme, 2008, p. 72). The concept of catharsis has evolved since Aristotle first brought it from the realm of medicine into the analysis of theatre. Meisiek (2004) outlines some of the different perspectives on catharsis in the 20th century and points out that "catharsis has been subject to various interpretations, depending on the historical context and research tradition. Consequently, it has become increasingly common to speak not of one type of catharsis but several, depending on the theatrical methods employed" (p. 801). Although it is beyond the scope of this literature review to provide a thorough overview of the evolution of the concept of catharsis and the accompanying historical, theoretical, and methodological context (for this, see Balme, 2008; Meisiek, 2004), a brief description of the three approaches to catharsis offered by Meisiek (2004) will be described.

One approach to catharsis, present in the writings of Scheff (1979) and Schoenmakers (1996), is inspired by Aristotle's beliefs and describes it as the audience releasing negative affect. An alternative approach comes from Moreno, who viewed catharsis as a tool to foster creativity, which can occur when emotions are linked to spontaneous action in his method of Psychodrama (Moreno, 1987). Finally, Boal's perspective on catharsis in the context of Theatre of the Oppressed is that it acts as a stimulus to action. Catharsis should liberate the audience and *spect-actors* (spectators who can also take on an actor role within Forum Theatre) from oppressive structures by motivating them to action (Boal, 1995).

Meisiek (2004) acknowledges that there are weaknesses in the concept of catharsis, mainly that the definitions are inconsistent, an infinite amount of imprecise theoretical texts exists on the concept, there are no empirical studies on

the process that are without controversy, there is no measure of the magnitude of the effect, and some scholars deny that catharsis occurs at all.

Regardless of these weaknesses, the concept of catharsis ignited a discussion on the possible effect of theatre, and at the foundation of this discussion is the idea that theatre has the potential to impact the witness in some way. Meisiek (2004) offers a very simple definition of catharsis: that it speaks to "the power of theatre to change the minds and hearts of the audience" (p. 800). This dual impact of theatre – to affect the emotions and cognitions of the witness – has been widely cited in literature and is at the foundation of fostering transformation through theatre. Horace (2000), in 1st century BC, claimed that "he who, mixing grave and gay, can teach and yet give pleasure…" (p. 80). Schiller (2000), in his writings as early as 1784, wrote that the stage nourished the soul and united the highest education of head and heart. In speaking about poesy (and, in turn, theatre), Sir Philip Sydney (2000) asserted in his paper dated 1583, The Defense of Poesy, that "no learning is so good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as poesy" (p. 123). Learning or education, and the fact that theatre has the ability bring about a holistic kind of learning that engages both affective and rational-cognitive processes simultaneously, is not a new notion in theatre studies literature. Does all theatre make us think and feel, leading to the beginning of a transformative process in the witness? It could be argued that although the potential exists for learning to take place through an emotional and intellectual connection to what is being witnessed on stage, the goal and context of the theatrical performance needs to be considered, and certain structural and aesthetic factors may be important in fostering transformation.

It is also important to remember that theatre is art, and an effort to apply theatre to certain purposes (such as education or social change) cannot compromise the aesthetic qualities that are valued in theatre, such as complexity,

multi-layered meanings, ambiguity, and richness of imagination (Jackson, 2007). Theatre is chosen as a modality for mobilizing communities and fostering transformation because it has the ability to capture and (re)present a vivid and embodied picture of what it means to be human in a certain personal, social, cultural, or political context through its aesthetic properties. If these aesthetics become an afterthought when creating applied theatre, the piece will not have the intended impact. As stated clearly by Saldaña (2005), "theatre's primary goal is to entertain—to entertain ideas as it entertains its spectators" (p. 14). Theatre will not be able to encourage audiences to entertain ideas if it does not consider the aesthetic qualities required to engage and entertain the audience.

Aesthetics and Performance

The study of aesthetics, or the nature of beauty, began as an inquiry for philosophers but has, over time, been taken up by psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists (Courtney, 1968), and art scholars. Finding a complete and precise definition of *aesthetic* in the diverse, multi-disciplinary literature on this topic is virtually impossible (Jackson, 2007). The aim of this section is not to provide a thorough history of the main philosophers who laid the foundation of aesthetic thinking and the resulting body of literature that emerged in the field (for this, see Bosanquet, 2005). Rather, the goal here is to review basic aesthetic concepts that are relevant to theatre and performance in order to aid in the analysis of aesthetic choices made in representing lived experience in performance to foster transformation in the audience.

In *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, Dufrenne (1973) wrestles with the notion of aesthetics and the subjectivity of beauty. He claims that, rather than struggling with the question of what is beautiful, it would be better to "look elsewhere for the essence of the aesthetic object by defining this object through how it is brought forth (as in an aesthetic of creation) or in terms of how it

appears (as in aesthetics of aesthetic experience)" (p. lviii). Dufrenne (1973) is suggesting that aesthetics lie in the art-object's ability to be what it claims to be and realize its essence. There is also an indication in his writing that he believes aesthetics are based in the experience of the spectator (aesthetic experience). John Dewey (1934), among others, argued this point much earlier, claiming that aesthetics are associated less with the inherent qualities of the artwork itself and more with the reception of this object. Though Dufrenne (1973) gestures to this idea throughout his introduction, it is in a footnote where he makes a concrete statement of the importance of the spectator in the aesthetic experience, stating that the spectator "understands in perceiving and can truly say that the beautiful is that which produces in him [sic] a harmony of imagination and understanding" (p. lxi). For Dufrenne (1973), the aesthetic experience is an act of understanding what is being witnessed while simultaneously accepting the creative image that is being presented through performance.

There appears then to be two aspects of aesthetics in relation to the theatre: the aesthetics associated with what is brought to the audience and how it appears, and the aesthetic experience that is created through the act of witnessing. Pavis (1999) makes this distinction as well in the Dictionary of the Theatre, claiming that *aesthetics of production* refers to factors connected to the formation of the text and stage functions whereas *aesthetics of reception* examines the experience of the spectator, including how the piece is perceived and the relationship between the spectator and the fictitious world. Therefore, in the field of theatre and for the purpose of this paper, the term aesthetic will refer to both "the quality of the work that makes its appeal directly to the sense-perception of those who…watch it, and to the response itself" (Jackson, 2007, p. 37). Aesthetic choices made in the mounting of a performance piece will be discussed in addition to the aesthetic experience of witnessing the theatrical event.

One important point to consider when discussing aesthetics in relation to theatre, is that theatre is not an "art-object". The word object indicates static matter that, once created, is only altered in the eyes and mind of the observer; it is transformed in perception only. In theatre and performance, however (and other interactive and performance art), the creation itself is in a constant state of change. Theatre is a lived experience, happening in time and space in a manner that can never re-occur in exactly the same way. Performance responds to the environment. Although in most theories and discussions of aesthetics, theatre is still commonly considered to be an "art-object", it is important to take into consideration the live qualities of this art form.

Aesthetic distance. The experience of witnessing a theatrical event can, at times, be quite powerful. The quality of this emotional and intellectual reaction, however, is different from the reaction that occurs when engaged in real life experience. This is due to a certain kind of distance that exists when witnessing a performance. *Aesthetic distance* is a concept that has been widely and consistently discussed over time in connection to the creation, execution, and reception of theatre. It is often discussed as having a "protective function" (Jackson, 2007, p. 140), and providing emotional and psychological protection for the spectator (Ben Chaim, 1984) through creating a boundary between real life and the art.

Edward Bullough (1912) presented the concept of aesthetic distance as existing between our perceptive and emotional states (Furman, 1988), which can disappear in states of underdistance or overdistance (Bullough, 1912). Sociologist Thomas Scheff (1981)—who was also a scholar in many other areas including theatre studies and psychotherapy—also identified aesthetic distance as an ideal point between overdistance and underdistance, and applied this concept from theatre to the practice of psychotherapy. When one is in an underdistanced state while watching dramas that are designed to evoke an intense emotional experience, there is an abundance of emotion and, "under these conditions

members of the audience find it difficult to reflect on the experience because they are insufficiently distanced from it" (Scheff, 1981, p. 46). Conversely, overdistanced dramas result in the spectator simply thinking about the experience being represented, but not feeling the emotional content. Aesthetic distance is achieved when the audience can experience emotions related to what they are witnessing while not being overwhelmed by them. There is a simultaneous occurrence of thinking about an experience and feeling the emotion associated with the experience. Scheff (1981) discusses this point of distance as a place where one can participate and observe simultaneously. Whereas Aristotle believed that underdistance lead to the purging emotions/catharsis (Furman, 1988), Scheff (1981) claimed that emotional catharsis is possible when aesthetic distance is achieved, as one can experience potentially repressed emotion and "discharge it" (Scheff, 1981, p. 47), leading to therapeutic change. Other therapists and drama therapists, namely Robert Landy (1983), have incorporated the idea of aesthetic distance (based on the theatrical model and Scheff's presentation of the distance continuum) into theory and practice of psychotherapy. Whether discussing the experience of a spectator in theatre or a client in therapy, the main position held is that, while different amounts of distance can be beneficial at different times, aesthetic distance is an optimal position where one can access their emotional states while simultaneously maintaining an observer stance, leading to catharsis, reflection, and healing (Glass, 2006; Landy, 1983, 2008, 2009; Scheff, 1981).

While some theorists view aesthetic distance as a central point of balance between underdistance and overdistance, this term is also used simply to describe the boundary between art and life. This boundary is often managed and manipulated by different theatre practitioners according to their desired effect on the audience and belief of how much distance will bring about this intended impact. In this discussion of distance, to describe only what is considered to be "mainstream theatre" (theatre that presents characters, being played by actors

employing a psychological realism approach to acting, behind a fourth wall in a continuous narrative) and provide one alternative (such as the distanced Brechtian approach) would reduce what is currently being done in theatre and performance to a flat and un-textured picture of the current approaches to representation. Describing the vast and rapidly transforming alternatives to mainstream theatre, however, is far beyond the scope of this literature review. Given this, a spectrum of aesthetic distance will be briefly discussed along with some illustrative examples of theatrical conventions and how they can be manipulated depending on where on this spectrum the performance sits. This brief description of aesthetics in theatre is designed to inform the creation of the performance piece used in this study and lay the foundation for understanding the results of this research.

Elimination of distance. Seminal theories of aesthetic distance sit on a continuum from a desire to eliminate aesthetic distance altogether to an attempt to create as much distance as possible. Artaud and Grotowski both support an aesthetic that virtually eliminates distance and delivers a "direct assault on the psyches of the spectators" (Ben Chaim, 1984, p. 40). Artaud (2000) believed that through attacking the spectator's sensibility, the spectator's psyche would be completely filled with sensation and the audience would wake up and engage with what they were witnessing. Overwhelming his audience through his form Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud did not want the audience to be aware of the division between theatre and life (Ben Chaim, 1984), and preferred that theatre be perceived as a "believable reality" (Artaud, 2000, p. 436) wherein it is experienced as more of a dream rather than an imitation of reality (Artaud, 2000). Despite the desire to virtually eliminate this perceived division, Artaud believed it was important that this division remain between life and theatre to some extent to maintain psychological protection from the theatrical experience (Ben Chaim, 1984).

Grotowski (1968) also believed that shocking the audience would lead to a transformation. In his theatre performances and laboratory experimentations, Grotowski was not interested in the actors placing themselves in fictional roles, but believed the actors' "task was to construct a form of testimony drawing on deeply meaningful and secret experiences from their own lives, articulated in such a way that this act of revelation could serve as a provocation for the spectator" (Wolford, 1997, pp. 7-8). He eventually pushed his work so far, however, that he became more interested in the notion of providing a space where human beings can reveal themselves to one another (Grotowski, 1968), and was no longer concerned with the aesthetics of performance (Ben Chaim, 1984). Grotowski had little interest in representation and was now concerned with "approaching reality head-on" (Grotowski, 1968, p. 49). According to some scholars, in the Theatre of Participation phase of his work, Grotowski eliminated the boundary between life and art completely, and once aesthetic distance was removed, Grotowski was facilitating something that was closer to group therapy than a theatrical experience (Ben Chaim, 1984).

Some critics have pointed out that a direct attack on the spectator through the presentation of shocking and emotionally loaded material may produce the opposite of the intended effect (Ben Chaim, 1984); distance is actually increased because spectators cannot endure a lasting emotional response and must retreat from this feeling through switching into a rational thought process or focusing attention on the theatricality of the experience (Ben Chaim, 1984).

Distance reduced but maintained. Bullough (1912) believes that art should bring about the most intense personal experience for the viewer while maintaining a small degree of distance. According to Bullough (1912), art should promote the smallest amount of distance without its disappearance. Sartre (as cited in Power, 2008) would agree with this position because he believes that identification with and empathy for the character is necessary while maintaining a

degree of distance. His theory builds on this notion, making a strong statement about the engagement with the real and the "unreal," particularly in his essays "On Dramatic Style" and "Myth and Reality in Theatre" (as cited in Power, 2008). Sartre conceives aesthetic distance as the engagement with the unreal. According to Ben Chaim (1984), who offers a detailed review of theories of aesthetic distance, "…for Sartre, we are aesthetically distanced when we are imaginatively experiencing the image as opposed to when we are perceiving the real. Distance occurs when the real is negated" (p. 14). In order for art to affect the viewer, s/he must be engaged with the image (including characters, emotions, experiences of characters, the play world or story), and if the spectator becomes aware of the real (the actor as actor rather than character), aesthetic distance—and ultimately the theatrical experience—is destroyed (Power, 2008). Sartre's perspective will be discussed further in connection to specific aesthetic components.

Brook (1995) believes it is essential that the story, theme or basic material presented in theatre provide a common ground on which every witness is able to feel connected to and united with others in the audience. In doing this, the actor must represent a reality that evokes a similar response in the audience as the one being experienced/presented on stage. Jones (1996) points out that there are two processes occurring when the audience is connected to what they are witnessing on stage: identification and projection. This is explained clearly by Jones (1996) in the following excerpt:

> We may, as audience members, identify with the characteristics of one of the personae on the stage either through motivation, experience, or attitude. Accompanying this may be a projection. We project our own motivations, feelings and experiences into the mould the actor provides for us. As a result of the content and action we witness, we may shift our relationship with the projected feelings during or after the engagement

> with the performance. This may, in turn, affect the way we understand and feel about the parts of ourselves which have been engaged with the projection. (p. 100)

When the spectators identify with and feel connected to what they are witnessing, the distance between life and art is reduced. As described by Jones (1996), the witness can then create a new relationship with, or understanding of, the parts of the self that have been engaged with the performance, possibly through a process of critical reflection, as similarly suggested by Mezirow (1990, 1991, 2000).

While Boal advocates for involving the audience members actively in the embodiment of the enactments (calling this role spect-actors), he presents three concepts that he feels are essential in bringing about transformation in the audience: Identification, recognition and resonance (Boal, 1995). These three levels of engagement can also apply to the experience of witnessing, and can arguably help to initiate a process of transformative learning if the aesthetic distance allows for these processes to take place. Boal's (1995) *identification* is similar to Jones' in that the individual feels that they can understand the material based on personal experience. *Recognition* involves understanding the material based on interactions with others who have the lived experience, and *resonance* is occurring when there is an awakening of emotions that comes from a source that is less easy to delineate (Boal, 1995). Resonance can include identification and recognition, and Boal believes that in order to facilitate transformation, everything put on the stage must resonate with those who are witnessing (Sajnani, 2009)

Maximum distance. Brecht is a well-known for his view that theatre must involve a large amount of aesthetic distance in order to bring the spectator into critical reflection on what is being witnessed. Brecht's concept of *Verfremdungseffekt*—the self-reflexive approach to text/performance that produces a distancing or alienation effect on the witness—was designed to stop

the spectator from losing him/herself completely in the character in order to maintain the position of observer (Brecht, 2000). This enabled the spectator to take on a critically reflective stance on what he/she was witnessing. In later writings, Brecht has acknowledged the role that emotion plays in bringing about critical reflection in the theatre, and views both intellectual involvement and emotion as useful tools in creating the distanced, critical reflection he desires in his spectators (Ben Chaim, 1984; Brecht, 1949). What Brecht rejects, however, is the concepts of empathy and identification with the characters on stage, and believes that empathy places the spectator into the theatrical situation instead of remaining outside where one can critically observe what is taking place (Ben Chaim, 1984). Some of these stylistic devices that have been suggested by Brecht for heightening awareness and increasing aesthetic distance will be discussed below.

Bonnie Harnden (2014) believes that a performance should be designed to allow the audience to oscillate between thinking and feeling, and the inclusion of emotionally charged and dramatic images on stage requires a certain amount of distancing in order to keep audience members engaged and prevent emotional flooding. Harnden is advocating for a balance between emotional engagement/identification with what is being witnessed, and the opportunity for distancing through using different techniques. These techniques might include projected slides that clearly communicate theory or underlying principles (a Brechtian technique), humor, and other non-realistic embodied representations, such as the way Salverson (2001) uses clown to address difficult topics in her work. Harnden (2014) believes in the importance of achieving aesthetic distance, the optimal point of distance described by Scheff (1981), where one can "express feelings without fear of becoming overwhelmed, and to reflect upon an experience without fear of completely shutting down emotionally" (Landy, 2009, pp. 72-73). Aesthetic distance is created and maintained through a variety of

theatrical conventions, including how characters are performed, the structure of the piece, and the staging and scenographic choices.

Acting technique. The approach to acting known as psychological realism, as exemplified by Stanislavski's method, is generally considered to be mainstream in western theatre. In this method, the actor attempts to "take on" a character through identifying with the character and using his or her own emotional experiences and memories to draw on, in order to feed the emotional world of the character (Stanislavsky, 2002). When presenting a character for an audience, the actor attempts to completely merge the two entities (actor self and character), and present the self—the gestures, speech, and emotions—as if he or she was actually the character. In this approach to acting, union with the character occurs through developing the internal life of the character using *emotion-memory*, while also utilizing movement and speech to "achieve the fullest embodiment of the stage character" (Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2001, p. 45).
This acting technique would be in line with Bullough and Sartre's approach to distance, where the goal is to achieve minimal distance while still maintaining this boundary.

The acting technique that exemplifies Brecht's theory of distance is quite different, wherein "the actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying" (Brecht, 2002, p. 95). Brecht claims that the actor should not transform, so much as present the text as if it is a quotation (Brecht, 2002), not necessarily void of emotion but as if it was a copy of the authentic expression of such words. The gesture, words, and emotion exhibited by the character are separate and distanced from the actor; the body suggests emotion and produces gesture in the absence of an inner emotional or psychological experience of this response by the actor (Brecht, 2000, 2002). The actor does not become the character, the actor shows the character (Ben Chaim, 1984), in an effort to maintain the level of distance that will allow spectators to

assume a reflective stance rather than be pulled into a state of empathetic engagement. There are other approaches to acting and performance that value a highly stylized approach to representation, including Commedia dell'Arte (Henke, 2002) and Meyerhold's vision of stylized theatre and Bio-Mechanics (Meyerhold, 2002).

Structure. A structural aesthetic commonly used in mainstream theatre that assists with the identification and empathetic connection to the characters is a continuous narrative. The performance unfolds in a chronological sequence of events that tells a story about an experience. Many alternatives to the narrative structure exist, and are employed regularly in a variety of performance genres. Some other structures identified by Saldaña (2011) include the *time travel plot* (purposely un-chronological plots), the *braided plot* (interweving different storylines) and the *review plot* (different types of scenes ordered to provide dramatic variety). At times, a fractured narrative or a collection of scenes is presented in order to demonstrate alternate points of view or provide voices from different times and places.

Brecht (1949) proposes that scenes or episodes be "knotted" (p. 14) together in a way that creates a noticeable separation between scenes. These knots provide the audience space to insert judgment and take a critical stance on what has been witnessed. Brecht has been known to create these knots through changing the structure of one scene to the next or providing titles for each scene (Brecht, 1949).

Anthony Jackson (2007), in his book *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings*, presents a theory about how theatre can be structured in order to initiate a transformative learning process; to challenge audience's pre-conceptions, and invite "active engagement and reflection both during and after the performance" (Jackson, 2007, p. 185). He believes that theatre must be a two-way relationship (similar to Mezirow's concept of *discourse*) and claims that if

this is not the case, and a performance turns into a one-way lecture, it will not be successful at achieving the goal of fostering learning. He asserts that "if educational theatre becomes didactic, if what it offers is reducible to the one-way conveyance of a message, then arguably it will have failed aesthetically *and* educationally, and for identical reasons" (Jackson, 2007, p. 181). Witnesses must be put in the role of active learners, and rather than teach right and wrong, theatre should engage the witness in a decision-making process that requires one to take in what they are witnessing and evaluate it based on his/her own values and experience in order to come to a conclusion or realization. The question remains, how do we structure theatre so that it can facilitate active engagement and personal reflection in the witness? According to Jackson (2007), we need to create theatre with "creative gaps". He is referencing a reader-response model presented by Iser (1988) who claims that in works of literature there are "gaps" in the writing designed to draw the reader into a creative and active relationship with the text (Jackson, 2007). Of course reading a book and witnessing a piece of theatre is quite different, but Jackson extends this theory to theatre suggesting that we should leave "creative gaps" in the text and performance, and allow the audience to take on an active role in meaning-making. Jackson (2007) articulates the purpose of creative gaps:

> Only by designing those 'creative gaps' into the play, by offering opportunities for the audience to genuinely find their own ways of completing the imaginative and cognitive journey the play has taken them on, will we allow the aesthetic and the educative to coincide, the one feeding the other. Only then do we stand a chance of creating an artwork that can simultaneously challenge assumptions and develop understanding. (p. 181)

There appears to be a combination of processes at work when an audience engages with a performance piece that has been structured with creative gaps. These gaps are an opportunity for co-creation between the playwright, performer,

and audience (Jackson, 2007), and the audience may move into a space of reflection, and then fill these gaps through the process of dramatic projection (as described earlier by Jones, 1996). For example, when witnessing a character who is faced with a difficult decision, the spectator may reflect on a decision they personally encountered, and project the feelings and considerations of their personal situation onto the characters'. In these gaps, the audience is joining together with what they are witnessing, and meaning making occurs in the space where the material being represented from the performance meets the material being projected by the spectator. While the word "gap" might seem to indicate empty space or a lack of stimulus, it is actually the opposite that Jackson (2007) is advocating for in order to encourage audience engagement. The presentation of complex, multi-vocal content, and including characters and messages that "resist neat categorization" (Jackson, 2007, p. 185), requires the audience to actively engage in reflection and challenges an audience to make personal meaning of what they are witnessing rather than leaving the theatre having simply received a neatly packaged message. Presenting the voice of a daughter who feels her father is destroying the family, *and* the voice of a father who is distraught over his lack of control over his own behaviour and his awareness of how he is negatively affecting his family, positions the audience in a place where they must reconcile these conflicting perspectives, and they are challenged to reflect on their own beliefs and personal experiences to form an opinion on what they are witnessing.

It is important that theatre practitioners resist filling those gaps with subtext or lead the audience to filling gaps in ways that are predetermined in order to achieve the project's objectives (Jackson, 2007). Allowing the witness to be an active participant in the making of meaning leads to a type of theatre that moves away from the one-way conveyance of a message and toward theatre that encourages dialogue and discourse with an active audience. Although Jackson (2007) implies that this would be executed most successfully in participatory

theatre, the concept of creative gaps could also be useful when viewed as a way of approaching the general structure of theatre, including playwriting/text and staging, in any form of theatre.

Theatrical elements/stage conventions. Stage and performance conventions used in theatre and performance are vast, and each form has a different relationship with aesthetic distance. These conventions include, but are certainly not limited to, mask, puppetry, clowning, dance and physical representation, music, projection and video, the presentation of characters speaking text, or a multi-media performance that includes a combination of these elements. Performance conventions can fall at different places on the distance continuum depending on how the piece is created and executed, but as a form may have a tendency to be more or less distanced. Clowning, for example, establishes a direct and intimate connection with the spectator whereas projected video offers an additional level of distance.

There have been many movements throughout the history of theatre that have challenged the status quo in an attempt to push boundaries and explore the possibilities of theatre and representation. Naturalism and Symbolism emerged in the late-nineteenth-century in Europe, and set the foundation for all other movements that followed (Rebellato, 2010). Realism is a distinct movement from Naturalism, though these approaches to theatre do have some overlap in their goals and style (Styan, 1981). More recently,

> the term ‘naturalism’, in particular, has become flattened out to refer to any theatrical production where the set and the acting attempts vaguely to resemble real life. Similarly, the term ‘symbolism’ can refer to any attempt to represent things and ideas through symbols. Naturalist and Symbolist theatre in their particular historical moments had a much more specific character and remit. (Rebellato, 2010, p. 6)

A full history of the philosophical underpinnings and applications to the stage of Realism, Naturalism, and Symbolism will not be provided here (for this, see Gale & Deeney, 2010; Styan, 1981). For the purpose of this research—in order to adequately address the modes of representation used in the performance and understand the results—a brief discussion of how "realistic" and "symbolic" elements can be incorporated into theatre will be included.

The concept of "real" or even "realistic" in theatre is complicated and highly debated. Realistic elements in theatre, however, are generally considered to be those that place everyday life on stage under a magnifying glass. In an attempt to create a picture of present-day reality, certain techniques can be used, including: (a) contemporary vernacular that one might hear in the real world, instead of heighted speech patterns or poetic language, (b) an established 4^{th} wall; the audience can see into the world on stage but the characters in the play are unaware of the audience, and (c) the use of real objects and realistic/three-dimensional sets.

Symbolic approaches to theatre involve using objects and images that have "more significance than is explained by their mere existence" (Rebellato, 2010, p. 17). As opposed to trying to depict a realistic representation of the world, the use of symbols aims to access the more internal, expressive material that is difficult to articulate and represent directly. As articulated by Mankovskaya (2015), "symbolization takes on singular typological forms: the metaphysical, the idealized, the mysterious, the hermetic, the suggestively aesthetic, and the heightened expressive" (p. 55). The goal is to make something that is invisible visible, and represent an illusive concept, personal/emotional experience, or feeling in a tangible way. This can be done through many different types of theatrical tools, including—but certainly not limited to—the use of the body, colour, props, costume pieces, and music.

Levels of distance are affected by the representational approach and the degree of realism and symbolism/stylization present in a theatre performance. As clearly articulated by Landy (2008),

> Reality-based enactments imply a greater degree of emotion; presentational styles imply a greater degree of cognition. Thus style of representation relates well to the distancing model given above, with overdistance as the most stylized cognitive form, and underdistance as the least stylized and most emotional. At the midpoint of aesthetic distance, where both affect and cognition are available, the style of enactment has qualities of both realism and abstraction. (p. 105)

The literature indicates that determining what type of aesthetic approach one will take to representation depends on the goals of the creation, the personal style of the theatre practitioners, and the type of experience one is attempting to capture and represent to the audience.

Performances Based on Lived Experience

Lived experience is included in many types of theatrical performance for a variety of reasons. In fact, Saldaña (2011) has found approximately eighty terms that overlap in their precise definition or are closely related to this phenomenon, including documentary theatre, ethnodrama, ethnotheatre, ethnostorytelling, performance ethnography, performing autobiography, research-based theatre, and verbatim theatre. The term *lived experience* in this research refers to an individual's personal narrative or story, or the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions connected to an experience that happened in the world. There are a variety of ways that this material can be incorporated into performance; sometimes a performance piece (a) is based on a historical event with fictional characters and storylines, (b) is created using personal narratives, interviews, and/or auto/biographical writing, but includes heavily fictionalized elements, (c) uses

dramatized verbatim text, behaviors, or body movements from an interview, interaction, or written auto/biography with varying degrees of artistic abstraction/transformation, (d) places an "actual person" (i.e. non-actor) on stage to tell his or her story or, (e) some other synthesis of lived experience and theatrical conventions (for two interesting continuums of using research-based lived experience in theatre, see Beck, Belliveau, Lea, and Wager, 2011; Rossiter et al., 2008).

There are numerous aesthetic expressions of and approaches to using lived experience/personal narrative in performance, which may alter the experience of witnessing. This discussion of the inclusion of lived experience/personal narrative in performance aims to explore the most fundamental component of this type of work: the audience's perception that they are witnessing a performance that is rooted deeply in lived stories.

Dan Yashinsky (2004), an award-winning Canadian storyteller, believes that "…every time a tale is told, the souls of both the teller and listener may be in the balance" (p. 164). According to some authors and theorists, personal narratives often move the listener/audience to consider and reflect upon their own lives or the lives of the people close to them (Miller & Taylor, 2006; Spry, 2011). When witnessing someone perform a personal narrative, the "audience members implicitly ask the question: Why is this relevant, here and now, to me? The narrative must evoke something of consequence to the spectator; the portrayal must spur some combination of reflection, challenge, and transformation" (Miller & Taylor, 2006, p. 171). The witness' personal experience can be understood differently and given new meaning when the witness identifies with the experience or emotion that is contained in the narrative (Clark, 2001). In discussing the narratives of decline and restoration that are shared in a context such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Clark (2001) claims that

> the power of the story lies in the fact that alcoholics who have hit bottom can identify deeply with the first half of the story they hear at AA and, because they see others who were once like them now living a better life, can embrace the second half in belief that their lives can change as well. (p. 88)

This quote integrates many concepts that have emerged as important in this research: identifying/resonating with the story being shared, creating a sense of hope, a shift in understanding or perspective, and the possibility of transformation.

Lived experience is often included in research-based performances or types of applied theatre, including theatre for social change and community development, therapeutic theatre, and educational theatre. As pointed out by Jackson (2007), there are very few pieces of literature specifically dealing with aesthetic and artistic aspects of applied theatre, theatre for development, and theatre in education. It appears that aesthetic merit may take a back seat to the goal of the work in theatre with a transformative purpose. Haseman and Winston (2010) acknowledge that the field of applied theatre is primarily concerned with "issues of social utility" (p. 465) because of the social, political, and/or therapeutic preoccupation of the practitioners, but also because the survival of such projects depends on it. The bodies who often fund such projects judge the worthiness of the work based on the effect and change that occurs as a result of the intervention, and do not measure the importance of the work based on the quality of the aesthetic experience. Despite this, professionals in the field are beginning to re-focus on the power and necessity of theatre aesthetics. These authors are arguing not only that the aesthetic properties are important, but in fact the usefulness of applied theatre depends on and is achieved through the aesthetics. Thompson (2009), in his book *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* claims that applied theatre "is limited if it concentrates

solely on effects – identifiable social outcomes, messages or impacts – and forgets the radical potential of the freedom to enjoy beautiful radiant things" (p. 6). Similarly, Jackson (2007) points out, "lose sight of the aesthetic and the *capacity* of such theatre to intervene is seriously diminished. It is through the aesthetic indeed that effective theatre will achieve its goals…" (p. 28, italics in original). In his book, Jackson (2007) takes a solid stance that carefully thought-out and well-executed aesthetic dimensions are absolutely essential to the success of any type of theatre that aims to bring about a transformation in the spectator or community at large. Aesthetics can actually act as the vehicle for change.

Actor/character and spectator relationship. Looking specifically at the performance of personal narrative/lived experience in theatre, it appears that a special and specific relationship exists between the performer of personal narrative and the witness. Langellier and Peterson (2006) claim that "the coincidence of performer and author, that is, the self-as-text, heightens the vulnerability of the performer and the responsibility of the audience; and conversely, that the self-as-text heightens the vulnerability of the audience and responsibility of the performer" (pp. 159-160). This quote artfully communicates the layers of impact that the performance of personal narrative has on the performer and witness. The performer has the responsibility to communicate their lived experience in a way that is accessible and meaningful, while the audience has the responsibility of bearing witness to this story. The spectator holds a crucial role as an active witness in the performance of personal narratives (Miller & Taylor, 2006). The performer is vulnerable in the telling of a personal story (rather than existing in the safety of a character), and the audience is vulnerable to the emotional and personal experience that can result in witnessing such a performance. This vulnerability is due to a decrease in aesthetic distance. When a "real" person is represented on stage, the distance between the witness and the representation of that person is decreased (Duggan, 2013).

There is a widely used theatrical convention of the fourth wall, which creates a barrier between audience and the play world and positions the spectators as unseen viewers of a theatrical event. In Sartre's view, this is essential in achieving the desired amount of distance and engaging with the unreal. Sartre (1976) believes that when an actor/character directly addresses the audience, making contact and shattering the illusion of the fourth wall, aesthetic distance is eliminated and causes the "imaginary character to vanish and to be replaced by the presence of the real person" (Ben Chaim, 1984, p. 18). Brecht actually supports breaking down the fourth wall and directly addressing the audience, but it is based on a similar rationale, that this will draw attention to the actors themselves and the theatrical event, creating the space for intellectual engagement and reflection (Ben Chaim, 1984). Both Sartre and Brecht's positions are based on an assumption that the spectator is not able to conceive of a character that is speaking directly to him or her. The illusion of a character vanishing with the fourth wall is a presumptuous claim that has been challenged many times in performance pieces. As articulated by Ben Chaim (1984), "Sartre ultimately avoids the question of perceptual knowledge and its role in the aesthetic experience by not accounting for how the mind can imagine the aesthetic object while perceiving the real canvas and the real paint" (p. 21). Brecht could be included alongside Sartre in this quote, given that his invitation for the actor/character to address the audience is based on a desire for the real to appear alongside the unreal.

Many performers of personal narrative make the aesthetic choice to speak directly to the audience, breaking the *fourth wall.* The performance used in this research was designed based in the belief that indeed aesthetic distance is dramatically reduced when the character directly addresses the audience, but not completely eliminated, establishing what Bullough (1912) believes to be the optimal amount of aesthetic distance in art: the most intense personal experience

while maintaining a small degree of distance. Even when a direct address occurs, it is still theatre and not real life. It is a framed experience that contains aesthetic conventions and theatrical tools, even if the performance is based on a personal narrative. Aesthetic distance is still present and necessary when witnessing a personal narrative being presented through theatre, though this distance is intentionally reduced in order to create a certain perceived relationship between the performer and witness.

Overview of Literature

The literature indicates that providing education for living within a family is important, particularly when facing family challenges where members would benefit from having increased knowledge, understanding, and skill. Transformative learning includes a shift in perspective or understanding that influences our behaviour, and this type of learning can be initiated when one is experiencing emotional arousal and personal, critical reflection. Transformative learning in FLE may be enhanced using performance, as it engages multiple ways of knowing in addition to those typically accessed using traditional adult education methods (for example, instruction and group discussion). Witnessing performances can impact the spectator emotionally (often discussed as *catharsis* in theatre studies), and encourage reflection on thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences. The aesthetic choices made in all areas of the performance, including the acting technique, structure of the piece, staging conventions, and approach to representation, all affect the level of aesthetic distance and the impact on the witness. The inclusion of lived experience in performance also influences the aesthetic distance and how the audience engages with and is affected by what they witness. The immediate and intimate experience of being in the presence of a performer telling his/her story may promote learning in relationship, an idea that

incorporates observational learning theory and recognizes the benefit of engaging in discourse.

This review draws on literature from diverse and complementary fields of study, and informs the rationale for this research. A performance based on lived experience may be a potential tool to initiate the beginning process of transformation in the context of FLE due to its ability to bring about emotional arousal and critical reflection, learning in relationship, and access different "ways of knowing" using aesthetic approaches to representation.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

In order to understand how the presentation of lived experience through performance can initiate transformative learning in the witness within the context of family life education, the *primary question* guiding my research is: What elements of a lived experience performance piece (if any) do witnesses feel (a) evoke emotion and, (b) foster personal/critical reflection?

Subsidiary research questions include:

a. How important is the inclusion of "lived experience" in such a performance piece designed for use within FLE?
b. What (if any) impact did witnessing the performance piece have on participants' beliefs, behaviors, or relationships at a two-month follow-up?

Theoretical Perspective

This research is based in the interpretive strand of inquiry, which values individual perspective and experience as an important source of knowledge. Rooted in a constructivist/interpretive perspective that reality is constructed and multifaceted—and influenced by an individual's social environment, experience, and perception—this research is based on the epistemological/ontological belief that the participants are the only ones who can really know, and provide

information about, their experience in the world (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Mayan, 2009).

While I do not subscribe to the positivist notion that there is a singular truth that can be identified and measured with a high degree of certainty, I do acknowledge that certain patterns exist in human experience, and understanding both the patterns of similarities and the divergences in how people experience a similar event is essential in building knowledge and theory.

Grounded Theory

This research aims to gain insight into the human experience of witnessing performances based on lived experience, and the elements of these performances that witnesses identify as important and useful in fostering transformation. Because the focus is on the experience of witnessing, this inquiry is situated within a qualitative frame. In qualitative research, various methods are used to "interpret or make sense of the meaning people attach to their experiences or underlying a particular phenomenon" (Mayan, 2009, p. 11). Qualitative researchers are searching for meaning, and attempting to extract meaning from their data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). There are many approaches to and genres of qualitative research with a common goal of conducting inquiry that is interpretive, inductive, and based in human experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Mayan, 2009). Grounded theory (GT) emerged during the mid-century movement toward positivism and quantification (Charmaz, 2014), in an effort by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to establish qualitative research "as a credible – and rigorous – methodological approach in its own right rather than simply as a precursor for developing quantitative instruments" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 8). Researchers employing GT methods aim to collect and systematically analyze qualitative data and, through a process involving constant comparison, construct theory grounded in the data.

Grounded theory developed through the work of Glaser and Strauss, who collaborated on a study on dying in hospitals. Their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) clearly articulated the strategies for approaching research, analyzing textual data, and generating theories grounded in data through an inductive process. These two researchers parted ways and developed different and, at times, opposing views of GT. Glaser went on to publish on what is often referred to as classical GT (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998) and Strauss continued to develop analytic procedures and aimed to further the evolution of GT (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998). For an overview of these two approaches to GT, see Heath and Cowley (2004) who offer a detailed comparison. Other approaches to GT have also been proposed (for example, see Charmaz, 2000; Clarke, 2005; Schatzman, 1991).

While both Glaser and Strauss' versions follow a basic research process involving the collection of data/theoretically sampling, coding, categorizing, developing a core category, and generating a theory (Walker & Myrick, 2006), these aspects of GT look different in each approach. The GT method used in this research will be aligned with Strauss and Corbin's approach. This approach was chosen due to the fact that the three phases of analysis (open, axial, and selective) are widely accepted among researchers (LaRossa, 2005), and this method also provides more structure for a researcher with little experience in GT.

Grounded theory is based in a constructivist paradigm. As clearly articulated by Corbin and Strauss (2015), "concepts and theories are *constructed* by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and lives, both to the researcher and to themselves" (p. 26, italics in original). The knowledge that we use to guide practice in a variety of fields is based on the concepts constructed by individuals who are making sense of their lived experience through a personal process of meaning-making and through discourse with others. When it comes to

researching human experience in order to develop knowledge and theory, I share Corbin and Strauss' (2015) viewpoint that the fact that we live in a world of construction and reconstruction "does not negate the relevance of findings nor the insights that can be gained from them" (p. 26). Based in the perspective that reality is constructed individually depending on a variety of personal factors—though patterns do exist in human experience—GT methods will be used in this research with the recognition that "the aim is not to discover *the* theory, but *a* theory that aids understanding and action in the area under investigation" (Heath & Cowley, 2004, p. 149, italics in original). The aim of this research project is to generate knowledge and theory that can be applied to the future creation of performance pieces designed for use within a FLE setting to facilitate transformative learning. The knowledge generated from this research will provide theoretical underpinnings for future work in this field.

Research Design

In order to systematically explore and analyze the experience of witnessing a performance piece based on lived experience, and inquire into the factors that foster transformative learning, a performance piece was developed and presented to three target audiences. Data was collected from these participants using a questionnaire, focus group discussions, and a follow-up questionnaire. This data was transcribed and analyzed using a grounded theory approach, leading to the development of theory grounded in this data.

Performance Creation

The first step of this research process involved creating a performance piece based on lived experience. It was necessary to choose a topic that would fit within the frame of family life education, addressing an issue that impacts families in Canada and around the world. It was decided that a performance

would be created using an individual's verbatim text about the experience of being a child in a family struggling with alcoholism.

There are many families around the world who are affected by alcoholism and struggle with this experience. In fact, drug and alcohol abuse is among the top three perceived concerns related to the family (Darling & Turkki, 2009) and is indeed a global issue (World Health Organization, 2004, 2010). The way families of individuals struggling with alcoholism have been perceived and treated has changed throughout history. Family members have been viewed as everything from innocent victims to major contributors to the maintenance of the disease (White & Savage, 2005). As early as the 1980's, studies demonstrated the detrimental, lasting effects of family alcoholism on the lives of children (Black, 1982; Wegscheider-Cruse, 1985). Given the amount of families who struggle with alcoholism, this is a worthy topic to explore when considering how performance may be used as a tool in FLE.

As the primary researcher, I decided to draw on a personal family narrative when seeking stories of lived experience for the creation of this performance piece. The content of the piece was based on stories collected from my mother, and depicted the experience of being the child of an alcoholic and how this experience influenced her throughout her life. My grandfather has been sober for 40 years and has assisted countless others in achieving sobriety through sponsorship and support. This family story—one of struggle, strength, and perseverance—acted as the foundation upon which a performance piece was built with the intention of (re)presenting (one example of) the lived experience of being the child of an alcoholic. Stories were collected from my mother in writing (through journaling) and orally (through discussions on the content of the journals), and once these verbatim stories had been transcribed, the process of creating a performance piece with this material began.

In order to generate ideas for the performance piece, two "work-shopping collectives" were assembled. The first workshop group consisted of four participants and the second consisted of five participants. All those who participated had some experience and training in theatre and the performing arts. Each group met for two hours to generate ideas using the verbatim text, improvisation, sculpts and body work, and other dramatic exercises. These workshops were videotaped and notes were taken throughout the process. Following the workshops, I considered the ideas and images generated alongside the verbatim text when writing the script and designing the performance piece. My mother was frequently consulted when choices regarding representation and content were being made, and she often assisted in developing or refining ideas for the script. Specific aspects of the performance piece will be described below.

A journal was kept throughout the performance creation process; detailed notes were made on the process of performance creation, including the choices made regarding content, structure, and aesthetics, and the decisions made about what was included and what was not included in the final performance piece. Sections of this writing have been integrated into this research text in order to enhance the credibility and transparency of the research.

Participants

This performance piece was presented for 3 target audiences: (a) a "community" audience, (b) a "professional" audience of individuals involved in FLE, therapy/counselling, and/or the psychoeducation of families and, (c) families of individual who were currently being treated for alcoholism and addiction in an in-patient rehabilitation centre. The purpose of inviting a general public/community audience to be participants in the study is to include data from a self-selected sample of individuals with varying amounts of theatre viewing experience and different types of relationships with the performer and

performance topic. Recruitment of target audience “a” included creating an event to be advertised through social media, and creating awareness through websites that advertise performances and educational workshops in Kingston Ontario.

The purpose of including audience “b” was to ensure the voice of professionals who may use such experiential methods in their work of educating for family life was included in the data. Recruitment of target audience “b” consisted of sending emails to relevant departments at Concordia University (including Applied Human Sciences, Psychology, Creative Arts Therapies, and Education departments) to be circulated among faculty and students. Information was also sent to the Marriage and Family Therapy training program at McGill University to be distributed to trainees. Finally, the research event was advertised as being included in Creative Arts Therapies Week, a week dedicated to education on and experiential exploration of diverse approaches to Creative Arts Therapies practice during which events are held throughout North America. The information was posted on the National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapies Association’s website as well as the Concordia Creative Arts Therapies Department’s schedule of events on their website.

Target audience “c”, the family members of individuals being treated for alcoholism and addiction, was included in order to collect data from a population who may potentially view this type of performance within the context of a FLE group designed for individuals who have a loved one suffering with alcoholism. In order to gain access to the third target population, contact was made with an in-patient rehabilitation centre in Ontario; a community that provides long-term intensive treatment programs for people struggling with alcohol and drug abuse. This community offers a variety of family support groups and educational experiences for their clients and clients’ families. The performance and data collection took place within the context of the “family group”, which occurs once a month.

Data Collection

The following data collection procedure was followed at all three performances. Participants were given a handout when they arrived at the research performance that included the consent form, a description of what would occur (performance information and data collection methods), and additional referral resources, should they be required. The consent form can be found in the appendices (Appendix A). The researcher was available to answer any questions the participants might have. Fifteen minutes were provided to read through the material, ask questions if necessary (only one question was asked at the third performance, as described in Appendix D), and sign the consent form. Once all consent forms had been signed and handed back to the researcher, the performance began. The performance lasted approximately 40 minutes. After the performance had ended, the researcher reiterated to participants what would occur in the following 45 minutes of data collection, and restated the participants' freedom to end their involvement in the study at any time and that their identities would be kept confidential.

Method 1: Questionnaire. Data was collected from participants through a questionnaire administered directly after the performance (see Appendix B). The questionnaire included items related to the general experience of witnessing the performance piece, and items specifically related to the research questions, including such topics as the inclusion of lived experience, and the structural and aesthetic choices that evoked emotion and encouraged critical reflection. This data-collection strategy was chosen because it collects data directly related to the research questions and gives value to the participants' personal experience and opinions. Questionnaires are used in qualitative research when the goal is to identify patterns in data from a large group of participants, and to "learn about the distribution of characteristics, attitudes, or beliefs" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 124). Also, a questionnaire allowed for the collection of data from the three

target audiences within a short amount of time, something that would not be possible with a strategy such as one-on-one interviews. This strategy collected textual data that was analyzed in order to generate theory.

Method 2: Focus groups. Data was also collected through focus groups, which followed the completion of the questionnaire. Audience "a" and "b" were divided into three groups, while audience "c" was one small focus group, and the focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. The focus groups allowed participants to introduce new topics or expand on topics they found meaningful. This method of data collection is based on the assumption that "an individual's attitudes and beliefs do not form in a vacuum. People often need to listen to others' opinions and understandings to form their own" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 114). Focus groups involve dynamic interactions between people, and as participants explain their ideas, justify their beliefs, and are challenged and inspired by fellow group members, rich data can emerge (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The focus group method of data collection was appropriate given the theoretical approach to—and inductive nature of—this research, as the group dynamic can contribute to bringing the discussion to areas of importance to the participants that may not have been addressed in the questionnaire. Two-way learning through relationship is an essential aspect of a FLE group (and educational—as opposed to didactic—theatre), and this method of data collection aligns clearly with the goals of FLE where individuals *respond to one another* in addition to responding directly to the researcher/facilitator.

The discussion began with an engagement question: Can you describe your experience of witnessing this performance piece? When appropriate, exploratory questions were introduced: How did you feel about the individual on stage or the story you witnessed? What did you think about while watching the performance? What did you feel while watching the performance? How do you feel performances based on real people's stories could be used to educate

families? The focus group ended with an exit question: Is there anything else you would like to say about witnessing this performance piece? A complete list of questions provided to focus group facilitators can be found in the appendices (Appendix C).

Family educators, trained group facilitators, and/or certified counselors facilitated the focus groups. These individuals are trained to deliver open-ended questions in an objective way, develop a rapport with individuals, use basic interpersonal communication skills such as restatements and paraphrasing, understand group processes and balance group needs, and detect distress or discomfort in an individual that may need to be addressed.

Method 3: Follow-up questionnaire. A second questionnaire was sent to participants electronically two months after seeing the performance to collect data on a possible lasting impact or transformation. This was a very basic questionnaire that asked the participants about (a) what they remembered most from the performance, (b) what (if anything) they value most about the performance piece they watched, (c) if they spoke to anyone about the performance piece, and (d) if seeing the performance lead to a change in their life (a change in perspective, behavior, understanding, or relationships). One of the subsidiary research questions involved collecting this follow-up data, and a questionnaire was used due to the ability of this method to "obtain a small amount of information from a large number of [participants]" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 125). Google Forms was used to administer this questionnaire, and a spreadsheet was automatically populated with participant responses.

Theoretical Sampling

In traditional GT, the researcher engages in a process of theoretical sampling, where the population is identified, but the data collection is not pre-structured. The researcher collects some data, analyzes this data, and concepts

emerge from this analysis. These concepts produce questions, which brings the researcher back to the field to collect more data. This process continues until the research achieves a point of saturation, "when all major categories are fully developed, show variation, and are integrated" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 135). Corbin and Strauss (2015) acknowledge that researchers cannot always conduct a GT study in this suggested manner, and often do not have the time or flexibility to fully engage in a typical process of theoretical sampling. This process often needs to be adapted to accommodate the requirements of research committees and ethics review boards, and the limitations imposed on research being conducted within an institutional setting for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements of a degree. In order to fulfill the requirements of the PhD program in a timely manner—and to provide the research committee, ethics committee, and funding committee with the required information on the study—traditional theoretical sampling could not be implemented, and an adapted process of theoretical sampling was used in this research. General research questions and the participant groups were identified before the research process began. The data collection instruments were developed and approved by the appropriate committees, but there was flexibility in the focus group discussions to ask questions related to concepts that were emerging in the data. Two of the focus group facilitators participated in collecting data from all three target audiences. After conducting the first group, certain concepts had emerged and were discussed with the primary researcher. The researcher granted permission to ask further questions about these concepts as they came up in future focus group discussions in order to understand and explore the properties and dimensions of these concepts (this evolution in questioning was also communicated to the focus group facilitator who only participated in collecting data from the second target audience). Another strategy used to facilitate a process similar to theoretical sampling, and allow the concepts in the data to push the research forward, was the use of a follow-up questionnaire. This

data collection tool was used for two purposes: (a) to see if there had been any change over time in the way participants valued the performance and any lasting impact it may have had on them, and (b) to ask questions about any concepts emerging from the analysis of the data collected in the first phase of data collection that required further development. When submitting a sample of this follow-up questionnaire to the ethics review board, it was made clear that the areas of inquiry may be altered as concepts emerged from analyzing the primary sets of data. Despite the inability to move through a traditional process of theoretical sampling, a point of saturation was reached in this research (as indicated by fully developed codes and categories; repetition in the findings as pieces of datum were analyzed and the lack of newly emerging codes and categories) that allowed for the development of theory with a solid grounding in the data.

Establishing Quality

There is much discussion—and contention—in the field of qualitative research around how to best judge quality research, and a question of whether the concept of validity should be used as a measure of quality. Tracey (2010) provides eight criteria to evaluate quality qualitative research, and accompanying techniques to meet these criteria. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) claim that in the context of qualitative research, validity refers to the presentation of plausible findings, credible research, and gaining the trust of the reader or audience. When conducting qualitative research, "trustworthiness takes the place of truth" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 48). While these concepts overlap in some literature, the ideas of (a) *credibility of the research and researcher* and (b) *plausible findings* will be used to frame this discussion of the steps taken to establish a high level of quality within this research project, all of which contribute to the "trustworthiness" of the research.

Credibility

Sincerity is a term used by Tracy (2010) that encapsulates two essential practices within the field of qualitative research: self-reflexivity and transparency. While Tracy (2010) lists sincerity as a criterion separate from credibility, it could be argued that sincerity in the research process can enhance the credibility of the researcher. Self-reflexivity was practiced throughout the research process using a personal research journal, in which I candidly explored my own responses to the work—the thoughts and feelings that were emerging in the process—and examined the position I held in relation to the different aspects of the research. A researcher can demonstrate transparency through being honest about the research process, including the study design, data collection, and analysis. A high level of transparency in the research text can elevate the quality of the research and increase the credibility of the work. An attempt was made to be highly transparent in the writing of this research text, to illuminate the actual journey the researcher took and disclose the unexpected experiences associated with this inquiry.

The concept of *triangulation* has been recently challenged within the context of qualitative research, as it is based on the notion that through triangulation one can identify a "truth" by using three access points, which aligns with a positivist paradigm. The concept of *crystallization* (Ellingson, 2008; Richardson, 2000) is emerging as a way to understand that, in qualitative research, multiple sources of data, methods and theoretical frameworks do not necessarily identify a single truth but rather lead to a more in-depth and complex view of an issue or phenomenon (Tracy, 2010). Despite the term used, it is generally agreed on that "multiple types of data, researcher viewpoints, theoretical frames, and methods of analysis allow different facets of problems to be explored, increases scope, deepens understanding, and encourages consistent (re)interpretation" (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). In an attempt to investigate how performances based on lived experience might foster transformative learning

within the context of family life education, a variety of theoretical perspectives were considered (adult education, family life education, theatre and performance, reception and observational learning, etc.); different methods were used to collect data in order to allow for various types of responses, and welcome a change in perspective over time (using a follow-up questionnaire); many types of target audiences were included in the study, which resulted in a multiplicity of voices and viewpoints being represented in the data; while there was only one primary researcher involved in analyzing the data, a number of other professionals were consulted throughout the research process.

Communicative validity in qualitative research can be viewed as engaging in a dialogue with those who are considered knowledgeable about the subject in order to invite alternate perspectives or a critical reflection on the findings (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The willingness to have the research discussed and potentially refuted validates the findings and increases credibility. The presentation of performances for a variety of target audiences (academic, communities with knowledge of the lived experience being presented, etc.), and an openness to receiving feedback was a necessary step in the research process. Many colleagues and professionals in the field were consulted while engaging in this work and their feedback was actively integrated into each step of the process in order to allow this dialogue with knowledgeable individuals to increase the quality of the research design and performance piece. Once this research text is disseminated, the research will again be discussed with professionals in relevant fields, and a critique of the findings will be welcomed in order to strengthen future research in this area.

Plausible Findings

One characteristic of quality research that contributes to plausible findings is *rich rigor* (Tracy, 2010). In addition to having a complex abundance of data,

the researcher should "exercise their due diligence, exercising appropriate time, effort, care, and thoroughness" (Tracy, 2010, p. 841). In this study, the amount of data collected, the number and depth of the memos and researcher journaling, the transparency demonstrated throughout the process, and the appropriate amount of time given to each stage of the research process was substantial, and demonstrates the existence of rich rigor in this research. Using direct quotes in illustrating the findings—showing rather than telling the reader (Tracy, 2010)—will add to the credibility of the research and the plausibility of the findings.

Muncey (2010) believes that the concept of *resonance* can be used in research involving performance to evaluate if the research is trustworthy and plausible. Resonance, as defined by Tracy (2010), is the ability for research to "meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience" (p. 844). This can be achieved through aesthetic merit, but also requires the research to be *transferable*. If the audience member feels that the research story intersects with his/her own experience or situation (even in a small or partial way), s/he is able to transfer the story to his/her own reality (Tracy, 2010). When this phenomenon occurs in the presentation of the research, it is viewed as being more "valid". Interestingly, "resonance" emerged as a code in the research, and appeared to be present for many of the participants while viewing the performance piece. More will be discussed about audience resonance in the results section, though it is yet to be seen whether this research text will foster resonance for those in the field who read it and consider the findings.

The extent to which the findings of the research have the ability to influence the individual, community or social structures involved in the research is referred to as *pragmatic validity* (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The impact of research will vary depending on the intended goal of the study, but having a significant outcome for the person/community who has been given a voice through the research or those who are given the opportunity to witness the

performance would increase the quality of the research. The influence that this research will have on the community and the individuals for which it is intended is yet to be seen. However, given the feedback from professionals in the field and the data collected from the audience (results described below), there appears to be a relatively high pragmatic value associated with this research project. The results and future applications of the findings have the potential to make a difference in the lives of those who attend family life education and support groups.

Ethical Considerations

The Performance

Throughout this research process, from the beginning of performance creation to the end of data analysis, there was a variety of ethical considerations, and possible pitfalls, of which I needed to be aware and to which I needed to attend. Using stories of lived experience as a central feature in the research lead to a number of situations where procedural and relational ethics needed to be negotiated. When discussing a form that uses lived experience as the source data for a performance (autoethnography) Saldaña (2011) claims that, unlike fictional theatre where audience members are "suspending disbelief", in performance autoethnography, the audience is "assuming belief" (p. 24). He believes that this unspoken contract between the performer and audience requires that the writer/performer adhere to an ethical obligation to only tell the audience that which is "true". Saldaña does not go on to say what he considers to be "true", and if the creative interpretation permitted in ethnodrama when representing the other is also allowed when creating a dramatized representation of the self and personal lived experience. The words "truth" and "authentic" are highly contentious in the theatre world, and the meanings of these words in the context of theatre are widely debated. In discussing this idea in connection to another performance based on lived experience, Duggan (2013) points out that the authenticity of the

work is not judged according to its "verisimilitude" (p. 150). Indeed, "the work is not attending to any sense of factual veracity but might be presenting something which speaks to the conditions of human existence" (Duggan, 2013, p. 150). As a researcher, I felt I had an equal ethical obligation to my mother and her story and the audience who was witnessing a story they believed was based on real lived experience. This obligation hung on my shoulders during each step of the process, while creating and embodying a piece of art out of the verbatim text my mother had provided.

> *I'm troubled by how I can best tell her story. I am pulled in so many directions: (a) tell her story, do it justice, (b) create a piece of "good art", (c) include all of the elements that the literature says will have an impact on the audience; allow them to connect, reflect, feel, and provide an opportunity to discuss the challenges and possibilities that exist for this type of tool.* (Research Journal, January 2014)

In a letter written by my mother to be included in the ethics review, she included a paragraph that reduced the anxiety around this ethical consideration, and provided me with an opportunity to engage with the story as both an ethical researcher and a respectful theatre practitioner:

> *I trust Shea completely with these stories and I am aware that, due to the nature of theatre and the arts, my stories may be altered, re-shaped, and represented aesthetically in a way that deviates from my exact experience for the purpose of representing the essence of an experience. Shea continues to include me when aesthetic choices are being made to transform my experience, and invites me to contribute to the creation of the piece. I have given Shea permission to use my personal material and stories in any way that will serve her performance piece, and hope that in doing so my story may help others who have the opportunity to see the performance piece.* (Mary Anne Wood, 2015, personal communication)

When representing an individual's story of lived experience, it is important to acknowledge that a personal story does not exist in isolation. Personal and family narratives exist in the context of a life, which inevitably include the lives and stories of others. When telling and performing personal family stories, important questions emerge: Whose story is it? Who has the right to tell it? This problem is confounded when speaking about family issues around such a sensitive subject as addiction and alcoholism. While a primary tenant of Alcoholics Anonymous is to share stories of addiction and recovery—which helps members to feel less alone, reduces the shame that accompanies holding these stories, and helps others find lessons in these stories that they can apply in their own lives—anonymity is also a central concept to be respected in this context. In deciding to perform my mother's story of being the child of an alcoholic, there were ethical considerations around who could give consent to have this story told. This is my mother's story, and the performance piece did not attempt to describe the experience of anyone else in the family; everyone grows up with their own unique perspective and experience, and this performance piece focused only on my mother and how she has tried to make sense of and learn from her experiences growing up. Both she and I believed it was important to discuss the performance and this research with her parents, and obtain their consent to perform this lived experience for the three identified target audiences. The purpose of the research and the general content of the piece was described to my mother's parents, who gave consent to have the piece created and shown to the three target audiences. As people who spoke often within the context of AA and cared deeply about using their story to help others, my mother's parents communicated that they understood the importance of such a project in helping others who are struggling with addiction in their families. An email was sent to my mother's siblings describing the performance piece and the goals and purpose of the research, but their consent was not necessarily sought; the email was aimed to inform family of

what was taking place and invite the family to support this research that could potentially help others who are struggling with this lived experience.

From Spry's (2011) perspective, ethical practice in representing others in personal stories exists in the balance of *agency*, or the empowerment of the researcher/autoethnographer through critical reflection, and *representation*, referring to how the autoethnographer decides to represent others. Choices were made in the writing of the text and the representation of others in the piece to (a) make it clear that all depictions of others were framed through my mother's childhood perception, and (b) ensure a textured, multi-dimensional representation was presented that did not paint anyone as either "good" or "bad", but as humans who are struggling. Duggan (2013) believes that we have an ethical obligation when representing the other, or memories of the other "to handle that material with care – not because of some sense of political correctness or fear of offending, but because to misappropriate such material is to run the risk of belittling it by denying the particulars of its original context" (p. 155). I share this belief, and careful consideration was made throughout the creation of the performance piece to present a fair and textured representation of the others included in the piece that still respected my mother's lived experience, not out of fear or obligation (though these feelings were invariably present), but because presenting a simplified, uncharacteristic representation would negate the complexity of the context in which these stories occurred.

White and Savage (2005) conducted focus group research with families who have struggled with alcoholism and, in connection to the theme of sharing their story with others, they found that most participants discussed passing through a stage where they were concerned about the judgment of others to a place where they recognized the importance of the message (White & Savage, 2005). They believed that coming forward as an individual who is part of a family who has struggled with addiction helps to send two important messages: (a) that

addiction can touch any family and can have a devastating impact on the family as a whole, and (b) there is a potential for recovery (White & Savage, 2005). In essence, "families telling stories of survival, forgiveness and reconciliation are powerful antidotes to the hopelessness that so often pervades the perception of addiction in this culture" (White & Savage, 2005, p. 28).

It was my ethical responsibility to be acutely aware of my personal bias and positionality as a researcher who is telling personal family stories. I have been engaging in a self-reflexive practice using a research journal in order to explore what were, at times, strong and complicated emotions related to telling a personal and family story within the context of my own research. I also participated in conversations with family and colleagues through which I was encouraged to interrogate my own position in relation to the research, and the possible relationship between myself as a researcher/performer/daughter and the methods and outcomes of the study. In qualitative research, the researcher cannot be separated from the research itself, and all choices made are a reflection of the researcher. This phenomenon is especially evident when the researcher is including personal stories in the research creation. With that said, the research questions, and the data itself, was focused on the form of the piece and the possibilities of using this form to foster transformation in the context of family life education, it was not necessarily concerned with the content of the piece. This separation, and the fact that the personal stories contained in the piece were not being critiqued, allowed for distance between my personal inclusion and the goals of the research. Despite this, it is necessary to be transparent regarding the personal journey that occurred while receiving feedback regarding how others responded to the content of the piece.

> *In all honesty, I think juggling the researcher and performer roles took my focus off the vulnerability and anxiety of sharing my family story. My main concern was for the research portion to go smoothly (especially the first*

> *time) in terms of introducing myself and the research, timing the whole evening, being sure all audience members provided informed consent, being sensitive to ethics, making sure all recording devices worked, hoping participants would provide enough data in the questionnaires and hoping that the focus group discussions went smoothly. Then there was my role as the performer and all of my concerns about the piece itself. I had rehearsed once with my technical director. Would the sound, projection and lighting cues go smoothly? Would I remember all my lines? Would I feel "in it" or disconnected (which I usually felt resulted in bad acting)? Would the audience respond? Did I create a piece that's going to help me answer my research questions? Am I a good enough performer? All of these concerns related to the performance and the research didn't fill me with anxiety as much as they simply occupied and dominated my thoughts. They did not leave room for me to think about what it truly meant to tell this story to these people. How would it feel? It wasn't until afterwards—processing with my mom and getting feedback from the audience—that it truly started to sink in that I had opened up my truth. Until the audience expressed appreciation and gratitude, I didn't even realize that what I had done was courageous.* (Researcher Journal, April 2014)

As a researcher negotiates the relationship between him/herself, the content of the research creation, and the experience of engaging in the research, writing out personal associations can act as an effective tool for externalizing and critically reflecting on personal responses being stirred up by the process. Corbin and Strauss (2015) advocate for keeping a research journal when conducting grounded theory, and believe it assists researchers in understanding personal biases and assumptions, and thinking about how they may impact the research project. A research journal can increase researcher reflexivity, help to maintain an awareness of the researcher's positionality, and may lead to more ethical practice

as one engages in the research with an acute awareness of personal responses that guide behaviour. Including this writing in the research text demonstrates a posture of transparency, which can increase the quality of the research.

The Participants/Audience

Ethics approval to conduct this research with human participants was received from the College of Ethics Reviewers (CER) for Concordia University. All aspects of procedural ethics were addressed in this process, including informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, handling of data, and the treatment of participants.

Tracy (2010) describes *relational ethics* as involving "an ethical self-consciousness in which researchers are mindful of their character, actions, and consequences on others" (p. 847). Though aspects of relational ethics were considered in the process of receiving CER approval, it was also necessary to be constantly reflexive on how the participants were treated in the moment while engaging in the research processes and collecting data.

Due to the use of arts-based methods in this research, it is also necessary to consider that the participants are also an audience, and the ethical conduct that is associated with using arts-based methods in research. Sinding, Gray, and Nisker (2008) "encourage informed researchers to anticipate ways that their representations may harm people witnessing them, especially people most affected by the subject matter" (p. 462). When creating performances based on the lived experience of such a sensitive, possibly traumatic, and wide-spread issue such as alcoholism, it was necessary to consider what harm might come from witnessing the performance piece. Appropriate promotion of the event is one way suggested by Sinding, Gray and Nisker (2008) to help protect the audience, and all promotion of the event should be consistent with the idea of informed consent by making clear the topic and experience explored in the performance. Along

with other information about the goals of the research and what was required of participants, all promotion materials included the following sentence: “The performance piece will explore the lived experience of being the child of an alcoholic and how having an alcoholic parent can affect families”. There was one target audience where this was not the case. For audience “c”, the families of individuals currently being treated for alcoholism and addiction, the gatekeepers did not pass on the information about the performance to the participants prior to the experience. The participants believed that they were attending a typical family group when they showed up for the session that day. This was not in-line with the initial protocol of recruiting audience members, which involved making participants aware of the topic of the performance and the research procedures before they attended the experience. The researcher became aware that protocol was not followed with this target group as the family members began showing up quite surprised to see the format of their room re-arranged and some technical equipment in the room. This was addressed immediately when all group members were present, and the researcher made it clear what was about to take place and that participants could choose to participate in the experience in any way that made them feel comfortable. For example, participants were told they could watch the performance piece, but not contribute feedback to the data, engage in the whole process, or engage in none of the process and have one-on-one time with a counsellor instead. All participants agreed to stay in the room for the performance piece and all participants contributed to the data.

The researcher provided each participant a sheet of local resources where participants could receive support if they experienced any lasting distress from watching the performance, or if they were motivated to seek assistance and/or treatment for themselves or a family member following the performance. Participants in audience “c” were also given the contact information of on-site counsellors and crisis team members that could support them in working through

any thoughts and feelings aroused as a result of watching the performance or participating in data collection. All participants were given the contact information of the researcher, the researcher's supervisor, and Concordia University's Research Ethics and Compliance Unit should they need further assistance or information. Sinding, Gray, and Nisker (2008) also advocate for providing spectators with the ability to process what they have witnessed through post-performance discussions and writing opportunities. The participants were asked to write about their experience of watching the piece and discuss it within the context of a focus group, which—in addition to providing data to be analyzed—became an important part of integrating the experience of watching the piece and largely contributed to the experience of witnessing (this will be discussed further below).

CHAPTER IV: DESCRIPTION OF PERFORMANCE

The performance piece was created as an illustrative example of the type of performance being explored in this research: those based on lived experience. Because one of the research questions inquired into the witnesses' perception of the importance of including lived experience, I performed the role of myself and the role of my mother while representing stories of my family's lived experience. The performance was shown to audiences in order to provide the shared experience of witnessing a performance based on lived experience. While it is impossible to describe in words the essence of a live performance piece, this section will outline some of the theatrical and aesthetic choices made in the design and performance of the piece. This knowledge of the performance content and design will inform how one understands the results of this research. While an attempt will not be made to describe every scene in the performance, examples will be included that illustrate the approaches used in representation. In addition, a

section from my research journal has been included in the appendix (see Appendix D) where I explore my personal experience of performing the piece.

> *I sit here having completed the final draft. I'm not sure how it happened. I knew the structure I wanted: me – mom – me. I knew I needed to include a number of different approaches to representation and media in order to ask participants which aspects were meaningful for them. So the piece includes voiceovers (my voice, man's voice, mom's voice), music (two songs), symbolic props (boxes, tensor bandage), lights (very basic wash and one small lamp on stage), a movement piece, direct-address storytelling, a short piece of film, a chalkboard, the ACA laundry list…I packed it full of different tools while attempting to keep the piece well paced. Why did I choose the pieces of writing I chose? There were certainly parts I didn't use. Reflecting on this I realized I was looking for an arc. I dramaturged it in a way that would provide a picture of the essence of the experience, but also a sense of movement through the experience. I drew on the images that came out of the workshop with an understanding that those were what these actors were inspired by; they felt touched by these sections, moved, connected to these moments and wanted to explore them more. Perhaps the audience would be drawn to similar moments?* (Researcher Journal, December, 2014)

Stage Set-Up

Due to the intended use of such performances—to be used within the context of support and educational groups—it was important that this piece could be performed in any room without heavy technical requirements. There was a projection screen, a single chair in front of it positioned stage left, a chalk board positioned stage right, a single lamp on stage, and three props sitting on the stage: photocopied journal pages, wooden nested boxes and a tensor bandage. "On

stage" simply refers to the space dedicated for the performance, as only one performance took place on a raised platform and the two other performances occurred on the same physical level as the audience.

The large chalkboard on stage was used at the end of the performance once I had transitioned back into the role of "Me". I turned to this chalkboard and worked out the connections between my grandparents, my mother, myself, and all of the "angels" and "ghosts" that had been sent down through the generations. Many participants commented on how powerful this section was, to see the performer/character making connections to her own life. The chalkboard was chosen because of the scale (it was important that it be big for visibility reasons but also for the impact), for the tactile nature of using chalk (how it crumbles and smudges depending on how you use it), and for the black and white aesthetic.

Roles, Framing & Writing Styles

I began the performance in the role of myself, and introduced the audience to the topic of family stories in general and my family story specifically.

> *Family stories link and tangle. It sometimes seems impossible to pull your own story apart from them.*
> *In my family, one story is known but never told; It's implied, but never really spoken.*
> *The iceberg of our family, where most of the mass is submerged.*
>
> *But one day, that story took shape; it emerged. I received it on pages photocopied out of a journal, my mother's handwriting smooth and deliberate.*

These pages are now so weakened from tears dropping off my chin and the creases have become like deep cracks in the earth; the result of a world shaken.

It was the story. The story I had never heard. A story that needs to be told.

At this time, I began to read the first journal entry and I transitioned into playing the role of my mother telling the story of living in a family struggling with alcoholism. Near the end of the performance, I transitioned back into the role of self, and included a section where I reflected on what it was like to have learned about these family stories, and the links I made to my own life and personal challenges.

And then a constellation of memories and experiences, sentences uttered in my childhood, connect.
Meaning made of pieces I couldn't digest
So I set them aside, hid them,
Hibernating – keeping them safe for the day that I may need to consume them
To keep from starving - When empty.
And yeah, they're hard to swallow
And when I finally do they sit, a rock in my stomach refusing to digest, to break down.
But when I finally broke it down, my history absorbed into the walls of my identity.

The story arrived on the day that I told myself 'I hate you';
On the day I asked myself 'why don't you love me enough to stop?'.

A blueprint that tells me how I was made;
This story brought me face to face with my own struggle,
Different but the same,
And with these smudged pages staring back at me, I couldn't hide from myself.

This story – took those pieces and sent them to my essential organs;
Sending messages to keep working, keep pumping, keep firing, keep fighting.
You are not a singular fucked up being with no history
You are not original DNA.
You are not alone.

The writing style used for the "Me" character was distinctly different from the style used by the "Mother" character. Because the journals were verbatim text received from my mother—words that had actually been written in a journal—they were quite conversational and direct. While my mother's words were poetic at times, they had a more realistic rhythm and everyday vocabulary. I made the choice to have the "Me" character's voice be stylistically different, (a) to make more of a distinction between the two characters, because I was playing both characters with no costume change, (b) to include varied types of writing that might appeal to different audience members, as some individuals might be drawn to the "real" and authentic voice, and others might be drawn to a more poetic/symbolic voice, and (c) I often tend to write about my experience using poetry, and my mother tends to write in narratives, therefore the inclusion of text was from two individuals with distinct styles of writing.

It should be noted that, though other "characters" were brought into the piece through voiceovers, video, and scenes performed with characters who were

not physically present, this performance included one performer (myself). This choice was made primarily for logistical reasons. First, I was aware that I would need to travel to different audiences in order to collect data throughout the research process and it would have been difficult to find a cast that could rehearse and travel to the necessary performances within the timeline set out for this research. Secondly, there was limited funding available to pay actors to be involved, and compensation would have been necessary in order to ensure that actor could meet the needs of the performance timeline indicated above. For these reasons, a performance piece was created that included a number of characters, but only one body onstage. A choice was made not to cast an actor in this performance because it would have added a layer of aesthetic distance, and the research aimed to explore the experience of witnessing an individual perform her personal and families stories.

My Mother's Stories

A number of scenes included in the performance illustrated my mother's lived experience, and many used different staging techniques. In terms of content, there were scenes describing the experience of being part of the Church, feeling unseen and Dad not showing up for important events, overheard interactions between the parents, the shame of having a boyfriend to the house, hitting rock bottom and the unsteady beginning of sobriety, seeking help for the lasting problems related to growing up this way, and the constant journey to healing and forgiveness as an adult. Some scenes were direct address to the audience, some were played with recorded voices acting as other characters in the scene, one scene was played speaking to another "character" who was not present (i.e. the audience only heard one side of the conversation), and a scene between the parents was projected as a 40 second film – a silent interaction between the parents took place while it was narrated by the character on stage. The scenes to

be included were chosen through the workshops and in consultation with my mother. We felt it was important to show some of the moments of struggle, while also including scenes that showed a progression and growth through the experience. The approaches to the scenes were also informed by the workshops, and I made final decisions about how to stage the scenes based on the desire to have variance in the type of representation that would result in different types of engagement and levels of distance for the audience (for example, watching the film with a voiceover narration may engage the audience differently than directly addressing the audience and making eye contact when telling them a story).

Universal Writing

Interlaced with my mother's story were sections of text that, while still illustrating my mother's experience, were intentionally designed to be more "universal". The aim of including these types of sections was to allow audience members with different types of experiences to connect with the performance. These pieces of text were more conceptual or symbolic, which witnesses could fill with their own projections and personally relevant memories and experiences. Some of the sections weren't intentionally written; my mother provided some verbatim text that described her internal experience that could have related to many life experiences other than being the child of an alcoholic. Examples of sections that could be considered more universal are included below.

Example 1:

Disease becomes the centre of a family orbit. It has the strongest gravity. You're always sucked in, completely pulled off your own path, while trying desperately to push away.

Our lives revolved around him, around this disease. There was a constant occupation with avoiding crisis, keeping the secret, protecting him from himself, cleaning up mess, pretending things were fine. Living in an orbit prevents a

family from turning toward each member when they need help or need to feel seen. Living in this orbit, I lost—or maybe never developed—my own sense of direction.

Example 2:

To this day I look back at so many of my choices—I made some bad choices—and I guess it is easy to justify them by pointing to the issues I had growing up in this kind of family, but all I feel is guilt. Guilt for any hurt I caused those around me by my selfish actions; Guilt that I wasn't a better person. I don't even know why I did some of the things I did.

…That's not really true. I do know in the moment I felt noticed. I felt loved and I felt desired but now I know those feelings were superficial. They weren't real. They would never make me see what I always wanted to see when I looked in the mirror.

Example 3:

We are all made from the fabric of our histories, our experience, our choices, our DNA, maybe a soul. We are woven from the stories we are told. And the stories we are never told. And stories we don't allow ourselves to hear… because this world demands so much from us that we feel facing a story could weaken us. But I realize now, I am not weakened by the story of my history; the story of this part of myself. I'm strengthened by it. It gives me power to change.

What story are you not telling? What story have you hidden away because you feel it will weaken you? It's time to tell it.

Symbolic Props

There was a very simple aesthetic achieved in this performance utilizing basic props that were used symbolically for a number of purposes. The main prop

Image 1 (Top Left). **Boxes representing orbiting planets of family members around disease.**
Image 2 (Top Right). **Boxes representing putting the parts of self away.**
Image 3 (Bottom Left). **Boxes representing stepping-stones to sobriety.**
Image 4 (Bottom Right). **Boxes representing building ourselves up into something stronger.**

was a series of wooden nested boxes that were used as: "planets" to show how disease becomes the centre of a family orbit (Image 1), to cover each other as a representation of hiding parts of the self in order to survive (Image 2), to walk on (unbalanced) as if they were stepping stones while navigating sobriety (Image 3), and to build a tower in the end to illustrate taking the parts of our selves and building ourselves up into something stronger following a challenging experience

(Image 4). The second symbolic prop used was a tensor bandage. An entry in my research journal describes the use of this tensor bandage and the development of this concept. This entry is included below in the section entitled "Laundry List".

The Laundry List

I decided to use a piece of Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA) literature in the performance piece to bring in theory that is used within that community. "The Laundry List" (Adult Children of Alcoholics World Service Organization, n.d.) is a list of 14 characteristics that are common in adult children of alcoholics. Of course, these characteristics are not guaranteed to be present in every adult child of an alcoholic, some individuals may have some of these qualities and not others, and they are not a "life-sentence" or things that cannot be changed about oneself. Rather they are demonstrated/research-based qualities that exist in many individuals who have lived through the experience of growing up in a home where one or both parents struggle with alcoholism. The goal of using this list was to (a) bring in a theoretical/educational component that is used within the ACA community, and (b) to provide the audience with a different aesthetic experience that may provide some distance and lead to critical reflection. The passage below from my research journal outlines my process in creating the section that includes both the Laundry List and the tensor bandage (Image 5).

> *The "authentic fiction" is gone. It's my truth acting as bookends to her truth. I knew distancing techniques would be important—both theatrically/aesthetically and theoretically (the literature pointed to this as an important aspect in these types of pieces). The laundry list was one of these techniques. As someone who grew up with ACA books on the shelf, I knew there was literature and theory specifically for this group of people. I loved and hated the list. Loved that it would be useful in the piece and hated that it described so much of my mother. The question became – how*

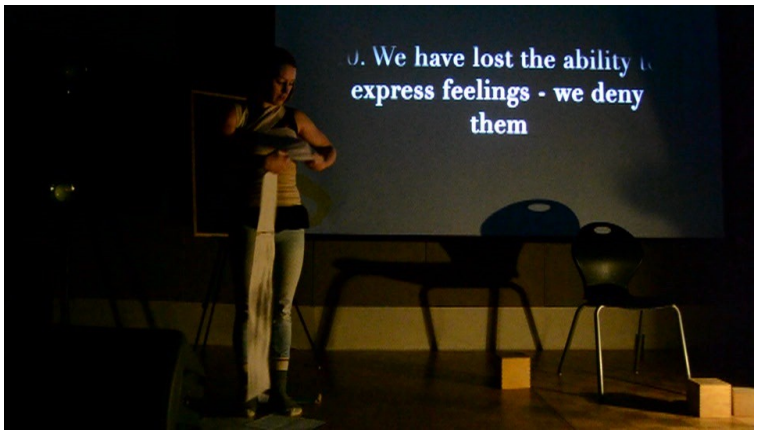

Image 5. **Wrapping myself in the tensor bandage while reciting the ACA Laundry List.**

do you present a list this long (14 items) in a theatrical production without it being boring… It is designed to create distance but people still need to be engaged. We brainstormed embodied ways to present the list: a magnetic board where magnetic strips with the words were applied, or working with the word "laundry" – pieces of fabric that were thrown into a bin. At the same time, I was choreographing the "layers" voiceover movement piece and I was stuck. It was all done up to the end when it specifically discussed layers. I didn't know what to do. I played with a sheet—covering, uncovering, wrapping—but it all seemed contrived and…too much. I don't know how or why, but it suddenly came to me. I saw the image of a long, narrow white piece of fabric with words written on it to represent each laundry list item and me wrapping myself with it. Then, during that part of the movement piece, I could remove it. Shed the layers. It made sense; it connected. I thought of covering up, binding, how we wrap wounds to keep everything in, to allow for healing. As these thoughts accumulated, I knew it couldn't just be any piece of fabric. It was a tensor bandage. I decided to project the words/list for improved visibility and to keep the bandage simple. I bought five tensor bandages. I

> *sewed them together roughly with my untrained hands with dark burgundy thread. The first time I rehearsed with it, I wrapped it too tight. As I was doing the ACA scene I felt it tightening around my chest. It was a bit difficult to breathe. I got lightheaded in the movement piece and learned that I needed to wrap in a particular way – with the right tension and speed. I remember walking home from the gym and calling mom to tell her the tensor idea. She agreed immediately, She loved it; embodied, symbolic, theatrical. It would work.* (Research Journal, January 2015)

Movement and Voice

As indicated in the passage above, a short movement piece was choreographed for the performance. This movement piece was accompanied by my mother's actual voice (which had been previously recorded and then played), discussing how this experience in childhood followed her into adulthood and what she has learned. The movement represented what my mother was saying in an embodied, symbolic way. This included movements that communicated struggle, resistance, becoming bound and restricted by difficult family experiences, and freeing one's self from the layers that are binding (Image 6). This "real" voice of my mother—an under-distanced approach—paired with a more symbolic representation of the content through embodied movement aimed to created a balance of distance when inviting the audience to engage with this section. Other recorded voices were included in the piece as well, and a man's voice represented the message sent by the church community ("he's a good man"), and my recorded voice was played to represent the voice in the Mother character's head.

Music

Two pieces of music were used in the performance: one was a song called I'm In Here (Sia, 2010) and the other was an instrumental piece called From Truth (Britain, 2012). I'm In Here was used in the middle of the piece, while

Image 6. **Unwrapping the "layers" during the movement section.**

playing the role of my mother, and From Truth was played at the end, from the point that I transitioned back into the role of "Me" to the end. The inclusion of music was important, as music has a way of bringing up emotions in the listener. My experience incorporating the song by Sia was described in a research journal entry.

> *I was stuck on the Sia song. I thought it was perfect – the emotion, the lyrics, her raw voice. I knew it needed to be in the piece. I added it to the script, but a sentence that said "do something with this" sat highlighted on my electronic page for a long time. What do I do with this? What do I* do*? I wrote the note "have boxes in a straight line by end of song" because I knew I wanted to use them as stepping stones for "rock bottom". I listened to the song countless times. I thought about my body on stage and the best way to connect the two elements. I went into my rehearsal space still having no idea what I would do. I rehearsed. When the time came, I pushed play. I stood for a second, not knowing what to do; in my head trying to direct my limbs. And then I let go, said screw it, and just let my body take over. My spontaneity. Just do what feels right not what makes sense. So I walked over to the chair and sat down. I curled my legs*

> *into a ball and just sat. Then I went over to the boxes and organized them for the next scene. Reflecting on this, I thought "maybe it's a chair dance! What else can I do on the chair?". I experimented a bit before realizing no, it was not a "chair dance". It was a time to sit, to breathe, to mourn, to be alone and lonely, to let the song speak instead of me. As I thought more about it, I loved it. It was a creative gap! The lyrics were open enough and the melody beautiful enough to provide space for audience members to reflect, to stay connected to me while looking inside. I didn't know if this would work, but I was convinced it had the potential to. But I was resistant to including it. I was scared. The first fear that came up was: people will be bored. Nothing is really happening. People will disconnect and be bored. And then the second fear surfaced. Maybe it is more of an insecurity. I'm willing to bet it was the real fear: I am vulnerable. In a piece where I announce to the audience of colleagues, friends, students, people I've never met that I've struggled with addiction, speaking this truth was not the part that made me feel insecure and vulnerable. It was the moment words stopped, the script ended and I was alone, with a backdrop of music, in a sort of silence with the audience. For some reason, that was the hardest part of the piece for me. And I felt that way every time I rehearsed and every time I performed. But I felt it was necessary, almost because of this feeling, to include this section. I was very curious to see how it would be received by the audience. I really had no idea.* (Research Journal, January 2015)

All of these aesthetic elements and choices regarding styles of representation were made based on my personal theatre training and experience, the workshops conducted with actors, and in consultation with my mother, advisors, and professionals in the field. These elements were not necessarily distinct from one another; they overlapped and informed one another. For

example, I projected the ACA Laundry List while using the tensor bandage prop. I engaged in embodied movement while a voiceover of my mother speaking was played. Music played while I wrote on the chalkboard to make connections between the family history and the character of me. Due to the interconnected nature of aesthetic elements and modes of representation in theatre, it is difficult to isolate these variables and study them independently. That was not the goal of this research. A choice was made to include as many different forms of representation and expression as possible in order to ask the audience what aspects of the piece (if any) assisted them in thinking about their own experience and connecting with personal emotion.

CHAPTER V. ANALYSIS

The first round of data collection (including the primary questionnaire and the focus groups directly following the performance) included 84 participants (Audience a: n=42; Audience b: n=29; Audience c: n=13). Two months following the first round of data collection, a follow-up questionnaire was sent to participants electronically to (a) collect data on any change over time in the way participants valued the performance and any lasting impact it may have had on them, and (b) to ask questions about any concepts emerging from the analysis of the data collected in the first phase of data collection that required further development. The response rate was relatively high at 71%, with 60 participants responding to the follow-up questionnaire (Audience a: n=35; Audience b: n=21; Audience c: n=4). While standard response rates differ depending on the conditions and context of the survey/questionnaire, and the method used to conduct the questionnaire, researchers should aim for around a 60% response rate (Fincham, 2008).

All questionnaires and focus group audio recordings were transcribed and entered into the qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA 11 by VERBI Software. Computer software can assist with the more tedious tasks, such as sifting, sorting and retrieving data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). While the researcher still does the "mind work" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 204), which involves using creativity to make connections and understand relationships in the data, the software is used to keep a record of the work and present different views of the data as the researcher conducts the analysis. This qualitative data analysis software made it possible to easily assign codes, and create categories and sub-categories, allowing me to organize the data and add memos as the analysis unfolded.

The data collected through the questionnaires and focus groups were analyzed through a process of open, axial, and selective coding as initially described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998). Open coding requires line-by-line analysis where categories are developed based on concepts in the text. Events/actions/interactions found in the data that are conceptually similar are group together into categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The researcher must also look at the relationships between categories through developing each category "in terms of its properties and dimensions of the properties" (Walker & Myrick, 2006, p. 552).

I began the analysis by coding line-by-line, identifying words and phrases existing in the data that participants were using to describe their experience of witnessing the performance piece and the aspects of the performance that stood out to them. During the process of open coding, constant comparison was employed. In this first round of coding, a number of concepts were identified and solidified and, as I would move on to the next piece of datum, I would compare it to the codes and concepts already developed. If the concept was similar to one already identified, it would be grouped with other codes under a conceptual label

(Corbin & Strauss, 2015). If the concept appeared to be different from previously identified concepts, a new code would be created. This constant comparison of data within and between documents allowed for the development and refinement of codes and categories. As I engaged in this first round of coding, I realized that I was identifying relatively high-level concepts in the open coding phase. For example, any time a participant spoke about having an emotional reaction to what they were witnessing, I simply coded it as "EMOTION" (capitals will be used to indicate codes and code categories). After this first round of open coding, only 13 high-level codes had been identified, which is a very low number of codes for a traditional GT open coding phase. It became clear at this time that another round of open coding was required in order to explore concepts in more depth, break each concept down into further codes, and sort codes into levels, resulting in some of these concepts being elevated to category headings and some ending up as sub-categories.

In this second time going through the data, the dimensions and properties (i.e. lower level concepts) were identified and integrated into the category. For example, when I returned to the raw data, I began to code the types of emotions being described, resulting in a number of lower level concepts nested under the code of EMOTION. I paid attention to the dimensions of the code (in the case of EMOTION, I was looking at the different types of emotions experienced) and the properties of the code (the characteristics of it – the strength of the emotion, the duration of the emotion, the expression of the emotion). At this phase, many additional, descriptive codes were added in order to understand the participants' experience in more depth.

A category was considered theoretically saturated when, through constant comparison, the inclusion of another concept did not produce any new insight or understanding about the category (LaRossa, 2005). The open coding process was aided by the asking of questions emerging from the data and the use of memos.

Memo writing allowed me to make note of the questions, hypotheses, and connections that were emerging as the data were coded.

The second stage of analysis, axial coding, brings focus to the conditions and context in which the phenomenon occurs, the actions/interactions of the participants, and the resulting consequences (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The goal of this stage is to explicitly analyze the relationships between the categories and subcategories. As the relationships between concepts were explored, categories were created that included a number of identified concepts as sub-categories. For example, EMOTION became a subcategory of RESPONSE, along with PERSONAL REFLECTION and THOUGHTS.

A number of diagrams and memos were created throughout this process to clarify and explore the relationships between the categories, especially in the later stages of analysis. Through memos, I explored thoughts and questions that emerged as I engaged in the analysis, as well as explanations for why I was assigning a certain conceptual label to a piece of datum. For example, a memo attached to the code of THOUGHTS provided insight into what was included in the category: "Thoughts reported during performance that do not relate to a personally lived experience or refer to an emotion" (Researcher Memo, May 7, 2015). A memo attached to the code of PERSONAL REFLECTION illustrates how I recorded note-worthy phenomena emerging from the data: "People talk about oscillating back and forth – looking inward with their own self-reflection and personal experience memories, engaging back with the piece, and then going back inside themselves" (Researcher Memo, May 7, 2015). These memos also contained preliminary hypotheses about the relationships between the concepts that repeatedly came up in the data. I found the creation of diagrams to be extremely helpful in understanding the relationships between categories. A colour-coded map of these relationships was constructed in order to begin to hypothesize about the data. In GT research, tentative hypotheses are developed

when analyzing the relationships between categories. Though GT is primarily considered to be an inductive process, this stage requires arriving at provisional deductive hypotheses. If the hypotheses regarding relationships did not hold up when compared with the data, they were either discarded or revised (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Creating and reviewing these diagrams also aided me in moving on to the final phase of analysis: selective coding. Selective coding involves identifying a core category that links together all other categories and has explanatory power. At times the core category emerges from already identified categories, and other times a new category is created that subsumes all other categories and helps to explain the main phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Identifying one core category proved to be difficult in this research, and in the end of the analysis, two core categories existed that, together, would encapsulate and integrate all other categories. These core categories—along with the subcategories that illustrate the properties, dimension, and context of these categories—provided the foundation for the development of theory grounded in this data. These categories were then considered alongside the memos, diagrams, notes, and theory on transformative learning, performance, and FLE, when articulating the theory that has emerged from the analysis.

VI. RESULTS

The primary question guiding this research is: What elements of a lived experience performance piece (if any) do witnesses feel (a) evoke emotion and, (b) foster personal/critical reflection? The two subsidiary research questions include: (a) How important is the inclusion of "lived experience" in such a performance piece designed for use within FLE? and (b) What (if any) impact did

witnessing the performance piece have on participants' beliefs, behaviors, or relationships at a two-month follow-up?

The following results assist in understanding potential answers to these questions. Making sense and meaning of the data through analysis and organizing the results has not been a linear process. However, by taking in the full, interconnected picture created by these results, theory can be generated from this data that can inform these questions and the future application of performances based on lived experience.

The two core categories that were identified to encapsulate all other categories were LIVED EXPERIENCE and REPRESENTATION (See Figure 2). All participant responses were related directly to the inclusion of lived experience in the performance piece or the theatre conventions and approaches to representation that were utilized in the performance piece. These two codes have distinct sub-codes that illuminate the aspects of these concepts that were central in the experience of witnessing this performance piece.

Lived Experience

Performing Personal/Family Stories: Shame and Permission

The results from this research indicate that it was important to participants that the performance was based on lived experience. Sixty percent of participants reported that it was "very important" that the content of a performance piece used within this context be based on lived experience. An additional 23% of participants said it was "important" that the performance be based on lived experience (10% said somewhat important, 3% said not important, and 4% did not answer the question).

> "This is just somebody telling her story, and if it turns out that that draws a connection, and I think it's inevitable that it will with people who are in

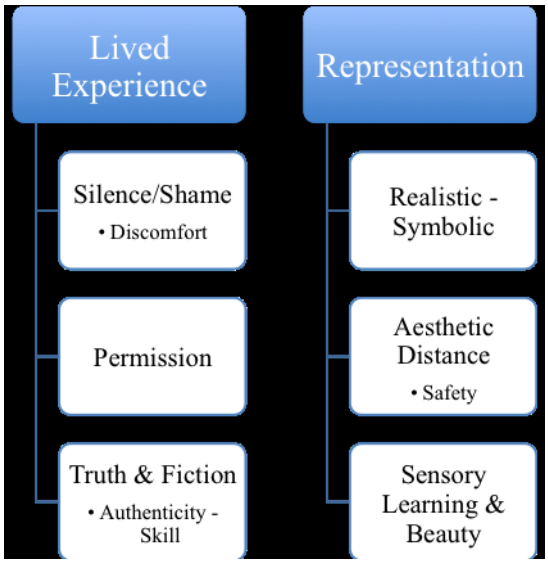

Figure 2. **Two core categories: Lived Experience and Representation along with their sub-categories as coded in the data.**

that situation, it ends up being—I think—much more powerful because it is based on a true story" (1b, 44).

Most participants believed that it would be most "powerful" and "valuable", if the person on the stage was somehow involved in the lived experience being shared. In the case of this performance, I played the role of myself at the beginning and the end of the performance, while also taking on the role of my mother for a large portion of the piece. The choice to have the performance piece based on the performer's personal or family stories allowed for certain phenomena to take place that would seemingly not have been activated otherwise. The following concepts were identified in the data analysis that are directly linked to performing personal and family stories of lived experience: SILENCE/SHAME and PERMISSION.

Silence/shame. The act of speaking about one's lived experiences reduces the isolation and shame associated with this experience, especially if the subject is one that is commonly considered to be shameful—or associated with stigma—

within one's culture (for example, mental health issues, addiction, and suicide). Speaking about the experience openly can break the cycle of shame that perpetuates dysfunction. When asked what they valued about the performance, many participants simply stated "the story being told", "it brings something out from the dark" (A1, P38). Having the content based on lived experience, rather than a piece of fiction, was an essential part of "breaking the silence" and reducing the shame around these types of experiences in families.

> "Well for me, one of the biggest rules in those kinds of families is you don't tell. So this is a narrative that goes completely counter to that. So for me, it helps break open the very thing that allows that kind of addiction to maintain itself in the family" (2b, 72).
>
> "The revolutionary act that the telling of the story is, that it's breaking out of that…then that's even more powerful, for someone to say look it's possible because the people in this room, the people who have created this piece, did it" (2b, 76).

The code SILENCE/SHAME became quite prominent in the research and revealed itself as one of the central functions of performance pieces based on lived experiences, especially those about experiences that are commonly considered shameful. A sub-category of this code—that showed up less frequently but was certainly present—was the concept of DISCOMFORT. Speaking about experience that one is not supposed to talk about appeared to bring about a certain amount of discomfort for some audience members, even if they were aware of the purpose of sharing these stories with others.

> "My reaction to it is largely, you shouldn't be talking about that in front of people. Which, in reality of course you should be. But that's my own biases and so I was…mostly it made me feel really uncomfortable but I realize that…I realize that's the point of it all. But it is a very real kind of, you keep that sorta stuff inside" (1b 19).

Sharing personal and family stories about addiction or other sensitive issues in families is something that many people avoid for a variety of personal, social, and familial reasons (White & Savage, 2005). Because these issues are rarely discussed, it is both uncomfortable and important to do so. It is important because it reduces the shame and isolation that comes with the silence that surrounds these issues in families.

> "I think maybe that's one of the goals, is to break that isolation that's somehow involved in addiction" (2a, 34).

> "There's so many people out there who are going through the same thing" (3a, 74).
>
> "But keeping it inside for so long without sharing" (3a, 75).
>
> "It destroys you too" (3a, 76).

This concept of SHAME/SILENCE was related to a secondary code: PERMISSION.

Permission. Watching someone else share their personal story gives the audience permission to think about, feel, and share their own stories. Many participants commented that watching the performance made them feel that "if she can do it, maybe I can" (2c, 9).

> "I think because of the real life experience, it makes it easier for all of us to admit those experiences…" (2a, 49).
>
> " One of the things that I sort of took away was that, the shame and the hiding. That it's okay to put your whole story out there, what ever it is" (2c, 18).
>
> "The fact that someone was simply telling us a story is so precious. We get the impression that by sharing their story, the performer gives us the right to do the same" (A2, P27).

The idea that performing stories of personal lived experience can break a pattern of silence and shame, and offer permission for others to also share their stories, reveals an important function of performing personal and family stories (as opposed to fiction or other people's stories). When audience members were asked what they valued most about the performance directly after witnessing the piece, HONESTY was mentioned more than any other value. HONESTY came up very frequently in the audience responses, and appears to have a strong, direct link to why performed lived experience was important and powerful. HONESTY was often included in the same sentence with concepts such as "truth", "vulnerability", "authenticity", "reality of lived experience", "courage", "bearing of an emotional experience", "believability", "honesty of emotions", and "sincerity". There was a meaningful link in the data between speaking one's truth (being honest), in order to break the silence and shame cycle, and give permission to others to do the same.

Truth and Fiction

Two alternate opinions were represented in the data that are worth noting. The second most commonly stated opinion related to the inclusion of lived experience was that the story should be based on lived experience, but it does not necessarily need to be the lived experience of the person performing it. Therefore a skilled actor could perform another person's story, as long as the story on which it was based was "true" and the actor had enough technical skills to embody the character and portray the emotions involved in the story in a way that felt "authentic". Finally, a viewpoint was presented that, had the story been purely fictional (potentially with it's roots in the essence of an experience as reported by many but not a specific individual's story) it could have been just as powerful and effective. One participants said that fiction can be just as moving if it is well acted, and another claimed that s/he could have allowed him/herself to get more

fully wrapped up in the story if they had known it was fictional. While this position was held by a very small number of participants, it speaks to a relationship between "authenticity" and "skill" when presenting performances based on difficult life experiences.

Authenticity and skill. Drawing on literature and the results of this study, it appears that in order for the audience to connect emotionally with the piece, there needs to be balance between authenticity and skill. These two concepts can be viewed on a scale that can be simultaneously manipulated based on the goals, conditions and content of the piece. If the "authenticity" scale is high (it is a real person who has lived the story and is telling it in front of you) the technical "skill" can be lower (an every day person may not have the same refined writing and performing skills as a theatre practitioner). If the authenticity scale is low (it is a theatre practitioner telling a fictional story or a story from secondary sources), the technical skill should be high (writer, performer, director have enough skill to build a performance that helps the audience to connect).

> "I think her use of the props and costumes, the box and the bandages, was…she was rendering the intangible ideas tangible. And I thought that, this clearly seemed to me to be somebody with a theatrical background to do that. You're not going to find that in the run of the mill advocates who are putting something together" (2c, 14)
>
> "I saw Morris Scornofsky play King Lear, I've seen all kinds of theatre all over the place, and the best piece I ever saw was adolescents in an addiction centre doing a scene because of the raw authenticity of it" (2c, 16).

Both the concepts of "authenticity" and "skill" are somewhat flexible, subjective, and a point of contention in the theatre world, and further research is necessary to construct the operational definitions—including the properties and

dimensions of these concepts—that would allow this model to be useable to theatre practitioners.

Aesthetic Choices and Modes of Representation

Realistic & Symbolic Modes of Representation: A Balance

A variety of different approaches to representation and aesthetic choices were made in the design and creation of the performance piece that have a bearing on the audience's experience of witnessing. The performance included voiceovers (my voice, man's voice, mom's voice), music (two songs), symbolic props (boxes, tensor bandage), lights (very basic wash and one small lamp on stage), a movement section, direct-address storytelling, a short piece of film, a chalkboard, and a projection of the Adult Child of Alcoholics "Laundry List" of personal characteristics. These elements can generally be placed on a spectrum between Realistic Modes of Representation and Symbolic Modes of Representation, though there is certainly overlap (See Table 1).

Realistic Modes of Representation	Symbolic Modes of Representation
• Acting technique • Text & voice – Regular Speech patters (Mom's language) • "The real" – Mom's voice, ACA list, film projection with realistic portrayal of parents	• Symbolic props – Nested boxes, tensor bandage • Poetic language ("Me" language) • Expressive movement/dance • Use of music • Voice-overs (bringing in other voices & characters, representing an internal voice, representing the messages sent from "society").

Table 1. **Modes of representation included in the performance piece considered to be "realistic" and "symbolic"**

Participants commented on every aspect of the performance, including the performance in general, the acting skill and technique, the emotions portrayed by the performer, the structure, story and writing technique, the embodiment and

movement, the use of props, the use of sound (including music and voiceovers), and the use of projection and film. It became clear through analyzing these responses that most audience members believed that using a *combination* of realistic and symbolic modes of representation strengthened the performance piece. Most participants commented on the performance being powerful due to how "real" it felt. This was due to the realistic modes of representation, the inclusion of lived experience, and having knowledge prior to viewing the performance that it was based on stories of lived experience. Many participants also mentioned that the more symbolic elements allowed them (a) to link concepts back to their personal lives and generalize the story to their own and other contexts, and (b) bring out emotion.

> "What I actually liked about it was that there are lights and music, and things in place that remind you that it's a play. Even though it's a real story, it's a play, so it puts it in a space where anyone can relate" (2b, 22).
>
> "The honest and creative way it was told. There were enough very real moments so that there were no ifs ands or buts about what was being said, intertwined with the right amount creativity to really explore your own interpretation" (A1, P29).
>
> "I am a real admirer of using things in the most simple way because it doesn't clutter the mind and leaves you open to experience the emotion" (1c, 16).
>
> "I liked her use of the props and costumes, the boxes and bandages was…she was rendering the intangible ideas tangible" (2c, 14).
>
> "And the visual props and the movement of the piece was really effective. And some of the props that, for me where most powerful, were probably blocks, the isolation they represented. The bandages and the unwrapping, that was really effective" (2a, 24).

The audiences in this research had different amounts of theatre-viewing experience, as indicated on their questionnaires. Participants were asked how many theatre performances they attend in a year. Twenty participants reported viewing 0-1 theatre performances a year (24%); 35 reported viewing 2-5 performances a year (42%); 16 reported viewing 6-10 performances a year (19%); 13 reported viewing more than 10 performances a year (15%). The majority of participants have what could be considered low to moderate theatre-viewing experience, and the results of the questionnaires and focus groups indicate that *a mixed/balanced approach* to representation was valued by these audiences.

The results of this study demonstrate that realistic and symbolic modes of representation have important functions in a performance piece being used to foster transformative learning. The symbolic modes left room for personal reflection and provided an opportunity for the audience members to connect with the piece in a way that was personally meaningful, increasing the UNIVERSALITY of the performance. The realistic modes created a direct connection between the audience and the performer, and it was these modes of representation that brought the story of lived experience to the audience and created an opportunity to reduce SHAME and increase dialogue around important issues. These findings are supported by a significant overlap in the codes related to symbolic modes of representation and UNIVERSALITY, and those related to stories of lived experience and SILENCE /SHAME. Based on the findings of this study, *both* modes of representation contributed to emotional arousal in the audience members, which is an important aspect of transformative learning. There were very few people who explicitly stated an opinion that did not align with these findings. These few participants would have preferred the extremes rather than a balance between the two approaches. One participant was drawn to the "inauthentic", and wanted more symbolic abstraction and one participant was drawn to authentic/the real and did not connect with more symbolic modes of

representation. It may be important to consider that the few participants who responded this way have earned PhD degrees, view more than 10 theatrical productions a year (as indicated on their questionnaires), and may have a developed taste in a certain aesthetic approach due to the high amount of theatrical involvement. Despite this, these findings act as a reminder that the audience is comprised of individuals—each of whom have their own tastes and experiences—and while a theory attempts to encapsulate as much of a population as possible, there will always be outliers to which the theory does not apply.

Safe Space: Aesthetic Distance

When discussing the experience of witnessing this performance based on lived experience, many participants discussed how the artistic approach offered a sense of SAFETY. This conceptual label was given to pieces of datum where individuals noted that the use of performance was "safe", "gentle" or offered "space" to safely explore personal experience, breathe, and feel emotions. Many participants discussed feeling that there was a containment that occurred which made them feel safe in the experience.

> "But I think in this artistic way, I think it touches people in a very gentle way. Reaches people in a gentle way" (2a, 35).
>
> "And by sitting there in the dark and not having to—at an AA meeting, so what's your story, and I have to be listening, and I have to be authentic. None of that pressure, so I could just experience it and feel it, and that really helped me live it and connect with it" (2a, 55).

Within the category of SAFETY, there are two connected but slightly different phenomena taking place: A lack of PRESSURE on the audience members to react and respond in the moment (as illustrated in the quote above) and aesthetic DISTANCE. Related to the concept of PRESSURE, audience members discussed not being "forced to do anything" while witnessing, and

without the pressure to act, one can take in what s/he is witnessing, and attend to one's own memories and emotions being evoked. In connection with this idea, some participants noted that this situation might be safer and more accessible for individuals who are not quite ready to tell their own story and are at the beginning phases of acknowledging their own feelings and experience.

Aesthetic distance. The concept of aesthetic distance is well covered in the literature on performance and, although audience members did not use this language specifically, many audience members used their own words to describe how the art created a certain amount of distance that allowed them to connect with the performance safely. The participants used words like "abstracted", "protected", "one step removed" and "artificial" to discuss the quality of the performance that allowed them to safely engage with it, and the label of DISTANCE (nested under the label of SAFETY), was applied to this category.

> "…there's a little bit of a protective, removed aspect to people acting out their own stories. Just the fact that they're acting out in front of other people might…I think allows people to say things that they may not feel comfortable saying in an ordinary conversation" (1c, 60)…. "Safe! It's slightly abstracted so it's slightly safer" (1c, 62).
>
> "The performance was good and was a very comfortable way to observe a very difficult topic. Allowed me to observe from a distance and question myself in private. Felt like it was therapeutic but from a distance. It allowed me to ease into the issues discussed" (A2, P15).

Many participants also addressed the "oscillation" or the "push and pull" of performance/arts-based approaches. While creating a sense of safe distance, the performance simultaneously drew participants deeper into an emotional and personal place.

> "Loved the connection with theatre that seemingly removes us enough from the topic to feel safer....then draws us in to explore it further" (A1, P2).
>
> "The theater permits us to sublimate a painful experience and provides a desire to open ourselves to it" (A2, 27).

This phenomenon is precisely the power of well-managed aesthetic distance; if an adequate amount of distance has been created through the use of aesthetic tools for the audience members to engage safely, it can bring the witness into a more personal and emotional connection with what they are witnessing.

Sensory Learning and Beauty

In this research, the power and effectiveness of using performance and arts-based approaches appeared to be linked to the concepts of SENSES and BEAUTY. Many participants commented that witnessing theatre can be more "real" and "effective" than talking about an issue, and more "powerful" than reading. This is due to theatre's ability to stimulate the senses and become a more holistic experience.

> "But when it's done in this way with all the senses that [participant] was talking about, suddenly it's more real and it's more effective. Instead of saying 'this can happen' or 'this can help'" (1c, 103).
>
> "The impact that an acted out drama can have on an audience, which is so much more powerful then something a person could just read" (A1, P32).
>
> "I could talk about that for hours but I don't feel like I would have got what I got from watching that…from talking about it" (3a, 4).

This sensory experience is a strength of theatrical performance, and by using multi-media in the representation of lived experience, the audience is able to have deeper experience of the material. Participants also mentioned that BEAUTY

(which is taken in by the senses) strengthened the educational impact and added "power" to the intervention.

> "I also talked about the beauty of Shea's performance-the acting, singing, lighting and the images she created. Also, how she created a beautiful piece of theatre that also had a powerful educational aspect and how the beauty and power of the performance deepened the educational aspect. The power of the story, and the way she presented it helped me as an audience member learn" (A2, P11).
>
> "I thought it was really neat how she was able to take something that's so dark and painful and personal and she made it something so beautiful and like touching. It resonated with me a lot in that way" (3a, 52).
>
> "Does the artistic skill then make the authenticity of the performance even more powerful, so it can be even more educational and open people up more?" (2c, 11)… "In this case, I felt that" (2c, 12) .

The participants are highlighting the fact that beauty heightens the educational aspect of a performance piece such as this, and this aligns clearly with the literature on this subject that these two elements must work in concert with one another (the educational component and the aesthetics of the piece), in order to be successful in encouraging audience reflection, emotional arousal, and transformative learning.

The Experience of Witnessing

The *inclusion of lived experience* and a *balanced approach to realistic and symbolic modes of representation* appeared to create the conditions for certain personal experiences to take place in the audience members witnessing the performance. The data collected from participants indicate that each individual had a personal experience while watching the performance piece, and these personal experiences resulted from a PERSONAL CONNECTION and sense of

RESONANCE with what they were witnessing. While these personal experiences differed slightly, there were distinct patterns and similarities in the types of personal experiences reported by participants. Three main categories have been identified that relate to the personal experiences reported by participants that directly relate to the inclusion of lived experience and the modes of representation (core categories), and were the result of a PERSONAL CONNECTION/RESONANCE: RESPONSE, VALUE, and ACTION (See Figure 3).

Personal Connection: Resonance

One major category that emerged from the data was PERSONAL CONNECTION: RESONANCE. Most audience members discussed having some sort of personal connection to the material being presented in the performance piece and personally resonated with what they were witnessing. Participants stated that they saw their life reflected in the lived experience presented in the piece, could identify with the experience presented, or personally resonated with aspects of the piece. RESONANCE emerged as a very frequent, prominent code in the analysis.

> "When I was watching I thought, well this was my life as well" (1a, 21).
>
> "I saw like probably hundreds of people. I saw people I've worked with and still work with, because I worked in addiction…And I saw people I'm mentoring, and my sister who is an alcoholic" (1a, 123).
>
> "It felt like my story…" (2a, 24).
>
> "I feel like I watched my life story, to be quite honest. I feel like I identified with almost everything she said, everything she went through" (3a, 2).

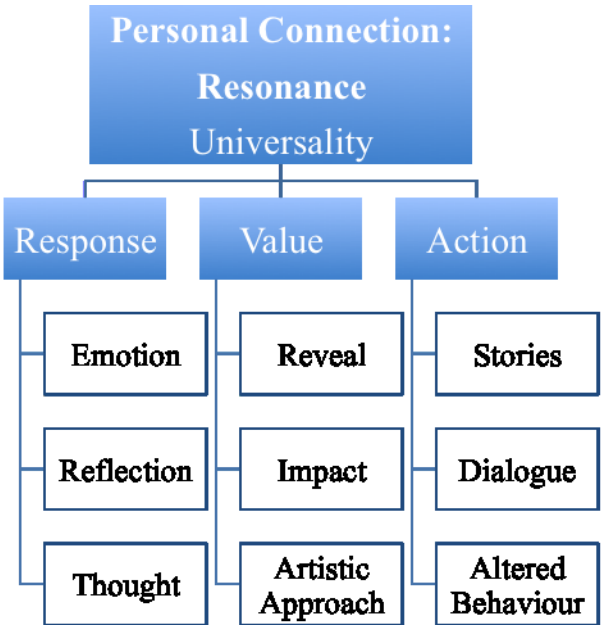

Figure 3. **The experience of witnessing performances based on lived experience as coded in the data.**

> "To me it wasn't a performance, it was watching my life over the years dealing with addiction, not myself but a family member. Everything resonated…" (3a. 3).

While this was not the case for every participant, personally connecting to the piece was reported consistently in every participant audience. There were a variety of performance elements that appeared to encourage resonance in the witnesses (as indicated by the audience responses), including feeling a personal connection to the stories of lived experience, and the emotional arousal and personal reflection that was encouraged through the use of both symbolic and realistic theatrical tools. It should be noted that, as evidenced from the results, there appears to be a two-way influence with resonance and emotion/reflection: resonance leads to heightened emotions and reflecting on personal memories, and heightened emotions and reflecting on personal memories results in a sense of

resonance. One does not necessary cause the other; these processes occur simultaneously and are all part of personally experiencing external and internal stimuli. A personal connection was reported even in cases when participants had no direct personal connection with the experience of alcoholism, and this was due to the UNIVERSALITY of the performance piece.

Universality. Many participants mentioned that the information in the performance piece could pertain to a variety of different experiences in a family in addition to the experience of having an alcoholic parent, including mental illness, abuse, physical illness, secrets, etcetera. This UNIVERSALITY allowed more people to personally connect and resonate with the piece.

> "And lets be honest, every family has some level of dysfunction, there's just degrees of it. I think anyone, be it adult any age, experience, could benefit from this kind of exposure, experience, performance" (1c, 66).
>
> "She did a really specific story…but somehow it touched on so many elements that are universal. I found that really amazing and I felt like anybody could relate to it really well and take what they need from it" (1a, 97).
>
> "I thought it was very easy to relate no matter what type of memories you have, because I think these are feelings that everybody can have felt at some point, especially when you were young. So yes I think this brings you into a place where you can relate to…and then figure out that you can transfer it to other problems" (2b, 4).

Choices were made about the content of the piece and the aesthetic conventions used (symbolic use of props, figurative speech, text/writing) that encouraged or enhanced the universality of the piece. The following quote from a participant addresses one part of text that was designed to be open enough to allow the witnesses to connect to it in their own way, while still being accurate to my mother's perception of her experience in the family. The actual text from the

performance piece that this participant quote refers to can be found above in the performance description.

> "It doesn't have to be about addiction [overlapping participant: it could be about a number of things], there's no addiction in my family but we definitely have the idea of secrets and pieces that are missing from the family history and the story. And I really strongly relate to that because, I don't know if she used the word disease or illness, and everything orbits around it. But I mean it can be so many things that suck the energy of the family, suck all the other members in, and don't allow them to have that…She had some beautiful imagery and words. Very simple but very profound…of not being able to find your own direction because you've spent so much time going around in circles around this thing that's in the family" (2c, 43).

UNIVERSALITY enhanced personal connection/RESONANCE to the performance piece, and this personal connection appeared to be very important to many of the participants; it allowed them to reflect on their own personal experience and brought about more of an emotional response from some participants (described further below).

Response

Audience members reported having some sort of personal response to what they were witnessing. These responses included feeling EMOTION and engaging in PERSONAL REFLECTION during and following the performance piece. In the questionnaires and the focus groups following the performance, the participants reported THOUGHTS they had related to the experience of struggling within families, some directly related to the concept of alcoholism and some more generally related to family dysfunction.

Emotion. The majority of audience members reported feeling an emotion while watching the performance piece. These emotions varied in the type of emotion, if participants allowed for any external expression of the emotion, and what aspects of the performance/witnessing experience elicited the emotion. While some participants simply stated that they were "emotional" or "moved", the most commonly mentioned emotions experienced were "sadness" and "hope". Other prominent emotions mentioned by participants include anger, sense of loss, joy, relief, shame, guilt, grief, regret, admiration, compassion, and anxiety.

> "Truly evoked strong emotional responses that I wasn't expecting to feel" (A2, P12).
>
> "In that space you had no choice but to feel, for your emotions to come out" (1c, 18).
>
> "I experienced many of the same emotions presented in the piece. I felt shame, anger, sadness, sympathy, and hope. It made me relive some of my own experiences" (A1, P11).

In the questionnaire, participants were asked what emotions they experienced and what aspects of the piece evoked the emotions, but some participants also discussed the *expression* of emotions in the focus group discussions. Some participants noted that they cried and got "teary eyed", and others mentioned feeling tight in the chest or not being able to breathe, but most participants only noted the emotions they felt and not how the emotions were physically experienced or expressed. One participant mentioned the steps he took to *not* allow the emotions to come to the surface and to regulate his emotions: "I sat in the front row, I wasn't even able to look at her. I had to stop looking at her because I knew if I kept looking at her I was going to break down and cry" (1a, 56).

When asked what they valued about the performance piece, many participants responded that the emotional experience was valuable to them: "Its

ability to evoke real, true emotion" (A1, P40). Emotional arousal was one of the most commonly stated personal responses to the performance piece, and the source of the emotion appeared to be related to both what the audience members were witnessing on stage (the stories they heard, the symbolic use of props, and other aesthetic choices), and also the personal memories the performance evoked in the witness.

> "The music was really powerful to me. So the music was just playing and Shea was doing her thing and then she started to sing, she started singing louder and more powerfully like her voice was being heard. I found that I really connected to that. I found that really emotional" (1b, 7).
>
> "I was very emotional. Brought back lots of memories" (A2, P7).

Personal reflection. Many of the participants reported engaging in some form of PERSONAL REFLECTION while watching the performance piece. Much of this reflection was centered on personal memories, and recalling experiences (and feelings associated with those experiences) in response to an aspect of the performance piece. As one participant noted (which reflects a large number of other responses from audience members): "hearing the actor's lived story made me reflect on mine" (A1, P27). Some participants discussed this phenomenon generally, while others were very direct with explaining what memories or experiences they reflected on during the piece. Quotes have been provided below to illustrate some of the audience feedback connected to the concept of PERSONAL REFLECTION, though no quotes containing personal material have been provided in order to ensure anonymity of the audience members.

> "I reflected on a lot and I felt like it was my story too. The props and film and text helped bring it all to life and I felt like I was back there again" (A2, P7).

> "It makes you reflect on your own family, childhood, dynamics, and interactions with other people. It makes you reflect on how you can help individuals who are in distressing situations or who may need help but don't know what to do or who to ask to receive support" (A1, P10).
>
> "The performance made me take a hard look at myself, which I very much appreciated. It truly touched my soul at a deep level. The performance gave me more insight into how our thoughts, feelings, and actions play into human behaviour" (A1, P24).
>
> "This performance piece made me feel, made me think introspectively about myself. Not many things do" (A1, P40).

There was shift in attention or an oscillation between focusing on the performance content and reflecting on personal memories that was mentioned by a number of participants. Many participants noted that there were aspects of the performance piece that would make them look inward and begin a process of personal reflection, then they would return their focused attention to the performance, and this cycle continued throughout the duration of the performance.

> "There were times when I'd be thinking about myself and my family's experience and its history, and then kind of come back to the performance and then another piece of the performance would illicit that kind of thought pattern. Like we said, I think that's what the performance was able to do kind of thing. But I found it interesting how, although I was watching a performance, I was watching something else" (1c, 48).
>
> "Yeah I was drifting into Shea's experience, and then drifting into her mother's experience and then drifting into my experience, it was just kind of going back and forth between everyone's experience" (2b 16).

Other types of personal reflection also occurred, and some participants noted that they found themselves reflecting on the feelings and thoughts they were having in the moment in response to the performance piece. For example, a

number of participants mentioned that watching the piece made them reflect on how they judge others. One participant found herself feeling anger towards the "father" in the performance piece, and then reflecting on the judgment she was making and how that did not fit with her view of herself as a non-judgmental person. Other participants noted critically reflecting on the judgments and expectations they have held in the past:

> "The part about why people don't leave abusive situations – I found that I have been judgmental" (A1, P25).
>
> "I was able to have some personal reflection and awareness of my own judgments and stigma's, as well as my expectations I set for society, and more importantly the people close to me" (A3, P11).

One participant who felt discomfort while watching the piece, with the feeling that these types of family secrets should not be shared with others, reflected on that response in the moment and acknowledged that it was this precise feeling that may contribute to people not coming forward with family problems to seek help. Another participant reflected on what it means to "understand" a lived experience and connect to his/her clients' stories: "I found myself reflecting on previous interactions with clients who suffer from addiction or have a loved one who is an addict and wonder if I ever truly understood, and if I ever truly could" (A1, P7).

This questioning of the self—an interrogation of personal qualities, opinions, assumptions, amount of knowledge, etc.—was a more critical form of reflection that was reported by a smaller percentage of audience members (in comparison to the many participants who noted reflecting on personal memories), but was mentioned often enough to be a significant finding in the research.

Thought. Many participants expressed opinions and thoughts that they had in response to witnessing the performance piece. These responses were coded as THOUGHT, as they appeared to be distinct from REFLECTION and

EMOTION, but were clearly a personal response to the performance. These thoughts varied in terms of being a highly conceptual understanding of a phenomenon to a personally held belief or realization about a specific situation. Some thoughts reported by participants were linked to ideas about the human condition, how we respond to life circumstances, and how we treat others:

> "Made me think about the layers that each of us carries with us and how so many of these may be invisible/hidden, so how important it is to be sensitive to what others may/may not be feeing" (A1, P13).
>
> "The belief that the performance reflected was that even in an extremely tough situation, if you put in the effort and anything it takes (and have family support), you can get through this negative chapter and have a much more healthy, open, and positive future" (A2, P3).
>
> "It made me wonder why some are able to forgive and others cannot and need to keep it inside to move on" (A1, P33).
>
> "It was so neat to hear different perspectives and it evoked different beliefs and perspectives for me" (A1, P30).
>
> "I tend to accept people as they present themselves and have not probed deeper. The character's description of her happy persona and her deeper anxieties should encourage me to look deeper" (A1, P39).

Some participants clearly noted aspects of the piece that brought up thoughts and considerations, which most often included parts of the story and the symbolic props used.

> "The bandages made me reflect on the injury, the emotional damage, and the need to both protect ourselves and free ourselves. The walk around the block to indicate stages of growth through sharing was effective, powerful" (A2, P10).
>
> "I reflected on the idea of falling apart vs being put together – the image of nesting boxes was an effective metaphor that brought this up. I reflected

> on the idea of resolution or healing – does this really even happen? Or do we simply learn to "live around" things? I also reflected on the idea of childhood trauma and the importance of telling stories over and over instead of hiding" (A2, P17).
>
> "The visual use of the boxes allowed me to visualize the layers an individual has that are hidden deeper, to deal with later. The aspect of the tensor bandage allowed me to understand the difficult struggle individuals have in recovery" (A1, P17).

Other participants reported very specific personal beliefs or realizations that were brought to the surface in response to the performance piece:

> "I always understood the importance of AA meetings, but I now see the 'true' value of al-anon. The work it takes to put a family back together even if the 'disease' is cured" (A1, P9).
>
> "I believe in the 12 steps, I believe that we all can heal from this disease, I believe that this is a disease, not a moral deficiency" (A1, P20).
>
> "It made me think about genetics and what is passed down – found it very powerful when the performer reflected on her own personal struggles and connected it back to her story. I think this 'connection back' made me connect back to my own family and my own struggle" (A2, P11).
>
> "I'd also like to make a statement that I believe the government and people don't realize how powerful this problem of drugs and alcohol is to our country. Like you say, it not only affects the person, it affects everybody around them. Now all these people are trying to go through their lives, do their jobs, whatever, carrying this weight. And I think if there's more money and more thought into helping these people…If you started taking numbers it'd probably astonish you how many people are having problems with alcohol and drugs and not telling anybody and keeping it to themselves" (3a, 61).

EMOTION, PERSONAL REFLECTION, and THOUGHTS are not separate processes; these human responses overlap and affect one another as we respond to internal and external stimuli. While coding these aspects of the participants' responses during analysis, it became clear that while they are distinct in some ways, these three elements of the human response to witnessing are interconnected and work together to create the overall experience of witnessing.

Value

Throughout the discussion of the previous findings, it was noted that participants were asked what they valued about the performance piece. Although some of the responses are connected to concepts already discussed (for example, emotional arousal), there are other distinct categories of responses from participants in relation to this question. There were three areas that were identified as being important to and valued by participants, each with sub-categories that fill out the dimensions of the code (See Figure 4).

Reveal. When participants addressed what they valued about the performance piece, a group of responses centered around the act of revealing the self and the qualities it took to do this. The conceptual label REVEAL was chosen because this word simply means to make something known, or allow something to be seen, that had been previously hidden. All of the sub-codes in this category were linked in a meaningful way to the central concept of a reveal. Many participants said that they valued the TELLING OF THE STORY; the act of revealing this story to an audience itself was an important aspect of the piece. This was usually stated very simply by the participants in response to the question of what they valued: "The telling of the story" (A1, P5), "The story being told – 'outed'" (A1, 21), "The deep and intimate and profound sharing that touched the hearts of everyone here" (A1, 26), "Sharing the 'bad things' that we are not supposed to feel" (A1, P15). Participants also valued that it was a TRUE

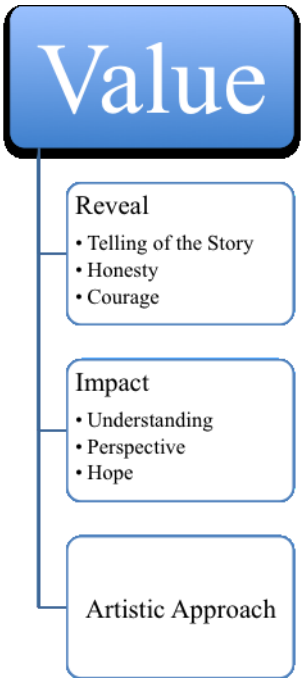

Figure 4. **The aspects of the performance that participants valued and all of the sub-categories as coded in the data.**

STORY—this was a common response from participants—and this has been discussed in detail in the section on the importance of lived experience.

As previously noted in the section on performing personal stories, HONESTY was mentioned much more frequently than any other response when participants were asked in the initial questionnaire about what they valued about the performance. The HONESTY involved in revealing your story, and the importance of that to the audience, emerged as a central concept in the research, and is linked to many other findings.

> "I really value the honesty and vulnerability, to shine a light on the darkness and secrets hidden in the silence, which leads to strength" (A1, P8).

> "I value the honesty of the performance and the genuine authenticity of the performer" (A1, P10).
>
> "I valued the honesty and the way the presenter was able to present such a painful issue in a safe, contained, and real way" (A2, P2).
>
> "I value the honesty in what was said and the openness of the performer. As a child of an alcoholic, you learn to hide a lot of your feelings and you don't want to share your burden with anyone" (A2, P8).

As demonstrated by these quotations, the idea of HONESTY was often linked to vulnerability, authenticity, and openness. HONESTY was also linked with the concept of COURAGE, and the data collected from the audience suggests that participants felt being honest in revealing one's story required a certain level of courage (sometimes the term "bravery" was used). COURAGE was also mentioned by a number of participants in ways that were not directly linked to HONESTY.

> "Just the courage and the sharing of that publicly and exposing yourself" (1a, 76).
>
> "I value the courage it took to both tell oneself this story and the courage to share it with others" (A1, P11).
>
> "The courage it took to write and perform this performance. It is already making me face some issues tonight I have kept deep inside" (A1, P24).
>
> "I value the courage and the bravery to own a story. I mean by that, the whole story: the good, the bad, the ugly" (A2, P9).
>
> "I appreciated Shea's courage in sharing her families history with insight, sensitivity and the hope to help others" (A2, P10).

Participants valued the courage it took to reveal a family story, but also the effect that courage can have on those who witness: helping individuals find the courage to face their own stories.

Impact. This performance piece had a certain IMPACT on some viewers that was highly valued. While it is clear that the impact was different for each individual, there are distinct patterns in the ways the performance affected the witnesses that were verbalized as being valued by the audience. The conceptual label IMPACT was used to group responses that indicated something had occurred or changed in the participant in response to what they had witnessed, including a shift in UNDERSTANDING or PERSPECTIVE, and feeling a sense of HOPE.

Understanding. Sixty eight percent participants who responded to the follow-up questionnaire noted that watching the performance piece altered their understanding in some way. Those audience members who did not have direct lived experience with alcoholism or addiction in their families felt they were able to understand what this experience might be like after watching the performance.

> "Having no relation to alcoholism, the performance changed my understanding of what living with an alcoholic is like" (A1, P4).
>
> "I value having a better understanding of how addiction impacts those around them.... and in ways that you may not naturally consider" (A1, P7).

Many of the responses related to an increased understanding referenced the lasting impact that addiction, alcoholism, and family dysfunction can have on a family, and how this can affect future generations.

> "I never saw how the second generation could be so affected…this living presentation of it was enlightening and was provided me with a felt sense of how deep the effects of alcoholism run" (A2, P23).
>
> "I have a deeper sense of understanding of how children are affect by alcoholism and/or any type of dysfunction" (A1, P9).
>
> "I gained a new level of understanding and perspective for family members who live with an alcoholic and the ripple effect that alcoholism can have for generations" (A1, P9).

> "The performance gave me greater insight into the lived experience of a child living with an alcoholic parent. I feel I have a better understanding of the immediate emotional trauma, as well as the lasting emotional impact and implications" (A1, P13).

Other participants, who did have lived experience related to alcoholism and addiction, acquired a deeper understanding of why they or their family members are the way they are; the performance helped them to understand their lived experience in a different way.

> "I think I came to better understand my father (the adult child of an alcoholic mother). I was able to reflect on certain things about how he related with us, and about things that were unsaid" (A1, P15).
>
> "Now I understand the anger in my sister-in-law towards her father…" (A1, P21).
>
> "Helped me understand and take action with family members dealing with addiction" (A2, P11).
>
> "My dad is an adult child of an alcoholic, and I'm watching those points clearly and gaining insight into my father" (1a, 31).

The focus group that occurred after the completion of the initial questionnaire also appeared to contribute to participants' understanding. In the follow-up questionnaire, a number of participants mentioned finding value in the focus group discussion, and how it influenced their understanding.

> "I don't have much first hand experience with alcoholism...the post performance discussion group where many participants were adult children of alcoholics gave me added insight" (A1, P27).
>
> "Actually the follow up discussion circle where so many others shared the nature of their experiences that were brought out by the play was enlightening" (A1, P31).

> "Perhaps listening to the audience member who was struggling with her recovery describe her perspective of AA and her positive reaction to witnessing the performance. I was able to appreciate her viewpoint and learn a little more about what recovery is like. I believe if I had not attended the performance, I would not have gained this new insight" (A2, P2).

Participant responses reflect that there were two levels of understanding impacted: understanding something one has little experience with and achieving a deeper understanding of personal and/or family lived experience. This understanding was the product of the performance piece content, the personal reflection that was encouraged though witnessing the performance, and participating in the focus group discussion following the performance piece.

Perspective. Increased understanding can lead to a shift in perspective. Some participants reported that as they learned more about the experience of being in a family struggling with alcoholism, their perspective on alcoholism, and aspects of the family experience, changed.

> "I think it changed my understanding of what it is like to grow up in a family with a parent who abuses substances. This in turn changed my perspective on how alcoholism is viewed" (A1, P10).
>
> "I definitely understand the issue further, and how it affects not only the addict, but the children/ families/ friends of the addict too. My perspective changed as I saw how deeply it can change/destroy/effect current and future relationships" (A1, P30).
>
> "Opened my perceptions about addiction" (A2, P11).

A few participants mentioned that their perspective of their self shifted in response to witnessing the piece, which in some cases lead to the desire to create change in one's life.

> "Perspective - I am recognizing that I've been in a victim mentality loop and I have been taking steps to break from that" (A3, P3).

Watching the performance also encouraged some participants to engage in perspective-taking and try to shift their perspective to include the perspective of others.

> "I think that, seeing that performance, because there are members of my family who were, like my dad, his dad was an alcoholic and I think it helped me also able to see the perspective of the people in my family and kind of like, why they are the way that they are, why they do the things that they do" (3a, 29).
>
> "You know I never thought of things that way. Having gone through the same situation its always about me me me. So it helped me to see things from a little bit different perspective" (2a, 9).
>
> "It also encouraged me to make more effort to show empathy towards others and to make sure that I understand other people's perspective" (A2, P9).
>
> "It allowed me to empathize with those in my family with similar experiences. Allowed me to see things from their own perspective" (A2, P12).

While more participants mentioned a change in their understanding, a shift in perspective occurred for some participants; a changed perspective on alcoholism and the effects of alcoholism, a shift in how one perceives one's self, and the ability to see a situation from someone else's perspective.

Hope. Many audience members used the word HOPE when discussing the performance piece. Some audience members included it as an emotion they experienced, others mentioned that the hopefulness of the piece was what they highly valued, and others felt that instilling HOPE was an actual function and purpose of the piece. HOPE was almost always connected to the possibility of

change, and the idea that healing, forgiving, and recovery are possible in the wake of addiction.

> "At the end I thought there was a lot of hope in that, there was also a lot of pain to it, but there also was a lot of hope. There is hope. There is recovery" (1a, 25).
>
> "There is the growing up and the coming through all of that, and seeking help, and there is hopefulness at the end" (1b, 47).
>
> "The intensity the play provided, to me, was an intense feeling of hope and actually made me feel I was not alone" (A1, P3).
>
> "It gave me hope for the future for handling the emotions and memories" (A1, P11).
>
> "It's a lesson of courage and hope for anyone struggling as it shows that someone did go though hell and survived and it's possible for others" (A2, P16).

Some participants discussed aspects of the piece that made them feel hopeful and, while most just referenced "the end" of the performance and how it finished on a hopeful note, others stated specific aspects of the piece (most commonly noted was the removal of the "layers").

> "Yeah she did a very good job of showing how there is hope and you can undo the layers and there is a bright light at the end if you work on it" (3a, 53).
>
> "Using the tensor bandage as the layers was a really good visual, when she was peeling them off that hopefulness really came out" (1c, 13).
>
> "And when those layers came off it was definitely, I totally felt that hope. You can be different, and you don't have to let past decisions dictate where you are now or where you want to go" (1c, 21).

This sense of hopefulness was prevalent in the responses of all three audiences and was found in both the questionnaires and the focus group

discussions. When creating the performance piece, an effort was made to show an entire personal process—not just the trauma but the treatment, recovery, and growth—as it seemed important to show all phases of the process when using this type of performance with individuals who are struggling with similar issues. Hopefulness appears to live at the intersection of many other concepts in the data, including a feeling of resonance and "not alone".

Artistic approach. In response to the question of what they valued about the performance, many audience members noted aspects of the ARTISTIC APPROACH. Some responses addressed "creativity" and "beauty" in general, while others pointed out specifically the aspects of the piece that they found had a strong influence on their personal experience watching the piece. Often, a discussion of the artistic approach to representation was also linked to concepts of emotion, simplicity, and how using an artistic approach can have an impact that goes beyond the use of words.

> "The honest and creative way it was told. There were enough very real moments so that there were no ifs ands or buts about what was being said, intertwined with the right amount creativity to really explore your own interpretation" (A1, P29).
>
> "People (and me) find this topic/disease so difficult to talk about so it was a release to see someone discuss it in such a creative way. You took a heavy subject and made it significant" (A2, P21).
>
> "Direct narrative, simple – no distracting sets or extraneous dialogue. Enough detail to really describe experience of child but not overwhelm audience emotionally" (A1, P32).
>
> "It was an intense emotional experience – beautifully crafted and wonderfully performed. This was not a one step removed performance as it was a deeply and I thought deeply personal experience – Brave!" (A1, P39).

> "Excellent acting, but very genuine, and especially I enjoyed the song and the 'layers'. Very 'realistic' performance that gives excellent idea what a young person goes through" (A2, P1).
>
> "I valued how the performance integrated movement, music, and acting in a barebones style" (A2, P17).
>
> "…presence of the actor; use of the simple staging; the blocks and the bandage. Simple music, simple movement" (A2, P20).
>
> "Even if their [sic] was just one actress, she was A-M-A-Z-I-N-G. Also, the script was wonderful. I also loved the fact that there was a lot of visual and auditive support" (A2, P28).
>
> "The visuals of the boxes…and the layers with gauze…I feel like people can explain those concepts to me with words 100 times but those visuals made it hit home big for me" (A3, P3).

As indicated by these responses, the artistic approach was in service to the PERSONAL CONNECTION, the RESPONSE, and the other aspects of the performance that were valued by participants (REVEAL and IMPACT) in that it helped to make these aspects of the witnessing experience possible. The performance was also valued on its own as being a good piece of art (apart from what it could accomplish or elicit from the viewer), as was articulated by a number participants throughout the study: "I felt that this was an excellent piece of theatre quite divorced from anything else" (2c, 12).

Change in value over time. It is important to note that participants were also asked what they valued about the performance in the two-month follow-up questionnaire, and while the responses still reflected the categories of REVEAL, IMPACT, and ARTISTIC APPROACH, the amount of participants who responded in certain ways shifted significantly (See Figures 5 and 6). For example, in the initial questionnaire, HONESTY was, by far, the most commonly reported value, with BEAUTY/CREATIVE APPROACH following closely

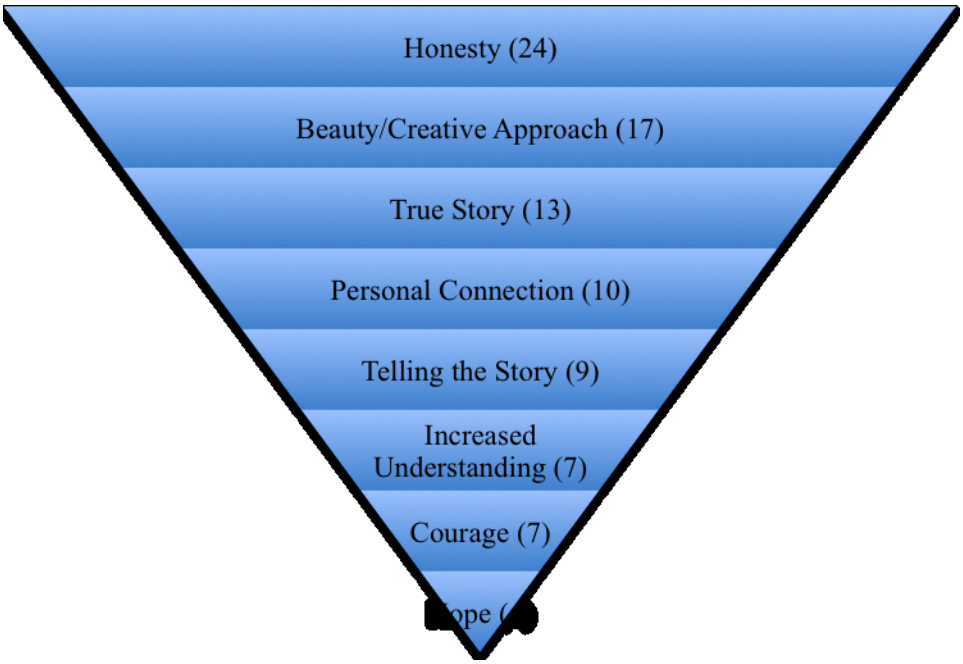

Figure 5. **Aspects of the performance piece valued by participants as reported directly following the performance in order of frequency.**

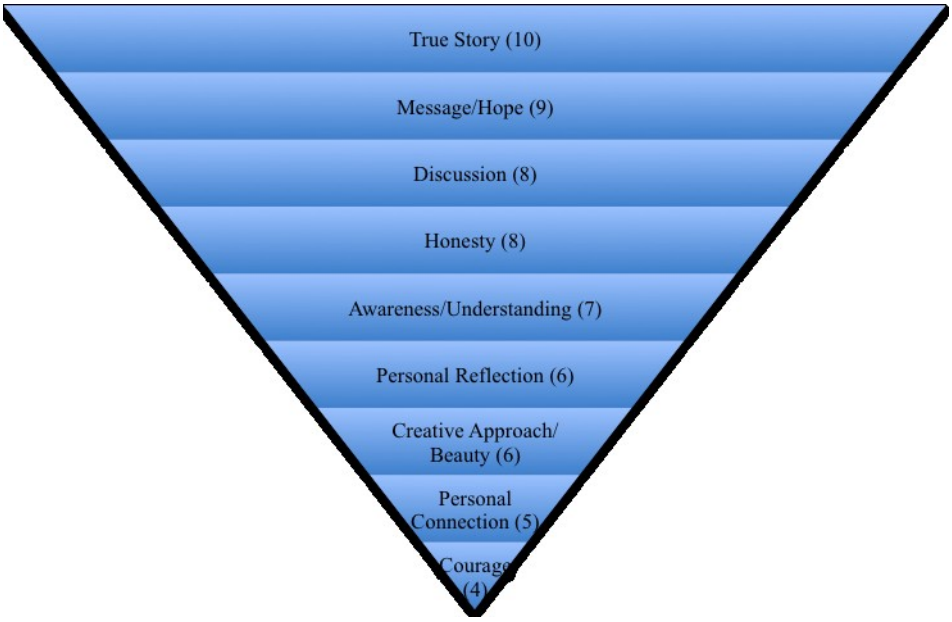

Figure 6. **Aspects of the performance piece valued by participants as reported two months following the performance in order of frequency.**

behind. HOPE was mentioned, but it was the least commonly stated value. In the responses to the follow-up questionnaire, TRUE STORY and HOPE/MESSAGE were the most commonly stated values. The results from a study conducted by Reinelt, Edgar, Megson, Rebellato, Wilkinson, and Woodis (2014) investigating theatre spectatorship and value attribution may help in understanding this shift in the way audience members valued the performance directly following the piece in comparison to two months later. The study found that "immediately after a performance the values most commonly identified are those embodied in the sensuous, emotional and affective experience of theatre; its immersive aspects" (Reinelt et. al., 2014, p. 28). Two months later, "the value most commonly identified is the theatre's opportunity to stimulate thinking and generate ideas and debate" (Reinelt et. al., 2014, p. 20). These results suggest that the value shifts from more affective and imaginative aspects of the performance piece to the more cognitive elements over time. The results from the present study align with these findings in that valuing the honesty of the performance and the beauty or aesthetic elements immediately after the performance connect more with emotion and the immersive experience of witnessing theatre. Valuing the message of hope and the fact that it was based on a true story, as reported two months later, appears to have a more intellectual and cognitive dimension. The findings of both studies (Reinelt et al., 2014 and this current study) add strength to the claim that theatre has the ability to impact the witness in both emotional and cognitive ways. A meaningful area for future research may be studying how this shift from an immediate appreciation for the sensory/affective components to the enduring cognitive aspects (thoughts and ideas) of the performance might influence the process and lasting effects of transformative learning.

Action

The data indicated that many participants engaged in some sort of action after witnessing the performance piece. The thematic heading of ACTION was used to group behaviour reported by participants that appeared to be—or was directly reported to have been—motivated by the experience of watching the performance, and the PERSONAL CONNECTION, RESPONSE, and VALUE assigned to the witnessing experience.

Stories. One action that was quite prevalent in the focus groups following the performance was the telling of personal STORIES, which appeared to be encouraged by the EMOTION, PERSONAL REFLECTION, and THOUGHTS that were elicited during the performance. When participants went further than expressing that the performance resonated with them or reflected their personal experience (coded RESONANCE), and began to share a narrative, the code STORIES was assigned. Many personal stories were told in the focus groups following the performances. Because these stories contain deeply personal content, the details of these stories will not be shared. Three examples will be provided below that are a composite of stories told; these examples contain elements of the reported stories but details have been changed to protect the participants' anonymity.

Sample Story 1:

I kept thinking of my friend Susan. Her dad was an alcoholic and I never really knew what it was like for her. One time she came home from school and confronted her father about his drinking. He pushed her down the stairs. When she finally told me about that I was sad for her, and angry at him, but I don't think I truly understood that this moment was connected to so many other moments that were not as extreme, but just as damaging.

Sample Story 2:

My brother was an alcoholic and, when he went into rehab, I played a big role in helping with the family; taking care of the kids and stuff. So the drinking has stopped now, but there are still huge issues. Like Shea said, the problems don't just disappear when the alcohol is gone. Now when I'm at the house I am always on edge. I'm always wondering when he is going to start again.

Sample Story 3:

Sometimes my mom was so bad that she wouldn't do anything but drink for days at a time. I had to be a parent because I was the oldest of my siblings. I would cook and clean and make sure my younger siblings got to school. I never knew what I was coming home to…because sometimes she wasn't like that. She was functioning. She was a mom. But other times, I was the mom.

The personal experience of witnessing the piece appeared to act as a catalyst for telling one's own story in the context of a group who had the shared experience of witnessing the performance. Not all participants engaged in storytelling, but sharing a personal narrative was a significant reaction to watching the performance in all three audiences.

Dialogue. In all focus groups, DIALOGUE took place between participants where ideas were expressed, and others responded to these statements with comments or questions. This dialoged often lead to a deeper exploration of a concept, or a more thorough exploration of an individual's experience connected to the topic of alcoholism and addiction. There were a variety of themes discussed by participants. While all topics discussed will not be identified, the following examples illustrate four common themes at the centre of dialogue: (a) the intergenerational nature of addiction, and addiction being a disease, (b) how the artistic approach can be accessible to individuals from diverse age groups and

types of experience, (c) how specific parts of the piece evoked thoughts and emotions, and (d) how the entire family system is affected by addiction.

Dialogue Sample #1 (Focus Group 1a)

I could identify personally….I haven't had any alcohol as an adult but I grew up in an alcoholic home and I can't take criticism. I can't take criticism, not even constructive. As soon as I feel like I have failed in any way, I overreact….When they did those 13 points, I was like yay, I'm not the only person.

Those points were so helpful. My dad is an adult child of an alcoholic, and I'm watching those points clearly and gaining insight into my father. It was really…

I'm just going to give you all chocolate, because I just want you to all to like me.

[overlapping laughs and talking]

Can I ask you a question? Did you find…because I'm in a similar situation…when I saw those points, I saw all those things in myself, you know but I didn't…don't have a parent who's an alcoholic. And so I kind of wonder if there is an intergeneration thing that happened, like do you kind of see some of those things in yourself?

Oh yeah, the criticism, […] the guilt and the shame […]. I find it really powerful when she did the chalkboard and you know, we have from genes and the […] and all these different things, right? I don't know, it's very powerful.

It all comes back to the same thing of it being a disease, right? We don't look at it as a disease we look at it as a lot of people thinking it's a moral deficiency. Why can't you change that? [other participant: why can't you stop?] And it really is a disease that's passed on. Whether you pick up the drug or alcohol, whether you have that problem, the disease is in you. You might be the one in the family it skips, but you still carry that. It's really becoming apparent in the society today that you see this. And the disease always plays out the same. It's always the same and it's always destruction. It's never good.

Dialogue Sample #2 (Focus Group 1c)

I think as a therapeutic model or whatever the word is, it's kind of…role-playing or storytelling in this theatrical way with families would be great because there's something just a little bit…there's a little bit of a protective, removed aspect to people acting out their own stories. Just the fact that they're acting out in front of other people might I think allows people to say things that they may not feel comfortable saying in an ordinary conversation. But because it's formatted in that slightly…well artificial…I don't know how to say it.

Safe.

Safe! It's slightly abstracted so it's slightly safer. And I think it would be an amazing workshop project to give with families. I don't know what the end thing is…If I had seen something like that when I was in high school it would have changed my life.

That's a pretty strong statement.

Well some people have strong values.

Oh I know, I'm just saying it is….There again I think that it has value…You referred to again taking it back to youth. I think adults can draw on that. Whether it's a marriage breakdown or it's a…it goes back to just dysfunctional families. Whether it's a sibling or what have you. It's about self-protection, and it demonstrates that. And going back to what you're suggesting, when you see that and it's a safe environment for you to unravel that for your self. It kind of sounds like you did to a certain degree. So what ever level you're on, what ever age you're at, there's probably still a potential to do that. And I think that says a lot for the performance if it's got that…affects that broad of spectrum…

And lets be honest, every family has some level of dysfunction, there's just degrees of it. So that's why you're right, I think anyone be it adult, any age, experience can benefit from this kind of exposure, experience, performance.

I think because of the storyline and it goes from such a broad spectrum, such a length of time. Like whether it's a child watching it, a parent watching it, someone that's struggling with an addiction at that time, they can pull something away from it just because of that storyline, and telling the story, and she does such a good job of showing it.

Dialogue Sample #3 (Focus Group 2b)

One of my favourite moments was when she was unrolling this kind of

towel and she was stuck into it and she was trying to get out but she couldn't. And at the end she could take off all the towel. So I was feeling good. I appreciated this moment.

When she felt like she could break free.

And filled with determination…

And the motivation that it gives to everyone that even if you think you're stuck you can do it till the end, you just need a bit of motivation, but you can do it.

Yeah I wanted to help her unwrap the thing.

But you know it's funny because I think that sometimes, if you see people struggling sometimes we want to take rid of their…but I think that it would be better not, but in real life too…it's always the thing to do. To do it for themselves. I think that even if it's painful to see people struggle, they need it to learn how to get up.

I think it's hard sometimes just to watch and see people struggling.

Dialogue Sample 4 (Focus Group 2c)
What struck me so powerfully was when she was using the box, it was the orbiting. We orbit around these stories.

[overlapping talking]

Actually that part inspired me so much I did my therapeutic integration based on how planets orbit and their solar systems, because that's like attachment right?

What is that though, is that the simple trauma of the family. Obviously, with her grandfather was unbelievably traumatic…

And everyone in the family rotates around that one person, right?

My wife's father was an alcoholic…serious. And I've heard the whole story many times of rock bottom and what that was. And this was a very cultured man, really very sophisticated. So how powerful that affects everybody, the whole family system.

And how every family has that one person who everyone kind of compensates to.

It doesn't have to be about addiction [other participant: it could be about a number of things], there's no addiction in my family but we definitely have the idea of secrets and pieces that are missing from the family history and the story. And I really strongly relate to that because, I don't know if she used the word disease or illness, and everything orbits around it. But I mean it can be so many things that suck the energy of the family, suck all the other members in, and don't allow them to have that…She had some beautiful imagery and words. Very simple but very profound…of not being able to find your own direction because you've spent so much time going around in circles around this thing, that's in the family.

And also trying to hide everything. You spend your energy trying to hide it so you're not living. You're just hiding.

It takes a tremendous amount of energy. And as she said, going to school and being fun and keeping a smile on her face. That too takes so much energy to be normal, to be fun, to be just a regular teenager when all this other stuff is going on behind the scenes.

It's like being two people. She's that outside person to everybody else, but then there's the inside person that's got all this shit going on. Pardon the expression.

Dialogue and discourse are highly valued within the context of family life education and contributes to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1981, 2000; Morgaine, 1992). Based on the focus group data, the performance appeared to act as an effective launching point for the telling of personal stories and the discussion of topics central to the experience of alcoholism and addiction in families. This dialogue also appeared to contribute to a deepened understanding and learning experience for those involved, as indicated by participants who stated in the follow-up questionnaire that they valued the focus group discussion.

Altered behaviour. In the follow-up questionnaire, most participants indicated that there had been a shift in UNDERSTANDING or PERSPECTIVE as a result of watching the piece and participating in the focus group discussion, however some participants also indicated that they had altered their behaviour in some way.

> "It changed my understanding because of course I know that these situations happen, but I do not know much about them therefore I am not sure how I would be able to help. This also leads into how it changed my

> behavior. Now that I have seen the performance and what some people really go through, I just want to make sure that I am doing what I can to help (if I encounter someone going through this) and if I can't do anything to help, just to be sure that I am acting appropriately" (A2, P3).
>
> "It allowed for my sister and I to actually have conversations about how we felt about our own experiences with our mother" (A2, P7).
>
> "It encouraged me to stop complaining about my finishing my masters. It also encouraged me to make more effort to show empathy towards others and to make sure that I understand other people's perspective. I made the decision to listen to others much more" (A2, P9).
>
> **"**Behavior - I think I'm less reactive…I attend ACOA [Adult Children of Alcoholics] meetings now too and am working on a positive life style and I'm following my heart; Relationships - I am loving to all the people in my life regardless of flaws and my relationships are improving" (A3, P3).

Other participants simply noted that the shift in UNDERSTANDING and PERSPECTIVE would lead to them treating others differently, though they did not specify in what way they have or plan on changing their behavour. Often when discussing this difference, participants used words such as "empathy", "compassion", and "support" to describe the internal experience that they plan to extend to others through behaviour.

Overview of Significant Findings

The results from this research indicate that it was important to participants that the performance was based on *lived experience*. The act of speaking about one's lived experiences reduces the isolation and shame associated with this experience, especially if the subject is one that is commonly considered to be shameful—or associated with stigma—within one's culture (for example, mental health issues, addiction, and suicide). Speaking about the experience openly can

break the cycle of *shame and silence* that perpetuates dysfunction. Watching someone else share their personal story gives the audience *permission* to think about, feel, and share their own stories. It appears that in order for the audience to connect emotionally with the piece, there needs to be balance between authenticity and skill in the creation and presentation of performances based on lived experience. The idea that performing stories of personal lived experience can break a pattern of silence and shame, and offer permission for others to also share their stories, reveals an important function of performing personal and family stories (as opposed to fiction or other people's stories).

Most audience members believed that using a combination of realistic and symbolic modes of *representation* strengthened the performance piece. The symbolic modes left room for personal reflection and provided an opportunity for the audience members to connect with the piece in a way that was personally meaningful, increasing the *universality* of the performance. The realistic modes created a direct connection between the audience and the performer, and it was these modes of representation that created an opportunity to reduce shame and increase dialogue around important issues. Based on the findings of this study, both modes of representation contributed to emotional arousal in the audience members.

Addressing such sensitive topics using an artistic approach offered a sense of *safety*. There was a lack of pressure on the audience members to react and respond in the moment and enough *aesthetic distance* where one could take in what s/he was witnessing, and attend to one's own memories and emotions being evoked. Participants highlighted the fact that beauty heightens the educational aspect of a performance piece such as this.

The *inclusion of lived experience* and a *balanced approach to realistic and symbolic modes of representation* appeared to create the conditions for certain personal experiences to take place in the audience members witnessing the

performance. Many participants made a personal *connection* to what they were witnessing; they stated that they saw their life reflected in the lived experience presented in the piece, could identify with the experience presented, or personally *resonated* with aspects of the piece. Many participants mentioned that the information in the performance piece could pertain to a variety of different experiences in a family in addition to the experience of having an alcoholic parent, and this universality allowed more people to personally connect and resonate with the piece. Audience members reported having some sort of personal *response* to what they were witnessing, included feeling emotion, engaging in personal reflection, and having thoughts related to the concept of alcoholism and/or family dysfunction. When asked what they *valued* about the performance piece, participants responded with (a) the act of revealing the self and the qualities it took to do this, (b) the impact it had on some viewers—something had occurred or changed in the participant in response to what they had witnessed, and (c) the artistic approach to representing these stories of lived experience. Many participants engaged in some sort of *action* after witnessing the performance piece. In the focus groups following the performance, participants shared personal stories and engaged in a dialogue (which often lead to a deeper exploration of a concept or experience). In the follow-up questionnaire, some participants indicated that they had altered their behaviour in some way in response to witnessing this performance piece.

CHAPTER VII. DISCUSSION

Transformative Learning Through Theatre: Emotion and Reflection

In order to understand how the presentation of lived experience through performance can foster transformative learning in the witness within the context of family life education, the primary question that guided this research was: *What*

elements of a lived experience performance piece (if any) do witnesses feel (a) evoke emotion and, (b) foster personal/critical reflection?

The results indicate that experiencing emotion leads to personal reflection and personal reflection leads to emotion. These two human processes are "two sides of the same coin"; they are interconnected phenomena that represent complementary ways that we take in, experience, and process information that is personally relevant. For this reason, it was impossible to isolate aspects of the performance piece that encouraged these processes separately; the same elements were mentioned by participants in relation to emotional arousal and personal reflection. A significant finding of this study was that both emotion and reflection appear to be encouraged by a sense of *resonance* resulting from the inclusion of lived experience (discussed in more detail below) presented using combined representation strategies (realistic and symbolic), which assisted in achieving optimal aesthetic distance (See Figure 7).

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that performance pieces that are developed for use within a family life education context with the goal of fostering transformative learning should be based on stories of lived experience, be designed to combine both realistic and symbolic modes of representation, and be structured in a way that encourages audience resonance.

Representation, Emotion and Reflection

When using these types of performances in family life education groups, it is necessary to consider that the individuals attending the group will have various amounts of theatre-viewing experience. The audiences in this research were also of mixed theatre-viewing experience, as indicated on their questionnaires, with the majority of participants having low to moderate theatre-viewing experience. The results of the questionnaires and focus groups indicate that *a mixed/balanced approach* to representation was valued by these audiences, and may have

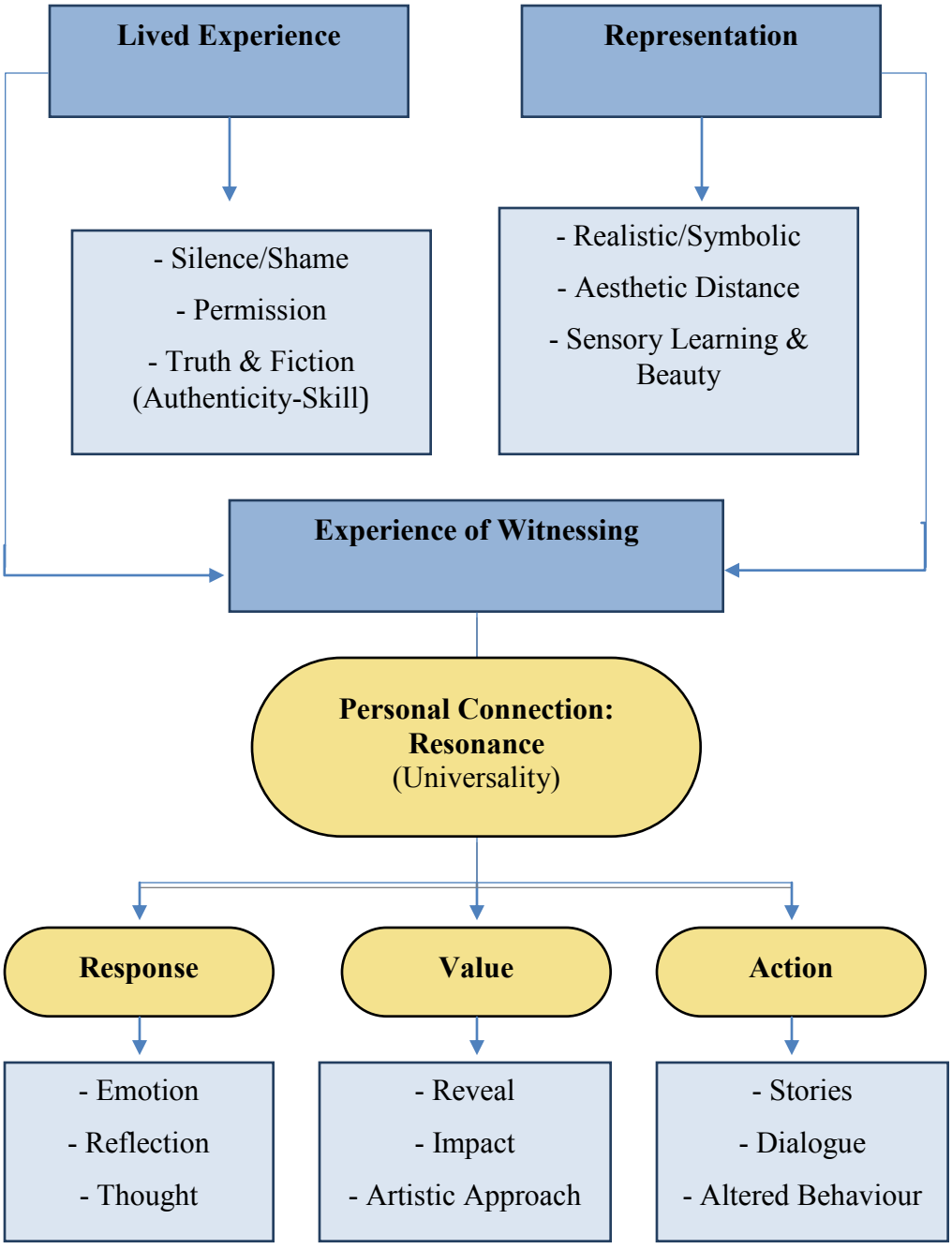

Figure 7. **Significant code categories that emerged from the data through analysis.**

contributed to initiating the process of transformative learning (as evidenced by the emotional arousal and personal reflection reported by participants). Using a few abstract/symbolic props and elements of the "real" through the inclusion of stories of lived experience (and many other elements that fall on the spectrum between symbolic and realistic), the participants felt that they were able to connect to the story they were seeing presented in the performance while simultaneously having enough space and prompts to reflect on their own experience. While many participants also connected with specific stories of lived experience that were presented, which allowed for emotional arousal and personal reflection, the more symbolic elements enhanced the *universality* of the piece, leading to a sense of resonance in a higher amount of audience members. Ultimately, participants reported that *both* symbolic and realistic elements lead to emotional arousal, both types of elements encouraged personal reflection, and both types of elements fostered personal resonance.

Utilizing both realistic and symbolic modes of representation appeared to assist in achieving *aesthetic distance*, an optimal point between overdistance and underdistance where witnesses can simultaneously think about an experience and feel the emotion associated with the experience without becoming overly intellectual or too emotionally flooded (Landy 1983, 2008, 2009; Scheff, 1981). As clearly articulated by Landy (2008), "at the midpoint of aesthetic distance, where both affect and cognition are available, the style of enactment has qualities of both realism and abstraction" (p. 105). Performing personal and family stories of lived experience established a relationship between the witnesses and performer that was relatively underdistanced, and the use of theatrical/aesthetic tools modulated this distance, allowing the audience to move through states of emotional arousal and personal, critical reflection.

The structure of the performance piece also appeared to affect aesthetic distance. The performance piece created for the study incorporated a variety of

approaches, including a basic braided plot (One character's story bookended by a second character's story), a review/episodic plot (different types of scenes to offer theatrical variety) where scenes were "knotted" allowing for some transition and reflection, and an overall arc that moved from the depths of a difficult experience in childhood, to a sort of growth and resolution as an adult. This approach to the structure appeared to be advantageous when fostering an oscillation between thinking and feeling. Audience members were able to "take breaks" from certain experiences that, when occur for a long duration or at a high emotional frequency, can lead to emotional flooding and/or disconnection. For example, a direct address storytelling approach would be taken for a couple of short scenes, and then a different type of scene would occur that allowed for a shift in distance, such as the projection of a short film piece, the playing of music, a movement piece, or the projection of the ACA laundry list. All of these types of scenes encourage different types of engagement, and this variation allowed the audience members to stay connected to the piece and regulate their emotions.

While a couple of participants with a high amount of theatre viewing experience would have preferred a specific aesthetic approach/type of representation—either very abstract/symbolic or more of the "real"—this was far from the majority of participants who were involved in this research and would be found in a general FLE group. For this reason, it is recommended that performances being used in this context utilize this mixed/balanced approach, as using only highly abstract symbols or very realistic content/approaches may limit the amount of resonance, emotional arousal, and personal reflection that can occur for audience members.

Resonance, Emotion and Reflection

Many theorists, in their own way, encourage theatre practitioners to provide space and opportunities for participants make links between their personal

experience and the performance piece they are watching. This phenomenon was labeled *resonance* in the context of this research. Jackson (2007) discusses the importance of leaving "creative gaps" and Brook (1995) believes that the content and material included in the performance should provide a common ground for all audience members to connect with the performance and with one another. Boal (1995) defines resonance as a more diffused kind of connection, which can include both identification and recognition. The findings of this study suggest that the audience members resonated with the performance as a result of a variety of elements that made the performance universal, connecting to one's own personal experience or the experience of others in the witness' lives (ie. identification and recognition was reported by audience members). Both the content (for example, realistic stories of lived experience) and the gaps (symbolic representation and presenting complex, multivocal pictures of experience) create an opportunity for the audience members to identify with what they are witnessing and project their own personal material or associations onto the character and performance.

Tracy (2010) uses the term resonance to refer to "research's ability to meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience" (p. 844), and asserts that it is an important factor in elevating the quality of qualitative research. Though Tracy discusses resonance in terms of presenting research findings, her perspective also aligns with the findings of this study on presenting performances based on lived experience. Tracy (2010) states that resonance can be achieved through *aesthetic merit* and *transferability*. Aesthetic merit, or representation through artistic, evocative and beautiful forms (Tracy, 2010), has been identified as important in representing stories of lived experience; it was valued by the participants in this study and was reported to contribute to personal resonance and the educational impact of the performance. Tracy (2010) believes that transferability occurs when the research/performance is considered valuable and meaningful across a number of different contexts, and audience/readers "feel as though the story of the

research overlaps with their own situation and they intuitively transfer the research to their own action" (p. 845). This is very similar to the concepts of resonance and universality in this research, where audience members felt that they could connect with what they were witnessing and found similarities or overlap with their own stories (even when they had not lived the exact same experience). Resonance is an important concept in the context of both qualitative research and performances based on lived experience; it allows those who witness to connect with, value, and find meaning in the research/performance.

Learning in relationship. The connection established between the witnesses and performance through the emotional and reflective capacity of resonance contributes to learning-in-relationship. As previously noted in the literature review, Yorks and Kasl (2006) advocate for engaging with arts-based approaches in order to access expressive ways of knowing. These authors noted four important functions of expressive ways of knowing. First, fostering this type of knowing—when paired with experiential, practical and propositional knowing—can result in a holistic type of learning. Expressive ways of knowing also "provide empathetic connections for learning-within-relationship" (Yorks & Kasl, 2006, p. 52), evoke personal experience, and provide access to feeling and emotion. The results of this study support the claim that engaging with performance-based approaches, specifically those that present lived experience with balanced representational strategies, has the capacity to tap into memories of personal experience and evoke emotion. The results also indicate that watching the performance piece can provide a foundation for connection with others, feeling "less alone" and learning in relationship through engaging in a discussion initiated by the experience of witnessing the performance.

Harnden (2014), in her autoethnographic performance piece *You Arrive*, synthesized the concepts of *mirroring* (Winnicott, 1957), the *gaze and gleam* of the caregiver (Kohut, 1977; Mahler 1968), and *mentalizing* (Fonagy & Target,

1997)—or having a caregiver attuning to our inner world—in order to articulate the importance of being seen. When one is truly seen, with all of one's strengths and weaknesses, through an empathetic and accepting gaze, one is "neurologically and effectively made real" (Harnden, 2014, p. 133). Although the cited theorists discuss these concepts in connection to child development, the need to be seen continues throughout the lifespan. Harnden (2014) coined the phrase: "I see you, seeing me, therefore I am" (p. 132) to reflect the importance of being seen in the creation of the self, and the role this can play in healing the effects of neglect—not being/feeling seen—in childhood.

In his book *Mirroring and Attunement: Self-Realization in Psychoanalysis and Art,* Wright (2009) applies aspects of Winnicott's theories in order to illustrate how art can replicate the mirroring process between infant and caregiver, and act as a reparative experience for those who have not had their experience mirrored back to them during childhood in way that allowed them to integrate and make meaning of their experience. When the caregivers act as a mirror for the infant's emotional world, "they echo and give form to the current feeling state" (Wright, 2009, p. 143). When an individual witnesses an art object (in this case, a performance) that mirrors back their inner felt experience or lived experience in the world (resonance), "this artistic mirroring can deepen, contain, and help integrate emotional experiences" (Harnden, 2014, p. 148). The spectator resonates with what they are witnessing because it mirrors back their own experience, which can lead to a sort of transformation in that witness. Theory related to performance as mirror to our emotional world, feeling "seen" through witnessing performance, and how that can influence one's ability to reflect on, digest, and integrate lived experience is an area worthy of future investigation. This psychoanalytic approach to understanding the experience of witnessing may deepen the conversation of how transformation occurs in a way that may surpass

what we would consider to be adult education, entering the realm of therapeutic change.

The Process of Transformation

According to Mezirow (2000),

> Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight. (pp. 7-8).

The process of transformation is a long and complicated journey involving a substantial personal shift. Mezirow (2000) outlines ten possible phases of transformation, and an adult learner may move through a variation of these phases during the process of transformative learning. The results suggest that performances based on lived experience, especially when paired with post-performance group discussions, may have the ability to *begin* a process of transformation in the witness related to a deeper understanding, change in perspective, and/or a desire to integrate these learnings into one's life. This may occur if the witnessing of a lived experience performance piece—through its ability to bring the witness into a place of critical reflection with heightened emotions—acts as an opportunity to be confronted with alternate ways of seeing the world, leading to a certain amount of disorientation, self-examination, and critical assessment of assumptions (Mezirow, 2000). Transformative learning involves seeing our world differently, and performance pieces that evoke emotion, stimulate personal critical reflection, and resonate deeply with an audience may act as a catalyst for transformation to begin.

Lived Experience in Performance Within Family Life Education

A subsidiary research question of this research was: *How important is the inclusion of "lived experience" in such a performance piece designed for use within FLE?*

The majority of participants felt that it was important or very important that performances being used for this purpose are based on lived experience. A substantial finding was that that the act of performing personal and family stories had an important function in this type of performance: to reduce shame/silence around sensitive family issues and provide permission for the witness to begin reflecting on and talking about one's own lived experience.

The findings of this study support White and Savage's (2005) focus group research on addiction in families and breaking the silence that is related to this family experience. They found that a "breakthrough of insight" (White & Savage, 2005, p. 25) is necessary before one can break the silence and discuss their experience with others, and this often occurs as a result of a reconstruction of one's perception of the addicted family member. White and Savage (2005) do not deeply investigate the types of experiences that assist in bringing about this shift in perspective and insight. It is possible that performances based on lived experience could act as a catalyst for this transformed perspective because, as indicated by the results of this study, this performance did encourage a new understanding and a shift in perspective for many audience members. Therefore, while the performance itself broke the silence around addiction in families, it could also lead to witnesses breaking their own silence about their experiences, as it appears to provide permission for others to do so but may also contribute to a shift in perspective that allows this to happen.

When using performances in FLE groups that are centered around family issues that are often shrouded in silence and shame (such as suicide, mental illness, addiction, and abuse), it appears to be very important to include content

that is based on lived experienced in order to help reduce this shame and provide participants with permission to be more open to reflecting on and discussing personal experiences. There is a possibility that the inclusion of lived experience may not be as important in contexts where the goals of showing a performance are different, or the topic being addressed is more openly discussed within the dominant narrative of our culture. However, when addressing sensitive issues shrouded in shame within a FLE context, the use of lived experience has an important function.

Authenticity and Skill

When designing a performance piece based on lived experience, there is always a question of where the source material will come from. There are a variety of factors to be considered when making decisions about the inclusion of lived experience, for example individual/family/community readiness to share a story publicly, and the skill of those creating the performance piece. An interesting dialogue came up in the focus groups around the idea of "authenticity" and "skill," and where a balance might exist between the two when creating performances to be used in a FLE context. The findings from this study suggest that if a performance is low on one scale it should be high on the other, as described clearly in the results section. This working hypothesis, which emerged from the participants' responses, could be tested more thoroughly in the future, both within the context of FLE and in other areas of applied theatre.

Lasting Impact

A final subsidiary question included in the research was: *What (if any) impact did witnessing the performance piece have on participants' beliefs, behaviors, or relationships at a two-month follow-up?*

Most participants who responded to the follow-up questionnaire reported some shift in understanding, perspective, behaviour or relationships. A change in

understanding was reported by the majority of participants who responded, though the type of understanding varied among participants. Participants with limited knowledge of and experience with alcoholism or addiction acquired a new understanding about what the experience of living in a family struggling with alcoholism might be like. Some participants who expressed having a personal connection to alcoholism or addiction claimed that they gained a deeper understanding of their family members, history, and/or dynamics. There were also many individuals who expressed having a changed understanding of different topics or themes that came up in the performance, including (but not limited to): (a) how being the child of an alcoholic affects an individual into adulthood, (b) how alcoholism affects other individuals in the family and future generations, (c) that many people may be suffering but putting on a brave face for the world, (d) the shame that people struggling with alcoholism and their family members experience, and (e) that we all have different coping strategies.

Some participants reported that watching the performance piece altered or reinforced personal believes and perspectives. While some participants simply checked the box "Perspectives/Beliefs" when asked about change, others described how their beliefs or perspectives were affected. The shift was most often associated with how one views addiction (the nature of addiction, seeing it as a disease), how one views others (everyone having their own struggles, never knowing what someone else is going through), or how one views themselves (maintaining a victim role, acting in ways that have been reinforced through past experiences).

Fewer participants reported a change in behaviour or relationships, though some participants mentioned treating others with more compassion, integrating the new knowledge and perspective into their work in the helping field, and making healthy changes in one's own life to deal with addiction problems or family dysfunction.

On the questionnaire, participants were asked why they attended the performance, and the responses indicated that there was a combination of integral and accidental audience members witnessing the performance (Schechner, 2003). While performance pieces to be used in family education are designed for an integral audience, the results of this study show that the performance was beneficial for both the accidental and the integral audience. While different lasting impacts were reported based on the level of previous knowledge, understanding, and personal experience with the material being presented, there was no significant difference in the results from one target group to the next or between those who would be categorized as integral or accidental audiences by Schechner (2003).

While two months is not a substantial period of time to acquire an understanding of the lasting impact the performance might have, or whether the process of transformation will continue, this short time period was necessary given the limitations of the study and the time period in which this study needed to be completed. It is recommended that, after integrating these types of performances into FLE groups, the facilitator perform a follow-up evaluation at least six months following the end of the group.

Applications to Family Life Education

Format

It is recommended that performances based on lived experiences be integrated into family life education programs to meet the goal of enhancing the lives of individuals and families, and encourage holistic learning. As indicated by the follow-up questionnaire, the focus group discussions were highly valued by participants. While these groups were designed to help participants share about their experience of witnessing the piece—ultimately to collect data about this experience—many participants found it to be a meaningful experience where they

were able to share their personal stories, learn about the experiences of others, and feel "less alone". Based on these results, it is likely that a discussion following a performance that has the goals of allowing participants to explore their personal experience, support others, and engage in two-way learning would be beneficial for participants. Ninety two percent of participants who responded to the follow-up questionnaire said that they spoke to someone about the performance. This indicates that the performance was able to initiate some sort of dialogue between the participants and another person, not just in the focus group discussions but in their own lives outside of that experience. As previously discussed in the literature review, learning in relationship and engaging in discourse can have a significant impact on fostering transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000; Yorks & Kasl, 2006). When the goal is to foster transformation for audiences/participants in the context of family life education programs, the role of such audiences need to be deeply considered and valued. Providing an opportunity to connect with others, discuss and debate ideas, and share personal family narratives after witnessing these performances is essential in connecting the use of performance with the goals of family life education. As articulated by Nisha Sajnini (2012), "therapeutic performances seeking to effect transformations amongst audiences would be encouraged to find creative ways of 'checking in' with those baring witness at various points in the performance project so as to offer multiple opportunities to identify with issues presented and to establish interest and consent" (p. 17). While this research advocates for moving beyond a typical audience role (only spectating and potentially engaging in a talk-back with the production team), exploring alternate ways of integrating two-way learning throughout the entire family life education session involving performance is an area of future consideration.

Overall, while performances based on lived experience can be an effective tool in providing an opportunity for participants to engage in personal reflection

and bring about emotional arousal, it is important that these performances be paired with other learning strategies—including group discussion, applied exercises (including case study, role play, activities), and the presentation of resources—in order to encourage holistic learning and transformation in the participants.

Safeguards

Some participants felt that witnessing performances of this nature could potentially be triggering or confronting for some audience members. For example there is a potential for individuals to have strong emotions that they may need assistance managing, or have memories of personal experience that continue to cause distress following the performance and discussion. When addressing sensitive issues that exist in families that are often surrounded in shame and silence, the exposition of such issues in a group context could potentially evoke personal responses that need to be addressed properly in order to be beneficial to the participants. As one participant noted, "After not talking about it, it could be confronting" (1b, 54). While many participants reported reflecting on personal memories they had not visited in some time, and experiencing emotions, no participants reported feeling overwhelmed by these responses following the performance verbally or in the follow-up questionnaire. One participant was visually upset following the performance, but was able to share about her feeling experience in the focus group and reported that it was an important experience for her by the end of the discussion. Despite not having any participants report being overwhelmed—or appearing as such after the discussion—some participants did discuss the potential of this happening in the focus groups.

There are some participants who felt that, due to the immediate and "powerful" nature of performance, and its ability to evoke emotion and personal memories, it would be necessary to have counsellors and other support services

available for processing and seeking assistance, should it be necessary. I also believe that this may be an important consideration, and the family life educator who is facilitating the group in which this type of performance is taking place should be sure to have resources on hand for those who require emotional and practical support, and want to seek personalized assistance that surpasses the aims of the family life education session. It is necessary to anticipate the potential reactions of participants and put safeguards in place to help support participants in their process.

Fostering Hope

Many participants felt that watching the performance made them feel a sense of hope, and "less alone", which is a potential outcome of using this type of performance in FLE. It is possible that this feeling of hope and connection with others in an experience that has been previously silenced and hidden could be a factor in allowing the performance to act as a catalyst for discussing personal experience and engaging in critical, personal reflection. The performance piece was built specifically to show an arc in experience; it followed a journey through the hardships of an experience, the recovery, and the resolution that, although not perfect, allows for the potential of growth and repair. A large percentage of participants noted that this hope was a highly valued aspect of witnessing the performance, and contributed to their personal growth and pursuit of altered behaviour. As articulated by White and Savage (2005), "families need to know that there are permanent solutions to addiction and that there is hope for their loved ones and their family" (p. 28). Therefore it is suggested that others who are interested in creating such performance pieces consider the guidelines for building a performance (outlined below), which include fostering a sense of hope.

CHAPTER VIII. CONCLUSION

Reflecting on all phases of this research—from scribbling theories in a notebook during my undergraduate degree, to standing on stage in front of audiences performing a piece about my family history, to sitting in front of complex diagrams of the results—I cannot help but feel completely humbled that the participants have let me into their inner world in order to understand their process of witnessing. I finally had the opportunity to chip away at the questions I have held for a very long time. What I have found, and have been able to articulate in this research text, may inspire more questions than answers. Despite this, it appears as though this research, in all of its complexity, captured a limited yet meaningful picture of what it means to witness a performance based on lived experience and the possibilities that exists for using this type of tool in family life education programs. The results are a reflection of my own interpretation of the data and, given the nature of qualitative research, it is possible that someone else with a different frame of reference and experience may identify other phenomena emerging from the data. With that said, I believe the results are rooted theory, rigorous method, and a deep and genuine curiosity to learn more about the experience of witnessing. I am excited about the possibilities that exist for using the theory generated from this research to develop programs that may truly help struggling families. As I conclude this research text, I will briefly describe the limitations and future recommendations associated with this work.

Limitations

There are aspects of this research that warrant drawing attention to in order to acknowledge how I, as a researcher, "bumbled" through this process and improvements that could be made on the study. As artfully stated by Jason Butler (2014), "by labeling them 'limitations' it would seem to imply that without these limits, the research would be able to achieve something concrete, absolute,

truthful" (p. 155). I do not believe this absolute truth exists when investigating human lived experience. I believe that you cannot separate the research from the researcher, that grounded theory aims to identify *a* theory not *the* theory, and that every piece of knowledge we produce or consume is framed by how each individual uniquely perceives the world. For these reasons, while the title of this section remains "limitations", the following points will be discussed as "considerations", and areas that would benefit from consideration if a similar study was undertaken.

I used existing theory and literature to develop the research questions, and this theory also framed my understanding of the results and ultimately shaped the theory that was generated from this research. Emotional arousal and personal/critical reflection were identified in the literature as being present and important in both theatre and transformative learning. Therefore, while there were open questions about the experience of witnessing the performance piece, other questions asked specifically if these responses occurred and (if so) what participants believed initiated these responses. Had I not included these specific questions, and simply inquired into the experience of witnessing without this scaffolding, different results may have emerged from the data.

Because grounded theory is designed to generate theory, and therefore a system of coding is used to find how the data connects and diverges, there is a focus on the thematic and conceptual understanding of an experience. While it does provide insight into the experience of witnessing this performance piece, the individual participant voices and stories are virtually unheard in this research. As the person who had the privilege of reading the transcripts repeatedly, I was exposed to and honored to hear the stories being brought forward of family struggle, perseverance, resilience, and forgiveness. While there was an attempt to use as many direct quotes as possible in this research text order to let participants

speak for themselves, another study—with a different methodology and goals—may be able to capture these stories and represent them in a meaningful way.

Due to the nature of qualitative research, the findings of this research cannot be broadly generalized with any degree of certainty. The results capture the experience of these specific audience members watching this specific performance piece at the time and place it occurred. While it may be possible to transfer some of the findings to different contexts, and use the theory to inform future work, the findings do not claim to represent every audience watching any performance piece based on lived experience.

The limited duration and depth of this study must also be considered. While it appeared that a point of saturation was met, and analyzing more data was not contributing new variations and dimensions to each code, only being able to do a two-month follow-up provided a limited picture of the long-term impact of watching this performance piece. Being able to collect data over a longer period of time could have provided a deeper understanding of how the experience of witnessing is remembered and valued over time, and how it influences future understanding, perceptions, relationships, and behavior.

Recommendations

The ultimate goal of this study is to produce knowledge that can be applied in practice to inform the creation and use of performances based on lived experience in a FLE context. With a connection now clearly established between witnessing performances based on lived experience and transformative learning, there is the potential that these arts-based methods will be integrated more frequently into FLE groups. I am excited about the possibility of using performance as a way to help FLE participants connect to their own stories, engage in a dialogue with others, and begin the process of transformation. What follows is a list of recommendations—most of which have been noted in the

discussion section—for future researchers and practitioners who wish to build on this theory and apply it in real-world contexts.

Creating the Performance

1. It is recommended that performance pieces that are developed for use within a family life education context with the goal of fostering transformative learning should be designed to combine both realistic and symbolic modes of representation, and be structured in a way that encourages audience resonance.
2. Include stories of lived experience in the performance piece. The results of this study demonstrate that the performer having some connection to the lived experience increases the amount of emotional arousal and personal reflection, reduces silence/shame around family issues, and provides participants with permission to begin reflecting on and speaking about their own lived experience. The results also indicate that the inclusion of lived experience is still flexible, and could happen to varying degrees depending on the skill of the individuals creating the performance. When considering the balance between authenticity and skill, it appears that if a performance is low on one scale it should be high on the other. If the "authenticity" of the piece is high (in that the lived experience is related to those on stage), then it is accepted that the technical skill may be lower, and the reverse is also true.
3. It is suggested that others who are interested in creating such performance pieces keep in mind that it is important that the performance fosters a sense of hope. Therefore it is necessary to consider the content and arc of the performance in connection to the concept of hopefulness when designing the piece.

Application to Practice

1. It is recommended that performances based on lived experiences be integrated into FLE programs to act as a springboard to accessing personal feelings and memories, and beginning a dialogue about lived experience in the FLE group. This approach will help to facilitate two-way learning and may act as the catalyst for beginning the process of transformation.
2. Post-performance group discussions should be utilized directly after watching the piece, and in following sessions, to allow participants to process what they have witnessed, share what is coming up for them in response to the witnessing experience, and work toward the goals of FLE groups (which include sharing resources and two-way learning).
3. The family life educator who is facilitating the group in which this type of performance is taking place should be sure to have resources on hand for those who require emotional and practical support, and want to seek personalized assistance that surpasses the aims of the family life education session.

Researchers

1. A more longitudinal inquiry into the experience of witnessing performances based on lived experience would strengthen this area of study. This more general area of study could be pursued in a variety of applied theatre contexts. It is also recommended that, after integrating these types of performances into FLE groups, the facilitator perform a follow-up evaluation at least six months following the end of the group to evaluate the efficacy of including such performances in FLE groups.
2. An emerging area of research is the complementary axes of "authenticity" and "skill" when designing performance pieces based on lived experience. This may include performances in any theatre subgenre, including

ethnotheatre, performance autoethnography, therapeutic theatre, documentary theatre, and verbatim theatre. Further research into the definition and variance of each axis and the relationship between the two would benefit a variety of practices that fall within applied theatre and performance.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN:
Witnessing Stories: *The Transformative Impact of Witnessing Performed Lived Experience Within the Context of Family Life Education*
Approved by Concordia University's Human Research Ethics Committee
(Research Protocol #30003987)

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a research project being conducted by Shea Wood of the Individualized PhD Program at Concordia University under the supervision of Bonnie Harnden of the Creative Arts Therapies Department, Faulty of Fine Arts, at Concordia University.

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to gain a deep understanding of how the presentation of lived experience through performance can be used as a tool in a family life education group in order to facilitate learning and personal reflection in the participants.

B. PROCEDURES

I understand that I will be watching a performance for approximately 40 minutes about the experience of being the child of an alcoholic. I will then be asked to complete a short questionnaire for approximately 15 minutes and participate in a group discussion for 30 minutes. Including an introduction to the research procedures and signing this consent form, which will occur before the performance, my total time involvement in this research will be 1 hour and 45 minutes.

I understand that in two months time, I will receive a short follow-up questionnaire by email and will be asked to complete the questionnaire (this may take an additional 15 minutes, resulting in 2 hours of total time spent participating in the research project).

I understand that the group discussions will be audio recorded and eventually transcribed and used as data in the study. These audio recordings will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher and research assistants transcribing the data, or used for any purpose aside from contributing data to be analyzed.

I understand that all data collected (including the questionnaires, focus group audio

recordings, and transcripts) will be kept in a filing cabinet, to which only the researcher has access, throughout the duration of the research process. When participant data is transferred onto a computer, the electronic data will be saved in a secure, password protected section of the researcher's personal computer and will not include any identifiable information.

I understand that participant data will be kept until the final draft of the dissertation has been finalized (approximately December 1st 2015). While copies of verbatim quotes from the textual data collected will be kept for future publications and presentations, all questionnaires, transcripts, audio recordings, and any other documents containing participant information will be destroyed at this time. All paper-based information will be finely shredded and disposed of, and electronic data will be deleted.

I understand that my identity will be kept confidential and not included in any of the printed or presented material based on this study. I also understand that I may provide my contact information in order to receive updates on the research project and receive a copy of the final research report.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

I understand that the performance piece may elicit strong emotions or arouse discomfort, which is a possible risk of participating in the study. A possible benefit of the study is that the performance piece may assist me in my work or personal life, as it may provide a deeper understanding of the reality of living with an alcoholic parent and how alcoholism affects families.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime up until December 1st 2015 (when the final draft of the dissertation will be finalized) without negative consequences. Any data I have provided will be destroyed (through shredding hard copies of documents and deleting all electronic data).

- I understand that my participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity).

- I understand that the data from this study may be published in a paper, available on Spectrum, and/or presented in academic/public forums.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

If at any time you have questions about the research, please contact the study's *Principal Investigator*:
Shea Wood, Individualized Ph.D. Program; Fine Arts Department of Concordia University
shea.wood@concordia.ca or
Faculty Supervisor: Bonnie Harnden, Department of Creative Arts Therapies, Faculty of Fine Arts, Concordia University - bonnie.harnden@concordia.ca

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481
ethics@alcor.concordia.ca

Appendix B: Questionnaire

WITNESSING STORIES QUESTIONNAIRE

Basic Demographic Information:

1. Age: _____ **2.** Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Other

3. Email Address *(for follow-up questionnaire)*: _____

☐ I would like to receive updates on the research project and performances

4. Highest level of education: ☐ Elementary ☐ High School ☐ College/Cegep ☐ Undergraduate ☐ M.A. ☐ Ph.D. ☐ Other:_____

5. How often do you attend theatre performances?
☐ 0-1 times a year ☐ 2-5 times a year ☐ 6-10 times a year ☐ More than 10 times a year

Questions About Your Experience Witnessing the Performance *(use reverse if necessary)**:***

6. Why did you decide to attend this performance?

7. What is your relationship (if any exists) with the topic of this performance?

8. What (if anything) do you value most about this performance?

9. What types of emotions (if any) did you experience while watching the piece?

10. What aspects of the performance (if any) evoked an emotional response from you?

☐ Music/Sound ☐ Lighting ☐ Props ☐ Text/Story ☐ Movement ☐ Acting ☐ "Liveness" (having a live person in front of you) ☐ Other audience members ☐ Other: _____ Please explain:

11.
a. Did watching the performance bring up memories or thoughts of your personal life and/or experiences? ☐ Yes ☐ No
b. If yes, please explain the *type of memories* and *what aspects of the piece* allowed you to reflect in this way:

12.
a. Did any aspects of the performance make you reflect on your own beliefs or perspectives?
☐ Yes ☐ No
b. If yes, please explain the *types of reflections* and *what aspects of the piece* allowed you to reflect in this way:

13. During the performance, did you connect with the person on stage as:
☐ A Character
☐ A Real Person
☐ Other: _____
Please explain how this affected your experience of watching:

14. How important was it to you that this story was based on real lived experience?
☐ Not Important
☐ Somewhat Important
☐ Important
☐ Very Important
Please Explain:

15. Do you have any final comments about your experience of witnessing this performance?

Thank you for completing this Questionnaire. Your responses are valued and appreciated.

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. The discussion will begin with an *engagement* question: Can you describe your experience of witnessing this performance piece?
2. When appropriate, *exploratory questions* will be introduced:
    - How did you feel about the individual on stage?
    - How did you feel about the story you witnessed?
    - What did you feel while watching the performance?
    - What did you think about while watching the performance?
    - How do you feel performances based on real people's stories could be used to help families?
3. The focus group will end with an *exit question*: Is there anything else you would like to say about witnessing this performance piece?

Appendix D: Research Journal Excerpt

April 2014

In all honesty, I think juggling the researcher and performer roles took my focus off the vulnerability and anxiety of sharing my family story. My main concern was for the research portion to go smoothly (especially the first time) in terms of introducing myself and the research, timing the whole evening, being sure all audience members provided informed consent, being sensitive to ethics, making sure all recording devices worked, hoping participants would provide enough data in the questionnaires and hoping that the focus group discussions went smoothly. Then there was my role as the performer and all of my concerns about the piece itself. I had rehearsed once with my technical director. Would the sound, projection and lighting cues go smoothly? Would I remember all my lines? Would I feel "in it" or disconnected (which I usually felt resulted in bad acting)? Would the audience respond? Did I create a piece that's going to help me answer my research questions? Am I a good enough performer? All of these concerns related to the performance and the research didn't fill me with anxiety as much as they simply occupied and dominated my thoughts. They did not leave room for me to think about what it truly meant to tell this story to these people. How would it feel? It wasn't until afterwards—processing with my mom and getting feedback from the audience—that it truly started to sink in that I had opened up my truth. Until the audience expressed appreciation and gratitude, I didn't even realize that what I had done was courageous.

I knew the first audience would be difficult for my mother, as it included family and individuals from the community who have known mom and the family in many different contexts. While the focus groups happened, I debriefed with my mom. She told me she had read the script every day leading up to the performance. She knew that the embodied/theatrical nature of the piece might

bring up emotion, so she didn't want the words themselves to be triggering. She desensitized herself by reading it over and over. What I found interesting was that my mom said she had been so pre-occupied with the hope and desire that everything went smoothly for *me*, that I did well, that she hadn't thought much about how people would respond to her. She thoughts about the basics: what will it be like for my siblings to see this experience (one that they share) from my perspective? But she said she was genuinely surprised when people came up to her after and thanked her. They thanked her for her honesty, her courage, they told her she was brave and strong. She said she hadn't expected that. Those messages came from many types of people: family, friends, acquaintances, and people she'd never met. I received many of the same types of comments. I was relieved that they found our honesty and our courage to tell our story inspiring.

Though the concerns about successful research and a good performance were still present at the second performance, the feeling of personally being seen was much more present for me. As the audience filled with past and current students, past and current professors, and colleagues in the field I started to think about what it meant for me to reveal that I had struggled with addiction in my youth. Would it make me a less credible researcher or professional? Would my students' level of respect for me change? Would colleagues still feel comfortable working with me? An interesting question surfaced more than once in my preparation to present this to an audience: my addiction experience was not related to alcohol. It's not explicitly made clear in the piece what my addiction experience is. What will people think if they see me having a drink? If they run into me at the pub? Will they think I have broken sobriety that I had never established (because there was no need – I never had an addiction to alcohol). In the end I knew this feeling of being seen by my fellow professionals and all the questions that came with it was part of the purpose of the work (a purpose that quickly emerged in the data after the first performance): to speak your truth, to

overcome shame by sharing your story and breaking a silence to claim and recognize your history. I knew it was something that had to be done. My mother felt completely different at this performance. She reported feeling distant and disconnected. No one knew her. A bunch of academics that she doesn't know are watching her story and then talking about it. Of course she was still interested in the way it would be received and the data that would be collected in this setting. She had a strange personal experience, feeling disconnected from the people in the room and even her own story, because no one attributed it to her.

The third performance was a wild card. I didn't know what to expect. These people were the family members of those currently being treated for drug addiction or alcoholism. I had been told about some of the dynamics of the group: some people came in angry or emotional, some people have had their own struggles with addiction (not surprising given the intergenerational nature of it), there might be alumni from the program there and there might be some resistant participants. Before the performance began, a woman—having read the consent form—approached me saying that the performance was about alcoholism and she was there because her daughter was drug addict. How would this be relevant to her? I explained that the performance addresses how addiction can affect families, and I hoped she would get something out of the performance. None of my worries about being seen were present – this seemed like that safest place of any to tell our story. Worries of all going smoothly were present but not overbearing. I felt quite present. Within a few sentences, the woman who had approached me began to cry. She cried through the whole thing (later discussing how it brought up many of her own experiences as a child). I screwed up a few times, re-arranged sentences and stumbled on the laundry list. A part of me was disappointed but most of me knew (a) most people would not notice most of the mistakes, and (b) it likely made me look more human. The small mistakes I made was the result of

me being authentic and present, rather than locked into the perfection of following a script.

When it was over my mom seemed somewhat more emotional. She said it was the most emotional performance for her – it had a different energy. I agreed. Something about being in that small room with those people created an intimacy that was certainly present with the other groups, but somehow heightened. After the focus group, when we returned to the room, I saw a man walk up to my mother and pull her into an embrace. I felt some strange mix of emotions well up inside me. I felt that somehow I was making a difference to these people and to my mother. This communion, this sharing of love and comfort, brought that realization to me.

Appendix E: Key Terms

Aesthetic: A term used to describe both the qualities connected to the creation and presentation of the work, and how the work is perceived and received by the audience.

Aesthetic Distance: An optimal position where one can access their emotional states while simultaneously maintaining an observer stance, leading to catharsis, reflection, and healing

Discourse: The specific use of dialogue for the purpose of exploring a common understanding, and assessing the justification of a belief or meaning of an experience.

Experiential Knowing: A visceral type of knowing that is the site of emotion, empathy, and intuition.

Lived Experience: An individual's personal narrative or story, or the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions connected to an experience that happened in the world.

Practical Knowing: The ability to demonstrate a skill.

Presentational/Expressive Knowing: Involves an intuitive grasp of imaginal patterns, which are expressed through various types of artistic expression.

Propositional Knowing: Conceptual and intellectual understanding.

Realism: [concept, not movement] Presenting a "likeness to life" on stage; theatre conventions that enhance the feeling of real life in text and performance.

Symbolism: [concept, not movement] Representing ideas and objects as symbols; images that hold more significance than is explained by their existence.

Transformative Learning: A shift in belief, perspective, or understanding that influences behavior brought about by emotional engagement and critical reflection.

Witness: The role of audience members in theatre, implicating the audience as being active in the theatrical process, even if not actually participating in creating the drama.