

Exploring the Broadway pandemic shutdown through transformation, hermeneutics, and arts-
informed narrative inquiry

by

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B.S., Northeastern State University, 1994
M.S., Oklahoma State University, 2012

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Abstract

The unprecedented 18-month pandemic shutdown of Broadway was extraordinary in that was much longer than any other shutdown of Broadway, affected not only work but also living arrangements, occurred during a slurry of political upheaval, and challenged factors of self-identity. The primary reason for this research was to understand the effects this shutdown had on the lives of five Broadway professionals. This research relied on the combination of three adult learning theories: a) perspective transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978/2003; 1997; 2000), b) communicative action (Habermas, 1984; 1991), and c) hermeneutical understanding (Dilthey, 2002; Gadamer, 1980; Ricoeur, 1977). Special focus was paid to the first phase of the disorienting dilemma in the transformative learning theory, the ideal speech situation inside the public sphere in communicative action; and the extended-extended understanding of visual, spatial, and movement text as part of the hermeneutical understanding. In addition, this research built upon the understanding and use of arts-based and arts-informed research by defining and clarifying a distinction between the two (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Saldaña, 2016).

Data was collected in an arts-informed narrative inquiry (Kim, 2015) way in which the five participants provided a song and dance number that represented their experiences of the 18-month pandemic shutdown. Seven themes, or scenes, resulted from the data. The data were described in an unusual way in that it was reported through a novella-script that integrated actual quotes by the participants as if they were in the same space communicating with one another. Additionally, a musical theatre fairytale with a little fairy guide was used to aid in hermeneutical understanding for this community. This journey through this research has provided insights into the effects of a remarkable global shutdown, the importance of a safe space for members to speak freely, and using art in a protective way inside that safe space.

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Abstract

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Dedication

Dedicated to the performers, creators, crew, directors, and choreographers of Broadway and the performing arts community, and all those who served or are attached to this art genre in any way. This unprecedented shutdown caused hurt and challenges that have sometimes been left denied and unspoken. Let this research be one piece of representation for this unprecedented time.

Chapter 1 - Introduction: The Story of Musical Theatre during the Pandemic Shutdown

Once upon a time in the land of Broadway...

... there were five musical theatre professionals. They sang and danced and directed and choreographed to their hearts' content. Until one day, a terrible, deadly, horrible, terrifying plague came to plague their land. This was not just any ole plague, it was a plague of pandemic proportions. It was the worst ever plague in Broadway land, in all the united lands, in all the foreign lands, in all the universe. It caused a great divide in the people of all the lands. Their beliefs and religions and justices were at odds. Some of the people believed that a shelter in place was necessary for staving off suffering and death. Some of the people believed that the economy should continue to prosper, and that herd immunity would secure survival. Tongues were sharp, not in check, and vengeful. Neither side of the great divide would budge. Until finally, it was apparent that something needed to be done. The death toll from the plague was astounding, higher than any other plague or any other cause of death (Cox & Amin, 2021).

Although the great leaders and healers and philosophers and wizards could not agree on how to best ward off the evil pandemic, they did all, however, agree to some precautions. It was ordered that all businesses of nonessential worth, close and lock their doors. It was suggested, but not ordered, that the following must occur:

- *All people shall separate themselves, one from another
with six feet amplitude*

- *All people shall cover their snout and muzzle their inlet
so germs cannot pass*
- *All hands shall be antisepticed on the routine*

Long overlooked businesses and professions became heroically essential.

The menial task of shopping for sustenance and supplies was bestowed upon those unemployed or between employment. Healers were worked, overworked, essential, and oft the last face seen by those fighting and losing their battle with the pandemic evil. Feasts in the village inns, taverns, and cookshops were traded for rides in the fossil fuel powered carriage to get boxes and bags and baskets of nourishments and drinks. Employment was lost for some and found for others. Educational establishments went from bustling milieus to wizardry of lessons that zoomed through the air and landed on projection boxes in halls and kitchens and even sleeping quarters. Worship was conducted outdoors by addressing people in their fossil fuel carriages in large open spaces. People all across the united and foreign lands did not go out to mingle or frolic or exercise. Therefore, and forthwith...

On the 12th of March in the year 2020, it was decided, Broadway land would shut down (Russo, 2020). The stage lights were turned off, the instruments were quieted, the performers were furloughed, the directors and choreographers became unimaginative. There would be no singing or dancing or acting any more. At least on stage, with large audiences, crowded into performing arts centers, there would be no singing or dancing or acting until further notice!

This was unheard of! Broadway land had only been shut down a few times in its history for such things as a power outage, union negotiations, weather

related concerns, and the 9/11 attack of the united lands. But never had it ever been closed for months (Dilella, 2021; Russo, 2020). This was a travesty. For you see, Broadway land was not only a geographical location in the northeastern corner inside the united lands. It was a band of people who traveled across the united and foreign lands to bring messages of song and dance and theatre that challenged and shook the status quo of the dominant norms.

Research Introduction

This was an arts-informed narrative inquiry (Kim, 2015) study of five musical theatre professionals on the disorienting effects they experienced in response to the March 12, 2020 shutdown of Broadway due to the Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) pandemic (Russo, 2020). Art gives depth to communication as stated by Sanders (2004), “The arts embolden us to perform that which we have not quite, but almost have been able to speak or understand in our reading of the world” (p. 63). As exemplified in the previous pages, an arts-based narrative report, in the form of a story or fairytale, will be threaded throughout this dissertation, to bring a deeper understanding of the disorientation caused by this pandemic. This type of report has been used by authors and researchers in The Center for Arts-Informed Research (Gislason & Cameron, 2008) as a way to bridge the gap between art and the social sciences. This narrative report that the researcher has developed combines the tradition of the fairytale format, which is not far removed from many musical theatre scripts. Additionally, the traditional fairytale text has been combined with current day text, which brings respect to tradition while also modifying the usefulness of current realities and expectations. This has been a useful inclusion of the arts format because it has provided a deeper understanding of the musical theatre communal intuitions and personal perceptions.

The arts-based fairytale format travels throughout all chapters of this dissertation and is in a similar structure as a musical theatre production by having two acts. Act 1 is comprised of chapters one through three; Act 2 contains chapters four and five. Act 1, chapter 1 is the introduction of the fairytale, where actors (experts) are introduced, and plots (conceptualizations) are portended. Act, 1 chapter 2 sets the scene with past literary descriptions and explains how we got to where we are. Act 1, chapter 3 is the foreshadowing imagery of where we plan to go. Act 2, chapter 4 is the highlighting climax of findings, explorations, and interpretations told through a culmination of the interview transcripts in a novella-script sort of way. Act 2, chapter 5 is the road home reflecting on the transformational learning that has been experienced throughout this real journey.

This chapter includes the rationale of the study, details of the study, and operational definitions. These definitions are placed before the remaining sections in this chapter so that the reader may have a familiarity with terms while experiencing the theoretical and methodological frameworks. The next section is qualitative research which supports the macro- and micro-level theoretical frameworks followed by the narrative inquiry arts-informed methodologies which lead into the methods. This necessitates the transparency of the researcher's subjectivity, culminating into the research purpose and research questions. Finally, there are sections on significance, limitations of the study, and the chapter summary.

Rationale

The purpose of this exploratory study was to understand the disorientating effects that occurred in the professional musical theatre community when Broadway shut down in March 2020. As mentioned previously, this was not the first time Broadway had shut down. It had shut down due to power outages, union strikes, weather related issues, and the 9-11 terrorist attacks

(Dilella, 2021; Russo, 2020). However, the previous record of shutdown was 25 consecutive days for a strike by the Musicians Union (Dilella, 2021; Russo, 2020). What was precedent for this shutdown, was the extended length. March 12, 2021, marked the one year anniversary of the shutdown of Broadway. In anticipation and hope of the reopening of Broadway, the Broadway community performed a surprise pop-up performance in Time Square wearing masks and/or shields while practicing social distancing guidelines, to the best of their ability (CNBC, 2021). The performers were paid, and the pop-up was sponsored by Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS (2021; NYC Next, 2021). Blake Ross (2009), a longtime Editor and Chief of Playbill, a well-recognized national theatre magazine, clearly stated, “Almost three million creative workers are out of work” (CNBC, 2021). This was a devastatingly extraordinary number of out-of-work workers. About well known performer Brian Stokes Mitchell, Ross stated that he, “has been charming audiences on Broadway for decades” (CNBC, 2021). Mitchell (CNBC, 2021) stated “Broadway has never been dark for this long”. This shutdown has caused disorientation and challenged the norms of the performing arts community.

At the pop-up performance, Tom Viola, executive director of Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, wore a rainbow striped mask as he stepped up to the microphone to speak. About the musical theatre community, he passionately stated, they are “the first to respond with generosity, compassion, and action...whenever crises hits” (NYC Next, 2021). Anna Uzeli, who had landed a leading role in the musical Six on Broadway (2021), felt the effects of this remarkable time as this show was shut down on opening night. Uzeli stated, “I think the most difficult part for me was trying to figure what to do with myself” (CNBC, 2021). These documentations demonstrated the effects in three important areas of musical theatre professionals: professional life, connections to community, and self-identity

This art genre was important for this study specifically because of the very large population of participants and audience attendees. For the 2018-2019 performance season, more people attended Broadway shows than the combination of all 10 of the New York City sports teams which are Mets baseball, Yankees baseball, Rangers ice hockey, Islanders ice hockey, Knicks basketball, Liberty women's basketball, Giants football, Jets football, Devils ice hockey, and Nets basketball (The Broadway League, 2019). And this only references the Broadway musical theatre community. Other musical theatre communities that watched and participated in musical theatre, such as community theatre, school, and religious associated musicals, followed a similar schedule and were also greatly affected by the shutdown. Furthermore, musical theatre films have been available, and are increasing in number on streaming platforms, television entities, and motion picture theatre. The large Broadway population and extended musical theatre populations make this art genre available to the masses.

Research Purpose and Questions

These research questions were meant to act as prompts for open-ended responses. Because this was such an event of precedence, more structured questions could not have even been anticipated. The world had not experienced this type of global pandemic, therefore the author did not know what she did not know. Her intent was that additional more structured questions would arise during the interview conversations and she did not want to limit answers to this exploration. Research questions were as follows:

1. What are the stories of musical theatre professionals as they experienced the effects of the shutdown of Broadway during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. What effects did this shutdown have on their professional lives?

- b. What effects did this shutdown have in their connection to their musical theatre community?
- c. What effects did this shutdown have on their beliefs of self-identity?

Through asking these questions, the researcher attempted to expose the conditions, realities, and social existence of the disruption of the pandemic shutdown for musical theatre professionals. However, Kim (2015) notes that qualitative research is exploratory and evolves over time, usually becoming clearer after living with the research including the data analysis period. During the collection and reporting of the data these research questions evolved, took on an almost life of their own, and created a beautiful exploratory adventure.

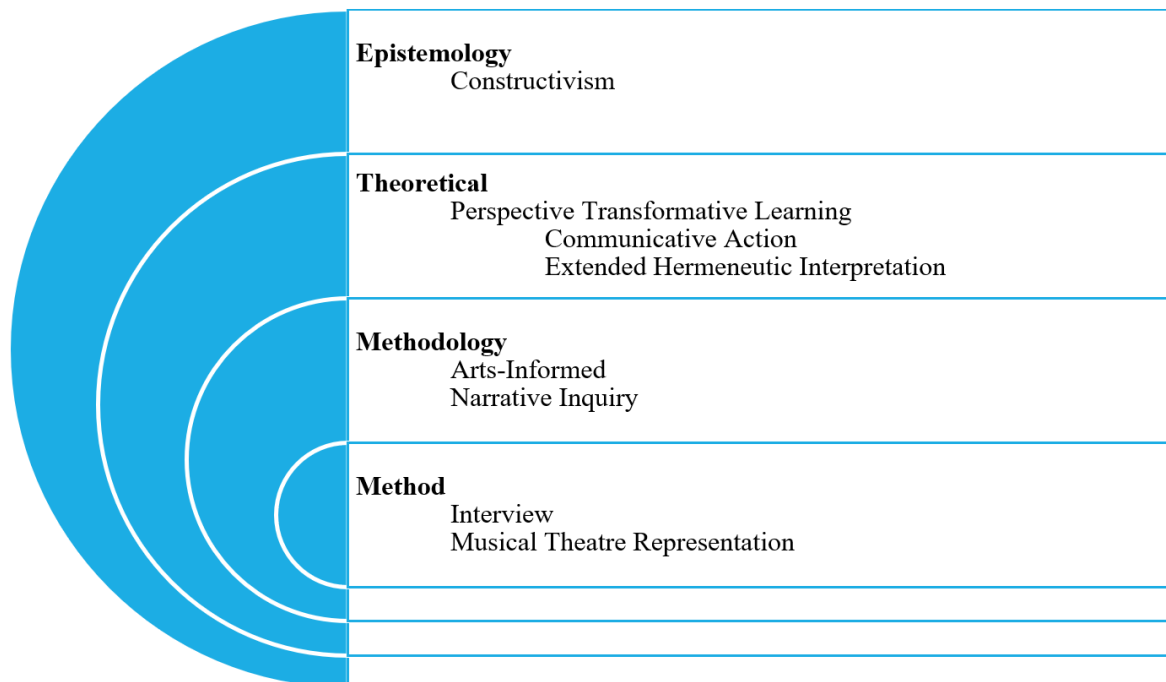
Conceptual Framework

The epistemology of this arts-informed narrative inquiry was constructivist in nature (Crotty, 1998), because it followed the responsive individual stories of five musical theatre professionals about the effects they experienced of the pandemic shutdown of Broadway. The intent of the researcher was to understand and describe the effects experienced by the individual participants as they shared their stories in rich description. Attention was given to the individualistic understanding of the event, personal effects, self-reflection, challenge to current understanding, and new understanding. Constructivism establishes that “meaning is not discovered but constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42) being constructed in the individual mind. Although there is meaningful organic influence of the conventions of language and societal understandings, the focus of this study was on the individual meaning-making that occurred in response to the disorientation of the pandemic shutdown of Broadway.

The macro-level theoretical framework (Kim, 2015) was the disorienting phase of Jack Mezirow’s (1997, 1978/2003, 2000) perspective transformative learning theory (see Figure 1.1).

Nestled inside of this was the micro-level theory of hermeneutic interpretation of communicative understanding (Gadamer, 1980, 2006a, 2006b). Additionally, equally nestled inside of Mezirow’s (1978/2003, 1997) perspective transformation, was the micro-level theory of Jürgen Habermas’s (1984, 1991) communicative rationale as a safe space to describe this disorientation. Influentially wrapped around all three of these theoretical frameworks, Herbert Marcuse (1969/2000, 1978/2003) postulates that “art aims at representing the essence of a given reality and not merely its appearance” (p. 11). Culminating this research on the disorienting effects of the Broadway shutdown, participants shared their experiences through narration and by choosing a musical theatre piece that represented their experience. This piece was the arts-informed portion of this research.

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework



Qualitative Research

Arts-informed narrative inquiry is qualitative in design. Traditionally, in research beginnings, quantitative research ruled the academic world (Boeren, 2018; Crotty, 1998). Cole and Knowles (2007) state that “The dominant paradigm of positivism historically has governed the way research is defined, conducted, and communicated” which consciously or unconsciously defines “what society accepts as knowledge” (p. 59). Quantitative research is characterized by the scientific method and often the positivist notion of “objectivity, validity and generalizability” (Crotty, 1998, p. 41). This made data findings valuable in a broad sense of understanding the big picture of quantifiable meanings. On the other hand, qualitative research is often derived from a smaller population pool within the quantitative population, to establish deeper understandings of the wider findings (Crotty, 1998; Peshkin, 1993). Bhattacharya (2017) states that qualitative research “aims to work within the context of human experiences and the ways in which meaning is made out of those experiences” (p. 6). Additionally, Peshkin (1993) encourages researchers to embrace the open-endedness of qualitative research that is not dependent on testing a hypothesis, driven by theory, or even focused on making generalizations. Denzin and Lincoln (2017) state that qualitative researchers “presume an active audience” where reader and writer interact in developing deeper understanding. This interaction sets an environment that can “simultaneously create and enact moral meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p.5). Working within human experiences, exploring open-endedness instead of theory-driven, and communicating interactively between reader and writer are what cultivate rich data for deeper understandings, which is definitive of qualitative approaches.

Qualitative research was an applicable format for researching the effects COVID-19 had on musical theatre professionals when Broadway shut down. This was unprecedented territory.

Broadway had never been closed for over a year. The Spanish Flu pandemic occurred in 1919, but when Broadway closed during that same year, it was due to a union strike, not the Spanish Flu. This was the first strike by the Actors' Equity Association and was prompted by the exploitative conditions of employed actors which were exacerbated during the Spanish Flu pandemic. According to the Actors' Equity Association website (n.d.), "The strike lasted 30 days, spread to eight cities, closed 37 plays, prevented the opening of 16 others and cost millions of dollars" (Actors' Equity Association, n.d.). A 30-day shutdown in 1919 cost millions of dollars. There are varying opinions of the cost of the 18-month COVID pandemic shutdown. However, the peak of Broadway attendance, was the 2018-2019 season at \$1,829,312,140, compared to more recent statistics of the 2022-2023 season that were \$1,539,278,706 (The Broadway League, 2024). This almost \$300,000,000 depreciation shows that Broadway has not yet returned to its pre-pandemic statistics.

Barone and Eisner (2012) postulate that quantitative research, considered research by scientific means, provides just one type of research. However, imaginative creative ponderings, are the catalysts to furthering scientific research. This crosses the borders between scientific and artistic means (Barone, 2006; Barone & Eisner, 2012). Additionally, although there are differences between science and art, they have become more difficult to define, further blurring the boundaries between the two fields of research (Barone & Eisner, 2012). As stated eloquently by Barone and Eisner (2012) "What we seek in the end is research that has elegance and subtlety, which promotes meaning not only through its literal or discursive features but because of its metaphorical and qualitative features as well" (p. 48). Translated, the artistic way, invites understanding between the speaker and the listener(s) to happen in more interesting and deeper ways.

In the arena of adult education, Boeren (2018), reports that “publications in leading [adult education] journals are dominated by qualitative research” (p. 5). She supports this trend arguing that using different approaches for research deepens the understanding. Merriam and Kim (2012) state that in researching perspective transformation, “the predominant mode of inquiry has been qualitative” (p. 61). This is plausible because transformation begins with the first phase of disorientation at the individual level, laying a perfect platform for exploring deep understanding, that is not really quantitative in measurement, yet equally important in a different way, to the understanding of adult learning. Mälkki (2010) has a similar term to this disorientation or disruption, an edge-emotion that “arise(s) at the edges of the comfort zone” (p. 49). Alhadeff-Jones (2021) extends Mezirow’s (1978/2003; 1997; 2000) disorientation to include the continuities of current beliefs and practices colliding with the discontinuities that act as catalyst to the “perception of a new identity” (p. 2). The qualitative interview conversations provided a safe space to share disorientations, edge-emotions, and catalysts of new identities furthering Barone’s & Eisner’s (2012) idea of blurring science and art.

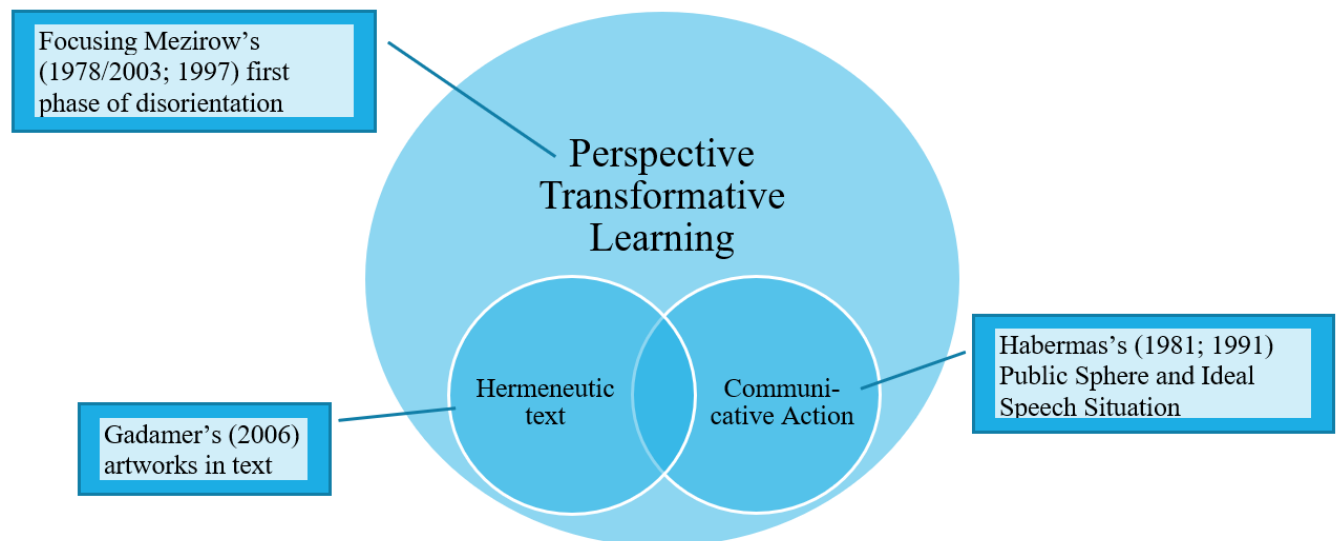
Theoretical Framework

The macro-level theoretical frame, Mezirow’s (1978/2003) perspective transformative learning is guided by ten phases. The first of which is the disorienting dilemma defined as challenges that “cannot be resolved by the usual way” (Mezirow, 1978, p. 101). Disorientation challenges current beliefs and requires critical reflection of current understanding and knowledge.

For this research, there were two micro-level theories inside of the perspective transformative theory, Habermas’s (1984, 1991) communicative action and Gadamer’s (1980, 2006a, 2006b) hermeneutic artworks in text (see Figure 1.2). They worked in unison and hold

equal importance in supporting the perspective transformative theory. Influenced by Habermas, Mezirow (1972) states that, to learn communicatively, “it becomes essential for learners to become critically reflective of the assumptions underlying the intentions, values, beliefs, and feelings” (p. 6). This supported the critical reflection caused by the disorienting dilemma. Gadamer (1980) postulates that understanding meaning in text was based on the interpretive conditions of the introduction of the text and that there was not just one truth of knowledge understood in text, but that it was disseminated by cultural influence (Lavery, 2003). An extended version of hermeneutics, which will be further described in the subsection below, was necessary to keep in mind when exploring the effects of the disorienting dilemma experienced by the musical theatre professionals, and also when deciphering the analysis of the collected data and art representation.

Figure 1.2 Theoretical Framework

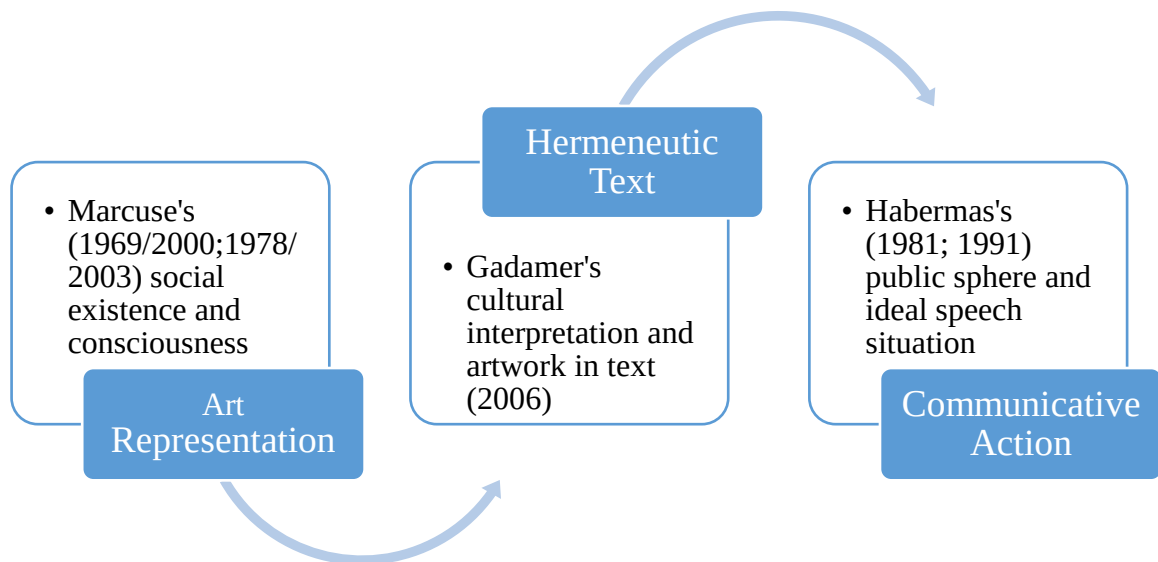


Macro-Level Theory: Perspective Transformative Learning

Mezirow postulates that learning is lifelong and that there are times when our norms are challenged or come into question. He terms this challenge as a *disorienting dilemma* (Mezirow,

1978/2003, 1997). The natural response to the disorienting dilemma is critical discourse, to reflect and talk with others about ways to fix what is causing the disorientation. The pandemic was the catalyst that created a disorientation in the musical theatre community which forced critical reflection on the traditional accepted ways of doing Broadway and brought into question the norms of musical theatre performance. Because of the nature of a narrative inquiry, findings of transformation, if any, cannot be expected or assumed (Kim, 2015). The theoretical focus therefore, was exploratory in nature and focused on the effects of the phase of the disorienting dilemma (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020; McKee, 2018, 2020; Mezirow, 1978/2003, 1997, 2000; Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

Figure 1.3 Macro and Micro Level Theories



Micro-Level Theory 1: Hermeneutic Interpretation Extended

One of the micro-level theories nestled inside of the perspective transformative theory was hermeneutic communication of text (Bhattacharya, 2017). Although hermeneutics was born from the interpretation of texts in the “science of biblical interpretation” (Crotty, 1998, p. 87), it

has evolved into many areas of academia and ventured into texts outside of scripture, such as “human practices, human events, [and] human situations” (Crotty, 1998, p. 87). Areas outside of scripture include not only text based verbiage, but also artistic arenas such as poetry, literature, art, and theatre (Dilthey, 2002; Gadamer, 1980; Ricoeur, 1977). This was the first extension of hermeneutics. Translating this to musical theater, texts would involve not only the vocal aspects of script and singing, but also the nonverbal communications such as facial expression and voice intonation; location of participant in reference to physical setting and one another; and the type and characteristics of dance and movement. In short, the researcher has proposed extending the hermeneutic text to include not only the written and spoken text, but also the visual, spatial, and movement text for a more intuitive and accurate interpretation. This proposal then becoming the extended-extended hermeneutical understanding.

Crotty (1998) joins this thinking of alternative text by confirming that whether text is uttered, artistically created, or construed in action, all texts have meaning. Bhattacharya (2017) encourages that hermeneutics “assumes a connection between the reader and the text” (p. 69) which creates shared meaning. Hermeneutics is a “method for deciphering indirect meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 88) by “unmasking hidden meanings” (p. 88) which are culturally situated. Pinnegar and Daynes (2012) postulate that “narrative researchers employ sociolinguistic analytical tools” (p. 3) in which hermeneutic interpretation is a social, cultural interpretive tool or skill. Hermeneutics was the perfect format for reading, writing, listening to, or observing visual, spatial, musicality, and movement texts. The culture of the musical theatre text was inspired by the relevant time and location of the author’s manifestation; yet was equally encumbered by the time and location of the participants – actors and observers – of the current performance. The

genre of musical theatre offered many intuited texts which the participants could use to unmask hidden meanings.

Micro-Level Theory 2: Communicative Action

Habermas (1970) states that understanding of communication must then not only be “grammar and phonetics but semantics too” (p. 362). There is this intersubjective universality in the community of musical theatre, where the understanding of words, phrases, expressions, spatial awareness, musicality, and movements developed at the cultural level where it was introduced (Habermas, 1970). In essence, words, phrases, visual cues, spatial awareness, and movement patterns introduced to performers as they enter this community, may have a different or deeper intuited meaning inside this community. Think of it as hand signals given by a coach during a baseball game. Those hand signals may have little or no meaning outside of baseball, but communicate clearly inside of baseball. So too are the signals in musical theatre, yet possibly at a more intuited level. This intuited understanding was important within the musical theatre community, additionally, when creating and directing musicals this intuited understanding was necessary to give authenticity to the performance. Being body aware, both kinetically and vocally, is an expectation and necessity of movement artists. Additionally, being able to portray a character or characterization requires visual interpretation, spatial awareness, musicality, and movement fluency. “The concept of communicative action presupposes language as the medium” (Habermas, 1984, p.99). This is where hermeneutics and communicative action meet.

Although this study was constructivist in nature (Bhattacharya, 2017; Crotty, 1998), meaning that it was based on the meaning-making of the individual, it was necessary to respect that the meaning-making from the disorientation was derived and originated from a place of social understanding of communication. Individual understanding of the pandemic began with

communal introduction, then evolved by self-examination and critical assessment of personal assumptions. In particular, in the musical theatre community, the communication was of verbal and written text, along with visual, spatial, musical, and movement text, for a deeper more adequate understanding. This communicative action was kept in mind when hearing the narratives of the participants, and also when analyzing the data.

Methodology

The methodological framework was an arts-informed narrative inquiry (Cole & Knowles, 2007; Gislason & Cameron, 2008; Kim, 2015) that consisted of narratives of five musical theatre professionals. Following, these have been defined separately then further defined as an amalgamation of the two. The reason for separate definitions was to show how the amalgamation purposefully aligned with the constructivist epistemology. The arts-informed portion of this research consisted of the participants' choice of a musical theatre piece to represent their experience of the Broadway shutdown.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is the process of using stories to create an environment of deep understanding of experiences. It is a "recounting of events that are organized in a temporal sequence" (Kim, 2015, p. 31) which is composed from the group of stories of the participants. Pinnegar and Daynes (2012) states that "narrative inquiry begins in experience as expressed in lived and told stories" (p. 3). Kim (2015) describes the narrator of narrative inquiry as "one who knows and tells" (p. 25) their story. Narratives can include not only the telling of the storied experience through interviews and conversations, but also may be further developed through observation and field notes, letters, journals, pictures, and other purposeful artifacts.

Narrative inquiry was appropriate for this study because it created a better understanding of the lived experiences of the five participants through the descriptive and detailed stories of their experiences of the pandemic shutdown of Broadway. This pandemic set a precedent of experiences since this was a first. Using narrative inquiry allowed for an open-ended exploration, laying a foundation free from preconceived ideas of understanding and meaning-making initiated by the disorienting dilemma. Because stories involve “self-reflexive and metafictional dimensions” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 31), including an arts-informed representation organically built a deeper shared understanding of the narrative culmination of the storytelling.

The narrative inquiry portion of this research was collected through three interviews: introductory, main interview, and follow-up. Additionally, storytelling artifacts organically transpired such as programs, photographs, and video. These artifacts could not be visually included in the data report because they would be identifiable markers. Unique to this community, during the interview, it was not surprising that the participants broke into song and dance numbers or musical theatre characters as part of their storytelling. Instead of an actual “*cabinet of curiosity*” (Kim, 2015, p. 308) where tangible artifacts and treasures were stored, performing artists “embody their instruments” (D. Ollington, personal communication, July 29, 2024) through their voice and body. Their *cabinet*, per se, was their mind and body. Searching through their *curiosities* were their many impromptu moments of song, dance, and character narratives.

Arts-Informed

Arts-informed research made the findings more palatable and digestible to audiences outside the community of academia. Cole and Knowles (2007) tout the ability of art to reach the masses by “making scholarship more accessible” (p. 59). The terms arts-based and arts-informed

are often used interchangeably. For this section, justifying the inclusion of art in research was the focus of this paragraph, not to decipher between the two. In the literature review, distinguishing between arts-based and arts-informed has been addressed. Barone and Eisner (2012) state that arts-based research “is an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable” (p. 1). This means that art can communicate at a deeper level, using things outside of, or along with, traditional verbiage such as visual, auditory, textile, and movement communication. Purposefully implemented, arts-based and arts-informed research brings understanding that could not be experienced without the influence of the artistic communication. Barone and Eisner (2012) state that in the arts, “symbols adumbrate: they do not denote” (p. 2). In essence, symbols in art foreshadow or outline realities, they speak-up, rather than simply report on current existence. Marcuse (1969/2000) tells us that art has the power to communicate a “truth, an objectivity which is not accessible to ordinary language and ordinary experience” (p. 40). Art is purposeful in research in that it makes difficult understandings more manageable, is representative of a current belief or understanding, and creates a safe space for ideas, concepts, thoughts, discussions, and discourse to land.

The previous paragraph spoke about the research reasons for using art as a communicative tool in this study. It was just that, a communicative tool. Here though, is a logical and instinctive justification for using art as a communicative tool. Naturally, when someone is sharing ideas and telling stories, it is common to refer to artist renderings to invite, or push along, understanding. Often, people refer to characters in television shows, lyrics in a song, or text from a well-known book. If all parties involved in this shared communication understand the insinuated meaning when referencing the art, then an intuited recognition is acknowledged. This

brings, as Marcuse (1978/2003) suggests, a deeper understanding than using mere words alone. Furthermore, the choice of musical art for this research was organic for this participant pool, because these members already speak *musical theatre talk*.

The arts-informed portion of this research was produced by the participant rather than the researcher. Participants were asked to provide a piece of a musical, be it a musical song and dance number or a character monologue, to represent their experience of the pandemic shutdown of Broadway. All participants chose as their piece of a musical, a song and dance number.

Arts-Informed Narrative Inquiry

In this research, participant chosen artistic representation was used to assist in a deeper understanding of the storytelling. The artistic representation was an existing piece of art and the purpose of the art was to serve as a depiction of their emotional, intellectual, personal, and cultural experience (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Kukkonen & Bolden, 2018; Sanders, 2004). According to Cole and Knowles (2012), “Arts-informed research is a way of redefining research form and representation and creating new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, subjectivities, emotion, responsiveness, and the ethical dimensions of inquiry” (p. 6). Essentially, although the selective stories of narrative inquiry could build a visual understanding of the experiential phenomena, using a piece of musical theatre to represent their experience gave not only visual understanding, but also a deep hermeneutic understanding of emotional and mental matters within the experience. Additionally, the artistic representation inside of the storytelling was communicative on a level that could not be readily or easily accessible or understandable without the combination of the story and the artistic representation together.

Methods

Methods included at least three interview transcripts for each participant via video conferencing, artistic artifact of a piece of musical theatre chosen by each participant, and researcher field notes (Kim, 2015; Saldana, 2016). Researcher field notes came from the verbal and nonverbal texts in the interview transcripts, and the review of the piece of a musical theatre chosen by the individual participant. As stated earlier, unique to this community, it is not uncommon for the musical theatre professional to break into song and dance or character monologue so that they may better communicate their intent. This was beautifully displayed by the participants during the interviews and was necessary for deeper understanding. A deeper understanding that could not have been understood otherwise. The interview structure began with a narration phase with focused attentive listening which included a “keen observation of the way the interviewee talks, the use of body language, emotional expressions, feelings, pauses, and more” (Kim, 2015, p. 293). The job of the researcher was to “try to sense, feel, see, hear, and even vicariously experience [the] narrator’s mental, intellectual, cognitive, and emotional engagement” (Kim, 2015, p. 293). This underlies the researcher’s proposed extension of the extended hermeneutical understanding to include not just the written and spoken text, but also the visual, spatial, and movement text.

For the arts-informed piece, the participants chose a musical theatre piece to represent their experience of the shutdown of Broadway due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This aligns with Marcuse’s (1978/2003) idea of art representing life and Gadamer’s (2006a) art as a truth statement. All the participants chose a song and dance number. The culmination of the narrative inquiry came from their stories. The stories were dependent upon the musical theatre

representative piece. Additionally, their stories were organically sprinkled with active artistry through their animation, singing, dancing, and acting.

Significance

The focus of this study was on the significance of the remarkable effects of the pandemic on the professional life, connections to community, and self-identity of musical theatre professionals. Although there have been significant studies of transformative learning and art (Mantas & Schwind, 2014; Miller, 2018; Todd, 2015), communicative action and transformative learning (Castañeda, 2008; Risser, 2019; Taeger & Yanchar, 2019), hermeneutics and art (Gadamar, 1992; Sumara, 2021), and hermeneutics and transformative learning (Konchak, 2017; Risser, 2019) this author was unable to discover arts-informed narrative inquiry based in perspective transformation supported by communicative action and hermeneutics, based in musical theatre. Studies were just beginning to surface on the effects that COVID-19 has had on the arts community (Americans for the Arts, 2021; Bogart & Shevtsova, 2021; Buchholz et al., 2020; Chandler & Scheuber-Rush, 2021; Lorenza, 2020; Pierce, 2021; Ristani, 2020; Sellars & Shevtsova, 2021). Furthermore, social media platforms have reported on Broadway specifically because the shutdown in March 2020 caused a disruption to millions of musical theatre connoisseurs - including performers, directors, choreographers, writers, musicians, backstage crew, light and sound crew, audience members, costume creators, designers, and the supporting community of theatre house attendees, custodial workers, parking affiliates, media writers, and educational outlets. The perspective transformative lens in art research is not new, however, the addition of communicative action and hermeneutics creates a new perspective. Additionally, the extended definition of text within hermeneutics to include visual, spatial, and movement text

took into consideration added intuited understanding within the musical theatre community. These added perspectives made this study significant.

Limitations

This research was limited in that the shutdown of Broadway occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic in this particular political terrain. Importantly though, this limitation was also a strength in that the hermeneutical understanding is organically understood by this community. This pushes the possibility that if these findings were properly and purposefully shared, they could be meaningful across diverse demographics to help others outside this sociocultural context gain a deeper understanding of this particular experience for this particular community.

Of note, the previous paragraph relied heavily on the strength of the researcher's ability to hermeneutically understand the data and share it in a meaningful way so that others outside this sociocultural community could meaningfully digest and absorb these shared understandings. Additionally, though the researcher's subjectivity could act as limitation in that she could only see this data as influenced by this sociocultural lens. To combat that limitation, self-reflection were practiced consistently throughout the data gathering and data reporting.

Definitions of Terms

Art product. This term is inclusive of all types of artistic creations such as, but not limited to paintings, sketches, sculptures, fairytales, poems, songs, plays, raps, dances, and musical theatre.

Actors' Equity Association. This is a worker's union for those working in live theatre. The union negotiates wages, working conditions, insurance, pension plans, and other life sustaining benefits of professionals in the performing arts.

Disorienting dilemma. This is the first phase of Mezirow's (1978) perspective transformation theory. A dilemma is a challenge that cannot be fixed or improved in the usual way. Some dilemmas are so disorienting and cause such discomfort that they push the individual to change.

Ideal speech situation. This is not just the mechanics of labeling a space free from communal nuances, but it is a place that has been "immunized in against repression and inequality in special way" (Habermas, 1984, p. 26) so that people can speak freely without judgement or consequences. This research intends to use arts-informed practices in this immunized manner.

Musical theatre. A musical, or musical theatre, is a type or genre of theatre in which the performance includes spoken dialogue, acting, singing, and dancing. These performances can range from paid professionals to volunteer participants. *On Broadway*, *Touring Broadway*, and *Off-Broadway* are all types of the genre musical theatre. Musicals are the individual shows. *Broadway* is the most famous musical theatre community in this genre across the nation.

Musical number. Usually, a song and dance piece inside of a musical is considered a musical number, also known as a song-and-dance number.

Musical theatre professional (also known as *participant*). Are any persons involved with the making and performing of a musical to include, but not limited to the following: writers, composers, performers, directors, choreographers, designers, stage managers, lighting crew, backstage crew, and costume crew. Not to go unnoticed, but are not included in this study, are the theatre house personnel, online ticketers, custodial support, advertising entities, and media writers.

Perspective transformation. When a dilemma is so disorienting that it challenges current ways of managing issues, it can initiate transformation. A disorienting dilemma exposes the challenge, which causes reflection of norming responses, realization that norming responses do not work, consideration of new responses, exploration of some of these new responses, and experimentation of one of these responses. The cycle circles back to reflection, realization, consideration, exploration, and experimentation as many times as necessary until the individual creates a new norm (Mezirow, 1978). This is transformation.

Private sphere. A private sphere is made of family, friends, and community without the attention or responsibility to institutional and governmental overseeing. In the private sphere, a person is “in a position to judge and act independently” (Habermas, 2005, p. 3) within the bounds of the law.

Public sphere. For the purposes of this research, Habermas’s (1964) idea of the public sphere as a space where private individuals congregate to discuss, will be mildly adapted to incorporate 21st century realities. I propose that although the closing of Broadway was not a direct link to political and democratic power struggles as Habermas’s definition of public sphere purports; those collaborating to make the decision to close Broadway were influenced, and confused, by political figures of power. Therefore, using an arts-informed structure for an ideal speech situation, which is immunized in a special way, so that narrators can safely, and without judgement, prejudice, or repercussions, can participate in sharing their experience of disorientation caused by the 2020 shutdown of Broadway.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began by introducing this arts-informed narrative inquiry, type of participants, and the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. A rationale was formed stating that

although this was not the first shutdown of Broadway, it was paramount in the length of shutdown. Previously, the longest shutdown was 25 consecutive days due to a union strike. Additional rationale, the musical theatre format was chosen because of its popularity in participation and attendance.

The conceptual framework included a constructivist epistemology with a macro-level theoretical framework of Mezirow's (1997, 1978/2003, 2000) perspective transformative learning theory and two micro-level theories of hermeneutic interpretation (Gadamer, 2006a, 2006b) and Habermas's communicative rationale (1984, 1991). The methodology was an arts-informed narrative inquiry. A review of the descriptions of arts-informed as opposed to arts-based, and narrative inquiry practice, were used to justify the purposefulness of this research. Methods included an interview process, an arts-informed artifact chosen by the participant, and field notes by the research. Field notes include the spontaneous anecdotal performance of the participants during the interview process and the reading and analysis of the chosen musical representations.

Research questions were based on the professional, communal, and self-identity aspects of the effects on the musical theatre professionals caused by the pandemic shutdown. The significance of the study was justified through a review of current research that has laid the foundation for this unique type of arts-informed narrative inquiry. Limitations were reviewed based on these unique five participants and this unique pandemic shutdown.

A researcher subjectivity section transparently described the researcher's historical positionality and her particular familiarity of musical theatre. Operational definitions were included for reference to the reader. Chapter two begins with another musical theatre fairytale insert then moves into the academic conversation.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review: Setting the Scene with the Past,

Present and Future

A Brief Historical History of Such

This is a brief history of musical theatre. It is in no attempt that the author claims completion, for that is impossible. You see, not everyone can agree, on the very first musical to be or on the exact descriptors for musical theatre necessity. Therefore, the author has responsibly, and with great contemplation, decided on important highlights of musical things of note. So, if your favorite is not included, please forgive. The attempt is to take an imaginary journey, through the formative traversing, over foreign and local terrain, to discover how musical theatre came to be. For descriptions of musicals see the Internet Broadway Database (n.d.).

*The beginnings of theatre started in the tragedies, comedies, and satirical plays of ancient Greece. They were held out of doors, and gifted to all, as they had a free monetary exchange. During the Middle Ages, individual minstrels and clowns crisscrossed Europe, offering popular songs and slapstick comedy in exchange for tossed coins. By the 12th and 13th centuries, Catholic churches were performing religious dramas, designed especially for those who could not read the biblical parables. In the 1400-1800s, along came *commedia dell'arte*, improvisational comedy (Meagher, 2007). By 1715, comedic and ballad operas came to be and represented the first inklings of current musical theatre magic of our 21st century! By the 1800-1900s, the operetta was born in Paris, France. A 14 year old Jewish transplant, Jacques Offenbach became known as the father of the operetta and quite possibly the grandfather of our very own modern musical*

theatre (Kenrick, 2017). The risqué early 1900s brought the music halls where sexually suggestive innuendos reigned, and minstrel shows where supposedly innocent racism preponderated. This led to barbershop quartets with four part harmony in a cappella. The 1800s brought the saloon variety show where girls sang and danced, speeches were orated, jokes were parodied, and dramatizations were displayed. A current historical variety show continues to be performed in the middle of the united lands (Boothill Museum, n.d.). Bawdy burlesque began sometime in the 1830s and showcased showgirls in tights and fluidity in gender roles all while poking fun of their current day plays and operas. The year, 1866, brought a five and a half hour show featuring a troupe of well-fed ballerinas. It was titled, The Black Crook, and is touted as the first musical by some (Kenrick, 2017). Others disagree. It was a culmination of many of the earlier musical spectacular displays. So very important is that it was the first musical extravaganza to become a nationwide sensation and the first show to run for more than a year. A more genteel cleaner family friendly variety show presented by Tony Past in October of 1881, was the first commercially successful variety show of its kind (Kenrick, 2017). His shows were highly held to decency and there was absolutely no alcoholic beverages or tobacco products allowed! Eventually, the greatness of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan musicals reigned with topsy-turvydom (Kenrick, 2017).

The 1900s brought us composer and songwriter Cole Porter with his witty ditties. Next came Irving Berlin, one of the most prolific songwriters who composed for the Ziegfeld Follies. The great depression brought emptiness to

frivolities of theatre pausing the bustling growth of the musical. As the economy recovered, composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist-dramatist Oscar Hammerstein brought us the musical Oklahoma! Cole Porter created the musical, in a musical, in Kiss Me Kate. Stephen Sondheim brought us West Side Story, a clash of the classes, and A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, an absurd tale of love, blackmail, and catastrophe. The much loved Grease brought an all too familiar story of love from the wrong side of the tracks. Composer John Kander and lyricist Fred Ebb brought us Cabaret, the foretelling of the impending atrocities of World War II and Chicago, the story of female criminals in prison. The film version of this musical presented some of choreographer Bob Fosse's (Broadway Musical Home, 2021) finest displays of his iconic isolation in dance movement. In the 1980s Cats graced us with one of Andrew Lloyd Weber's scores. Walt Disney brought not only Beauty and the Beast, but also the Lion King. Rent brought us a telltale story of the victims of the HIV virus. Hairspray showed a stance against racism, that also broke barriers of body acceptance and agism. Wizard of Oz was revived into Wicked. The groundbreaking Hamilton populated the stage with persons of color. The Book of Mormon brought the unexpected in which religion meets the real world.

Then comes the terrifying plague of the COVID-19 pandemic (Worldometer, 2021). The longest running Broadway shows that were on location and touring on March 12, 2020, the day of the shutdown were: The Phantom of the Opera, Chicago, The Lion King, Wicked, The Book of Mormon, Aladdin, Hamilton, Dear Evan Hansen, and Come From Away (Playbill Staff, 2021). This

author had the wonderful opportunity to see the touring Broadway production of Come From Away just a few months before the shutdown.

Some things important to note: 1) musicals are entertaining, 2) they push the boundaries of current societal terrains, and 3) they inspire conversation simply by participation. Because of this, they become safe, protected, reliable, comfortable, appropriate places to represent deeper understandings.

As exemplified previously in *The Musical Theatre Fairytale*, this literature review commences with the beginnings of academic research and progresses to the current qualitative research pertinent to this study. A discussion of quantitative research with positivist influence precedes the information on the birth of qualitative research. Narrative inquiry, a form of qualitative research is described. Connected to narrative inquiry, both arts-based and arts-informed research platforms are described, distinguished, designed and justified. A walk through the history of pandemics and their relation to Broadway shutdowns follows. Concluding in understanding the gap and justification of an arts-informed narrative inquiry for this particular research.

The Beginning of Academic Research

Quantitative research is now considered the underdog of academic research, but in the beginning, it was considered the norm (Boren, 2018; Daley et al., 2018; Rocco et al., 2021). Although not all quantitative research is positivist in nature, the positivist perspective lays a like-minded terrain for the quantitative ways. The spirit of Enlightenment that began in England in the seventeenth century gave birth to the positivist perspective (Crotty, 1998/2020). Like positivists, quantitative researchers wanted to “purge themselves of values that might impair

their objectivity” (Scott & Morrison, 2007, p. 187) and both wanted to make distinction between remarkable and normative claims. Identifying markers of quantitative research are measurable data, causal relationships, controlled conditions, generalizable findings, replicable research, and aggregation of individual data (Scott & Morrison, 2007).

One note of quantitative research is that it holds importance in reliability – consistently securing similar results when research is repeated, and validity – accuracy in the measurements within the data. However, even with this attempt, “a growing number of quantitative researchers acknowledge the influence of power and bias in quantitative reasoning” (Daley, et al., 2018, p. 160). Therefore, even though the commitment is to be scientific and objective in the research process, the research findings can be subjectively, intentionally or unintentionally, influenced.

A second note of quantitative research is that because the focus is on generalizability of aggregated individual data, the story of the data findings is wide but shallow (Bhattacharya, 2017; Boeren, 2018; Scott & Morrison, 2007). Patterns of a particular population become apparent, but the factors that influence those patterns are left unexplored. Remarkably, the individual data used in the aggregation process is full of rich text that could be beneficial if further scrutinized.

Quantitative research studies have been used in musical theatre to capture large data pools of number of performances, attendances, finances, and production information (Broadway World, 2020; Playbill, 2020; The Broadway League, 2021). However, quantitative research studies could not be found about Broadway shutdowns in general, and in specific, due to pandemic situations. These types of studies look at professional Broadway. Other quantifiable research in musical theatre has included comparative studies on education based on theatre participation (Burchard, 2014), the impact of participation on performing arts and health and

behavior (Daykin et al., 2008), and participation in theatre arts and literacy and mathematic achievement (Inoa, et al., 2014). These types of studies look at non-professional musical theatre involvement with students. Yaakov Bressler (2018), a data scientist and theatre producer is interested in “opening the ‘stage door’ for big data in Broadway” (p. 2). He is interested in the collection of regular data, but in a more expedient speed and the availability of cross analysis with the major current data collection agencies. Addition of note in his quantitative collections are data collection on the possibility of a show being a hit and whether the show was a hit. Bressler (2018) is also interested in using the technique of web scraping, extracting data from websites, to create a conglomerated collection of quantitative data of Broadway, or at least offer the possibility for dedicated researchers to collect, categorize, and compare research. Although these quantitative research studies have viable information, research like these could not be found in Broadway shutdowns due to pandemics. When using the identifying terms “quantitative research”, “Broadway closing”, and “musical theatre”, 14 peer reviewed articles were produced. Upon further inspection, none of these dealt mainly with the shutdown of Broadway. Additionally, no sources were written in 2021 and only one was written in 2020, but referred to child authorship and racial oppression.

Although quantitative research has viable information, to deeply understand the ramifications of this remarkable time in the Broadway closing of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a qualitative approach offers more descriptive experiences. The halt in attendance and the loss of finances could be accurately portrayed via quantitative measures. However, to deeply understand the loss of community and disorientation of self-identity, these personal experiential accounts of the time remarkably shed light to the current historical event.

Qualitative Research was Born

From the broad understandings of the aggregated data of large populations of individuals in quantitative research comes the need for understanding the stories of the individuals.

Qualitative research is “informed by different interpretive paradigms” (Kim, 2015, p. 22) using words rather than statistics. Denzin and Lincoln (2017) push this idea further in that they encourage the qualitative researcher to “experiment with novel forms of expressing lived experience” (p. 20), of which some of their suggested forms include “conversational, critical, visual, performative, and co-constructed representations” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017, p. 20).

Although positivist research conveys important findings, it is not the “paradigm that reflects how individuals in society actually experience and process the world” (Coles & Knowles, 2007, p. 60). Although both quantitative and qualitative description can create an understanding, qualitative research evokes a “certain quality of life that can be imaginary but that is rooted in the text” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 11) and brings forth the culminating whole experience.

Qualitative research is like a quilt made from pieces of pertinent data concentrated on a specific focus. Qualitative researchers act as a bricoleur of narratives, stories, and aesthetics that are, “a pieced-together set of representations that [are] fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 4). The qualitative structure that was used in this research was pertinent because it exemplified the constructivist epistemological frame (Crotty, 1998) of meaning making for the participants based on their world experience of the pandemic shutdown of Broadway.

Distinguishing factors of note for qualitative research are credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness (Bhattacharya, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Saldaña, 2016). Tracy’s (2010) *big tent* criteria for excellent qualitative research includes eight requirements: a worthy topic that

is relevant and timely; rich, complex, and rigorous constructs; a sincerity in self-reflexivity and transparency; credible thick descriptions; resonating and evocative representation of study; a practical, significant contribution; dedication to ethical practices with special attention to participants and cultural situations; and, meaningful and purposeful coherence in the research structure. Furthermore, according to Bhattacharya (2017), conscious efforts made by qualitative researchers to fulfill these standards include aligning research epistemology, theory, methodology, and methods; being iterative throughout the research process; collecting multiple sources of data; using longevity in data; and sharing researcher subjectivity. Trustworthiness can be established through member checking with the participant repeatedly (Bhattacharya, 2017) and triangulation - using more than one source for data justification, creation, and analysis (Carter, et. al, 2014; Kim, 2015; Saldaña, 2016). However, Denzin and Lincoln (2017) postulate that qualitative research should have a crystallization process instead of a triangulation. Meaning that “the writer tells the same tale from different points of view” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 6). Additionally, crystals are more fluid and changing than a triangulated structure, and metaphorically, can reflect different ideas, emotions, and perspectives. For this research, the tale was the 18-month pandemic shutdown. The crystalizing points of view came from all five of the participants in reference and response to the pandemic tale. And the data reporting was a culmination of these different crystalizing points of view.

A very noteworthy distinction of qualitative research is the attention placed on transparency in subjectivity. Referring to Tracy’s (2010) *big tent* criteria of sincerity, the “research is marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher’s biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research” (p. 814). The qualitative researcher must transparently place themselves subjectively so that the

reader or observer of the data analysis can understand and interpret the findings within the point of view from which they came. Unlike quantitative research where the division of research and anonymity of subject is an attempt to eliminate bias; qualitative research admits that subjectivity, positionality, and bias are human presences and rather than deny, must be ethically recognized (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bhattacharya, 2017; Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Johnson-Bailly, 2004; Kim, 2015; Saldaña, 2016; Smith, 1999/2012). Researcher subjectivity was transparently shared with the participants from the beginning of this research, was reflectively managed during the collection of the data, and was intentionally and purposefully used during the creation of the data reporting and telling.

Narrative Inquiry as a Form of Qualitative Research

If qualitative research is a quilt made of many pieces, then the stories are what make up the pieces. Furthering this, what makes up the stories are pieces of narrative experiences. Leaning into the ideas of novel forms of expressions claimed by Denzin and Lincoln (2017), this research relies on the conversational, visual, and performative collecting, analyzing, and reporting of data.

Narrative Inquiry Described

Stories and narratives are comfortable and safe ways of sharing experiences. Although these two terms are often used interchangeably, Kim (2015) tells us that “a story is a detailed organization of narrative events arranged in a (story) structure based on time although...not necessarily in chronological order” (p. 31). Chase (2011) states that “Narrative inquiry revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them” (p. 56). Furthermore, Kim (2015) states that “A narrator, then, could mean one who knows and tells” (p. 25). Pinnegar and Daynes (2012) combine these descriptions, “narrative inquiry begins in experience as

express in lived and told stories” (p. 3). This research looked at narrative inquiry through the lens of the lived experience of five Broadway professionals caused by the shutdown of Broadway. The focus was how the participants were constructing understanding and meaningfulness in the reality of the shutdown (Chase, 2011).

Narrative Inquiry and the Hermeneutic Text

Hermeneutics, like narrative inquiry, assumes a communicative connection between speaker/writer and listener/reader. Hermeneutic understanding is the understanding of written and verbal text, with the influence of background knowledge of the situation in which new learning was encountered, plus, the influence of personal background of historical understanding (Laverty, 2003). Musical theatre organically respects the realities of tacit knowledge or hermeneutic interpretation of meaning making. Of particular interest in this research was how the participants told their story in interpretive communication through hermeneutic texts, including the extended-extended visual, spatial, and movement texts. Musical theatre brings with it a preconceived understanding of these types of communicative interpretations. Because of this, the nature of the data gathering was a collaboration, so that the understanding and meaning making came from the participants while composing and sharing their narratives (Chase, 2011).

As stated earlier, Kim (2015) postulates that in narrative interviewing, the interviewer must have a “keen observation of the way the interviewee talks, the use of body language, emotional expressions, feelings, pauses, and more” (p. 293).

Gentle reminder, this researcher suggests extending the definition of hermeneutic to include visual, spatial, and movement for consideration in textual communication understanding. Sumara (2021) is interested in hearing who the narrator “needed to *become* and *became*” (p. 7) through the hermeneutic interpretation. This aligns with the process of this research as the

researcher is interested in the narrative of the participant, understanding who they became from the disorientation, wrapped in the hermeneutic social interpretations, of musical theatre communal understandings.

Narrative Inquiry and Transformation

Narrative inquiry, with its exploration in personal history and attention to listening to the narrator (Gilligan, 2015; Gilligan & Eddy, 2017; Kim, 2015), is an inviting platform for sharing storied experiences of disorientation and perspective transformation. Merriam and Kim (2015) state that “narrative analysis is particularly well suited for the study of transformative learning because it allows people to convey their personal experience...through stories” (p. 63). They point out that the stories are told from their heart. This narrative, told from the heart, is the connecting factor that Habermas (1970; 1984; 1991) refers to in the ideal speech situation where everyone has a voice.

The narrative inquiry format was a perfect setting for two-person sharing in which a mutual understanding could occur. As Saldaña (2016) states, “Narrative inquiry is not a solitary research act but a collaborative venture between the researcher and participants” (p. 157). Additionally, Mezirow (1997) states that communicative learning “involves at least two persons striving to reach an understanding” (p. 6). The process of sharing the narrative allows the narrator to share *their* story. True understanding comes when the listener hears *their* story, not the story assumed. Ginsburg and Wlodkowski (2021) state that “in recent years, there has been a trend among scholars of adult education to use storytelling to foster transformative learning” (Transformative Learning section, para. 3). Continuing, Ginsburg and Wlodkowski postulate that “stories allow adult learners to reflect over longer periods of living at a more emotional and deeper level” (Transformative Learning section, para. 3). That is the beauty of the narrative

inquiry, emotional engagement for empathic understanding to negotiate self beliefs, understanding, values, and actions.

Transformative learning is not always enjoyable, it can be uncomfortable and challenging (Bhukhanwala et al., 2016; Blackburn, 2018; Mälkki, 2010; Mezirow, 1997, 2010; Rocco, 2021; Taylor & Cranton, 2012; Todd, 2015). Todd (2015) shares that anxiety may arise, causing separation from one's beliefs, pushing a need to do something different, and awaking a responsibility to do so. Mezirow (1978/2003, 1997) shares that a disorientation, which is a disturbance to one's belief system, is the initializer of transformation. As those who have transformed begin to share or explain their experiences, their narrative becomes a part of their story. There is a relationship in the narrative process between the narrator and research through the inquiry activities. For narration to occur, the researcher cannot separate themselves from this process.

The Need for Arts-Based and Arts-Informed Research

Marcuse (1969) states that “Art would tend to form reality” (p. 24). Mezirow (2000) shares that “Intuition, imagination, and dreams are other ways of making meaning” (p. 6). Habermas (1984) speaks of a rationalization of art that is “freed from the everyday conventions of knowledge” (p. 16). And finally, Gadamer (2006) voices that “Art is able to build bridges that reach beyond the enclosure and space in which it originated” (p. 60). This justifies a need for an artistic platform for the collection, analysis, and reporting of data in qualitative research. In the data collection process for this research, art was used as a representation of the reality of the lived experiences of the participants. Meaning making grew from the sharing of these artistic representations that were free from the everyday conventions. An artistic platform was also used in the analysis and reporting of the data building bridges between the spaces and times in which

the art pieces originated to the intentional representative current place and time surrounding the pandemic shutdown. Additionally building bridges that reached outside the specified artistic community in which it originated and bringing the understanding of the findings to the masses.

Further Description of Arts-Based and Arts-Informed Terminology

To further explore interchangeability of the terms, *arts-based* and *arts-informed*, an in-depth research was conducted on the usage of these two terms. Although the difference might have seemed subtle, it was important for this research. The research world has enjoyed an evolution in artistic platforms as a rigorous, credible, and trustworthy form of qualitative research. Distinction between these terms furthers that rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness.

Barone and Eisner (2012), when assessing research for a viable *arts-based* structure, use the following criteria: “The story rings true. The analysis is cogent and credible. The tale is coherent. The meanings are generalizable” (p. 163). Furthermore, they state that these criteria cannot be used as a set of rules, “They must be deliberated or discussed; one needs to exercise judgement in the absence of rule” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 163). In Barone and Eisner (2012) *arts-based* was tagged 500 or more times in text and citation, and *arts-informed* zero. As stated earlier, a distinguishing factor for *arts-based* research is to “express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable” (p. 1). They go on to state that *arts-based* is “rooted in aesthetic considerations and that...culminates in the creation of something close to a work of art” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 1). The data reporting of this research was a culmination of the communication by the participant and the shared hermeneutic understanding with the researcher. There were really no references to *arts-informed* research in Barone and Eisner (2012). This was identified as a gap in research understanding. To further explore Barone’s research, a search was conducted to find more recent works. The parameters were: author, Tom Barone; from years

2008 to 2020; and peer reviewed. Results were five published articles. The first article was a critique, on narrative inquiry and social change, focused on the textual design of the narrative to promote or discourage multiple perspective, assumed privileges of authorship, and the political responsibilities of the readers (Barone, 2009). The second article was an essay in which Barone (2010) focused on who was being served by the vantage points highlighted in narratives. The most recent article (Barone, 2016), was a reprint of a 1996 autobiographical experience of Barone and his wife sharing a holiday with Elliot Eisner and his wife in Europe. Barone was influenced by Eisner and referred to him as, “the mentor, the friend, the teacher/critic, the connoisseur of life-that I, before and since, have grown to admire and appreciate” (p. 12). They later came to co-author an *arts-based* textbook (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

Interestingly, Barone (2016) shared that his 1979 dissertation defense was “not the most pleasant of experiences” (p. 19) because of the traditionalists who focused on validity, objectivity, and subjectivity. Qualitative research has earned a firm place in educational research because of its rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness. *Arts-based* and *arts-informed* are still relatively new forms of qualitative research and have experienced similar growing pains today as described by Barone (2016) during his dissertation process.

A second search focus was conducted on Eisner, parameters were: author, Elliot W. Eisner; from years 2008 to 2020; and peer reviewed. This resulted in five articles as well. The only *arts-based* article was a book review by Stronach (2012) in which he praised the book, “It works well as exposition, even better as exemplification” (p. 3). However, he did not address an *arts-informed* conversation.

The work of Barone and Eisner (2012) is praiseworthy because they have termed the term *arts-based* and have legitimized art platforms in academic, qualitative, rigorous research.

Because of their beginnings, research using art platforms is becoming more sophisticated and precise. Therefore, an attempt has been made through this research to further their description of art within the research community by distinguishing between *arts-based* and *arts-informed*. After the following further searches, a description distinguishing the two terms, *arts-based* and *arts-informed*, will be forthcoming.

In Bhattacharya (2017), *arts-based* was tagged nine times in text and *arts-informed* zero. *Arts-based*, creating an art product, was at the center of these identifications, “adapting some tenets of the creative arts at various stages of qualitative research, especially leading to an artistic representation” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 29). In Crotty (1998), neither of the terms, *arts-based* nor *arts-informed* appeared, however, art representation was referred to by Crotty. In Rocco et al. (2021), *arts-based* was tagged five times in the text and *arts-informed* once. Although upon further investigation, there was little evidence of any distinction of whether the references were truly *arts-based* or *arts-informed*. There was one distinction however, where *arts-based* was compared to “participatory research methods” (Smith et al., 2021, *Strengthening Adult and Continuing Education Scholarship* section, para. 2) which might insinuate the activity of the making of art. In Saldaña (2016), *arts-based* was identified 10 times in the text, *arts-informed* was not identified in the text, but was identified once in a reference section. There were three times that *arts-based* was used referring to presentation and representation. Interpretively assumed through the surrounding context, it appeared that this meant the creation of an art product.

Another attempt at distinction was through Cole & Knowles (2008). Although a distinction was not made, there were things of note to continue this postulation. Cole and Knowles (2008) state that the form of the *arts-informed* research should include “*form as*

communication”, “*form as aesthetic element*”, and “*form of procedural element and emergent phenomenon*” (p. 10). Meaning that the research must communicate effectively and deeply with attention to not only the academic reader, but also the reader of the masses; that the research and the research report must provide a recognizable or justifiable *artistic* aesthetic; that the form of the research evolve from conception to completion; and that the intent to have a specific art form may be adapted, edited, deleted, or added depending on the drive and direction of the research. And finally, “*form as a technical element*” which refers to the design of “the physical appearance of the document – how the text and media are presented on the page” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 10). This was the inspirational factor of *The Musical Theatre Fairytale* at the beginning of each chapter that precedes the academic writing. An additional article with the term *arts-informed* was explored (Ignagni & Church, 2012). For the most part, this research aligned with art as a representation but did not make a distinction between *arts-informed* and *arts-based*. In theory, the assumption may have been made that there was tacit understanding of the two terms. However, if art research is being used to reach the masses, then the distinction is important. Additionally, it is important that a comfortable distinction be clarified for the masses.

This author postulates the distinction that in arts-based research, the learning comes from the making of an art product. An art product is anything that has been created and labeled by the creator as *art*. The learning of the artistic skills is part of the environmental disorientation that makes exploring the art-making a part of the process of the meaning-making adventure.

Different from this, for *arts-informed*, is that the art informs, inspires, and represents the meaning-making. *Arts-informed* often, but not always, uses existing art. The distinguishing difference lies in where or how the meaning-making occurs. In *arts-informed*, the meaning-making occurs in, or from, or is inspired by the art representation. However, the skill of the art-

making is not what caused the disorientation or meaning-making. This is a finite difference and is the responsibility of the researcher to purposefully distinguish and justify the label of *arts-based* or *arts-informed*.

The Need, the Purpose, the Magic

The magic of *arts-based* and *arts-informed* research is this deep understanding that could not happen otherwise. There is this hermeneutic understanding inside of the community of musical theatre. This understanding is not reserved for just the participants - the performers, directors, choreographers, or costumers. It is also privileged to the audience members who religiously attend and follow Broadway, even if they never actively participate in creating a musical theatre production. When talking about theatre, Saldaña (2003) articulates that “both the researcher and audience gain understandings not possible through conventional qualitative data analysis” (p. 230). The vernacular of musical theatre aficionados is a language unto itself where a character’s name, or a specific location, a facial expression, or even a stance can communicate things that words cannot begin to transfer.

Using fictional events to depict nonfictional happenings, makes revisiting those events a less risky venture so that transformation from disorientation can evolve in a manner that is manageable and pertinent. Gadamer (1992) states that “there is much that is completely unnamable” (p. 58) and Marcuse (1978/2003) postulates that art goes beyond what can be understood by words alone. Additionally, transformational learning invokes empathy and learning rather than giving instruction, direction, or advice (Bhukhanwala et al, 2016). With Gadamer’s (1992) unnamable and Marcuse’s (1978/2003) going beyond words and the empathy and learning of transformational learning, an *arts-informed* narrative inquiry data collection sits perfectly in an *arts-based Musical Theatre Fairytale* final report.

The Perspective Transformative Learning

Mezirow's (1978, 1991, 2000; Dix, 2016; Mälkki, 2010; Nerstrom, 2014; Taylor & Cranton, 2012) perspective transformative learning theory is this idea that continuous learning occurs when something challenges our current understandings and beliefs. The first of Mezirow's (1978) meanderings of adult learning and perspective transformative learning theory began with this notion that adults are "caught in [their] own history and reliving it" (p. 100). In his own experiences, and experiences he observed in other adult learners, through change there comes a time certain challenges and problems "cannot be resolved by the usual way" (p. 101). This disrupts the normal way of knowing, forces critical self-reflection, and invites a maturation in being. Since living is in a continuous flux of change, Mezirow (2000) postulates that there is a "continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings" (p. 3). In addition, as adults attempt to manage these changes, formerly accepted understandings may not suffice. This causes a disorientation, a challenge, and a "need to acquire new perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of changing events and a higher degree of control over their lives" (Mezirow, 1991, *The Cultural Context of Learning*, para. 4). When disorientation challenges understanding, then staying dormant or intellectually docile is difficult, if not impossible.

This disorientation is the first of Mezirow's (1991, 2000) 10 phase model of transformation. Transformative learning does not add onto what the individual currently knows, instead transformation modifies, synthesizes, and assimilates new ways of thinking. The idea is that once transformation occurs, the person will be totally changed, unable to continue as before. The predominantly referred to 10 phases have slightly evolved from Mezirow's (1991) earlier version. The predominantly referred to phases are as follows:

1. A disorienting dilemma

2. Self-examination with feelings of feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22).

In this research, the focus is on the first stage of Mezirow's (1978, 1991, 2000) perspective transformation that originated from the unprecedented 18-month shutdown of Broadway (Dix, 2016; Mälkki, 2010; Nerstrom, 2014; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Some disorientations can originate organically through the maturation process. However, the 18-month shutdown of Broadway originated externally, a forced disorientation, a global disruption, causing edge-emotions (Mälkki, 2010) for those not only in the performing arts industry, but for all. Not all phases must occur in transformation, nor must they occur in said order (Mezirow, 1978; Nerstrom, 2014). Instead of searching for all phases in this research, the focus will be on the one very recognizable phase of disorientation.

Mezirow (1997, 2000) was influenced by Habermas's (1970, 1980, 1991) communicative learning and the essential critical reflection needed for truly understanding that which is attempted to be communicated. He continues by saying that communicative learning involves "understanding *purposes, values, beliefs, and feelings*" (Mezirow 1997, p. 6) and again "feelings,

intentions, values, and moral issues” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 9) which inspires rich discourse for meaningful understanding. Mezirow (2000) postulates that Habermas’s culmination of this communicative discourse, *emancipation*, is redefined as *transformation* in the perspective transformative theory.

This importance for deep understanding in communication, specifically for the musical theatre community, is embedded in tradition of understanding not only words and phrases, but also visual, spatial, and movement communication. Mezirow (2000) states that “our identity is formed in webs of affiliation within a shared life world” (p. 27) and that “our life histories and language are bound up with those of others” (p. 27). This is especially true in the musical theatre community where a reference to a musical, a scene, or a song and dance number can communicate far quickly and more deeply than using mere words could ever communicate. There is this attention to what Mezirow (1997, 2000) referred to in the previous paragraph, that communicative learning is influenced by feelings, intentions, values, morals, purposes, and beliefs.

The Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is more than just understanding text, it is the understanding of text within the context in which it was learned, affected by the individual’s historical understanding. Gadamer (2006) postulates that hermeneutics is more than just understanding text, it is “more an understanding of the true sense of what is meant in the specific expression in the target language” (p. 29). This research was focused on the target language in the narrative of the participants, the target language being *musical theatre speak*. Gadamer (1992) includes a description that art can be verbal or nonverbal. This is interesting because, this researcher has argued that even the verbal art has nonverbal – visual, spatial, and movement – components. And

conversely, even the nonverbal art, such as paintings, statues, graphics, and photographs can speak volumes. Gadamer (1992) also postulates that art rises above time, communicates unnameable understanding and is a “statement of truth” (p. 58). This aligns with Marcuse’s (1978/2003) idea that art is representative of social existence.

Konchak (2017), influenced by Gadamer, postulates that there is “a sense of dialogue and openness to the other through conversation” and that “humans are fine beings embedded within their language and tradition” (p. 4). He continues, stating that hermeneutics is “an account of understanding that is self-understanding, meaning that we change in the process of interpretation” (Konchak, 2017, p. 4). This arts-informed narrative process provides an openness for shared language, tradition, and understanding in which both the researcher and the participants have been affected and changed due to this shared hermeneutic venture. Risser (2019) states that “the universe of language lives its life in conversation” (p. 2). Hermeneutic interpretation has the capability of “equally expanding and disrupting established meanings” (Davey, 2017, p. 6). This aids in the meaning-making process because as reflective measures begin after a disorientation has challenged current beliefs, the hermeneutic interpretive actions can further commitment to current beliefs making them stronger, or can just as easily cause a change, a shift, a shattering of beliefs making the intentional transformation of action.

The Communicative Learning

The public sphere is a space where individuals congregate and discuss current social existence, political discourse, representation of power, or other challenging societal concerns (Habermas, 1964, 1970, 1984, 1991). It is a “realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” (Habermas, 1964, p. 49). Although the idea of communicative learning inside the public sphere involves reaching a genuine consensus

(Habermas, 1964, 1970), this research was focused on a genuine understanding. According to Habermas (1970), non-linguistic communications require respective appreciation for genuine understanding. That is, body language and gestures inside of the social text give deeper hermeneutic understanding to communicative actions (Habermas, 1970). The vernacular in musical theatre is a shared language, “speech is the medium of communication which already pre-supposes a tacit consensus” (Habermas, 1970, p. 370). This aligns with the extended-extended version of hermeneutics as proposed by the author that *text* includes the visual, the spatial, and the motional.

The Pandemic

The following stroll through history shows that pandemics are not a recent phenomenon. Additionally, this stroll shows that previous pandemics have not been globally as proportionally devastating as COVID-19 which in a short amount of time, disrupted the milieu norm to include mask wearing, constant attention to sanitation practices, school closings, business closings, and isolation.

1700s Yellow Fever and Before

In the late 1700s, the yellow fever outbreak in Philadelphia killed over 5,000 people. There were pandemics and plagues prior to this century such as the Athenian plague of 430 B.C. (Huremović, 2019), Justinian plague of 541-542 A.D. (Huremović, 2019), black death a.k.a. bubonic plague 1346-1353 (Huremović, 2019; Taylor, 2020), American plagues, including smallpox, of the 16th century (Huremović, 2019), and the great plague of London in 1665-1666 (Taylor, 2020). However, since the musical theatre historical beginning referenced in this paper began in the 1700’s, this was where the starting reference point occurred for this pandemic timeline.

1800s The Seven Cholera Pandemics

Moving on to the 1800s until the first quarter of the 1900s, the seven cholera pandemics, (Azizi & Azizi, 2010; World Health Organization, 2021) occurred during the theatre beginnings of tragedies and comedies of ancient Greece (Kenrick, 2017). According to physician Dr. Sell (1866), his documentation of the first case of what he refers to as “cholera Americana” (p. 94), occurred in New York in June of 1866. Interestingly, this was the same year of the famous performance, *The Black Crook*, as described in *The Musical Theatre Fairytale*. Since there wasn’t a statewide system for reporting cases of deaths due to cholera, there also was not a way to represent how this affected the Broadway community (Brooks, 1973).

1900s Measles, Polio, and the Spanish Flu

Moving on to the 1900s, in 1912, measles became a notifiable disease in the United States causing, on average for the decade, 6,000 deaths a year (National Center for Immunization, 2020). Although schools were closed due to the spread of polio, Broadway continued, as much of industrial America did also (Tucker, 2020).

One of the first closings of Broadway was during the Spanish flu epidemic, but it was not this pandemic that caused the shutdown. The Spanish Flu, caused by a strain of the H1N1 virus, was the first documented global pandemic and the first to occur during modern medical practices (Huremović, 2019). During the Spanish flu, many New York theatres were closed either by choice or by mandate. However, Broadway remained open, but “few people were willing to risk their lives for an evening’s entertainment” (Kenrick, 2017, *Plague and Contention* p. 4). Broadway felt the loss from the Spanish flu with the loss of actors. To name two: Shelley Hull, a promising actress, died January 14th due to the virus, and John Barrymore, a Broadway star, was unable to perform, dropping out, postponing, and canceling performances (Pettit, 1976).

Rather than the pandemic, a month-long shutdown of Broadway occurred on August 7, 1919, when the casts of twelve Broadway productions walked out, causing and inspiring others to eventually follow (Dilella, 2021; Kenrick, 2017). Eventually, the unions of the stagehands and musicians joined in bringing a nationwide standstill causing more than 37 Broadway productions to close and preventing 16 from opening. By September 6, 1919, producers succumbed to the strikers and accepted a new union contract (Kenrick, 2017). This was a historical happening because it was the first time that theatre participants were recognized as laborers establishing the Actors' Equity Association (Dilella, 2021).

1980s HIV Aids

The 1980s brought a deadly virus, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that led to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) (Kenrick, 2017). This was crudely referred to as a gay man's disease as this was the population affected the first and the hardest (Campbell, 2011; Francis, 2008; HIV.gov, 2019; Kenrick, 2017; Worobey et al., 2016). Although Broadway did not shutdown as a response to this pandemic, "AIDS has had a profound effect on the musical theatre, killing off many talents and theatre lovers in the prime of life" (Kenrick, 2017, Chapter 24 section, para. 1). The brutal deaths suffered by AIDS victims had similar characteristics to the deaths suffered by COVID-19 victims in that they often contracted fatal breathing issues and many died alone. The stigma of this disease, however, was different in that it was considered to be brought on by the victim-patient by their own actions. Musical theatre has a higher than average population of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, partly because of ancient roles in the arts "where women were banned from working required that men be recruited to play female roles" (Morris, 2021, p. 3). This provided a safe place for a male to exercise traditional feminine characteristics, and transgendered from male to female persons, a place to experience

their true selves. Patrick Pacheco, theatre historian, shares how musicals have evolved from not really having gay characters but having male characters with effeminate qualities, to musicals with double entendre, to numerous musicals with powerful resilient divas, finally to modern day boundary pushing musicals with greater queer representation (Colleran, 2019). Furthering this explanation of effeminate qualities, “audiences saw the occasional coded queer character, often the subject of jokes, or negative representations” (Ring, 2024). Additionally, Finn (2018) shares about gay men and musicals, it is generationally cultural, and that theatre has developed a tolerance of acceptance.

Swine Flu

The Swine flu was of pandemic proportions infecting 60.8 billion people globally with deaths ranging from 8,868-18,306 (National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Disease, 2019). Additionally, although the West African Ebola was considered pandemic, in the United States only 11 people were treated for Ebola (National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases, 2019). Neither of these prompted a Broadway shutdown.

Pandemic Portrayals in Theatre

Interestingly, theatre has portrayed many epidemics from the Greek tragedy of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* (Kousoulis et al., 2012; Ristani, 2020) to the 2017 play by Neil Bartlett, *The Plague* (Camus, 1957; Writing: Translations, adaptations, plays, 2018) based on Albert Camus’s classic book of the same name. A search in the Internet Broadway Database (2021), the official database for Broadway theatre information, found no musicals about pandemics or epidemics. A Google search brought results about the current ways to survive the closing of musical theatre performances and ponderings if a musical will be created about COVID-19.

Previous Pandemics and COVID-19

Previous pandemics have not even come close to the impact that COVID-19 has made on those who make a living in musical theatre (Dilella, 2021; Worldometer, 2021). As of May 29, 2021, with 34,035,318 documented cases and 609,421 deaths in the United States and 170,618,170 cases and 3,548,491 deaths globally (Worldometer, 2021), COVID-19 has caused more devastation from the late 1700s, the beginning of this research study, than any other worldwide phenomena (Cox & Amin, 2021). Pandemic statistics stopped being updated on April 13, 2024, because “the majority of countries have now stopped reporting” (Worldometer, 2024). The last reported global numbers of Coronavirus cases was 704,753,890, which was more than a four times increase in cases, and total number of deaths was 7,010,681, which was just about double the increase of deaths.

Other than Pandemic Shutdowns for Broadway

Pandemics are not the only catastrophic phenomena that affected Broadway. The Great Depression and the 9/11 terrorist attacks affected Broadway participants and attendees. These are the two biggest national phenomena that affected Broadway outside of pandemics and are referred to here to continue to build the understanding of the devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Great Depression

The Great Depression that occurred in the 1930s, caused poverty, lack of work, and health disparities, (Fishback et al., 2007; Ohanian, 2009; Stuckler et al., 2013) altering the consumption of musical theatre (Eisler, 2016; Pierce, 2021). During the depression of the 1930s, “Revues got smaller but funnier, musical comedies became sharper and better crafted, and operetta offered more spectacle than ever” (Kenrick, 2017, Keeping Broadway Alive section,

para. 3). Even though the run of each performance became shorter, there were enough ticket sales to keep musical theatre alive. “Broadway was down, but far from out” (Kenrick, 2017, Keeping Broadway Alive section, para. 3). From 1935-1939, the Federal Theatre Project was created during President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s tenure with the aim for “reemployment of theater workers on public relief rolls, including actors, directors, playwrights, designers, vaudeville artists, and stage technicians” (Federal Theatre Project, 1935-1939, n.d.). This seemed to be a time of reconfiguring a new normal, not far removed from the current attempts made at creating a new normal caused by COVID-19.

The September Attack of 9/11

The 9/11 terrorist attacks closed Broadway for only two days (DiLella, 2021; Kenrick, 2017; Russo, 2020). The Broadway League ordered a Broadway shutdown due to transportation issues citing that as a practical matter since tunnels, bridges, and subways were closed, people could not get to Manhattan (Russo, 2020). However, New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani encouraged a quick reopen to help ease the depression felt from the devastation of the terrorist attack (DiLella, 2021; Russo, 2020).

Musical workers came together as they so often do, to lighten the burden of social existence and bring song and dance to the stage. However, tourism was down forcing shows to close and exemplifying Broadway’s dependence on audience dollars (Kenrick, 2017). This has a similarity that was shared with the Broadway experience during the Great Depression (Eisler, 2016; Pierce, 2021) in which economic unrest made attendance almost feel like a frivolity rather than community moral building unity.

The 9/11 shutdown was different from the COVID-19 shutdown in that 9/11 was a coming together, an alleviation of sorts from a mutual evil enemy so that rebuilding economy,

American moral, and emotional healing could occur. For COVID-19, a coming together had to occur through social distancing purview.

The Musical

A paramount search in this literature review was searching for a connection between musical theatre and the adult education concepts of transformative learning, hermeneutic interpretation, and communicative learning. The search began with individual searches with musical theatre and each one the adult education concepts separately. Following this was a cumulative search of musical theatre and all three adult education concepts.

The Musical and Transformative Learning

In a search using the subject lines *transformative learning* and *musical theatre*, including peer review as a perimeter, 1,503 articles were discovered. In checking the first 20 articles listed in the search results, only six, 30%, actually included references to musical theatre (Bang, 2016; Cayari, 2019; Klatt, 2017; Standish, 2015; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2016; Wolf, 2017). Out of the remaining 14 articles, 13 were not related to musical theatre and one had reference to theatre in general. One musical theatre article of note in this discovery was by Bang (2016) in which she referred to Columbia professor, playwright, and author Dorothy Marcic's (n.d.), work in using music and musicals to explore real-life problems. There was also an article about musical theatre summer camp, but the focus was on the importance of amateur musical theatre rather than the Broadway experience of professionals (Wolf, 2017). Additionally, one article was based on the use of musicals by youth and their impact to positively transform themselves and their community (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2016).

The articles by Tintiangco-Cubales et al. (2016) and Wolf (2017) inspired a third subject line, *adult education*. There were two reasons this subject line of *adult education* was included.

The first is Mezirow's (1978, 2000) theory of perspective transformation. He postulates the difference of learning as an adult, as opposed to learning in childhood, is that adults discover there are "no fixed truths or totally definitive knowledge" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 3). Adults are constantly negotiating understanding and meaning based on the circumstances. Perspective transformation organically grew from the adult getting "caught in [their] own history and reliving" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 100) it, then being forced or jarred by a disruption in their current understanding, leading to critical self-examine of current assumptions (Mezirow, 2000).

Perspective transformation is an adult learning concept.

Second, although some professional musical theatre performers are children, this research was focused on the experience of five adult professionals which sometimes brought with it the added responsibility family. When all three of these subject lines plus the peer review perimeter were applied, 439 articles resulted. This was less than a third of the results in the previous search without the *adult education* subject line. The first 20 articles listed in the search results repeated nine of the previous articles and provided 11 new titles. Only three, 15%, of the articles in this search referenced musical theatre (Bang, 2016; Klatt, 2017; Wolf, 2017). Of note, these three articles were present in the search that included only the two subject lines of *transformative learning* and *musical theatre*, without *adult education*. The remainder focused mainly on arts research in adult education with no reference to musical theatre. The current research skirts the edge of these three subject lines, but has not exhausted or provided comprehensive research in the combination of these three areas.

The Musical and Hermeneutics

In a search using the subject lines *hermeneutics*, *musical theatre*, and *adult education*, including peer review as a perimeter, 214 articles were discovered. This exploration resulted in

an interesting play of hermeneutical understanding. The first article listed in these search results was by Legg and Green (2015), in which they tied hermeneutics to music theatre. Remarkably, the term *music theatre* in this New Zealand written sense meant music technology, not musical theatre as referred to in this paper. The first 10 articles listed in the research results had no connection to musical theatre, however, two were tied to music education in the compulsory setting (Legg & Green, 2015; Hatt, 2018).

Since few results seemed possible with previous searches in hermeneutics and musical theatre, the scope was widened to include just the subject line *theatre* instead of musical theatre. This brought a much bigger pool of options at 1,215 publications. Although the initial findings were bigger, the filtering results were similar to previous results. In the first 20 articles listed in the search results, three peripherally connected hermeneutics and theatre. The most promising was Sacerdoti's (2019) hermeneutic interpretation of Mickey Mouse at Camp de Gurs (Knudde, 2020). This was a seven-to-eight-minute film of Mickey traversing being a Jew in an internment camp. Although it was not a musical, it was theatre, and since Disney has many musicals that are animated or on stage, this was the closest possible connection. One other semi-close connection included the article by Bereswill and Morgenroth (2010) in the relationship of 30 years of television audience research and hermeneutic interpretation. However, the television shows studied were reality TV rather than musical theatre, live theatre, or even music programs.

The Musical and Habermas

In a search using the subject lines *Habermas, musical theatre, and adult education*, including peer review as a perimeter, only 93 results were discovered. Although none of the first 20 articles listed in the search results referred directly to musical theatre, two were of note. Goodman (2013) conducted a research involving an Algerian Reformist Theater group and

cultural communications, referring to Habermas as one, but not the main, of the references.

Turley (2001) looked at the German sociologist Max Weber's methodology in the socialization of music linking directly back to Habermas's Communicative Action Theory. Although Goodman's (2013) article touched on communicative action and theatre, and Turley's (2001) directly addressed communicative action and music, neither made a connection between communicative action and musical theatre.

When looking at Habermas's (1964, 1970, 1984, 1991) theory of communicative action, he distinguishes between the public and private sphere. The latter, the private sphere, is a safe space where an individual must be invited to participate, such as a home or a family. The former is a place where private individuals come together to speak freely about state and governmental activities. Important to note, the public sphere is not a part of the government, it is where private individuals congregate, to speak publicly and freely about state and governmental activities. However, the public sphere was designated as a rational voice acting to inform state and government. Although the data collection in this research was conducted in a setting of just two people for each interview, the researcher and the participant, the setting acted as a small public sphere. The participant shared their story in a setting where they could speak freely to inform the state and government, which for the purposes of this research was made up of educational entities, artistic entities, researchers, and those who have experienced disruption due to the pandemic.

Because the beginning findings in this search were so small, only 93 articles, further exploration of the literature was conducted using the term *public sphere* in substitution for *Habermas*. The results exploded to 1,468. However, a deeper dive into the first 20 articles listed in the search, showed that all three subject line words did not exist in individual articles. There

was one article of note by Hickey-Moody (2013) appropriately titled “Little Public Spheres” which explored the small individual public spaces of youth inside art arenas, one of which included musical theatre. Additionally, this article was influenced by Habermas’s theory, public spheres, and public pedagogy. However, this research was based on the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge which was a dance and drama challenge for youth in government funded schools to promote a healthy lifestyle (Green, 2003).

All three searches initially brought over a thousand results in the widest search perimeters, yet brought 93-437 publications in their narrowed perimeters. This literature search demonstrates that there was interest in these identifying combinations, yet not enough completed research to fill the gaps. For the author, this was inspirational in that the musical theatre culture provides an almost overt hermeneutical playground that with a little bit of enticement and sharing of information could reach the masses in an important way.

The Musical and Transformative Learning + Hermeneutics + Habermas

When all subject lines were used *transformative learning*, *hermeneutic*, *Habermas*, *musical theatre*, and *adult education*, only three results ensued, two of which were peer reviewed (Cardiff, 2012; Park, 1999), one was a dissertation (Carr, 2005), and one was based in nursing (Cardiff, 2012). The dissertation was focused on curriculum integration and critical diversity dialogue on college campuses (Carr, 2005). However, Carr’s (2005) dissertation differs from this dissertation in that it is an arts-based project in which a collaborative script was written by the director, with the collaboration of the students, about social hot topics.

When changing the subject line from musical theatre to just *theatre* in combination with the other five subject lines, 35 articles resulted, but on 17 were peer reviewed. Even though the articles had some reference to all or some of the subject lines, there were no complete matches.

This area of these particular identifiers has been broached but has not been saturated and was ripe with invitation for more exploration.

The Gap

Arts-based research is purposeful and growing in acceptance as credible qualitative research format (Barone, 2006; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Brown, 2015; Kim, 2015; Knowles & Cole, 2007, 2008; Saldaña, 2003, 2011; Yassi et al., 2016). In a library search using terms arts-based and narrative inquiry with the parameter of peer reviewed, dating from 1955 to present, the results were 3,794 documents. Using the same terms and identifier, but changing the years from 2000-2010, resulted in 801 documents. Again, using the same terms and identifier, but changing the years from 2010-2021, resulted in 3,045. In the last 21 years, there are more research documents with the same identifiers as there were in the 71 years combined. This is remarkable! The gap then is not in arts-based narrative inquiry.

The gap was in two areas. First, the gap was in arts-informed and narrative inquiry. Using the same parameters consecutively with the term arts-informed instead of arts-based netted for years 1955-2021 = 439 document; 2000-2010 = 93; and 2010-2021 = 357. Although this grouping is growing, there is still room for informative research. Second, the gap of the terms arts-informed, narrative inquiry, and COVID-19, pandemic, or coronavirus. This was interesting because the search engine adapted the year range according to its matrix. Addressing the term COVID-19 as the variable term, the search engine would only allow 2020-2021 in the year range, understandably. Three publications were found, but none were applicable or had the identifying terms in their title or descriptors. Addressing the term pandemic with all like identifiers, the search engine limited years to 2004-2021 and netted seven documents, but only two were in 2020 and zero in 2021. Neither of these were applicable. Finally, using the term

coronavirus, there were zero documents. This signified a remarkable gap, marking this research as one that could contribute.

Chapter Summary

This chapter started with a historical walk through research genres describing and justifying the theoretical framework, methodological platforms, method structures, and influential researchers. After setting the stage for qualitative research, a section on narrative inquiry described the purposeful connection to the perspective transformation and the extended version of the hermeneutic text. Following this, a clearer description of arts-based and arts-informed research was illustrated. Additionally, the need for arts-based and arts-informed research was justified. Next, a purposeful connection of perspective transformative learning theory with extended hermeneutics and communicative learning was described. It was important to reiterate not only the extension of hermeneutics from the strictly religious interpretation to academic interpretation, but also to encompass the visual, spatial, and movement communication involved in cultural interpretation.

For situational reference, two sections were included on previous Broadway shutdowns. The first involved other pandemics and although some shutdowns occurred during these historical pandemics, they were not due to the pandemic, but rather to fear of crowds and union strikes. The second involved financial constriction during The Great Depression and the shocked pause of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Summarizing this chapter was the discussion on the gap in the research. Although there was a significant number of narrative inquiry researches and even a fair number of arts-based researches outside art subject areas, there were fewer, but not a minute amount of arts-based narrative inquiry researches. The smaller representation comes from arts-informed research studies. Additionally, the distinction between arts-informed and arts-

based was fuzzy at best. The gap in need of exploration and clarification was within the arts-informed narrative inquiry arenas. And specifically, since COVID-19 was a relatively young pandemic, research in this arena was limited to the last year or two. The closing of this chapter assimilated the need for an arts-informed narrative inquiry exploring the effects of the COVID-19.

Chapter 3 - Methodology: Where We Plan to Go

The Hermeneutics:

The Visual, The Space, and The Movement

So now is a good time, a very, very good time to talk about the hermeneutical understanding of the interpretation of storytelling in this fairytale land of musicals. Hermeneutics is the understanding without knowing, it is the tacit, it is the hearing that which is not being said. Although hermeneutical understanding began with the interpretation of ecclesiastical, doctrinal, scriptural, theological texts, it soon outgrew these confines and became advantageous in the academic, collegiate, scholarly, educational realms. Furthermore, text became not only written, but verbalization, rhetorical, unwritten expression. Now this is all good and well in real time, in authentic living, in the present day present. However, the land of musicals is more than that. It is timeless, bigger than authentic, and can be experienced in the past through the written script, influenced by the setting in which it was set, and persuaded by the present day perception. Therefore, and forthwith, the nomenclator of this fairytale musical deems that the term text shall include all visual expression, spatial relationships, and movement communications! This is how we communicate in this lovely land of song and dance and drama.

Let us begin with that which is closest to the verbal communicating apparatus, the face. A fairytale in the land of musicals prevails on a stage, arena, theatre, colosseum, and sometimes if we are lucky, if we are very, very lucky, On Broadway. Because the adoring crowd, audience, congregation, and gallery of

admirers may be far away in this colosseum, facial expressions must be hyperbolic in nature. Smiles must be bigger, tears must drop more heavily, confusion must tumble from profiles, and fear must shutter through bones, so that those in the back, the very, very back of the colosseum can see the intended facial interpretation and hear that which is not being said.

Moving from the facial to human vessel, spatial relationship influences the hermeneutic interpretation of knowing. First and foremost, it is imperative, necessary, compulsory that you, the reader of this musical fairytale, become versed in the directions of the stage. The front of the stage, the part of the stage that is closest to the gallery of admirers, is called downstage. This is because in the very beginning, the very, very beginning, the stage was tilted (scribed) so all the admirers could see the performers as they moved about the stage. Therefore, the front of the stage was tilted down, making it downstage. In complementary fashion, the back of the stage was titled upstage. This is known as a raked stage (American Association of Community Theatre, 2021). Now this tilted topography did not last forever, eventually almost all stages became flat, and the gallery became raked. However, there are a few of these historical tilting stages left. The West End Theatres in London, England – which is the English version of On Broadway – is home to a plethora of raked stages to this day.

In addition to reference of space on stage, spatial reference to objects, things, props, curtains, and edge of the stage communicates understanding. Center-center stage is the strongest point, it is where the audience ocular is automatically drawn. Upstage, along the curtain draped border is the weakest

point, followed by either of the side legs. Legs, now that is another story for another time. Let us just say legs are the side curtains. In addition, spatial reference to others bore interpretive importance here. In close proximity, means that of intimate communication whether it be friendly banter, verbal brawling, or cozy affections. Across stage, however, is not necessarily the converse. Distant communications on stage lean heavily on facial expression and movement to better define intent.

You see, intimacies can be shouted across the stage in friendly banter with facial expression and movement to convey friend rather than foe. However, similar verbiage may be shouted across stage with hardened face and sharp staccato punctuated movement conveying disappointment, anger, or threat. Imagine the phrase “come here”. Even at a distance, with a smile, a grin, a beam on the face and a wave of beckoning hand by the gesturer, “come here” becomes a playful, requesting, and delightful urgency. Even at a distance, with a turned down muzzle, stomp of the foot, and pointing designation, “come here” commands, expects, demands the listener to comply. And finally, even at a distance, “come here” turns to a silent unspoken “com hither” with a bowed head, seductive eyes, and beckoning temptations So you see, how the words sound affects how the words are interpreted, depending on the collective of facial expression, spatial location, and movement enhancement attached, associated, and affiliated to the words. It is not only the words themselves that speak, it is the way in which the words are presented that speaks the truest of true.

Introduction to the Methodology

This was an arts-informed narrative inquiry based on the first phase, the disorienting dilemma, of the perspective transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978, 1997, 2000) that was forced upon the musical theatre community during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. Mezirow (1978) states that “art, music, and dance are alternative languages” (p. 6). Marcuse (1969/2000; 1978/2003) postulates that art organically represents social existence bringing awareness that inspires productive discourse. This was a story created from the narratives of the experience of five musical theatre participants when Broadway closed for the 2020 season on March 12, 2020 (Russo, 2020).

The epistemology of this research was constructivism based on Crotty’s (1998) definition where the focus was on the “meaning-making activity of the individual mind” (p. 58). The theoretical framework was perspective transformative learning that comes from our critical reflection “on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 7). Perspective transformation was initiated by a disorientation that caused discomfort in understanding, that inspired reflection, modification, evolution, and transformation of the current knowing (Bhukhanwala et al., 2016; Mezirow, 1997, 2000). The methodology of this research was an arts-informed narrative inquiry (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2015) using the format of a novella-script for the final research report. This novella-script progressed with the storyline of the research creating a narrative that has a beginning, middle, and end. Kim (2015) tells us that a story is made up of detailed, organized narrative that are arranged in a story-like way so that the organization of the narratives form a beginning, middle, and end. The methods included two interviews of five

different members of the musical theatre profession. The interviews were comprised of conversation phases (Kim, 2015) and in-depth open-ended (Bhattacharya, 2017) interviews.

Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this research was to understand how the Broadway pandemic closing affected five musical theatre professionals.

The design of this research was to tell a story of the impact of the 2020 shut down of Broadway through a culmination of narratives collected from five musical theater professionals. Because art can generate emotion that disorients our beliefs and redefines how we see norms (Eaves, 2014; Gadamer, 1992; Marcuse, 1978/2003), the participants were asked to choose a piece of musical theatre to represent their emotional response to this disorientation. For this research art was a purposeful and necessary form of communication. The closing of Broadway was unique, remarkable, and significant. The one research question and three research sub-questions that guided this research were as follows:

1. What are the stories of musical theatre professionals as they experienced the effects of the shutdown of Broadway during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. What effects did this shutdown have on their professional lives?
 - b. What effects did this shutdown have in their connection to their musical theatre community?
 - c. What effects did this shutdown have on their beliefs of self-identity?

Subjectivity Statement

In respect and authenticity for accurately representing researcher subjectivity, first person voice will be used in this section.

I have previously formed understanding and opinion in movement arts, dance, and musical theatre. In consideration of my subjectivity, I have experience as an educator, performer, choreographer, movement coach, and director. I was adjunct professor and head of the department of movement and dance for an American community college for four years. My duties included choreographing, coaching stage movement, and performing in musicals. I helped host and taught workshops for the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (The Kennedy Center, 2021). Topics of the workshops included stage movement and musical theatre dance. This brought to me an awareness of the musical theatre community in general, but also the individual nuances of each sub-community that organically develops within each musical. It is common for musicals to rehearse from six to eight weeks, up to 10 hours a day, in preparation for performance (Simonson, 2010). Therefore, in these quickly formed musical communities there were constant verbal, physical, and emotional human connections, which created shared interpretive nuances, meanings, and understandings.

Additionally, I was a speech, drama, debate, and dance teacher for the public and private school setting for 12 years working with preschool through twelfth grade students. During this time, I had the unique opportunity which included an experimental choreographic approach of separately choreographing six groups of 35-45 teenage students in movement patterns. For performance, the 200+ students were joined together *en masse* to dance, on stage, in the aisles, and up the stairs in unison. Also, I have choreographed for large religious settings for 10 years. Audience numbers often peaked at 3,000 and performances were televised. This brings an awareness of the challenges that Broadway professionals may experience with large audiences and videography. I have worked for an arts and humanities council teaching prominent state and national leaders about musical theatre and dance, for over 10 years.

I have earned a master's degree and administrative professional certification in education focusing on creating curriculum and professional development. My research topic focused on the brain-body connection and used movement to challenge learning. I have presented this professional development at universities and for national entities such as The Big Read (National Endowment for the Arts, 2021), Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teaching & Teachers (Teacher 2 Teacher, n.d.), Oklahoma State University Writing Project, Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English, and for the regional director of the National Writing Project.

In the culture of musical theatre, messages of existence and consciousness are communicated through voice, action, and script. Mezirow (1978, 1998, 2000) postulates that social responsibility begins with the self. Marcuse (1969/2000, 1978/2003) sets forth that the purpose of aesthetic representation is to the commitment and responsibility of social existence that inspires, requires, and transforms social consciousness. Disorientation has the organic nature to produce self-examination leading to assessment of current assumptions and an exploration of other options that may initiate transformation. For this research, the use of art organically, and with less risk, acted as a catalyst for self-examination and provided an opportunity to develop the social consciousness of which Marcuse spoke (1969/2000, 1978/2003).

Because this research was not judgmental in nature, I did not act as adjudicator, give opinion, or have biases on the participant narrative or choice of musical theatre representational piece. My concern of researcher bias was in the area of anticipating the participants' connection to the musical theatre representational piece. It is common in this community to be familiar with a multitude of musicals and with that comes common understandings and interpretations of shared musicals. Often, when there is conversation amongst musical theatre participants, instead of describing something in commonly held verbal text, there will be references and comments

such as, ‘The atmosphere is similar to the third scene of the first act of this musical’; or, ‘Do you remember how the towns people felt when the house landed on the witch and her feet shriveled up?’ (staceypacer, 2008). A slew of ongoing conversations often transpires organically, sometimes with unfinished sentences, yet still with shared understanding and evocative body language. This hermeneutic understanding could not be separated from the interview data collection, and has been transparently shared and represented throughout the data reporting process.

Subjectivity is not something that can be separated from the researcher. Peshkin (1988) states, “One’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed” (p. 17). Although I could not remove this garment, or better suited for this study, my costume, I could reflexively attend to it in a manageable way. Tracy (2010) states, that “Self-reflexive researchers examine their impact on the scene” (p. 842). Additionally, Tracy (2010) shares that “Researchers can practice self-reflexivity even before stepping into the field through being introspective, assessing their own biases and motivations, and asking whether they are well-suited to examine their chosen...topics at this time” (p. 842). Being aware of this self-reflexive commentary is why I started a musical theatre fasting prior to collecting the musical theatre arts-informed representation from my participants. This fast helped to provide me with a cleansed palate so that I could see, hear, and understand from their point of view what my participants were trying to convey.

Furthermore, this self-reflexivity was repeatedly used not only through the data collection process, but in the data analysis reporting as well. Although, as stated earlier that researcher subjectivity could not be fully removed, I intentionally attempted to “show rather than tell self-reflexivity by weaving [my] reactions or reflexive considerations of self-as-instrument

throughout the research report” (Tracy, 2010, p. 842). Self-reflexivity is considered to be “honesty and authenticity with one’s self, one’s research, and one’s audience” (p. 842). As Peskin (1988) states, “By monitoring myself, I can create an illuminating, empowering personal statement that attunes me to where self and subject are intertwined” (p. 20). This coincides with Kim’s (2015) idea of the researcher and participant being co-creators of an oral history. These theoretical understandings helped me ethically and transparently manage my subjectivity.

Rationale for Qualitative Study

The focus of this study was to understand the impact experienced by musical theatre professionals when Broadway shut down due to the pandemic. The pandemic pushed a reshaping of language, perception, and understanding. From the collection and culmination of the literature review, it became clear that a gap existed in a few areas of this proposal. First, although there was some interest in a dichotomy partnership between the three adult learning theories, there were no studies including a combination of all three together. This was interesting because hermeneutics and the ideal speech situation organically support a transformative environment. The idea that these three theories had not been explored in unison left an omitting opportunity to better understand purposeful transformation.

Second, because musical theatre professionals commonly speak in *musical theatre speak*, it was purposeful to use an art platform to collect the data. However, the data collecting pool was muddled in that there was not a clear structure for collecting, housing, and reporting the data in an artistic way. Of note, and frustration, was the discovery during the literature review that there was not a clear definition between creating art for a deeper understanding, or using existing art for a deeper understanding. This gap prompted the researcher to propose the clarification of terms and definitions of *arts-based* and *arts-informed*. After this clarification, it became clear

that an arts-informed platform was the best way to keep the focus on the stories and narratives where using an existing piece of art as a representation would create a quick and thorough understanding. Furthermore, the choice of art to act as representative was obvious in that the participants were musical theatre professionals. Using a piece of musical theatre made for an authentic and purposeful ideal speech situation that was hermeneutically influenced and understood.

Third, also of importance in the review of literature was the history of shutdowns and closings of Broadway, not only in reference to other pandemics, but for any reason. The most surprising was the abbreviated shutdown after the 9/11 attacks. Not only was it just a couple of days, but the main reason that Broadway closed was because of traffic. Another surprising shutdown was the union shutdown that occurred at the time of the Spanish Flu epidemic. This initiated recognition for, and the creation of, the Actors' Equity Association. Because these were the two most notable shutdowns of Broadway, this further pushed and inspired the importance of this research.

Fourth, one last validating note. In the same timeframe of the 2018-2019 season, more people attended Broadway shows than the combination of all 10 New York City sports teams events. This work meets the masses, in a way that makes understanding scholarship and research more accessible. As exemplified by The New York Times theatre reporter in his many articles announcing the pandemic shutdowns (2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2021a; 2021b). These announcements began with a few days' shutdown (Paulson, 2020a) and morphed into "the rest of the year" (Paulson, 2020b), to "at least through May" (Paulson 2021a), eventually to, "But not until September" (Paulson, 2021b). This was a worthy topic that is relevant in reaching the masses for understanding life world and transitional meaning-making. Additionally, it was

timely and significant for the current erratic bipartisan terrain that has been affected by the pandemic conditions.

Methodological Frame

The methodological framework for this research was an arts-informed narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is the narrative text shared by the participant, used to understand and describe the knowing of the lived experiences, social influences, and emotional responses (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2015). Arts-informed differs from arts-based in that the latter is focused on that meaning-making that occurs while the art making is being explored and created. The former is focused on art that inspires and represents a deep understanding of the meaning-making. The main purposes of arts-informed practice and research are “to enhance understanding of the human condition...[and]...reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 59). Depending on art in this way brings forth this tacit understanding, that otherwise would be indescribable, inexpressible, and incommunicable.

Although arts-informed research is a stand-alone qualitative method, it was used in this research to enhance other methodological approaches (Coles & Knowles, 2007). Barone and Eisner (2012) state that arts-based research is a species of qualitative research. For the purposed of this research, nestled inside of qualitative research was narrative inquiry, nestled inside of narrative inquiry was an arts-informed data collection research method, and finally, an arts-based format portrayed the data analysis in a creative way that meets the masses.

The data collection was comprised of arts-informed narratives, chosen and created by the participants, during the interview processes. The participants chose a song and dance number that represented one of the most disorienting moments they experienced during the 18-month pandemic shutdown. They shared these narratives in video conferencing interviews. The

transcripts from these interviews provided raw data that would be culminated into the data analysis report.

The data analysis was reported in a novella-script format. It was part novella in that it was a short novel or long story. It was part script in that it was told with a shortened version of description that you might see in a normal musical theatre script. However, it was not a formal script structure. This semi-script structure was chosen so that the visualization comprehension of the space, movement, and mood of the setting could be understood, without tramping through the technical jargon of the directorial directions of a formal script. This was intended as a respectful way of meeting the masses.

This novella-script was comprised of quotes from the individual transcripts of the participants and was combined in an entertaining, but highly informative and effective way. A story was created as if all the participants were on a stage and sharing their stories about their pandemic shutdown experiences with one another and the audience. Quotes from the interview transcripts were woven together so that it was as if the participants were talking to, understanding, and comforting each other. Yet, they had never, to the researcher's understanding, met one another in real life.

As an added purposeful way to meet the masses, including those who are not musical theatre aficionados, a little musical theatre fairy interrupted the data reporting throughout the novella-script and shared intuited hermeneutical musical theatre understanding. Interestingly, this little fairy thoughtfully explained intuited things just in the nick of time for the proceeding part of the novella-script.

This arts-based storytelling of the arts-informed collection of narratives went beyond the scope of traditional formats to create a deeper understanding that could not have been

experienced without the art (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bhattacharya, 2017; Bhukhanwala et al, 2016; Cole & Knowles, 2008; Eaves, 2014; Gadamer, 1992; Kim, 2015; Marcuse 1969/2000; 1978/2003; Saldaña, 2003). The arts-informed data collection created a safe space, an ideal speech situation. Arts-based data reporting created a meaningful and powerful way of sharing the data. And the musical theatre fairy made understanding the data for the masses.

Arts-based research is a purposeful method of sharing narratives of social realities (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Brown, 2015; Kim, 2015; Yassi et al., 2016) giving “voice to those traditionally marginalized and providing a less exploitative research method” (Lewis, 2011, p. 506). The intention of this research was to give voice to the participants by providing minimal intrusion of their lives by using their native language, musical theatre speak. By using a representation with which they were well versed and familiar. An arts-based research study, that inspired the creativity used in this research, focused on the oppression experienced by the participants, three incarcerated women who recycled trash into art in a large dump site of Jardim Gramacho in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Brown, 2015). This art recycling research was transformational for the participants in that the art-based research process allowed the women to reflect and explore their past, while inviting them to imagine their future. In a different directional approach, rather than Brown’s (2015) personal point of view of the participants for social existence awareness, Yassi et al. (2016), looked at using art for social change. Five different field projects used different arts-based formats to explore and challenge social power dynamics. The study by Yassi et al. (2016) exemplifies Marcuse’s (1969/2000) position that art tends to “form reality” (p. 24) and Mezirow’s (2000) position that arts create “inspiration, empathy, and transcendence” (p. 7) of self-knowledge.

Arts-based research is often used in the educational setting in a constructivist approach of meaning-making on the individual level (Crotty, 1998). Bhukhanwala et al. (2016) used the theatre of the oppressed techniques on the transformational learning experienced by teacher candidates in an internship preparatory program. This explored their identity, conflicts, and meaning-making depicted through critical self-reflection, disorientation, discovery, and transformation. Through the transitional learners' lived experiences, learners took "ownership of their learning process when the disorienting dilemmas" (Bhukhanwala et al., 2016) occurred, providing the pivotal moment of transformation. Chilton (2013), an arts educator, took this self-exploration further when she created an alternative book in an ethnographic study of arts as a paradigm. Both of these arts-based studies created a finished product depicting the research data.

Arts-informed research has been used as a safe platform for difficult conversations. One example is a study in which the researcher was complete participant (Preissle & Grant, 2004). A group of art instructors conducted a self-directed study on how to make art more meaningful and relevant for their students (Gates, 2014). Findings uncovered privileged sameness, self-silencing, downplaying diversity, and playing nice, which exposed emotions of oppression in the teacher participants and questions of trickle-down effects in student experiences. Arts-based and arts-informed research make it possible that "Both the researcher and audience gain understandings not possible through conventional qualitative data analysis" (Saldaña, 2003, p. 230). This research exemplified the previous statement made by Saldaña (2003) in that the researcher gained understanding about the participants' experiences that would not have been possible through conventional methods. Additionally, the audience gained understanding not only about the participants' experiences, but also about the hermeneutical understandings intuited by this community.

Participants

Five participants were identified through purposive sampling and were interviewed for information-rich text using an arts-informed format. The arts-informed format, a musical theatre song and dance number, was chosen by the participant and used as a representation of their experience of the 18-month pandemic shutdown. Data was collected by verbal and nonverbal communication during video conferencing interviews which included description of how the chosen song and dance number represented their experience.

Participant Selection

A purposive sampling of five musical theatre professionals, either employed at the time of the announcement of the March 2020 shutdown or scheduled to perform/choreograph/direct during the shutdown, was assembled. All participants met the following requirements. They originated from a professional musical theatre company such as MTH Theaters (MTH Theater at Crown Center, n.d.), regional theatre companies that perform new musicals (Wright, 2014). Even though some of the aforementioned companies are not Broadway, they take their lead from the best known and most reputable American musical theatre company, Broadway. All participants were members of the Actors' Equity Association (n.d.).

An additional parameter requirement was that participants must have been employed in the profession at least two years, establishing a normative (Habermas, 1974; Mezirow, 1997) for understanding the musical theatre working environment. The two-year professional working requirement was put in place because the environment of performance is a fluctuating terrain, having a larger than conventional acceptance of untraditional working times, environments, and expectations. Theatre becomes the life world and creates the normative expectation, *the show must go on*. The first year of professional theatre is similar to an apprenticeship perspective of

teaching where the social aspect is more than just the immediate physical space and community; it is also the connectedness of the community within the bigger societal norms and influences (Pratt et al., 2016). Therefore, this year of apprenticeship and year of work experience were justifiable for participant perimeter.

The phrase, *the show must go on*, has been often repeated and carries some understanding even for those outside the community of professional performers. However, those outside may not fully understand to what extent this mantra, spoken and unspoken, truly implies. For performers to willingly, or expectedly, play through injury or illness, especially pre-pandemic, is and has historically been the norm. Although the phrase focuses on *the show*, it also encompasses the performer. Because if the performer cannot perform, someone else will perform their part. This can create insecurity in their job security. *The show must go on* even in bleak times, sometimes especially in bleak times. A powerful example of this is how quickly Broadway returned after the 9/11 terrorist attacks of 2001 (DiLella, 2021; Kenrick, 2017; Russo, 2020). *The show must go on* even when scenes require emotions that are not easy, almost impossible, to access for the performer. Additionally, when emotions are not easy, almost impossible, to manage while preparing and performing a show. If a performer has an aversion to or a hatred towards another performer, and the next scene requires a beautiful loving intimate emotion, then the show overrides the personal issues. If a performer has had a great loss of a loved one, and the musical they are performing does not match, and may hinder, their personal grief, *the show must go on*. To add insult to the challenge, a performer may willingly, or be directed to, channel their pain into their performance. Happy songs may be sung with tears of sadness. Anger towards someone may be reimagined, readdressed, reconfigured, and portrayed

as love on stage. This is what the phrase, *the show must go on*, more deeply means in the performance industry.

Research Site

Because of the pandemic, and because of the focus of this research, the research site was a commonly used video conferencing platform familiar to all of the participants. During the interview process, research findings referencing the video conferencing platforms as the norm for interviewing, could not be found. However, since then, video conferencing interview format has multiplied many times over and is considered a normative option. At the time, there was, however, research on video conferencing sessions by mental health professionals (Cipolletta et al., 2018; Connolly et al., 2020; Wells et al., 2020) and medical professionals (Dalley et al., 2020). This seemed an ethical equivalent to video conferencing for professional research. Cipolletta et al. (2018) conceded that if a client feels more comfortable in their own home than in the therapist's office, then video conferencing was a productive vehicle for therapy consultation. Not only do many in society feel safer in their homes, but often there were long periods of mandated stay-at-home orders. Additionally, Cipolletta et al. (2018) stated that "while being present in two different physical environments" the engaged participants are "simultaneously present in the environment of the other virtually" (p. 225). Video conferencing offered a recording and transcription option, both of which were utilized.

Interestingly, the video conferencing environment created a unique comfortable and safe cocoon-like environment that encapsulated discussions about difficult experiences protected and confidential. To make sure the video conferencing environment was safe and confidential, the invitation to the conference was password protected and required admittance by the researcher.

This gives the researcher an opportunity to filter only the entrance of the participants. The particular video conferencing platform was chosen because it was also a part of the learning management system of the academic entity that proctored the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

Sequence of Enrollment

To clearly communicate the sequence of enrollment, it was necessary to understand the structure of the research:

1. First, an invitational email was sent explaining that the participant would be involved in three interviews via a video conference platform.
2. Next, a 15-30 minute Invitational video conference conversation with each individual participants took place giving the opportunity for the researcher and participant to put a face to the name and voice. This established trustworthiness. Additionally, it built excitement for, and commitment to, the research process.
3. Email communication continued as necessary throughout the process. This continued to build trust between the researcher and participant. The email preceding the first interview, included the letter of consent, offering to answer any questions via email, phone, or video conference.
4. A 30-60 minute Introductory video conference interview began with a verbal review of the letter of consent. The participants had either returned their signed consent prior to the first Introductory video conference interview, or as the interview started but before any discussion or questions proceeded. The researcher required that the consent arrive via email before the interview proceeded. The consent had to be printed, signed, scanned, and emailed. Although prior to the pandemic, this type of email consent was not the

norm, it was necessary during the unprecedented times. Once this had been completed, a description of the research process was explained. Then, a schedule of interview times was set. Following this, a description of the arts-informed musical theatre piece was discussed. Lastly, a description of the member checking process was shared.

5. The arts-informed piece was a piece of musical theatre, chosen by the participant, to represent their experience of the Broadway shutdown. It could have been a song and dance number or a monologue. They all chose a song and dance number and provided a link. It did not have to be, but could have been, a piece that they had previously performed.
6. For the lengthy Main interview, the time limit was not capped. The participants continued sharing until they had completed the description of their experiences. One participant had an unexpected interruption and required two settings to complete their thoughts and descriptions of their experience.
7. A 15-30 minute Closing conversation provided a chance to explain the member checking process, answer any lingering questions from the participants, and a final farewell. Email contact continued as needed or prompted throughout the process.
8. Unexpected opportunities to meet some of the participants arose during this research as the researcher made yearly visits to New York City to attend multiple Broadway shows. The meetings were casual in structure, not focused on interview questions or procedures, but more on getting to know one another. For the researcher, it included getting to know the Broadway and New York City milieu. For the participants, they happily shared their experiences and asked about the research process. Additionally, the researcher had the opportunity to see all participants either perform themselves, or a performance in which

they directed or choreographed. Some of these performances happened during the research process, others happened before the research was even imagined. The researcher directed the participants that if they should run into one another before, during, or after a performance, that they would act as if they did not know one another. It was fortunate that this was stated, because the researcher and a participant ran into one another on a few occasions.

The opportunity for this wonderful group of participants developed through a committee member of the researcher's doctoral committee team. This committee member was in contact, professionally and/or personally, with five musical theatre professionals that were available and excited to participate in this research.

The first email, the invitation to be a part of this research, was sent to all five participants on February 2, 2021. After receiving positive responses from all five participants, the first Invitational video conference was scheduled with each participant, that included the following information:

1. The researcher's name and information on how this research came to be
2. A sincere appreciation for being a part of this research
3. Description of the three interviews
4. A consent must be printed, signed, scanned, and returned via email before interviewing could begin.
5. An invitation for them to email, text, or call with any questions, concerns, or comments
6. Reassurance of updates, schedules, and expectation
7. Exchange of how the researcher and the committee member know one another, and the participant and committee member know one another

Data Collection

Data collection was comprised of interviews and arts-informed pieces of musical theatre representation, along with researcher field notes. All participants were eager and excited to participate.

Introductory Interview

The first introductory interview continued the “conversation phase” (Kim, 2015, p. 293) that was born in the 15- minute invitation conversation. Trustworthiness had already begun in the email communications and the Invitation conversations (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bhattacharya, 2017; Cole & Knowles, 2008; Kim, 2015). The trustworthiness built in the conversation phase began laying the foundation of Habermas’s (1974; 1984) ideal speech situation. A description of the research process was shared, consent forms were signed and returned, and schedules were agreed upon. The consent had to be printed, signed, scanned, and returned via email. Proper protocol normally required hard copy signature, but this had become the new norm under pandemic circumstances.

Included in this interview, the participants were asked to identify and bring to the next interview three disorienting moments that they experienced during the pandemic shutdown. The number of three disorienting moments was chosen because it was a reasonable representation of the changing terrain experienced by the musical theatre community as the initial shutdown of March 12, 2020 changed reopening dates (Pogrebin & Paulson, 2020; Russo, 2020), suggesting that numerous disorientations and pivotal moments might have occurred. The researcher’s reason for asking participants to provide three disorientations was to guide the focus of the narrative so that the participants concentrated on disorientating moments rather than a meandering of things that happened.

In preparation for the lengthy Main interview, the participants were prompted to bring an answer to the following question, “If you could choose a musical theatre song and dance to represent one of your pivotal moments, what would it be?” All the participants responded positively to this question and were eager to ponder it. This was a big part of setting the tone, focus, and mood of the Main interview.

Lengthy Main Interview

During this lengthy 2- to 4-hour long main interview, the researcher’s positionality varied from outsider in collaboration with insider to reciprocal collaboration and sometimes even insider in collaboration with other insiders (Rowe, 2014). Special attention was given to actively seeking out and monitoring my subjectivity throughout by focusing on the point of view of the participant, especially when referring to the arts-informed representation (Peshkin, 1988; Tracy, 2010). If lulls occurred during the interview process, the researcher used sentence stems such as, “Please tell me more about...” and “You mentioned earlier that...”. The researcher had a narrative “competence of listening” (Kim, 2015, p. 293) and act as both an excavator of and co-creator the narrative process (Kim, 2015).

Closing Conversation

The third closing conversations varied in length and were conducted as a conversational phase (Kim, 2015) during varied settings that included email and in-person communications. There was a review of the member checking process, a chance to answer any lingering questions by the participants, and a final farewell. Although questions organically rose, no additional data was collected.

Movement Communication

The quotes from the transcripts provided pieces of information. Additionally, details were collected and noted when comparing the transcripts with video recordings in the form of visual, spatial, and movement communications. The combination of the transcripts with the visual, spatial, and movement communications created mood, intent, and purpose of stories shared. Throughout the data analysis, these moods, intents, and purposes were preserved and authentically shared.

Interview Questions

The following questions were intended as a guide, however, the participants often addressed these questions even before they were asked. During the Introductory Interview, the participants were asked to bring to the Main Interview the stories of three disorienting moments caused by the pandemic shutdown and a piece of musical theatre representation. By postponing the responses to these requests, this helped to set the atmosphere for deep reflection on the part of the participant. Additionally, the request for the participants to wait to bring a piece of musical theatre representation to the Main Interview, aided the researcher in properly managing intention and authenticity so that she could experience the piece through the eyes, ears, mind, and heart of the participant.

Introductory Interview Questions

The introductory interview was combined with information sharing. Some of the interview questions were administrative, some were personal, and some were confirming that the participants understood the process.

1. Do you have questions about the letter of consent? (Although most of the participants had already properly signed and returned their consent forms, it was still important to also discuss this verbally.)
2. Where are you now and what professional activities are you participating in?
3. Do you have any questions about this research process?
4. Before our next interview, I would like you to think of three pivotal moments of disorientation that were caused by the shutdown. Can you bring these and share them during our next interview?
5. Please do not share this next request with me at this time, bring it to our next interview. It is important that you do not share it with me now because I do not want to anticipate what your responses will be. Can you choose a musical theatre piece, such as a song and dance number or a monologue that would represent your experience of this 18-month pandemic shutdown focusing?
6. Remember this is an arts-informed research. You get to help direct how the conversations go in these interviews. Do you have any questions?
7. Can we schedule our next interview? It may be lengthy, the time will depend on you.

Lengthy Main Interview Questions

There were only a few questions for this interview. The purpose was to let the participant lead in this narrative.

1. Can you share your three disorienting moments caused by the pandemic shutdown?
2. What piece of musical theatre did you choose to represent your experience?
3. Why is this pivotal moment the one you chose to discuss?
4. In what ways does the musical theatre representation represent your experience?

Organically through these few questions, the participants addressed how the shutdown affected their professional life, connection to their community, and their beliefs of self-identity. However, towards the end of this interview, the participants were asked directly about each of these three areas giving them a chance to add or clarify important details.

Closing Conversation

This was guided by what was left unasked or unanswered by the participant and researcher. This was open-ended. No data was collected.

Member Checks

For member checking, the participants were sent a copy of the historical chronological accounts created from the raw data secured in the transcriptions of the interviews (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2015). The risks of this research were not more than minimal compared to everyday life encounters.

Data Management

Not only was accuracy of the interview transcription imperative for proper data collection, but equally important was the nonverbal communication recorded in the video but not represented in the written transcription. After the transcription text was downloaded, it was housed in a spreadsheet for ease and organization. For validation of transcription, the researcher watched and listened to the video recordings while verifying or editing the transcript. Additionally, the researcher notes were added to the transcription describing nonverbal communications and mood shifts in the video conferencing milieu.

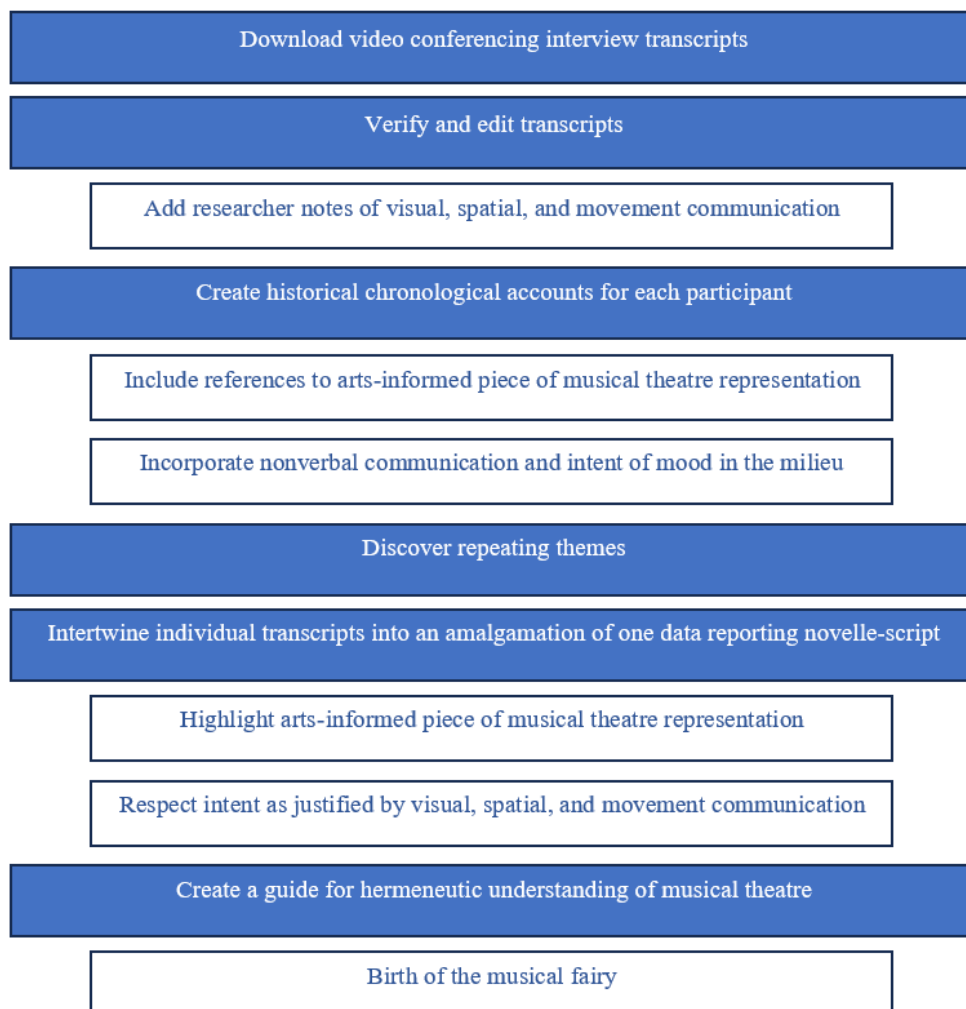
After the first introductory and second interviews, the video recordings were downloaded and safely stored. Transcriptions were pulled via the video recording platform. Transcriptions

were scrutinized by verifying or editing accuracy, plus researcher field notes were added describing nonverbal communication and shifts in the milieu.

Data Analysis

To begin the data analysis, the video recordings, audio recordings, and transcriptions were downloaded from the video conferencing platform and safely stored. A few attempts were made to thoroughly, professionally, and accurately analyze the data, while also thoughtfully, authentically, and genuinely report the data. Eventually, a process that respectfully addressed both the professional and the artistic was decided. See Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Data Analysis



Analysis began with the creation of detailed historical writing of quotes from the transcriptions. It was tedious, long, and laborious; however, it was an important step in setting the stage for the intertwining of the amalgamation of the separate stories. This step was comprised of 260 pages of quotes purposefully woven with anecdotal information so that the researcher could better and more clearly understand the participants.

From the historical chronological accounts came seven repeating themes. These themes later became the seven scenes of the novella-script data reporting. Without the historical chronological accounts, these seven repeating themes would not have been as thoroughly explored and vetted. The data from the visual, spatial, and movement communications were added to the stories. The intent of the visual, spatial, and movement communications from the interviews of the participants, was preserved and respectfully portrayed in the novella-script.

This novella-script was born. To keep the anonymity of the participants safe, not only were pseudonyms used, but identifying information was adapted. The use of fictional devices added in securing their anonymity by keeping the intent of their exact quotes while keeping their identity unrecognizable. The novella-script provided a genuine representation of the data by placing the data in a fictional way inside of a representatively real environment. Again, this kept the intent of the accuracy of the stories without exposing the participants. Finally, and importantly, the novella-script made academic findings, which can sometimes be hard to digest, more palatable for the masses.

A surprising discovery made for a beautiful new character. While writing the novella-script, it became apparent that pieces of hermeneutical understanding in the musical theatre community were needed. It was as if a pin needed to be put in place in the novella-script, and a narrator needed to step inside of the novella-script to describe the intuited understanding of the

musical theatre community. Kristin Bernadette Lansbury, the musical theatre fairy, became the guide for hermeneutical understanding in this community. Her presence made these findings not only palatable, but intentionally enjoyable.

After a few attempts at managing and analyzing the data in the normal ways, it became clear that the data would not fulfill the authentic intent by using the normal ways. Therefore, arguments for not coding, for doing something unusual, and for using fictional devices were made. This is what inspired the novella-script idea with the help of the little hermeneutical musical theatre fairy.

Second considered, was data reporting in the conversational storytelling manner. Although patterns and themes could be recognized in the data, fitting the data into coding perimeters would chunk up the findings and make them less organic and palatable. Saldaña (2016) states that “there are times when coding the data is absolutely necessary, and times when it is most inappropriate for the study at hand” (p. 2). This statement not only gave permission, but also inspired new and unusual ways of data reporting.

The participants shared their storied experiences surrounding the 18-month 2020 Broadway pandemic with intent and integrity. Therefore, relying on the data to dictate the organizing and reporting of the findings became a more authentic way. Saldaña (2016) states, “Coding is just *one* way of analyzing qualitative data, not *the* way” (p. 2). Therefore, in keeping with the artistic theme of *The Musical Theatre Fairytale*, the grip on safety of coding was loosened and it became clear that was more fitting and apropos to report in a like-minded musical theatre way. The encouragement to brave the new way came from Saldana (2016) when he stated that he preferred, “You yourself, rather than some presumptive theorist or hardcore methodologist, determine whether coding is appropriate for your particular research” (p. 2). This

gave liberty to the researcher to analyze and report on the data in a unique way that would respect the depth of understanding shared by the participants.

The Argument for Doing Something Unusual

After attempts were made to report the data in the normal coding ways, and after the discovery of support from Saldaña (2016) to know when to use, and when not to use, coding was discovered, the barriers to report the data in an unusual way were removed. Because the participant population and the arts-informed piece were musical theatre in nature, it seemed purposeful to use a similar format for reporting the data. The first consideration was to create a script. However, script writing and reading, with all its technical jargon and symbols, can be quite tedious even for the experienced performer and director. An edited or adapted version of a traditional script seemed a possible solution. Because these data reports were longer than a story but shorter than a novel, the term *novella-script* seemed to be the perfect identifying title. Inside the novella-script, just enough directional details, without the professional jargon, could be added to help describe the scenes without getting bogged down in the technical terms.

This way of data reporting then brought the challenge of how to integrate all the separate stories in a meaningful way. The researcher was inspired to bring together all the participants in the same story and section this cumulative story into scenes of repeating themes that were discovered in the historical chronological writings from the transcripts. This was the pivotal moment that the ideas for the ebb and flow of the novella-script were born.

In the writing of the novella-script, it was discovered that some of the intuited understandings of musical theatre needed to be clarified and shared to confirm that this scholarship was palatable for the masses. When reading through the novella-script, there was a need for a pause in the scenes where a character would step in to share important intuited

information so that a deeper grasp of the powerful understanding could be had. The musical fairy was born. Interestingly, her persona shared as much about musical theatre understanding as did her spoken words.

By reporting the data in this way, it made the reader part of the story, as if they were in the novella-script. It made understanding the data more powerful and relatable than could be experienced by normal data reporting ways.

The Argument for Using Fictional Devices

As this research moved from data analysis to data sharing, it was discovered that there was a need to find a way to share data so that participants could not be identified by the details they shared in the interviews. Clough (2002) states that fiction has purpose in research in that the researcher can “import fragments of data from various real events in order to speak to the heart of social consciousness – thus providing the protection of anonymity to the research participants without stripping away the rawness of real happenings” (p. 8). Furthermore, Kim (2016) states, “fiction and fictional devices might in fact be more effective in conveying certain aspects of lived experience” (p. 251). She addresses believability in that it “leads to issues of representation, making us think about how well we can represent the lived experience of self and other in a believable way” (Kim, 2016, p. 251). This is the exact intent of this research therefore, fictional devices were purposefully employed when necessary. This allowed the participants to remain anonymous, the stories to be told with the intent with which they were shared, and the powerful deep understanding of how the shutdown affected the participants was respectfully maintained and shared.

Fictional Devices in this Research

Besides using a pseudonym for the participants, a generic term was used for other identifiable information. These fictional devices were not treated in any other exceptional way because it would call attention to the liberty taken to protect the participant and interrupt the narrative. When appropriate, descriptions and quotes contained a combination of nonfictional direct data plus fictional telling of data to keep the integrity of the experience of the participant, without exposing identifying information. Examples of fictional telling of data in chapter four may mean that slight changes of geographical places or types of public events were made to protect anonymity. Exact titles of shows that performers were in at the time of the shutdown were referred to as *the shutdown show*. Special attention was made to be true to data detail intent, without risking participant exposure. These adaptations in direct quotes will be included in the scrutinizing in the member checking process.

Introduction to the Novella-Script

As Kristin Bernadette Lansbury shared, I will be reporting the data using this theatrical way of storytelling where I am the narrator and my participants are the lead performers. This way of storytelling was inspired by a recent On Broadway musical that I attended titled, *Our Town*, in which the narrator, Jim Parsons, spent most of his time on stage in the corner downstage right. He periodically meandered through frozen scenes to share necessary information to move the story along. In doing this, he would sometimes break the fourth wall to speak directly to the audience. Just like Jim, I only narrate to move the story along.

Sprinkled throughout these scenes are musical lyrics of the song and dance piece of musical theatre chosen by my participants as a representation of their experience of the pandemic shutdown of Broadway. I have taken liberty to share these lyrics in an intentional way so that

they purposefully represent the feelings and emotions shared by my participants. Think of this form of communication as *theatre speak*.

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: The Inspiration of the Novella-Script Data Reporting

(The curtain is closed. The stage is dark. Kristin Bernadette Lansbury opens the center curtain wide and holds it open. The very small bright white light created as Kristin holds open the curtain captures the attention of the audience. She is wearing an old fashioned lacy white tea length dress and white lace-up boots.)

The author recently visited Broadway in New York City and had the most fortunate fortune to attend a currently playing play titled, Our Town, written by playwright Thornton Wilder in 1938. The show is about the experience of the circle of life with celebrations, challenges, and depressions. Now, this play tells a very, very, good story. But what is truly and most excitingly important about my sharing this tidbit with you, is the way in which Wilder told this story. He wrote this play in a manner that the story was like a living retelling of a storybook in real life fashion. The narrator was on stage and narrated throughout the entire play. He would mosey and walk through the scenes and the cast as he narrated. Often, interrupting the moments in many of the scenes, breaking the fourth wall, and speaking directly to the audience. It was like having a storybook read to you at the same time as hearing out loud the voices of the characters. It was magical! So magical in fact, that it inspired the author of this dissertation to use this formatting for the reporting of the data. (Kristin pops back and promptly snaps the curtains together creating a dark auditorium.)

Author's Note: Moment of Compassionate Consciousness

During the interviews, sometimes powerful, thought provoking, emotional feelings arose. These kinds of feelings often happen in the reflection of disorienting experiences. The researcher

felt a strong need to not act solely as an observer in these powerfully emotional moments, but to take pause, acknowledge the moment, and act with genuine compassion. It would be remis of the researcher to hear and report on painful things that were discovered during the interview process without compassionately being aware of how it was affecting the participants. The researcher termed these intentional pauses as moments of *compassionate consciousness*.

Reciprocity and Ethics

The attention to ethics began at the very beginning of imagining this research. Because musical theatre as a profession is less amiable to the attitude of *just going to work for money*, it was reasonable to assume that emotional moments would be a part of the narrative inquiry process. IRB approval was sought prior to the beginning of the research. A human consent agreement approved by the IRB was required to be signed and returned by the participants, in a manner that respected the newer consent signing protocols that came out of the pandemic challenges. The researcher was attentive and cognizant of the ethical relationship building from the very first contact throughout the research process. The researcher was transparent about her research interests and purposes and formed an alliance and trustworthy relationship” (Kim, 2015, p. 180). The researcher prepared a safe place built in collaboration with the participants. This was akin to Habermas’s (1974; 1984) ideal speech situation in that there was unity and the space was *immunized* in a special way. The arts-informed representation, the chosen piece of musical theatre, was the focus of the narrative, making verbalizing for understanding of the disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1997) more manageable.

Rapport was established through email, phone, text, audio conferencing, and in-person contacts. It was further developed through shared conversation prior too, and along with, the conversations and interviews (Roulston, 2010). Additionally, musical theatre is a community in

and of itself which brings social normative (Habermas, 1974; Mezirow, 1997). There was a shared understanding and language of universal values (Mezirow, 1997, p. 9), within this musical theatre community. The cocoon-like environment of the video conferencing platform, along with the use of art as representation, was a lovely place to have difficult narratives.

Data Representation

Data representation was twofold. The data collection was represented by an arts-informed process provided by the participants. The data reporting was an arts-based product created by the researcher. It was twofold in that the data report was an original novella-script of an amalgamation of the participants' quotes. Additionally, a needs based fictional character was created to act as a guide for hermeneutic understanding of the musical theatre community. Woven into this arts-based data report were the rigorous academic connections. Lewis (2011) tells us that, "the relationship between narrative and humans is akin to symbiosis" (p. 506). *The Musical Theatre Fairytale* at the beginning of the first three chapters, and the novella-script with hermeneutic musical fairy guide were thoughtfully and intentionally chosen as a platform for sharing academic findings in an engaging way.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

The researcher minimized her influence on the data by cleansing her palate of any preconceived notions of musical theatre pieces chosen by the participants as representatives of their experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017; Crotty, 1998; Groenewald, 2004; Kim, 2015; Laverty, 2003). Tracy's (2010) eight key markers of criteria for excellence was the structure followed to properly frame trustworthiness and rigor. The following eight key markers are in italics for easy identification. This was a *worthy* topic in that the pandemic was global and the population of musical theatre professionals and connoisseurs is vast. This study was *rigorous* in that it was

based on well-known adult learning theoretical constructs being combined and leveraged in new and innovative ways. The *sincerity* and *ethicality* of the author was loyally followed throughout the interview conversations. The inclinations and tacit understandings of the author were discovered and shared through the attention to organic self-reflexivity and transparency of processes, along with the edits and adaptations of the data collection and reporting processes. The author adhered to procedural ethics while paying special compassionate attention to verbal and nonverbal cues of emotionally challenging content. Additionally, the author's dedication to anonymity laid the groundwork for *sincerity* of the participants throughout the interview conversations. *Credibility* was one of the biggest focuses of this research through the intended thick descriptions provided by the participants as they used art as a representation for deeper meaning. The member checking process supported these descriptions, and included and highlighted tacit understanding of this community. The interest of this work *resonated* with many as performance art is a part of our human culture and attended by many. Using art as a representation, by its own nature, made this work aesthetic and evocative. Concluding Tracy's (2010) markers, this work has *meaningful coherence* in that it used methods and procedures that purposefully and intentionally fit the goals, genre, milieu, and interest of the participants.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed for accuracy (Roulston, 2010). The filming of interviews was important because of the candid movements that accompanied the verbalization of movements related to the disorienting, pivotal, and transformational moments. Movement artists tend to talk with their whole body.

The researcher did not receive any funding or sponsorship for this work and does not foresee any conflicts of interest. The intent of the research was to purely discover the

transformational moments experienced by professional musical theatre artists, during the nine-month pandemic shutdown of the 2020 Broadway season.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began by describing the structure as a constructivist epistemology with an arts-informed narrative inquiry methodology. The author posed a research question with three sub-questions, and shared a thorough subjectivity statement of her in-depth experience in this community. Following this, the rationale of the study was described in that the effects of a Broadway shutdown of this magnitude has never been experienced. The methodological framework was described further clarifying the purpose of the arts-informed piece nestled inside the narrative inquiry. The research design included the description of the selection of the five purposive participants. Justification was made as to the requirement of the online communication and conferencing during this pandemic time.

The membership role of the researcher was described as both insider, reciprocator, and outsider that organically evolved throughout different times in the interviews. A visual representation with the process of the data collection was included to clearly translate this process. The data analysis process was described including an argument for not coding, using fictional devices, and providing compassionate consciousness. Wrapping up this chapter, reviews of the ethics, trustworthiness, and rigor were described.

Chapter 4 - Results: The Findings, Explorations, and Interpretations

Through this novella-script, the stories of the participants are told and addressed the research questions. The primary research question is address in the entirety of the novella-script: What are the stories of musical theatre professionals as they experienced the effects of the shutdown of Broadway during the COVID-19 pandemic? The sub-questions are explained throughout the different scenes. What effects did this shutdown have on their professional lives? This sub-question is addressed in Scenes One and Two. What effects did this shutdown have in their connection to the musical theatre community? This sub-question is addressed in Scene Three, Scene Five, and Scene Six. What effects did this shutdown have on their beliefs of self-identity? This sub-question is addressed in Scene four and Scene Seven.

In this chapter, we will be introduced to Kristin Bernadette Lansbury. She is the musical fairy inside *The Musical Theatre Fairytale*. She will be a helpful guide to the intuited hermeneutical understanding of musical theatre. I am reporting the data in a novella-script sort-of-way and the performers, or research participants, will portray themselves. The novella portion of this chapter is a conglomeration of the individual conversational interview transcripts of each of my participants. This data reporting organically intertwines their individual dialogues as if it was a shared communication happening at the same time in the same space. Even though, all the data was collected independently in different spaces and times. For the script portion of this chapter, I will describe an abbreviated stage setting for each scene. This novella-script will be performed on a proscenium stage, the most well-known stage in which the stage is framed on three sides by curtains, and has an opening on the downstage side that faces the audience.

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury – Let Me Introduce Myself

(The lights on stage are dim. There is a fluttering sound off stage right, like little fairy wings. Kristin Bernadette Lansbury comes fluttering in. She makes a big sweeping circle high above the stage. She is wearing light blue fairy regalia that sparkles and shimmers. She has tiny blue slippers on her tiny fairy feet. Her tiny fairy wings continue to flutter as she makes a bumpy landing downstage center. She is surrounded by sparkles floating around her like a glowing bubble. She rights herself, straightens out the corner of her fairy wing that was askew, and with a big smile, faces the audience. Her little wings continue quietly fluttering as she speaks.)

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury here! I am the fairy princess inside of The Musical Theatre Fairytale! I will be popping in and out of the remainder of this dissertation. The author has graciously invited me to help you, the reader, to understand what we, as musical theatre connoisseurs, understand about all things in this magical world of musical theatre. Whenever it is necessary, helpful, and just enjoyable, I will be here to share what I know about musical theatre with you. I am named after three very important musical theatre performers, Kristin Chenoweth, Bernadette Peters, and Angela Lansbury. These women have been involved in musical theatre for decades and have been life changing performers for their audience members and musical theatre colleagues. I will be fluttering in the stage space, sometimes staying suspended in the air, other times landing somewhere on stage (a tilt of her head, a mischievous smile and a tiny little cough, cough) or other convenient places. Because I am magical, I can take on a variety of different musical theatre type characters and wear a plethora of different costumes. When I come into the stage space, it will be as if time is frozen. The performers will stay perfectly still and be perfectly quiet and will not interrupt my very important, remarkably

significant, magically hermeneutical understanding messages. Then when I leave, POOF! It is as if I was never there. The actors will begin speaking where they left off the second I leave.

Scene 1: The Accidental Broadway Debut

Setting the scene: The curtain opens. All of my participants are on stage. They are in a tight circle in the center of a darkly lit stage. Instead of facing into the circle, they are facing out. They are so close together their elbows and shoulders are touching. The stage is mostly black, with only a spotlight on the face of the person who is facing the audience. Each participant will share a monologue of how they came to be Broadway performers. We begin with Joseph. He is male and could probably play the parts of a 30-50 year old character. He is married to his wife and has one child.

“My brother and sister got a lot of attention because she was very pretty, and he was very handsome. I got no attention in that regard. To get my attention, I had to be funny. In middle school, when I made my teacher laugh, (leaning towards the audience and holding his hand near his face as if telling a secret) who was kind of a hard egg to crack, I thought (settling back into place and shrugging), I’ve got something here. So, I never really intended to just be a musical theatre performer. I just wanted to be a performer. But it just so happens to be that I am On Broadway at this moment. Serious actors will say that they have something to share or that they have a story to tell or want to have a voice, to make a difference. I think that’s what actors say in interviews when they want to sound good. But for me, it was just a matter of getting attention. When people looked at me when I did things that made them laugh, it made me feel good. Eventually, I became a professional television actor, stage performer, and college theatre professor, got married and had a kid. As life would have it, I decided – along with the support of my wife – to resign my teaching career. We all moved to New York City. We found temporary

housing near the Broadway district to make job hunting easier. One day, on my own, I went to see a Broadway. After watching that show, I thought, that looks like a role that I could play. Two months later, my agent calls to tell me he has scheduled an audition for me for that same show! After a short audition process, I was cast! I just happened to hit it big pretty quick. It's kind of a neat story. You know, I had been ignoring the call to go to Broadway and telling myself no, no, no. Until finally, the call to go to Broadway was overwhelming. I thought, I have to do this. I have to go now. I went. And I landed a significant role on my first Broadway audition.

As the entire group rotates the circle right, I will share Felicia's demographics. She is female and looks much younger than her years. She is married to her husband who worked from home even before the pandemic. Felicia begins, "I have to go to New York City! Like, a lot of women have a baby clock, I had a Broadway clock. I felt like if I didn't go to New York City right then, I would die. My love of all things musical, theatrical, and dance started at a young age. I commend a teacher in my public school for encouraging my love and talent to blossom. She singled me out and told me that I was talented and I should continue performing. I just fell in love with storytelling. I fell in love with the community that creates it. That's literally what it was like. It was all because of my elementary teacher's encouragement! If that had not happened, I'm not sure that this is what I would be doing with my life right now. It's kind of amazing. I love singing, dancing, and acting. I just love all the elements of it. And again, I love the family and community that it creates. I performed in musical theatre from elementary through high school. Then I wondered to myself, can you go to university for musical theatre? Is that a thing you can go to college for? I honestly didn't know, so, I looked into it. And guess what? You can! I came to Broadway. It took a few auditions, more than I want to recall, to land my first

Broadway role. And now look at me, I just finished writing a musical that's had long running regional tours. My elementary teacher literally changed the course of my life."

As the entire group rotates the circle right, I will share Gene's demographics. Gene is male and a seasoned performer. He has a regal walk and presence. He is married to his husband, and they have two children. Gene begins, "I found a love of musical theatre in elementary school with very supportive teachers in a very, very small community. When I was in middle school, I was talking to the high school theatre director. I asked her, so, you know what would make this year's high school musical better? I then proceeded to dissect the choreography for her. That led me to, as a middle schooler, working with high school seniors revamping their choreography. My trip to New York came when a casting agent, who had seen me perform outside of New York City, tracked me down through family members. This was definitely another day and time when home phones and telephone books were the norm. Performer's places of origin are often included in their bios in show programs. Being that I was from a small town, it did not take long for the casting director to make the connection. I followed the request of the casting agent, and went to audition for the musical. My first audition went great. But for the callback, there were quite a few very famous people in the room. I was so nervous, and it was just awful! As the audition went on, and the more I tried to be better, the more awful I got. As I left there, I thought to myself, I guess I was just excited that the audition had happened at all! However, for another audition, one of my most iconic roles, I had four callbacks. I met all the requirements to be the lead, except that I could not dance as well as the director wanted. So, the director provided an apartment in New York City, with a few months of private dance lessons. It was very intense. I had my own private dance teacher. We did eight hours of dancing, seven days a week. I had

blisters. I didn't know New York City that well. I was afraid to get on the subway. I walked seven miles round trip. I performed in that show for well over a decade.”

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: The Cost of Lessons

(Kristin quickly comes flying and zooming in from stage left. She comes to a screeching halt mid-air and lands directly on top of Gene's head. She is sporting a black leotard with full sheer black chiffon sleeves often worn by ballroom dancers, black saggy pants often worn by hip-hop dancing artist, a pink short tutu often worn by ballerinas, one character shoe on her left foot often worn by musical theatre female performers, and one noisy, clicking tap shoe on her right foot. She klomps her little tap shoe five times on Gene's head. His head bounces with each klomp. She smiles satisfactorily.)

I just wanted to take a moment to talk about dancing, singing, and acting lessons. Let us look at the currency exchange needed for dance lessons as an example. According to Broadway Dance Center (n.d.) in New York City, a class titled “ABW – 190”, that meets six Sundays in a row for one-and-one-half hours, costs \$190 in total plus tax. Or, about \$31.67 plus tax per class. This is for a conglomerate group of dancers, not an individual private affair. According to their magical space on the interweb, this quote is good until the date of August of 2024. So that is only one-and-one-half hours for one day a week. And that is just for one class of the dancing sort. So, for instance, if a professional performer is between gigs and wants to keep their skills at high peak performance levels, they might easily take a few, a quadruplicate, a quintuplicate, or more lessons per week. They may also take classes in vocals and theatricals, depending on what they believe they need to improve and also what is available at the time, being taught by people from whom they are interested in learning. So, a performer could be strong in vocals and theatricals, similar to Gene's predicament, but not as strong in the dancing. Plus, shoes and any other

paraphernalia they might need for the lessons, such as a cane, top hat, leotard, flowing fabric, or other props. Two things of note, the aforementioned lessons of ABW – 190, are classes that meet once a week for an hour-and-a-half, and are group lessons. Let us assume for the sake of this imaginary storytelling, that there are about 10 dance students. This is really a microscopic group size for a New York City dance class, but I am using this as an example because it is easy to do the mathematics. So, 10 students at approximately \$200 currency per student, equals \$2,000. Divide that by 6 classes which is about \$333 per class income for the dance instructor. This may sound like a great quantity of currency, but remember the cost of living and renting in New York City is high, very high. If this magnificent instructor is teaching a private lesson, they have to consider their financial reality. Therefore, an instructor must be fairly compensated to work with only one person in a private lesson, as opposed to what they might make in a group lesson. Private lessons vary, depending on the factors, additionally, depending on the reputation of the teacher's magnificence, ability, and famousness. For the Broadway Dance Center (n.d.), a 90-minute private dance class for little children is \$180 per class. There were no quotes quoted for the grown-up person. Let us look at Gene's experience. He had a private dance lesson for eight hours a day, seven days a week, for a couple of months. Plus, the director provided a place to stay. The investment this musical theatre company made in Gene was monumental! It speaks highly of his talent and dedication. (With a quick tap-tap-tap by her little tap shoe covered foot, she leaves as quickly as she arrived, zooming off stage right.)

As the entire group rotates the circle right, I will share Topaz's demographics. Topaz is a seasoned actress, choreographer, and director. She lives by herself and usually directs, choreographs, or creates, but seldom performs now. Topaz beings, "You know, I came to musical theatre in kind of a circuitous path. I always thought I would either do dance company or

straight acting. I went to New York City on a school holiday, and I just went to an audition, to see what it was like. I auditioned for that show, and I got cast in it. I called my mom to ask her if I could take a break from university and try this Broadway thing. She approved. I performed in this Broadway show for many, many years. Then my company went on tour. Unexpectedly, the choreographer resigned from show business and I kind of inherited maintaining the choreography of that show. Then I set the choreography for the European company of that show. Then people started asking me back to direct and choreograph other shows. I just kind of kept getting hired in musical theatre. I was never a great singer. I could sing, but I was a dancer and an actor. But those skills were enough. So, at kind of an early age I began mostly directing and choreographing in musical theatre. I love being part of the big picture. I think as an actor, performing is a creative outlet, but you're in the service of the director, the playwright, and the choreographer. So, I found more creative fulfillment in directing and choreographing. It feels like a much larger contribution. I love the storytelling aspect. I love how space and energy are used on stage.

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: Auditions, Audition Process, and Triple Threat

(A tiny little spotlight hits downstage left and circles the tiny little Kristin Bernadette Lansbury standing in front of a tiny little microphone. She is wearing a leotard, tights, leg warmers, and a scarf around her neck to keep her vocal cords warm. It appears that she is prepping for an audition. She stands close to the microphone with her mouth close to the mic, her hands are in presentation mode out to the side at shoulder height. She is sliding her foot to a point repeatedly in a front, side, back, side repetition as she speaks into the microphone.)

The audition process for musicals is usually made up of three parts. One part is for vocals in which the auditionee may be asked to bring or prepare a certain piece of music. They

may also be asked to sight read a song. They may sing as a soloist, or in a duet or group. Often there is a pianist to accompany, and the space varies depending on availability and acoustics needed. The casting director will listen for proper musical pitch, enunciation, and ability to harmonize. Additionally, they will notice how the auditionee looks and moves while singing.

The second part is dancing. Usually, a choreographer teaches a combination of dance movements. Dance is often counted in sets of eight, but is based on the musical measures and sometimes is counted in other combinations. In a studio, the choreographer will stand in the front of the room to demonstrate the movements by counting out or giving musical cues. Dance has its own terminology, and it is expected that the auditionees understand these terms. Usually, in a large group, auditionees will follow the choreographer as they teach the combination. Auditionees may be grouped and re-grouped, dance in duets or dance as a soloist. Auditionees will be judged on how well they execute the movement, awareness of the stage space, awareness of others on stage, and ability to make facial expressions in harmony with the movement.

The third part is the acting portion. Sometimes auditionees are asked to bring a monologue of their choosing, and sometimes they are asked to prepare a specific scene. There may be props and scenery, or it may be a completely empty space and the auditionees may have to pantomime props or scenery. An auditionee may be asked to perform the script in a different way, with a specific emotion, or with added stage movement. Auditionees will be judged on enunciation, script memorization, awareness of location on stage, and projection. Additionally, casting directors will look for believability in the character which includes proper stage movement and visual properties of the character.

All auditions are unique, and therefore may not follow these descriptions exactly. One thing of note, often performers feel strong in a couple of the areas, and challenged by one area.

If you are very good in all three of these audition areas, the term used would be that you are a triple threat! That means that you can sing complicated vocals, dance sophisticated movements, and act comfortably, flawlessly, and organically.

As the entire group rotates the circle right, I will share Ryan's demographics. Ryan is young and new to Broadway. Not in real life, but in this novella script, they are non-binary. Ryan begins, "I'm sort of realizing the way things have worked out for me. These professional jobs just sort of keep coming to me. I kind of landed in musical theatre accidentally, through the suggestion of one of my childhood babysitters. I went from not really liking being in sports, to loving being in musical theatre. All through high school, I secured one role after another in local and regional theatres. Although my family wasn't very supportive about it, I decided to come to New York City to audition for Broadway. I landed my first Broadway role very quickly without really completing the normal audition process. I went to one audition but didn't make it. The casting director then just invited me to go to another audition for another company. I had one audition for this company. I mean, it was the shortest Broadway audition process that I know about because usually people go in for days and days and days, weeks and weeks and weeks. I had one audition for this show and landed a part! It was the first time in a long time that I felt like, oh, that's right. Like, I belong here. I am supposed to be doing this, and it feels comfortable, and it feels safe."

Scene: The lights dim as the curtains close.

Scene 2: The Exact Moment

Narrator: When time stood still, the world stopped revolving, and singing and dancing ceased. For some, this was an exact moment. For others, this moment was spread throughout a specific time frame. All participants were in the middle of something though. Felicia was on her

way to watch a Broadway show with her family and friends, Joseph was at a reception outside of New York City celebrating the cast of his Touring Broadway show, Ryan had just purchased new home goods for their first solo apartment, Gene was on Spring Break with his husband and children, and Topaz had just returned home after helping her siblings take care of her ill mother.

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: On Broadway, Touring Broadway, and Off Broadway

(High, near the top of the ceiling, Kristin Bernadette Lansbury comes flying in from stage left. She's wearing a black top hat, leotard, tights, and character shoes with a silver sequined vest and gloves. She's looking at the audience waving jazz hands by her side. OUCH! She flies directly into the side of a big marquee sign filled with a grid of unlit light bulbs. She grabs onto the corner of the sign and ungracefully pulls herself to sit atop the sign. She tries to straighten her top hat, but instead, knocks it completely off her head and it lands on the stage with a quiet little plunk. Suddenly some of the light bulbs pop on spelling the words ON BROADWAY.)

When we think of Broadway, we think of On Broadway, in New York City, in the Manhattan borough, on Time Square, in one of the famous 41 Broadway theatres. Each Broadway show is its own company. (On the sign, the words, ON BROADWAY go to dark. Next, the words TOURING BROADWAY shine brightly across the sign.) When we think of Touring Broadway, we may not realize that this too is an authentic Broadway show. Sometimes, the performers move between Touring and On Broadway performances for the same company. The cost of tickets for On Broadway and Touring Broadway shows are similar. They are at the highest end of the ticketing prices. Touring Broadway shows may either be a company in and of themselves, or they may be a part of the On Broadway company of the same name. (The lights of TOURING BROADWAY dim and the lights of OFF BROADWAY come up.) When we think of Off Broadway, we may not realize that these are smaller theatres, encapsulating approximately

120 theatres, usually seating less than 100, and are on the geographical peripheral of On Broadway theatre locations. These tickets are a little more affordable than the On Broadway or Touring Broadway tickets. Often, new musicals may try the path of opening Off Broadway and then hoping to move to On Broadway. (The sign snaps to dark. There's a small scream and a smattering of expletives.)

Setting the scene: The curtains open and there are three circles of light encompassing three different scenes on stage. Before anyone speaks, Kirstin Bernadette Lansbury gently lights off the sign and does show-tune kicks with jazz hands as she floats down to the stage floor. When she lands, she grabs her black top hat, waves at the audience, and scampers off stage left. For those who experienced the exact moment, we have Felicia in her New York City apartment, downstage right, with her husband and four of their friends; Joseph, upstage center, standing next to a serving table with long-stemmed plastic glasses. Joseph is holding a glass of a refreshing celebratory beverage; and Ryan, downstage left, holding large bags bursting with home goods from a well-known department store. Everyone stays frozen until it is their time to speak.

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: What I did for Love

(Still wearing her black leotard, tights, one silver glove, and clomping along with her jazz shoes unbuckled as if she's in the middle of a costume change, Kirstin Bernadette Peters enters walking from downstage right, in front of the first scene she comes to. She faces the audience.

Felicia will begin sharing her piece of musical theatre representation titled, "What I did for Love". This is from the show, A Chorus Line. It is about hopeful dancers auditioning to be in the chorus line of a much sought after performance. In this show, hundreds of people come to New York City to audition for only a few spots. This ratio of hopefuls to actual performers depicts how the performer can be solely thought of, and treated more like a product and less like

a human. It is about a few successes and a lot of failures. This song is not about love for another person, but about what happens if you cannot do what you love to do? Dance. (Kristin Bernadette Lansbury abruptly turns back to stage right and klomps off stage.)

Felicia begins, “Within only two hours after the public announcement of the Broadway shutdown, my husband, our four visiting guests, and I fled New York City. I was afraid that the airports would shut down. Like, I was honestly afraid that we wouldn’t be able to leave. That they would shut down and we’d all be stuck.” At the time of the shutdown, Felicia had just finished co-creating a musical and was performing it throughout the nation. The hope of her company was to bring this new musical to an Off Broadway venue. She also taught performance art at a New York City performing arts school. Remarkably, what Felicia said about shutting down the airports was foreshadowing of what was to come. She sings,  *Kiss today goodbye ~ The sweetness and the sorrow ~ Wish me luck, the same to you ~ But I can't regret ~ What I did for love, what I did for love.*  She continues, “We were like leaving with no real sense of how long we would be gone, or when we would be back. We kind of packed to leave thinking maybe we’ll be gone for like a month or two. Two months tops. But it was not two months.”

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: Something’s Missing and Stop the World

(Kristin Bernadette Lansbury comes rushing in from stage right again, sliding into center stage, wearing a tan blazer and skirt with a white Oxford shirt, rainbow striped socks with no shoes, and still wearing that one silver sequined glove. For some reason the top hat is back on her head as if she’s getting confused about what costume to wear.)

Joseph has two pieces of musical theatre representation one titled, “Something’s Missing” and the other titled, “Stop the World”. Both of these are from the musical, Come From Away. This musical is based on the experience of the 7,000 plus airline passengers that were

forced to land in Gander, Newfoundland when the air space was closed due to the 9/11 attacks (Come From Away, n.d.). (She puts up one finger to punctuate this sentence.) Interesting fact, the 9/11 tragedy was also the last time that Broadway had shut down, however, it was just for a short bit, not 18 months. This musical does not have traditional showy songs and dance numbers with flashy costumes. The costumes were streetwear, and the choreography was more about emotions. Most of the characters played multiple parts and there was a smooth and uninterrupted changing of their characters while on stage by exchanging small costume props and by the way they moved and postured themselves. In the middle of the stage of this musical was a very big embedded circular platform that turned while the performers sang and moved. The choreographed movement going with and against this platform invited the audience to feel the ebb and flow of the emotions. It is eerie, beautiful, and powerful. (Kristin Bernadette Lansbury abruptly turns stage right to exit, but as she's leaving, she loses her top hat again. She runs back to pick it up. Smashes it in place on top of her head. Then stomps off stage right.)

(Narrator walks upstage center picking up a celebratory plastic glass off the table.)

Felicia's experience was so different from Joseph's experience where although his first thought was a sense of, "Oh, my God! It's here." His next thought was followed by a sense of relief. Continuing he said, "Okay, now we know. I found it almost the opposite of disorienting. When I got the word that Broadway was closing, it was very orienting. It actually put things in order." Putting things in order was important to Joseph. He was a seasoned performer and had been in a well-known Touring Broadway show. Although this was his first Broadway experience, he had previously been in multiple television roles, theatre productions and a university professor. He quietly sings,  *We all looked the same ~ But we're different than we were.*  Just before the pandemic, Joseph had resigned his teaching position and uprooted his wife and child and moved

to New York City. Then the pandemic happened! Since he was on tour, his next thought after the announcement news was settling in, were the logistics. Pacing back in forth, he shared, “But then, it was not so much about the show, but the logistics of how do I get home? How do I get stuff out of my show trunk? How long are we going to be staying in temporary housing? Are they, the company, going to send us back to New York City? What are the options? If it’s really bad to travel by air, should we rent a car to travel back? Just all that kind of stuff. (He abruptly stops and looks at the audience.) Then the dreaded COVID came that night! I woke up in the middle of the night thinking, Oh no! I’m sick! I got it!” This was his second bout of COVID.

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: I’m Going to Go Back there Some Day

(Kristin Bernadette Lansbury enters from upstage center, crawling from underneath the bottom of the back curtain. As she stands up, she smooths and straightens her outfit. She is wearing the same tan suit and white shirt, and the same rainbow striped socks. However, now half of her hair is in a pigtail on the right side of her head and the other half is in a mess of curls. She scurries downstage center, turns left and stops in front of Ryan’s scene.)

Ryan will be sharing their musical theatre song, “I’m Going to Go Back There Someday” (Muppet Songs, 2019) sung by Gonzo in The Muppet Movie (Frawley, 1979). This is a children’s movie and lends insight into the vulnerability that Ryan, this young musical theatre performer, was experiencing during the pandemic shutdown. Interestingly, this musical movie is about the lead character, Kermit the Frog, being recruited by a Hollywood agent to audition for a Hollywood production. This is not far removed from Ryan’s coming to Broadway experience. It is easy to see this parallel, especially if Ryan watched this movie as a child. Gonzo sings this song as all the Muppets are sitting around a campfire stranded at the side of the road because

their car broke down. He is reminiscing about his love of being in the air and flying and friends and loved ones. (Kristin scurries off stage left.)

(Narrator sets the glass down on the table and meanders downstage left.) Of special note here: Ryan has intentionally chosen a pseudonym that is nongendered. I asked what pronouns they preferred. Ryan left it up to me to make that decision. The pronoun gender did not matter to them, but the pseudonym did. After much reflection, and in the spirit of the pseudonym, I chose here, to practice using the pronouns they/them/theirs. I intentionally use the term, *practice*, here because these pronouns used in the singular are a new addition to my vernacular. According to the American Psychological Association (APA Style, n.d.), when writing the singular pronouns of they/them/theirs, the plural verb form is used; when writing the name of the person with the they/them/their pronouns, the singular verb form is used.

Ryan, my youngest participant, had just moved to New York City and had been cast in their first On Broadway show that was a well-known long performing musical. They remembered the exact moment. Twice. Ryan sings,  *Sunrises, night falls ~ Sometimes the sky calls ~ Is that a song there ~ And do I belong there.*  Ryan remembers both exact moments. They were new to New York City, they had just moved from a large city outside of the state of New York. Their friends were new, and they had little support from their family and friends back home for moving to New York City and auditioning for Broadway. For the first of the two exact moments, Ryan was shopping in a home goods store, buying items for their first solo apartment. They said, “That’s what I was doing. I was shopping (laughing). When a friend from another show came rushing up to ask if I had heard the news about the Broadway shutdown. But nobody from my show was calling us or emailing us until like the very last second. All the other shows had already shut down. This kind of gave me a false sense of security. (Sitting down the

shopping bags.) The second exact moment was when I was heading to the train to go to the theatre to perform, and my phone dinged. I finally got notified by email that my show was shutting down. Okay, so we're not performing. We're shutting down for...I think originally, they said it was going to be two weeks. It was not two weeks. Eventually, I had to think about my financial commitment to my brand new apartment lease contract. So, I thought, okay, I can make it for a month, but if it's any longer than that, I am completely screwed. I ended up being stuck in that year-and-a-half lease. I sublet to someone else. They paid me only part of what I owed. And I stayed in my situation with my crappy roommates. This was the most affordable way to do it."

Scene: Curtains close and the stage gets reset for the next scene.

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: Playing Many Parts in One Musical

(Only the front of the stage, in front of the curtain, is brightly lit. Kristin enters in front of the curtain from stage right. She is wearing a costume that encompasses identifiers of many different generational markers. She has on that same tan suit and the rainbow socks and has now added purple roller blades. The left side of her face has the telltale wrinkles of a much older woman surrounded by a half-head of gray curls. The other side of her face is wrinkle-free and she is sporting that high pigtail with a big bright purple scrunchie. She has a backpack covered in rainbows and hearts slung over her left shoulder. Under her left arm, close to her side, tucked into her armpit is a large manila folder. And in her left hand she is carrying a little baby doll. In her right hand, she holds a cane and leans heavily to the right, depending on the cane for support and safety as she skate-walks to the center of the stage. This takes some time. The audience is quiet. There is a little bit of sniggering going on as she shuffles to the center.)

There is a common goal for many musical theatre professionals, to play multiple roles in one musical. In some instances, the idea of playing different age appropriate characters

throughout this single musical is important to them. So, when a performer is in their twenties, they may have a 20-year old character picked to play. They may imagine themselves in a middle-aged role when the time is appropriate, and even the oldest character of the show when they are in their senior years. This is remarkable because this crystallizes in their visualization of self, that they will still be in musical theatre when they are old enough to play the older roles. It is not unusual, in fact it is probably more common than we recognize, that performers may have ideas on parts in which they feel they would be good. Can you imagine if a professional performer decided not to return to Broadway, or to the profession in any capacity after the Broadway pandemic shutdown! This would be a complete and distinct shift in their sense of self. Gene shares this next. Also, Felicia will later share her story of this dream gone. (Kristin picks up her cane, holds it high in the air, and clumsily out of control stage roller blades off stage left.)

Setting the scene: The curtain opens for the two participants who remember the timeframe but not the exact moment of the announcement, we have Gene, downstage right, sitting on an unmade bed in a resort condo, with his husband and children eating and chatting at the kitchen table. And Topaz sitting on the floor of her New York City apartment surrounded by opened overflowing messy suitcases, script papers, and dance shoes.

For Gene, remembering an exact moment was elusive but he did remember that he was on Spring Break with his family. His first thoughts were, “Oh, this is only going to be for two weeks.” At the time of the pandemic, Gene was a professor at a university outside the state of New York and had multiple regional shows on the side that he directed, choreographed, or performed. Previously, he had decades of performing On Broadway and Touring Broadway as the lead in well-known musicals. However, he had always imagined himself in regional theatre. At the time of the shutdown announcement, Gene was grateful to have a secure teaching position

and not have to rely solely on performance income. He shared, “Thankfully just two days before the shutdown, I had received my tenure letter. That was nice. Although I was missing my normal additional income from my many regional gigs, I did not have to rely on my performance gigs to sustain me and my family. What was hard, really, really hard, was that just before the shutdown, I had been hired to play a lifelong dream role of mine. I wanted to play three different roles in one of my favorite musicals. I had already played two of these roles. I was just now the appropriate age for the character that I was hired to play. Then the shutdown. And that show went away. Cancelled. Completely gone. I’m not sure that particular role will come back to me. And that makes me sad. So, I have to, you know, I don’t know, make peace with the fact that the theatre owners and directors are not going to ask me to do it because I’ll be too old by the time they can reschedule it.”

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: The Secret of Topaz’s Arts-Informed Piece

(Kristin Bernadette Lansbury comes fluttering in, delicately lands on the corner of one of Topaz’s opened suitcase lids. She’s looking kind of frazzled in pumpkin orange colored sweats, purple fuzzy slippers, and hair wrapped in a towel as if it has just been washed.)

“The author cannot share Topaz’s arts-informed piece because she chose a piece from her new current work with one of her colleagues. This colleague has won and been nominated many times for a Tony Award. They’re kind of Broadway royalty. Because it is an original work, the author cannot share any lyrical pieces. This work is scheduled to be performed first in New York City Off Broadway and possibly beyond. This I can share because at any given time there are new pieces being developed and performed throughout many venues in New York City, and are being curated for bigger shows and wider audiences.” (Kristin Bernadette Lansbury begins to take flight to flutter of stage left, but no matter how fast she flutters her wings, she slowly

sinks to the stage. As she lands on the stage floor facing stage left, she sighs deeply, hangs her head, and slowly and quietly exits stage left.)

(The narrator heads stage left, but abruptly stops at center, not wanting to step on the scattered items on the floor.) Topaz had just returned to her New York City apartment. She shared, “I had just come back to New York. My mother passed away after a long illness literally, like three days before everything shut down. I was with her. My siblings and I have talked about it now, that in retrospect, she might have had COVID.” Like Gene, Topaz was a professor outside of New York City and had multiple shows on the side. Previously, she had spent decades as a performer and choreographer for a well-known show On Broadway, Touring Broadway, and European Broadway. She continued, “I had three days of rehearsals for our new show and then everything shut down. And then I actually got sick. But it was too early to know if it was COVID. I couldn’t get tested so I’m not sure if I had COVID.”

Both Joseph and Topaz were COVID positive during one of their interviews. From offstage and through a microphone, Joseph candidly shares, “I’m reporting to you from a COVID quarantine in my hotel room.” This brought a little comic relief to the auditorium, albeit it was from such a tragic origin. When I found out that Topaz had COVID at the time of one of her interviews, I suggested we reschedule it. She responded, “I am so excited to do this!” And so was I. So, with watery swollen eyes, a red tipped and stuffy nose, we continued. During their interviews, both seemed happy to have had the time to talk to someone during their quarantine.

Scene 3: The Continuation

I think my participants found this part of the shutdown the most trying part. The not knowing, the often postponed reopening, the eventual reopening, only to experience vast

substitutions and eventual temporary shutdowns, are what perpetuated continual disorientations. Or in Ryan's case, not reopening at all.

Setting the scene: For this rolling scene of continuing shutdowns, re-openings, and re-shutdowns. Gene began the conversation sitting on the apron of the stage, the narrow space in front of the curtain when its closed, with his feet dangling off the stage and swinging back and forth. As he began Felicia and Ryan enters and sits near him. Gene began, "I think for all of us, the sinking, sadness, depression that happened was with that constant moving of that light at the end of the tunnel." Ryan sat crisscross a little to his upstage right and Felicia sits on her knees

tucking her feet under her just to Ryan's right. Ryan quietly begins to sing, 🎵 *This looks*

familiar ~ Vaguely familiar ~ Almost unreal yet ~ It's too soon to feel yet. 🎵 Felicia agreed, "I

just didn't know when I'd get to go back to New York, or when my art form would be back. I mean, there was just no telling when any of that would come back. And the longer it went, the more it was like, this is going to be a very long time before we're back to anything resembling normal." Joseph joins them taking a seat to Gene's left casually leaning back on propped hands and outstretched straight legs crossed at the ankles then shares, "As we began reopening everybody knew what they were getting into. But then Boom! We started performing, and then

Omicron came. Once it hit us, it really changed everything. 🎵 *We all tried to go back to normal,*

~ except the town was more quiet and ~ Somehow far emptier. 🎵 Ryan's experience in this

rolling opening-closing-repeat trauma was the most transparently disturbing. They stated, "I was thinking that it'll all go back to normal. Then I'll be able to start refiguring out life as it was, but with new, you know, with all this new stuff." By *stuff* Ryan was not referring to tangible items, but to new knowledge and understanding of how to live life. However, their show did not

reopen. In fact, their company gave a remarkably late announcement that they were not reopening. Ryan heart wrenchingly shared, “I mean, it’s just...it has not come back for me.”

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: The Magic Bubble of the Rehearsal Space

(Kristin Bernadette Lansbury flutters in from somewhere in the audience. There are *ohs* and *awes* as people in the audience recognize her flying above. She circles down to land on tiptop edge of Ryan’s knee, sits down, and dangles her feet over the edge of their knee. She is wearing a white and cream fairy dress with trimmings of sparkly lavender and blue. Her white translucent slightly glistening fairy wings are barely visible behind her. She delicately places her hands in her lap and intertwines her fingers as her little fairy feet begin to swing.)

Performers do not miss only the performance part of performing. (She slowly spreads her arms wide as if in presentation.) There is this wonderful space of magic and make believe in the bubble of the rehearsal space. I want to share with you this emotional connection that often happens in this sacred shared space. (Bringing her hands together as if holding something valuable.) Often, performers experience this communal cocoon of being wrapped in the moment, the setting and time, of this shared breath of understanding. It is like being inside this protected cocoon where shared experiential creativity grows. Not being able to create this protected expanse because of the breaks in time for protocol reasons, does not only adversely impact a performance, but also the emotional connection for which so many performers yearn. This emotional connection, this human connection, this connection of self to self often occurs inside this expanse, and it is what makes the art, the artist, the artistic journey so remarkable and wonderful and valuable. There is something purely magical about being inside this magical bubble. (Kristin Bernadette Lansbury takes flight and flutters upstage right exiting at the top near the gridiron scaffolding.)

Gene shares, "It's not like all performing arts jobs went away, they sort of trickled away. So, you sort of had these constant losses. I tried to make a recording for a performance that was meant to be live pre-pandemic, but had been moved to a filmed version during the pandemic. I recorded it maybe eight times, and I ended up sending them my first take. It was a moment. I was like, I can't, I can't do this." Felicia chimes in singing,  *Look, my eyes are dry ~ The gift was ours to borrow ~ It's as if we always knew.*  Gene continued, "Recording it, I didn't love my first take, but I did not have the vocal stamina to continue recording." Felicia added, "What if this thing that we love is taken away? You know, like, what if it disappears permanently? Who are we? What are we? What do we do now? And did any of it really matter?"  *It's as if we always knew, and I won't forget what I did for love. (Felicia gains momentum as she crescendos)* *Gone. Love is never gone.*  Ryan breaks in and shared, "It just felt like I had just gotten there, to Broadway, but hadn't actually experienced it. I don't know, for me it was,  *I've never been there, but I know the way. I'm going to go back there someday.*  We did not reopen. So, yeah." There was a sense of defeat in Ryan's demeanor when they said this. Their facial expression portrays emotions that were evident and were very different than the nonchalance that phrase emoted. I was about ready to ask Ryan about it when Gene pops in and says, "I think it was a rolling thing. It's almost like each month, the depression just sort of settled in more. I find it still even hard to be fully motivated because you don't know what the future will be." This creates a pause. Everyone is in quiet contemplation as they ponder their experiences.

All of a sudden, Joseph pops up with the question, "You know the people that this pandemic is affecting the most in show business?" He waits impatiently for a minute, making eye contact with each one of the other participants. Then he blurts, "It's the standbys and the

understudies! Since re-opening, some of our standbys have done all four of their tracks in a week's time. So that means, they're having to remember, from night to night, not only their lines, but their movement, lyrics, and activities. All of that. Then the next night, they do it all for a totally different character. And that has happened many, many times."

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: Standbys

(A gust of pink sparkles puff in from stage left. Kristin Bernadette Lansbury enters making little spins with tiny little tiptoe steps as she attempts a beeline of chaîné turns (chain of turns) from off-stage down left towards center near the actors. Her line becomes a little chaotic and less line-like. She is wearing all pink everything, including a tutu and a tightly wound bun at the top of her head. There are pink trendles of loose hair that she keeps blowing out of her eyes as she continues this zigzag attempt of a straight line. Finally...painfully...she arrives down center She is weaving and pushing trendles out of her face. Her tutu is lopsided. She is not really standing in a dance position. However, she appears ready to speak.)

I want to share some food for thought here. (Kristin weaves a little, then covers her mouth as if her tummy is a little upset from the spinning.) For a standby performer who is replacing an original cast member, these last minute character changes form an innate understanding that during the day, the performer has to completely readjust their mind set and become someone new. As a performer, you often think about your character, and sometimes are even in character, outside of your stage performance time. It would be like having multiple personalities. Literally, the standby performer would have to hang up the persona of their character when they hung up their costume after the show so that they could then spend time preparing for their new character for the next upcoming performance. And at the end of that show, hanging up that character with their costume so that they could spend the next day

preparing another character for the next show. Now let us remember, (she becomes more stable now), for days that have an afternoon matinee and an evening show, a standby could be playing one character in the afternoon and a completely different character in the evening. Therefore, before and between performances, the standby would need to prepare for completely different characters. The standby prep must include not only on-stage activity, but backstage choreography. (Kristin begins to spin directly to stage left. After three wobbly spins, she stops to realign herself. She begins again and completes four wobbly spins this time. She stops. She walks off stage left, disgusted and brushing pink trendles out of her eyes.)

Joseph continues, “So, what the standbys and understudies did was really heroic. But at the same time, my heart goes out to them because they’re under unbelievable amounts of stress.” Everyone nods and murmurs agreements. Speaking as she is walking on stage, Topaz shares, “I felt such guilt. You know, like, how did I get it? My sister now has it too. Who all have I exposed to COVID? (She sits upstage between Ryan and Felicia.) I just felt so guilty that I contracted COVID.” Wide-eyed, Ryan had experienced a different but equally as strong of an effect. They share, “I was just like...I don’t know...I felt like I just lost everything, and it was never coming back. So, I just didn’t care. I kind of acted a bit irresponsibly with my money...and maybe (miming drinking and smiling a bit) imbibing in a little too much drink. I was just so isolated by myself during the pandemic.” Topaz jumps in, “Me too. I just spent time watching reels, films, and video clips of the political upheavals, especially about George Floyd’s tragedy. I couldn’t stop seeing all of that.” Felicia began,  *Kiss today goodbye ~ And point me toward tomorrow.*  Gene joins her,  *We did what we had to do ~ Won't forget, can't regret ~ What I did for love ~ What I did for love.*  Felicia shares, “I have a weird personal goal of playing all the female roles in my favorite show. So far, I’ve managed to play three of the four roles. So,

I'm doing pretty well because almost nobody ever does that show. It's kind of amazing that I've made it to three of the four already. However, now I don't really know what may happen. Or if this will ever be possible. Or if I even care anymore."

Gene announces that he was also commissioned to direct a regional opening show after Broadway re-opened. He shares, "Okay, so we were going to work on this show. We started rehearsing. Then the opening date just kept getting moved further and further away. Who'd have thought that it would be a-year-and-a-half before anything kind of even remotely came back." Ryan lowered their head and quietly said again, "It has not come back for me." Everyone looked at Ryan. After a little prompting by the group, they share, "Just like the late notice from my company about the shutdown, they also were very late in notifying us that we would not be re-opening. I had been asked to audition for other shows, but I passed up these other shows because I had this show. Or, I thought I had this show. This was so unbelievably hard. Especially that second time, when it was actually ripped apart. I know what it took to get to Broadway. It took me almost 10 years to get to that spot. I still never really got to actually have it. You know?" Topaz scoots closer to Ryan, puts her arms around them and her head on their shoulder, and quietly sings from their song,  *Close to my soul ~ And yet so far away ~ I'm going to go back there ~ Someday.*  Ryan puts their hands on top of Topaz's hands and nods their head in agreement, "The amount of anger I felt, because it had been almost two years of waiting for Broadway to reopen. That had been sort of the only thing that I was really holding on to. It was like I couldn't wait for Broadway to come back. Like, I would be able to immediately pay off all this credit card debt." The milieu of the group became unsettled, concerned, compassionate. Ryan thoughtfully states, "It's not that I want everybody to like gang together and feel pity for those of us who didn't get to return to our previous shows or something, but it just seems like

nobody cared at all. Or really even saw it. It felt like I had been working so hard for years and years and years to get to where I was, and then, just sort of being like the butt of a joke.” Ryan and Topaz finish with Ryan’s song, 🎵 *I’ve never been there ~ But I know the way ~ I’m going to go back there ~ Someday.* 🎵

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: You Cannot be Involved in Other Work

(Kristin Bernadette Lansbury walks onto stage from stage right. She is carrying a little white stool, she sets it down and perches upon it. She is wearing a brightly colored red, pink, orange, purple, and blue polka-dotted clown suit with exaggerated puffy sleeves and trousers. Instead of big floppy shoes though, she is wearing tiny little pink ballet slippers with tiny little bows. Her cheeks have big red round circles, her lips are painted purple and are oversized, and there is one very big bright blue sparkly tear painted on her right cheek.)

The demand of Broadway rehearsals and shows do not leave time to have a second job. There are fewer positions than there are Broadway hopefuls. Therefore, a performer would never risk losing their position in a Broadway show for anything. Unfairly, Ryan was left without work, without financial stability, and without a plan. This caused insecurity in Ryan’s world. Unfortunately, this experience was not unique to Ryan. This perpetuates the alarming idea of the disposability of the performer and their art.

Scene: Kristin stays perched on her chair as the actors help one another up from their seated positions on stage. The lights slowly dim. Everyone exits stage right as they talk quietly, pat one another on the back, hug each other, and console one another. Kristin watches them exit. She looks at the audience, jumps off her chair, and exits following the path of the actors.

Scene 4: Questioning Career Choice

The first thought after hearing about the shutdown that occurred for my participants in some way was whether they had chosen the right profession. They were concerned because they had chosen a life, studied, prepared, and committed to a profession that had a reputation of being a risky endeavor even prior to the pandemic. They had built a life around being a Broadway professional. And then when the pandemic shutdown occurred, it seemed to exasperate this sentiment. Joseph, Gene, and Ryan mainly focused on whether they had chosen the right profession. Felicia mainly questioned whether she wanted to continue chasing the Broadway dream or continue down her recent path of creating new musicals. However, I do not think that Topaz wondered as much about her choice of profession as she did about how to better the moral terrain inside of musical theatre.

Setting the scene: The curtain opens. The actors are in a straight line in the center evenly spaced horizontally from stage right to stage left. The first person on stage right is Joseph, then Felicia, Gene, Topaz, and finally Ryan on stage left. They are independently circled by a spotlight. They are looking directly at the audience.

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: Dramatic Reading

(Still in her clown suit, but now with two more blue sparkly tears on her cheeks and carrying one great big blue sparkly tear, Kristin Bernadette Lansbury flutters and flies a complete circle around all the participants. As Topaz gently brings up her hand to make a little stage Kristin lands on her palm and begins speaking.)

This scene is a dramatic reading. There is little movement and the staging is minimal. When there is little movement, it makes the little movement there is, seem more powerful. Each person says a line, or few, at a time, presented in a meaningful order, and giving this feeling of

powerful, personal, thoughts being spoken out loud. The actors do not interact with one another, yet it's as if their words are a shared narrative. It is as if they are voicing out loud what they are thinking inside. (Kristin flutters up and flies to each performer touching them lightly with the tip of her hand on the top of their head. Then flies off upstage left.)

Ryan, "There was a lot of validation for me in getting that job. I don't think anybody really thought that I would get here." Joseph, "I already felt the guilt of uprooting my family out of their comfortable life in the town where I was a professor, and moving them to New York City." Topaz, "As white people, it's our problem to fix it. And it's not our place to center ourselves in it." Gene, "When you have spent your entire life doing something, and training for something, and it goes away in an hour." Felicia, "What's funny is I don't think I've felt as emotional about losing musical theatre as I think a lot of my friends have. I think part of that is from having already done this work to separate myself and my value from the thing that I offer to the industry"

Scene: In silence, everyone takes one step forward and the spotlight follows them. This is a little jarring.

Joseph, "I think that if I hadn't gotten COVID a second time at that time, then the disorientation wouldn't have been as bad." Ryan, "So, when the pandemic happened, it sort of took all my confidence away. I was sent back to this place. Like, why, why, why, just why, why did this happen? When I was right there?" Felicia, "So, I was like, okay, well, if this is our new reality, then I have to find a way to function within it. And find that same creativity and fulfillment and purpose. I think that's what humans really want, is purpose." Topaz, "I felt very aware that I needed to create the space for someone else to come into our institution. And I felt it

should be a person of color. So, that directly affected my decision to retire.” Gene, “I wasn’t sure that I would get to do this again. It started to feel hopeless.”

Setting: Again, in silence, everyone takes one step forward, a bigger step this time, and the spotlight follows them.

Felicia, “I never would have done it, taken a break, on my own. Without the imposing forced stop caused by COVID, I never, never, never would have voluntarily removed myself from that environment and from that relentless striving.” Topaz, “I think that director, choreographer, actor was too much of my identity and too much of my validity. So, it’s been a relief to allow that to loosen.” Gene, “During dress rehearsal of my re-opening show, I just could not stop crying. I love this theatre. To be there at night, working with a small group of friends, doing amazing work. We hadn’t been able to do that for a year-and-a-half.” Ryan singing,  *Come and go with me ~ It's more fun to share ~ We'll both be, completely ~ At home in midair.*
 For me, it’s that place of belonging somewhere.” Joseph (singing),  *Something’s changed ~ Something’s rearranged ~ Something’s strained ~ Something’s missing.*  It makes me think about people that I don’t even know that have died from COVID.”

Setting: Again, in silence, everyone takes one step forward, a bigger step this time, and the spotlight follows them.

Topaz, “I was forced to do other things that I wouldn’t have taken time for. It gave me an opportunity to do a lot of self-searching and valuing.” Gene, “Not knowing an end, where an end might be, or if an end might be. I looked into what it would take for me to get a real estate agent license.” Felicia, “I kind of felt free from that grind. I kind of felt I could explore something else. I could find fulfillment somewhere else.” Ryan, “I belong here. I am supposed to be doing this. This has always been the space where I know exactly what I’m doing.” Joseph, “I was new to the

New York scene. I didn't know any casting directors and they didn't know me. So, I was completely untethered professionally."

Setting: Everyone takes three steps forward until their toes are just at the cusp of the stage, causing unrest in the audience.

Gene, "Should my husband and I and our kids get passports?" Felicia, "So, you can be out of New York City, you can *not be doing* a musical, and there's nothing to miss out on because literally nothing is happening." Joseph, "It was pretty heavy, pretty hard. And I remember being pretty depressed in the midst of all that. I got pretty blue many times." Topaz, "Having time for just being in touch with people. Those are all things that I really value, and I will not let go of again." Ryan (singing),  *This looks familiar ~ vaguely familiar ~ almost unreal ~ yet it's too soon to feel ~ yet close to my soul ~ and yet so far way.*  Everyone joins Ryan in singing the last line of this chorus,  *I'm going to go back there someday.* 

And scene. Lights go out.

Scene 5: The Politics

The political conversations of my participants were a surprisingly heavy topic during our interviews. I was surprised because my interview questions focused on my participants' personal experiences surrounding the shutdown. Whether the pandemic caused or exacerbated political upheaval, or whether these events happened simultaneously, is still controversial. I have often wondered in what ways the pandemic shutdown experiences might have been different if the world was not also experiencing remarkably challenging political upheaval.

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: The Political and Social Self-Reckoning of Broadway

(The curtain is closed. A tiny spotlight shines at the very top of the very center of the stage. Kristin Bernadette Lansbury appears. Her little wings flutter as she stands perfectly still

midair with her feet together, her hands lightly clasped resting low in front of her. She is wearing all black clothing from head to toe that is tattered and torn. Her outfit is covered in glow in the dark patches of almost neon colored filament, depicting many of the iconic symbols of the political reckonings and opinions during the pandemic. There were individual patches of the many queer communities, a white patch with a black fist, a rectangle patch of the BIPOC colors, a confederate flag, a Christian cross, a Jewish Star of David, the crescent and star Islamic image, MAGA, and patches with the pro-life and pro-choice emblems. Standing perfectly still, with her hands clasped, she floats in descension until she lights on the stage. She is silent. Once she has landed on the stage floor, as she speaks, her gaze begins to the audience right and slowly, very slowly, excruciatingly slowly, scans across the auditorium to the audience left as she speaks. It is as if she is making eye contact with every person in the auditorium. This backwards movement goes against the common left-to-right direction that we experience when we read. This is a common tactic used to make the audience feel uncomfortable and disrupt the norm.)

The political charges were influential of the time. Whether you agree or disagree with the performers is not the point. The point is how those influences were woven into this challenging time and how it affected all their experiences. Please note, the author did not filter the political conversations of the performers. This dissertation is not intended as a political statement, or even a political push. She is sharing the stories of the performers, as accurately as possible. Political talks and agendas were in a hyperbolic state during the pandemic. The author kept the thinking of her participants on political meanderings and concerns as pure as possible. This was their thinking at this time. It does not represent what preceded, nor what may follow, this moment in time. (Kristin's eye scan ends at far audience left on the very last word. She jumps into the air and quickly ascends exiting behind the top curtain.)

Topaz was deeply affected by George Floyd's brutal death (Cape and Islands District Attorney's Office, 2020; Department of Justice, 2022). Her emotional response to the racial provocations at this time caused her more grief than her own suffering from the shutdown. Topaz felt that whether it was that the pandemic caused racial reckoning because of statistical data on the COVID hospitalizations and deaths, or whether it was coincidental timing of issues being long overdue, this concern at this time became real, raw, and powerful for her. She believed that these things happened in tandem, almost in harmony with one another. She deepened this feeling by saying that these things could not have been as powerful had they happened in isolation.

Setting the scene: Curtain opens. We begin with Topaz standing center stage, bathed in a soft spotlight. She was the participant that had the loudest voice about politics. She shared, "You know, I was like one of those that thought, from the civil rights movement on, we'd been headed in the right direction. George Floyd's murder and the days following were horrific and completely disorienting. I wanted to march and protest, but at the same time that felt like that would have been completely irresponsible to come into close contact with others and accelerate the spread of the pandemic. The pandemic heightened my feelings of outrage, isolation, loss, and the vivid awareness of the evils of white supremacy that are alive and well in this country. I felt so enraged and powerless. Sitting in my comfortable home, with my dog, completely privileged, no worry for my next meal, or my safety, or my future. I thought of the insidious nature of both racism and the pandemic. It's like this silent killer of both this virus of hatred and the virus of the pandemic that really hit me deeply. The virus of hatred and the virus of the pandemic are the same. They both destroy and kill. I felt like unless there was a pandemic, we wouldn't have had this time to stop and let the racism, the hatred, penetrate into our reality really looking at it and

taking the time to educate ourselves.” As Topaz was finishing Felicia enters from stage left, stops left of Topaz, and turns to face the audience.

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: Changes in Broadway Norms

(The lights on stage dim and a small spotlight hits upstage right. Kristin appears. She is wearing a bright blue business suit, carrying a designer navy blue stand-up briefcase bag, sporting a tightly wrapped brunette bun, and looking very much like a lawyer. She crosses from upstage right to downstage left, being careful to walk around Topaz and Felicia. She sets down her briefcase, pulls out a manilla folder and begins thumbing through the papers in the folder.)

We are seeing changes in Broadway traditions and unspoken hermeneutical understandings being challenged. Like, persons of color being cast in the fabulously desired leading roles. Lin-Manuel Miranda’s musical Hamilton (Hamilton Musical, n.d.) is a perfect exemplifying exemplar of breaking the boundaries of White normative character casting. (Papers begin to escape and flutter to the ground. Her briefcase tips over with a loud clap on the floor. Undisturbed, Kristin Bernadette Lansbury continues.) Even though the beautiful diversity of racial representation in the musical may not be historically definitive, Miranda’s interpretation marries the then, the history, with the now, the current, in a way that is remarkable. While also being very delightfully entertaining. Many musicals address unfair and unjust social topics. Yet, the hermeneutical understanding in the community of musical theatre has quietly, discreetly, covertly been practicing many of the same marginalizing norms. (Kristin quickly drops to the floor, scurries to pick up the papers that had escaped but she does not have much luck putting them back in the manilla folder. Finally, she just holds them close to her chest, bending and creasing many of the papers. The lights on the stage begin to come up. You can hear the pitter-patter of tiny feet as she rushes off stage right.)

And just as Felicia begins to speak, Gene and Ryan enters from stage right (amazingly not stepping on Kristin). Felicia shares, "I think just during COVID, we've really had a reckoning on lots of things about our theatre community. Again, about the whiteness of it and about the way we cast things and the people that we exclude on many levels. Whether that's skin color, size, disability, or whatever. Plus, the reckoning of gross stuff in general like sexual harassment or feeling like you're somehow selling more than just your talent to get a job. That happened to me. And it messed me up. That can last a little while or a long time. There are casting directors who I know who have hit on gay men and they prioritize casting gay men. And that's gross. That's abuse of power." Nodding in agreement, Topaz added, "I'm worried about my students. They don't seem to have a perception of what is unsafe and damaging, and what is uncomfortable. They don't understand that the learning zone is uncomfortable. That stepping out of your comfort zone can sometimes be a good thing. Any time they feel slightly uncomfortable, they're like, 'Oh no, I'm in danger. I'm not safe.' There needs to be an intimacy director with everything." This is a relatively new field. An intimacy director deals directly with physical, emotional, and violent intimate moments in the acting. This includes, but is not limited to, sexually intimate scenes. Additionally, it includes violent scenes or anything else that is physically or emotionally damaging. In these times of answerability, performing arts arenas have responsibly discovered and attempted to create this safer way to play vulnerable parts.

Both Ryan and Gene were nodding their heads in agreement while Felicia was talking. Gene shares, "In a venue that I regularly direct shows, I told the owners that I would not direct this year unless I had a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) choreographer, associate director, or someone on the leadership team with me, that is a person of color. The first response from the venue owners was that they would need to mull it over a bit. I was like, can you hear

yourselves? You have people of color in your families. I've worked with many people of color who were very qualified and have not had the opportunity to work in leadership positions because of traditional ceilings. When I shared what I had told the theatre owners with one of my friends and colleague of color, they told me 'I don't think any of us would want to do work for the owners of this theatre, without you there as the buffer'. This was a brutal awakening I hadn't yet thought of."

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: I am What I am

(Kristin Bernadette Lansbury slowly comes twirling from the top center of the stage. She is wearing a split costume. One half is a purple sequined long evening gown with big gaudy earrings, and the other half is a men's traditional black tuxedo, white shirt, and black tie complete with a satin stripe down the outside of the trouser leg. She gently lands center stage facing the audience.

Gene will be sharing I am What I am (Vaydr, 2018) from the musical La Cage aux Folles (Molinaro, 1978) that George Hearn sang for the 1984 Tony Awards. This musical tells the story of two gay men who were living a traditional monogamous life. As a couple they were going to have dinner with one of their grown sons and his fiancé, to meet the future in-laws. The son was ashamed of his gay father and his partner. (Kristin turns her body so only the purple sequined evening gown can be seen. She keeps her face facing the audience.) His father then decided to act as a female so that they could appear normal. In the filmed version of the musical, Hearn played the father/mother in drag. (Kristin then turns to face the opposite direction so only the tuxedo is showing. Her face continually faces the audience.) However, for the Tony Awards performance of this song, Hearn sang as a straight man in a traditional suit. About his choice Hearn stated, "It's funny, but I never thought twice about playing a cold-blooded murderer like

Sweeney Todd” (Playbill Staff, 2017, para. 11). (Kristin then turns to fully face the audience.)

The lead character in Sweeney Todd (Playbill Staff, 2017) is a barber who cuts off the heads of clients during their hair cut, and along with his co-conspirator, processes the meat to make into meat pies to sell to unsuspecting customers. This song, I Am What I Am, was written to represent a gay man publicly declaring independence and identity as such. However, it can be, and has been, interpreted in many different ways, including ways that have nothing to do with being gay.

(Kristin starts to head off stage right, but then quickly changes to stage left, trying to decide if she’s going to be male or female. Finally, she decides to make a grand exit by holding her arms directly out from her sides, making a large circle with her half side of the sequined dress billowing and flowing beautifully. Then exiting stage right as she smiles and waves to the audience. This would make Hearn’s character in *La Cage aux Folles* so proud.)

Gene continues, “In light of the recent elections, my husband and I have been looking at passports and things. What’s interesting, is that my ancestors fled Europe in the early 1900s when Hitler was coming to power, so it is odd that we are considering moving back to Europe.

♪ *I am what I am ~ I don't want praise, I don't want pity ~ I bang my own drum ~ Some think it's noise, I think it's pretty.* ♪ The idea of this special creation, that I had built a world in a career that I never thought I would have, and then suddenly, that’s gone. All that specialness that I had been able to build, in a difficult career field. Even where it’s hard to maneuver, I was able to have five, six, seven projects in the summer. That just went away with the shutdown and the politics.” Topaz added, “During this time, my thoughts have raged about how all great societies eventually fall. Those that are taken over by dictators probably began with some event that later is identified as the beginning of the end.” Ryan steps in, strikes a flamboyantly beautiful grand pose and adds, “I want to be creating queer art because I don’t think we have a lot of that.

Although the queer community has a strong presence in art, not a lot of musical theatre is specifically made for queer people. We have things that are made for straight people that are digestible about queer people, but it's not made for queer people." There was a pause at this time as everyone on stage thought about that. Everyone came to the conclusion that it was true. Gene chimes in with a baritone voice that grew in intensity,  *I am what I am ~ I am my own special creation ~ So come take a look ~ Give me the hook or the ovation.*  There was a round of applause by the other participants on stage. He bows and continues, "You know, that *special* from Hearn's mouth, did not feel special. He needed to let go of the quality and let the phrase have meaning by chewing the consonants." I ask, what is *chewing the consonants*. Gene explains, "Taking that one little breath beforehand, so that the next word has that moment of power and importance. We needed to feel that (throwing his hands up in the air) 'Fuck you! Do you know how hard I've worked to embrace this special human that I am?'" Ryan gasps! That brought this escalating moment to a halt. Everyone was staring at Gene. Then they slowly look back towards the audience again and smile meekly. Bringing comedic relief in this moment by perfect timing, Joseph came sliding from stage left, crossing downstage and coming to an abrupt disruptive stop between Topaz and Gene. He asks innocently, "What's going on?" Everyone on stage was silent. So, I said that we were just talking about politics. Joseph shares, "I got a political thing for you. I don't want to be pessimistic. I'm ultimately an optimist on every level, but it really does kind of shake your faith in humanity if we can't trust and believe in science. And the science that is in favor of wearing a mask to help prevent the spread of COVID is clear." Joseph throws open his hands and punctuates the next three words with a foot stomp. "Wear. A. Mask! You know, we basically had to wear masks all the time during the pandemic. The company provided us with N95 masks. To make my allegiance clear, I often wrote a political

message on each of my masks so that people would see it. Especially when I was in the states that were very opposed to masking. I was trying to do, in a strange subversive sort of way, my best to let people know that I don't agree with all you non-maskers." Felicia pipes in  *Kiss today goodbye ~ And point me toward tomorrow ~ We did what we had to do ~ Won't forget, can't regret.*  Then Gene steps forward and begins in a deep bass baritone,  *It's my world that I want to have a little pride in ~ My world and it's not a place I have to hide in.*  Joseph interrupts and shares, "Once while on tour when our tour bus stopped at a gas station to get gas, we ran into a group of non-maskers. A scene ensued between us Broadway mask wearers and the local non-maskers. One of the non-maskers crossed my path in an aggressive sort of way. Words were exchanged. Looks were exchanged. Huffs and puffs were expressed. Much was communicated without words." This was an accurate sign of this tumultuous time. After this story, Gene jumps in with his own masking story, "For opening night of one of the shows that I directed right after the re-opening of Broadway, I think all but one of the orchestra members tested positive. So, the musical director had like a day to gather a whole new orchestra and sort of (Gene does air quotes hand gestures) rehearse with them. Some of the audience members sent letters of complaint about the orchestra members wearing masks! Only a few audience members could even see them, and only if they intentionally leaned over to actually look into the orchestra pit." Felicia jumps in to add, "What about ageism and fitting the expected physical image. I'm in the in-between. You know what I mean? Like, I don't look old enough to be Evan's mom in *Dear Evan Hanson* (Chbosky, 2021), but I'm also not young enough to be a teenager in that show. So, it's like, where do you live if you're in the in-between? Or if you're a comedic actor, the directors are like, you don't look like...I don't know...like, you either need to put on weight, or do less funny stuff. What a gross thing to say, but that's how directors felt." All my participants are

attractive, in good physical condition, and take care of not only their appearance but their voice and overall health. Felicia loudly breaks into song using exaggerated hand gestures to punctuate the singing, 🎵 *Gone ~ Love is never gone ~ As we travel on ~ Love's what we'll remember.* 🎵 Gene interrupts and adds, “I had a voice teacher that pushed me to start eating healthy, taking more dance classes, and doing a lot of theatre courses, even though I was in the school of music. I didn’t really find my place in musical theatre until probably my junior year in college, after losing weight, and taking some theatre and dance classes. Which led me to start auditioning for musicals, which led me to getting work. And I found out that I loved it! And I excelled at it!” There’s a delicate line between visually fitting a character role, and exclusively fitting the sometimes elusive and often unrealistic standard norm.

This scene closes with everyone singing Felicia’s song patting, hugging, and linking arms as they exit upstage right, 🎵 *Gone ~ Love is never gone ~ As we travel on ~ Love's what we'll remember ~ Kiss today goodbye ~ And point me toward tomorrow.* 🎵 You can hear their voices fade away as they exit the stage. The lights dim slowly.

Scene 6: Theatre People Have Theatre Friends

The realization of this phenomenon was a direct effect of our interview process and speaks to the realization of the effects of the pandemic shutdown on community and self. This was not one of my original queries for my participants; however, it became apparent during the interviews that this was a common situation. My participants really, mainly, only had friends in the theatre. Every one of my participants would begin by sharing that yes, they did have friends outside of the theatre. Yet would slowly come to the realization that all their friends were somehow related to, or had at one time been related to, theatre. My participants had never really

thought about it. And in that moment, each participant had a bit of a chuckle when they finally came to the conclusion that most of their friends, were a part of musical theatre.

Setting the scene: The curtain opens, the lights come up, and downstage center, all my participants are standing side-by-side, arms linked at the elbow, uniformly right elbow over left, and looking at the audience. They stay in this line, with arms linked, not moving from this spot, for this entire scene.

Ryan begins, “The pandemic has really helped me realize who was just sort of convenient and there, but didn’t really offer my life anything, and sort of made it worse.” (Everyone nodded in agreement.) Felicia adds, “You know, the majority of my friend circle were definitely theatre related.” (Everyone looks up in thought.) After a minute-long pause of thinking, Josheph said, “Humm.” Topaz finally adds, “Well, I guess my closest friend is my college roommate. She is saving the world, raising money for those in need, and protesting things she is politically against. I admire her commitment.” Gene thoughtfully adds, “It was interesting that pandemic year, watching many of my theatre friends lose their jobs and a lot of them transitioning to become real estate agents.” (Everyone looks at Gene. Pauses. Nods their heads then faces the audience again.)

So, I ask everyone if they have friends outside of musical theatre. They all immediately respond “Yeah!” Ryan shares first, “I have a non-theatre friend who works at a pizzeria near my house. I love their pizza. (After a moment of thought.) Awe, but...he was previously in musical theatre and is actually considering returning to musical theatre.” Gene shares next, “I have a real estate friend who is selling multimillion dollar homes. This is great but it’s kind of sad too because this rich friend of mine is a very talented performer. We’ve performed On Broadway together. Oh! But I almost forgot, I just remembered that he is an understudy for another lead

role On Broadway.” (Everyone shakes their head as it’s sinking in that most of their friends are theatre people.) Joseph shares, “In my company, we met for ZOOM meetings during the pandemic shutdown to help us kind of deal with the feelings about it all. I kind of felt like I withdrew a little bit during these meetings. It was like, I wasn’t going to see these people, these colleagues, these friends that much for a while, so I just protected myself. And usually, I’m really outgoing and friendly and talkative.” (Everyone looks at Joseph, smiles, and nods in agreement. Then they all look back at the audience.) Ryan shares, “I’m good friends with someone who is in the backstage crew, but not a performer. Does that count as a non-musical friend? (Ryan sheepishly grins and admits) No. Yeah. I guess that’s really a theatre friend too.” Felicia shares, “Honestly, the other community that’s really grown for me during COVID was completely unrelated to musical theatre. It was my fencing class. We consistently met via ZOOM and continued to have simulated fencing bouts online.” (Everyone’s head snaps in her direction. They even lean in so that they can get a better look at her.) She continues, “I would say that was probably the strongest community I had during the pandemic because it was so consistent and so...I don’t know. It was just exactly what I needed!” Everyone starts talking at once. They want to know how fencing spars worked online. Felicia states, “We couldn’t do as much combat as we would have liked, but we did drills so that we would be prepared when we were back in person.” I’m not sure everyone was convinced. But they stepped back in line, and faced the audience, to continue.

Ryan ponders, “Yeah, now what I’m thinking about...I’m like...hmmm, I don’t know if I have a lot of friends that don’t do theatre.” This realization causes us all to chuckle a little bit. Ryan continues, “When I was actually On Broadway, I didn’t really know anybody then. Now, I could go to any Broadway show, and I would know four or five people, like, pretty well.” Felicia

chimes in, "Literally, everything I loved to do before the pandemic was related to my work. So, like singing, dancing, playing the piano...that's all still my work. Before the pandemic, I had never had a hobby that wasn't related to my work. (Lots of nodding and murmurs of agreement.) Because I've never loved anything that wasn't related to that. Fencing is honestly the very first thing I've ever been interested in, in any way, shape, or form that wasn't musical theatre." Topaz adds, "I guess pretty much everyone else, I mean my closest friends, I guess are all linked in some way to musical theatre." (All nod in agreement and shrug their shoulders.) Ryan adds, "I've met so many people during the shutdown that are in the theatre community and that were in other Broadway shows that I didn't know before, but that I had heard of. So now I have this whole new group of people. And during the shutdown, I started to feel so much more connected to the actual Broadway community than I had before. 🎵 *There's not a word yet ~ For old friends who've just met ~ Part heaven, part space ~ Or have I found my place.* 🎵 Gene adds, "I really looked forward to reconnecting with my friends when summer rehearsals began for the re-opening. Summer was sort of my reenergizing moment to get back into creative work with friends." Felicia returns to thoughts about fencing again, "Honestly, fencing really helped me survive the pandemic because it let me know what time it was, what day it was, and it was a place that I had to show up regularly. It also helped me feel connected to my New York life because I was like, oh, those people still exist. They're still in New York. And I'm still a part of it. So, even though it wasn't musical theatre related, it was the thing that made me feel like I still lived in New York and that I was still a part of that place." Topaz was still contemplating friends that she had that might not be in theatre, "I'd say my siblings and my children are my closest friends." Then a mischievous grin spreads across her face. "And my children are in the business." What an unexpected discovery about community and self.

Scene: My participants make a circle like the circle from the first scene. They are facing out of the circle, standing so close that their shoulders and elbows touch. The lights dim but do not quite go to black.

Scene 7: Everything Leads Back to Self-Identity

I'd like to start the introduction to this section with two quotes. Joseph steps out of the circle and faces the audience to speak. He shares the first quote, "This interview has been very therapeutic and slightly cathartic. And I appreciate that. Truly, as I was processing and catching myself in some of my answers, it's just like, oh, that's something I kind of needed to air." Joseph steps back into the circle and takes his place. Ryan steps out and faces the audience. They begin, the second quote, "It's been very nice to be able to talk about it because there has not really been a moment to really do that...with anybody." Ryan returns to their spot.

Every interview conversation led back to self-identity. When I did the final check about self-identity at the end of the second interview for each of my participants, often they would share that we had already kind of talked about that and that self-identity was wrapped in all the other stuff. There were practical losses of jobs, finances, living arrangements, and connections with community, however, the overriding discovery was that everything was glaringly, pointedly, unmistakably, recognizably, significantly, connected to self.

Setting the scene: As mentioned earlier, we end this last novella-script scene like it began. We begin with Topaz, "The quieter slower paced moments during the shutdown gave me an opportunity to do a lot of self-searching and valuing the me that just sits and plays the piano. Poorly (laughing and smiling). It makes me so happy to play the piano. Just to let myself be. Let myself alone for a while. During the shutdown, I was forced to do other things that I wouldn't have taken time for. I mean, playing piano was the biggest one. I also do yoga now. I didn't cook

much before the pandemic and I cook a little more now. And just saying no, a lot more. You know, being more particular about what I agree to do. I talk to my siblings every day. I cherish having time for just being in touch with people. Those are all things that I really value, and I will not let go of again. I've always been an activist and I've always been involved in outreach. But I centered myself before. I thought I had some sort of, like, extra points because my children are biracial. I didn't fully, and I still don't, understand my privilege. As a professor, I've just done a lot of education and reforming of my curriculum, what kinds of materials we do and how I approach community agreements. I'm also having those conversations with my students, to feel safe. I always assumed that my students felt safe in our classroom and rehearsal space. But I didn't really, you know, like go line-by-line (she punctuates this with hand movements) and check how we were going to address if they felt triggered, or how we were going to move forward."

The entire circle of my participants rotates circling stage right. Joseph begins, "My earliest memories of the shutdown were, this is coming. It's coming! I clearly remember being in conversations about the fact that it was coming. But just when will it be coming and how long is it going to last, we didn't know. Then when it happened, I was on tour. I might have seen a kind of a linear effect of traveling back to New York City, then making plans to move on from there. But I immediately got COVID and couldn't go anywhere. And by the time COVID was over in my family, the virus was so bad everywhere else, especially in New York City. We didn't want to go to our New York apartment home. We wanted to stay away from New York City. But then we realized our lease was about to expire on our apartment in New York City. So, we had to go back to New York to pack up and move out of our apartment. We decided to move to a house outside of New York City, but only a train ride away from Broadway so that I could stay near

opportunities to perform and continue to function until it all re-opened. The guilt I felt moving my family to New York City was then compounded by the guilt of moving them to yet to a whole other community just months later. It was very disorienting. Moving to a new community I really felt untethered and unanchored. I didn't know anybody. I didn't know who to turn to. I didn't have anybody to talk to. I had to learn where to shop, I had to drive around and find out where the grocery stores were. So, that was really big for me. But we were the lucky ones because we had enough savings that would get...hopefully...we had budgeted and thought it would get us through January. We had savings, a home, shelter, food, clothing, and we were in this really nice, beautiful neighborhood. We could walk our child to school. So, you know, after I went down the rabbit hole of all the dark stuff, I then started thinking about all the blessings that we had and how lucky we were. In all, our lives have really been changed for the better.” Please recognize the theatre speak of the last phrase of this last statement. It is from the musical, *Wicked* (Wicked the Musical, 2016).

As the entire group rotates the circle right Ryan begins, “I stayed in New York City during the pandemic. I didn't even go home to see my parents and siblings during the holidays. I celebrated with friends. I just cooked recipes I found online, which usually turned out pretty good. Unlike my friends who had shows to return to after the pandemic, I did not. Because my company was late in letting us know that we weren't reopening, I had passed up other opportunities to go to auditions. I had no idea what I was going to do. I had nothing lined up. I didn't even have an agent. After the pandemic, people were getting appointments to audition through their agents. The whole industry had basically gone virtual, so there weren't really open calls in person anymore. Sometimes audition videos didn't even get watched at all. So, it's like what's the point? Where I was able to get work without an agent in the past, I started thinking

that I probably should get one if I wanted to continue working. During the shutdown, all these performers and actors were making these videos because that's all they could do. All the videos were so serious. They were all about their depression, what they were going through, and what they lost because of the pandemic. It was all just so traumatizing. So, I started making videos with a couple friends, but they weren't depressing. They were fun! We posted them on social media platforms. People really seemed to connect to these videos during the pandemic. A lot of things that I was able to do during the pandemic happened because of these videos. I think that if I had not made these videos, I definitely wouldn't have worked the latter half of the shutdown. I mean, I've worked pretty consistently actually all 2021. Some of the work I did was outside of the United States. And I don't think that would have happened if I had not made that first video. The only reason that a producer of a televised event reached out to me, was because he saw one of those videos on social media. So, then I got to meet all these other people who have Broadway shows. Because of that video, I got to do the televised performance. And also because of that video, I have had a lot of people that are really supportive of me. It's really cool."

As the entire group rotates the circle right Felicia begins, "What's funny is I don't think I've felt as emotional about losing musical theatre as I think a lot of my friends have. I think part of that is from having already done this work to separate myself and my value from the thing that I offer to this industry. You are always just a very small cog in this very large Broadway wheel. And kind of disposable. I felt like taking a break was fine, and honestly, what I needed. I kind of felt free from that grind or that rejection or that relentless pace and those remarkable demands. I kind of felt free. I kind of felt I could explore something else. I could find fulfillment somewhere else. So, I thought, well, if not this, then what? I just kind of like, let it come to me. Whatever it was going to be because I just don't believe in being miserable. Before the pandemic, I was like,

my creativity was limited to this art form. Broadway. And it is still the art form that I love the most. So, in the past I wanted to put all of my, or much of my, creative energy into that. But, when Broadway didn't exist, my creativity had to go somewhere. It's not like now you'll cease to be a creative person for the next two years. I certainly wasn't about to wallow in self-pity for two years, and be sad about this thing, or long, or pine for this thing...that didn't exist right now. I often found myself feeling kind of outside of it. I don't know how I fit into Broadway anymore and whether or not it matters to me. I mean, like, do I care that I don't feel connected to that. That's something I kind of have to think about and examine as I get back to New York. Do I want to do the work to try to make a community for myself again? Or do I feel like I have what I need, and I just keep making the art that I want to make, with the people that I want to make it with? I've gotten more fulfillment out of doing my own projects and working on my own new collaborative work than I ever have in any other setting. I know that I need to keep functioning within this industry, but I think maybe it just looks a little different because I like having more control over what I do with my talent and what I put out into the world and what I say about art in the world.”

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: Regional Theatre and Community Theatre

(Kristin Bernadette Lansbury flutters in, circles around the circle of actors. Ryan makes a perch out their hand holding out one curved finger for Kristin to land. It becomes very apparent that she is having a hard time navigating the landing. Ryan tries to help by moving the perched finger around hoping to make it easier for Kristin to land. This goes on for about a minute when finally, Ryan just holds open cupped hands for Kristin to eventually safely land. She is wearing a bright yellow wrap around housecoat with bumble bee slippers. Her hair is wound in curls on top her head and she has on heavy stage make-up.)

A quick note on the difference between the regional theatre and the community theatre. Regional theatre, also known as professional or resident theatre, usually pays some or all of those involved, from the performers to the musicians to the scenery crew and costumers. Regional theatres may bring in headliners from across the United States or localities close by. These performances are usually displayed in professional performing arts centers or arenas that are dedicated just for this. Usually, scenes and costumes are fairly elaborate, professional, and specifically created for the performance. Often, season tickets are more affordable per single show than individual tickets. Community theatre, also known as school, religious, or nonprofit theatre, the actors, leaders, and crews may not receive monetary compensation. This is usually a voluntary venture. Often the performances are based around a certain time of year influenced by the calendar celebrations, or based around an end of academic sectional learning. There are not really any seasonal ticket purchase opportunities. These performances are performed in places or spaces that are small theatrical venues. They also may not necessarily be dedicated performing arts centers or arenas. Such as, school stages or religious pulpits, bimah, or other traditional spaces for performance and presentation. Usually, costumes and stage scenery are a hodge-podge of different make-do furnishings and props. Some items may be specifically created, however, it is more common to adapt items to loosely fit the acceptable idea needed.

(Ryan carries Kristin off stage and returns to their spot in the circle.)

As the entire group rotates the circle right Gene begins, “In the beginning, pushing back an opening night performance because of the pandemic shutdown didn’t hurt so much. Pushing back was like a couple of weeks off. I have always been a performer. I started out in regional theatre. Then, I went on my first Broadway audition, and I landed a leading role! I’ve always been fortunate that I have work and that a lot of my work ran for long periods of time. I

remember thinking while I was On Broadway, this is my moment! But I knew that at some point, I wanted to go back to doing regional theatre. And I did. When I decided to settle down and have a family, I went back to the regional theatre and became a theatre professor. I wasn't, as many actors were, I was not solely relying on performing for income during the shutdown because I had my income from university. However, live theatre is more of an artistic fulfillment for me. So, when it went away because of the pandemic shutdown, that was the hurt. And when my dream bucket list role went away, that I can't really ever do again because I will soon be too old, I shed some tears. There had been a year of press about me playing the lead part in that show. The theatre had already been selling out of advanced tickets for that show. They had a picture of me on the back of their programs for a year, like in the *Coming When* section. That was a big one. That was a dream gone because I can't do this role later because I will soon be too old. Eventually, I was not singing, I was not performing, I was not doing anything. I was just surviving. So, when I finally did get to do theatre again, it was different. It does not seem so much like life or death anymore. I am thankful that being a professor has helped me stay sort of grounded. My students are now finally working regularly, can pay their bills, and find supportive sustaining work. That still allows them to perform, while securing health insurance and pension plans. So, it is broadening the idea of the definition of being successful. And I am trying to learn to be more protective of my time. I'm supposed to be doing three projects next summer, but I'm going to probably have to step away from one because I don't think I can physically or mentally maneuver through that. And it's sad because it's one that I really wanted to do. As artists who have just gone through, like, two years of not being able to do anything, there's a fear of that going away again. Especially now, what that could look like in the next four years. What that

could look like for academia, and for the arts in general. It could be problematic. So, it's hard to figure out what the next best steps are."

My participants begin to break away from the circle one at a time and head downstage center to form a line. They each sing a final excerpt from their song. Except for Topaz because she cannot share her song. Gene begins by walking downstage center as he sings,  *I am what I am ~ I don't want praise, I don't want pity ~ I bang my own drum ~ Some think it's noise, I think it's pretty.*  Felicia begins to sing and follows Gene's path to downstage center. As she joins him, she reaches to hold his hand  *Kiss today goodbye ~ And point me toward tomorrow ~ We did what we had to do ~ Won't forget, can't regret ~ What I did for love ~ What I did for love .*  Joseph joins them and reaches for Felicia's hand,  *Take a picture ~ Of the scenery ~ Of a lookout ~ Of a moment ~ Which is over ~ Of the ocean ~ Of the river ~ Of the trees ~~~ Stop the world ~ Please.*  Ryan joins them and holds Joseph's hand,  *We're flying not walking ~ On featherless wings ~ We can hold on to love ~ Like invisible strings.*  Everyone joins in as they continue singing Ryan's song. And Topaz comes downstage to hold Ryan's hand,  *There's not a word yet ~ For old friends who've just met ~ Part heaven, part space ~ Or have I found my place. You can just visit ~ But I plan to stay ~ I'm going to go back there Someday ~~~ I'm going to go back there Someday.* 

The auditorium is silent. Somehow, it's a deafening silence that is also comforting. As all five of my participant continue holding hands, they raise their clasped hands up towards the rafters, (the audience begins to applaud) then take a bow as they hands swoop towards the floor. (The audience stands, and the applause gets louder.) The performers repeat their bow. They drop hands, wave to the audience, and all run off stage right.

Kristin Bernadette Lansbury: The Finalé

(But before the audience can go, from off stage, you can hear this squeaking, rolling, and thumping noise. It continues until finally, a royal blue trimmed open carriage with fine golden details of flowers, leaves, and birds enters downstage right. Kristin Bernadette Lansbury sits regally atop, looking straight ahead to stage left, as the carriage with the squeaky out-of-round wheel continues towards the center of the stage. She is wearing the gown of a Medieval princess with luxurious royal blue velvet, highlighted by an ornate silk inlet the length of gown, and featuring a gusseted corset tied with ribbons tipped with sapphires at the ends. On her tiny little head sits the biggest princess crown, overfilled with all sizes and shapes of sapphires, pearls, and gold flowers. Kristin slowly turns her head to the right, looking directly to the center of the audience. Her gigantic princess crown begins to slide to the left. She gracefully, or not so gracefully, catches it and pushes it up just a bit. Not quite making it back to the original symmetrical position it should be. She begins to speak, staying ever so still so as not to lose her princess crown.)

I believe, I truly feel, that this is the hardest, most difficult part of being a member of a magical musical theatre performance. It is the finalé. When the work ceases, the magical make believe bubble has come to an end, the performances have concluded, and our musical theatre family must disembark and migrate to new spaces and places and faces. Depending on the length of the musical run, this can feel like a dismantling of what had become the norm. For the performers in this novella-script often, many of their musicals ran for years, a decade, or more. When the finalé concludes, their office workspace, professional skills and activities, and work familial and friendships change all in an instant. Sometimes, their next employment opportunity may take them to a new home relocation. (She sighs dramatically.) It is not just the changing of a

job. It is not just moving to a new dwelling. It is not just gaining a few or losing a few friends. It is a complete dismantling of how it once was. This brings up the feels, (shrugging and shimmying her shoulders) you know, the feels (crown slips and she replaces it) that make you feel grateful and contented and joyous and appreciative and...sad. (Pause.) Sad and heartbroken and untethered because even though it may be time for it to be completed, you might not be quite ready or not know what to do. But it is the finalé. The last part of something special. The grand ending. (Her little carriage continues rolling again. The wheel is squeaking and bumping along. This causes her crown to fall off her head, tumble to the stage floor, and bounce off the stage onto the auditorium floor. The carriage comes to a sharp halt. Kristin gracefully, or not so gracefully, climbs down from her high perch on the carriage. She comes down to the edge of the stage. Teeters at the edge of the stage, holds up her hand to shade her eyes from the stage lights and sadly and dramatically inquires, "Please!" A little boy, whose favorite thing to do in the world is attend musicals, is sitting in the second row. He jumps out of his seat, clambers over the older woman sitting in the front row in front of him, grabs the tiny crown from the floor in front of the stage, and gently presents it to Kristin. She smiles as a tear escapes, takes the crown, properly placing on top her head, and climbs back onto the carriage. Magically, as so often happens in musical theatre fairytale endings, the crown stays perfectly situated atop her head as her carriage regally squeaks and rolls off stage left.)

Scene: The house lights come up.

Conclusion: Where to Begin...or End...

One of the challenges as I began imagining this chapter was figuring out how to share the data. Trying to fit the unexpected into a clearly defined format structure has been a heavy lift. Dissertations are usually linear and clearly structured. I began in the traditional dissertation

norming way but was met with roadblock after roadblock. The data report refused to be structured in the normal way. Therefore, my data report was very different from what I ever imagined.

On this adventure, I have talked, laughed, questioned, discussed, and cried with some of the most remarkably amazing people. Who just happened to be Broadway performers. This has been magical. It has been hard work to tell the stories properly and accurately while also keeping identities protected and unrecognizable.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion: Discussion and Conclusions

This study was based on the experience of five Broadway professionals surrounding the 18-month shutdown of 2020 which was caused by the COVID pandemic. Special attention was paid to the first of ten phases of Mezirow's (1978/2003, 1991, 1997, 2000) Perspective Transformative Learning Theory, the phase of the disorientating dilemma. This chapter will develop findings and compare them to the literature.

Discussion of Findings

The umbrella macro theory was Mezirow's Perspective Transformative Learning Theory (1978/2003, 1991, 1997, 2000; Dix, 2016; Mälkki, 2010; Nerstrom, 2014; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Additionally, it was organically purposeful and necessary to include two micro theories: Habermas's (1984, 1991) Communicative Action Theory and Gadamer's (1980, 2006a, 2006b) extended hermeneutical understanding, to support Mezirow's transformation.

The Disorienting Dilemma of Perspective Transformative Learning

When Mezirow's wife returned to school after their children were grown, her academic learning led to a new career and lifestyle (Mezirow, 1991). She had been transformed. This played a heavy influence on Mezirow's decision to conduct a national study on women returning to college and work. What came out of the amalgamation of that study were Mezirow's ten phases of perspective transformation. The focus in this research was on the first phase, the disorienting dilemma. The 18-month pandemic shutdown of Broadway clearly forced a catalytic disorienting dilemma.

All five of the participants could remember when they received the official announcement of the pandemic shutdown of their theatre company. This was designated as the

disruptive disorienting dilemma. Three participants remembered the exact moment they received the announcement, and two participants remembered the timeframe. For four participants the announcement of the shutdown was disorienting. However, Joseph found the announcement of the shutdown orienting. Although there were rumors and social media posts about a Broadway shutdown, there was no formal or estimated plan when a shutdown might occur or how long it might last. This caused Joseph to feel disoriented. So, when the actual shutdown was announced, Joseph felt a decision had been made and he found orientation in this decision. It was as if this provided a sense of direction bringing back a normality to the disruption (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020). After the opening announcement, it was the ongoing promise of the opening-closing-reopening, that he again found to be disorienting.

Mezirow (1991) shares that dilemmas are painful, often causing people to question themselves and threatening their understanding of self. In scene seven in the previous chapter, all things led back to self. So, even though an attempt was made to distinguish how the pandemic shutdown affected the participants' professional lives and community connections as well as self, all things initialized and finalized with self.

For at least four participants, after they received the initial announcement, which could be categorized as shock, disequilibrium, disruption, realization, or a culmination of all of these (Mezirow, 1991), they began with one of the biggest questions of self. This “externally imposed epochal dilemma” (Mezirow, 1991, Outlines of the Transformation Process section, para. 2) made them wonder whether they had chosen the *right* career. Specifically in reference to the pandemic, Eschenbacher and Fleming (2020) state that a disorientation is when, “An individual is unable to make sense of an experience within her or his current pre-pandemic frame of reference” (p. 662). The external epochal dilemma, the shutdown, caused the participants to

question their choice of career, further based on the pre-pandemic knowledge that this was originally a risky career choice. Mezirow (1991) shares that disorientation starts as a doubting process that comes about from a heightened awareness of current normative inadequate ways. The shutdown caused the participants to doubt their career choice in sight of this heightened awareness of how vulnerably dependent this career choice was on the health and financial well-being of not only the professional Broadway population, but additionally that of the audience population.

Topaz was the only participant that did not heavily identify with this questioning of self in choosing the *right* career choice. However, she did question whether she should retire early as a professor and university leader to give space for a person from a marginalized community to move into her positions. Mezirow (1991) states that rather than “diligently applying old ways of knowing,” it is important through transformation to “acquire new perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of changing events” (The Cultural Context of Learning section, para. 4). So, as Topaz gained this understanding of changing and challenging events caused by the shutdown, she questioned her positionality. Mezirow (1991) continues this thought by stating that by acquiring this new perspective it inspires the individual to gain a “higher degree of control over their lives” (Mezirow, 1991, The Cultural Context of Learning section, para. 4). Thus, the long pause caused by the shutdown prompted Topaz to reflect on her positionality in which she gained new perspective, and self-imposed a higher degree of control over her life with the intention of leaving space for those in marginalized communities.

On the other hand, Gene questioned his choice of career the most. He felt this anticipatory grief of loss as he tried to cope with crisis caused by the shutdown (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020). He thought seriously of getting a realtor license or going back to school for a

degree in psychology. For Joseph and Ryan, they lost their sense of normal and were urgently seeking a new normal (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020). Not only were they questioning career choice, but they were also questioning whether their recent move to New York City was the *right* choice. Joseph's questioning of moving to New York City was exacerbated because he had signed on the closing of the sale of his home within days of the announcement of the shutdown, and he moved his spouse and child with him to New York City.

Mezirow (1978) shares that a disorienting dilemma comes about when things cannot be solved in the usual ways, forcing us to readdress our usual problem solving ways. All the participants experienced this. Especially depicted in scene three where the continuation of not knowing when, or if, Broadway would reopen. Gene shared that things did not abruptly stop but that they also just, "trickled away" and that just "sort of had these constant losses". He shared that because he had not been rehearsing as often during the shutdown, he had lost his singing stamina. Even though he had made multiple recordings of a song that he had been contracted to perform, and was honored to perform, he sent the contracting entity his first recording. He settled on what he thought was the best of the bunch, but felt in no way that it was his best. Even during the interview as he was sharing this story, it still caused him emotional turmoil.

Additionally, even though the participants had experience in living the nomadic life of being a Broadway professional, especially through the common practice of subletting apartments, the long indefinite 18 months forced the participants to continually readdress their usual problem-solving ways when it came to managing their living arrangements (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020; Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 1997, 2000). The interpretation of previous experience is an influential guide for solving future problems (Mezirow, 2000). When a disruption occurs causing a disorientation of the norm, a problem arises. Eschenbacher and Fleming (2020)

describe that “for learners experiencing disruptions to originally unproblematic ways of being and living” (p. 668) new ways of solving problems are forced. Even Felicia, who was adept at both sides of the subletting experience, she too struggled with solving this unknown for living arrangements. In an attempt to help feel grounded, she and her husband bought a house near family and friends during the pandemic. Remodeling and updating a home were not something that was in their immediate purview to do. However, it was her attempt at trying new problem solving ways. Additionally, it gave her an outlet in which to use her creativity in new ways. As she shared that creativity did not cease to exist just because Broadway was shut down.

Mälkki (2010) furthered Mezirow’s thoughts on the disorienting dilemma when she explored this idea of the *edge-emotion*. These emotions, that are at the edge of the comfort zone, trigger a need for reflection and reconsideration of the “discrepancies that threaten the consistency of our meaning structures” (p. 56). This was felt by Felicia when she asked, “Well, if not this, then what?” She then made intentional choices to explore other options for being a musical theatre professional. Interestingly, she also shared that since Broadway was closed, she was not experiencing that feeling of missing out on her chance for the next big thing. She continued that pre-pandemic, if she was away from Broadway for very long, she would be having thoughts of missing out, that things were still happening On Broadway. By not being On Broadway auditioning and preparing, she might be missing out on her next big part. This was something that really could not have happened had Broadway not been completely shut down for an extended period. This feeling of not missing out aligns with Mälkki’s (2010) idea that by paying attention to physical and psychological indicators of the edge-emotions, a person’s attempt at restoring balance and returning to a newly defined comfort zone. Mezirow (1978; 1991; 1997) terms this newly defined comfort as transformation.

Mezirow (1978) shares that a disorientation results from someone being “caught in [one’s] own history and reliving it” (p. 101). The most challenging of the continual dilemmas was Ryan’s journey through the pandemic shutdown. Their usual ways of problem solving were no match for being in New York City for a short time, being in rehearsal for their first On Broadway show, receiving a very late shutdown announcement, and tragically – receiving a remarkably late notice that their show would not be reopening and had been completely cancelled. Not only did this leave them unemployed upon reopening, but they had also passed on other opportunities where casting directors were asking them to audition. Since Ryan was newer to New York City, their support pool of friends was still fairly small. The dissociative responses made by Ryan’s Broadway company forced Ryan to relive their history every time a new brutal dilemma unfairly surfaced.

Each participant faced many dilemmas that could not be solved in the usual ways. Yet, each participant had a remarkable, never-ending sense of hope and faith that their spot in this profession would return, or that their definition of their spot in this profession would be updated to better suit their new sense of self.

The Communicative Action

The communicative action, specifically the ideal speech situation inside of the public sphere, played an important role in the data collection for this research. Mezirow was influenced by Habermas, demonstrated through his descriptions of self-negotiation caused by a disruption in norms (Eschenbacker & Fleming, 2020). For Mezirow this disruption is called a *disorienting dilemma*, for Habermas it is called a *critical reflection* (Eschenbacker & Fleming, 2020). Both transformation and communicative learning are influenced by feelings, intentions, values, morals, purposes, and beliefs. Additionally, both have an end growth that is akin to

emancipation. Not from others, but as a reflective emancipation from the old ways of thinking, norms, and meaning making.

Habermas's (1964, 1970, 1984, 1991) communicative action theory postulates that there are private and public spheres. The private sphere is where an individual has privileged connection. To be in a private sphere an individual must be born into or be invited to participate, such as a family or a closely committed group of friends. It provides an environment without the worry of societal and governmental overseeing. The public sphere is where private individuals come together to collaborate and have discourse on current social existence, political discourse, and representation of power. Inside this public sphere Habermas (1984) encourages us to strive to create this ideal speech situation where words, phrases, and thoughts are immunized from judgement in a special way and people can speak freely. There were three very specific areas in this research of note for the ideal speech situation, the milieu of video conferencing platform, the use of *theatre speak*, and the intention of political concerns.

The Milieu of the Video Conferencing Platform

Of note, Habermas (1964, 1970) suggests that the focus inside the ideal speech situation should be on a genuine consensus. That was not the focus for this research. Coming to a genuine consensus is more necessary if the private individuals inside the public sphere come from opposing standpoints. For this research, the true purpose of the ideal speech situation was to create a safe space free of judgement making room for difficult topics to be shared in a deep receptive way. What was truly born in this situation was a genuine understanding. Using the ideal speech situation in this way stretched the boundaries of Habermas's (1964, 1970) original intent and encouraged this deeply communicative exchange.

Personal connection and communication were facilitated by the video conferencing platform. It established this protected cocoon environment. While the researcher and participants were geographically located around the world, yet all were comfortably seated in surroundings with which we were familiar, located in our homes, offices, and hotel rooms. This protection of anonymity was strongly in place, almost creating this feeling of a sacred space and time.

Even though Joseph and Topaz were COVID positive during one of their interviews, they still wanted to, and were excited to, do the interviews. The video conferencing platform offered this beautiful way to connect where we were virtually close, the conversation was private, and we were safe from sharing COVID germs. Furthering this, scene seven in chapter four began with two quotes. One from Joseph in which he shared that these interviews had been, “very therapeutic and slightly cathartic.” The other was from Ryan where they shared that it was nice to talk about this experience because, “there [had] not really been a moment to do that...with anybody.” The video conferencing platform created this safe space, free from judgement and repercussion. A place to voice the travesties experienced during the shutdown in this video conference cocoon, cloaked in a pseudonym, giving space to emotionally explore, examine, and explain their stories.

The Use of Theatre Speak

Besides the milieu of video conferencing platform, *theatre speaking* created this automatic password or secret handshake into the society of musical theatre understanding. Habermas’s (1964, 1970, 1984, 1991) *ideal speech situation* lives inside the public sphere. It is where all people involved can feel safe sharing difficult things and realize that they are being heard in an equal and relevant way. My participants organically speak in *theatre speak*. It is where, just by the mere mentioning of a piece of musical theatre, images can conjure up feelings,

emotions, and understandings instantaneously and with accurate shared understanding. This was exemplified by Joseph sharing, 🎵 *Something's changed ~ Something's rearranged ~ Something's strained ~ Something's missing.* 🎵 These phrases were not sung in one long sentence, one right after another in this song. Instead, versions of this two-word phrase, *Something* plus a verb, was sung 20 times in the song with spoken verses between. However, when Joseph sang just the two-word phrases without the spoken verses, all the feelings, emotions, and desperations that he was intentionally trying to communicate were clearly, deeply received.

The most powerful example of this was Ryan's art representation. In this Muppet film, Gonzo shared his pain in such an innocent childlike way. The words alone 🎵 *vaguely familiar...do I belong there...we can hold onto love...not a word yet...I'm going to go back there someday.* 🎵 The words gently scream of loss and confusion and hope. The words, phrasing, and tune emoted this naïve uninhibited rawness from which there was no escape in the moment that they were sharing this. However, when Ryan shared information about the late announcement for the pandemic close of their Broadway company, and consequently the very late announcement that their show would not reopen, they were brief and almost flippant. It was not because they did not care, but it was their young stoic form of resilience. This piece of musical theatre communicated more responsibly and accurately their emotions and challenges surrounding these experiences, than Ryan's actual words alone were able to communicate.

The Art

Narrative inquiry was an inviting platform for my participants. They were all happy and excited to tell their stories. When I requested that they use a piece of musical theatre, the arts-informed piece, as a representation of their storied experiences, they were all a little confused. Although musical theatre artists organically talk in *musical theatre speak*, I sensed that they had

not really thought about it, or heard it requested, in quite this type of way. Their stories alone would have been beautiful and powerful and important. However, by using art as a representation in this way, it created a deeper understanding that would otherwise be ineffable (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

This became most important in Gene's telling of the specific singing of George Hearn at the Tony Awards. I have seen the films of Hearn singing *I Am What I Am* in both the musical *La Cage aux Folles* (Molinaro, 1978) and also at the Tony's (Vaydr, 2018). This particular version at the Tony's was significant to Gene because it completely changed, or at the very least muddled, the intention of the song. When Hearn sang this song in the musical, it was about being a gay man, father of a politically conservative son, and living in a committed homosexual relationship in the 1970s. When Hearn sang it at the Tony's, unless the audience member was aware of the musical context, the song could have portrayed a plethora of different topics. At the Tony's it was more about the talent and logistics of the vocals than it was about the meaning of the lyrics. I could not have truly understood this through Gene's eyes without the representation of, and communication of, the art. Gadamer (1992, 2006a) refers to this as a truth statement or the unnamable. Marcuse (1978/2003) tells us that it is going beyond words or not accessible by ordinary language. Another example of this was in Topaz's communication. Her arts-informed piece was newly developed piece not available yet to the public. I had not heard the lyrics or seen the imagery of this musical theatre piece. It was a newly developed musical, so there was no specific preestablished hermeneutical understanding of the emotions of this piece. However, just being a member of the musical theatre community, so much could be tacitly understood. Topaz created this magical adventure as she described the song and visuals, the setting and plot, and the inspiration that gave life to this new musical.

The Intention of Political Concerns

Habermas's (1974) political discourse inside the public sphere became a daily, sometimes hourly and minute by minute practice that was forced upon the participants, their community, and the nation. However, the participants took up these arms with vigor, dedication, and intention. The intention of the ideal speech situation inside the public sphere is discourse that is born on the "ideas of truth, freedom, and justice" (Habermas, 1970, p. 372). Since our ideal speech situation was structurally and reliably situated in the video conferencing environment, it became increasingly important to the participants that they share their meandering, reflective, thought provoking, and accountable opinions surrounding political reckonings during the pandemic. The epistemology focus was that of a constructivist lens when searching for responses to the research question and sub questions (Bhattacharya, 2017; Crotty, 1998). Meaning that the focus was on the individual meaning making. However, for the participants, political self-reflection, awareness, and accountability had become a big part of their individual meaning making experience. For Joseph it was masking; for Felicia it was gross practices by those in power; for Gene it was equality in the queer community, masking, and persons of color; Topaz had a strong reaction and responsibility to improve the community for persons of color; and for Ryan it was equality in the queer community. My participants were not only concerned about these reckonings, but they also shared the ways they planned to make society better. It was not just talk. They were all taking actions. Although Felicia was the one who spoke specifically of this *grossness* in the profession, all of my participants alluded to these "pre-established codes" (Habermas, 1970, p. 361) in some manner. The term, *casting couch*, is not a new term. It has been around for about 100 years and originally referred to the older white male in leadership

exploiting the younger female who wants to become a star. It has since evolved to include other populations in subordinate positions.

Topaz's decision to retire to make space for a person of color to move into her teaching and leadership positions was the most remarkable. Mezirow (1991) states, that it is in the public interest "not to allow the dictates of political, legal, or religious systems become substitutes for rational discourse" (Communicative Learning section, para. 10). Topaz's action transpired from this deep development of social consciousness (Marcuse, 1969/2000; 1978/2003) pushing her to take this social and political action (Habermas, 1970; Marcuse 1969/2000; Mezirow, 1991). She did this quietly and humbly but with resounding intention.

Ther Hermeneutics

As much as the ideal speech situation supported the data collection, the hermeneutics supported the data analysis and reporting. Hermeneutics played an important role in the understanding and interpretation of these stories. In addition, hermeneutics played an important role in organizing the stories in interesting, purposeful, and digestible ways. Finally, hermeneutics played an unexpectedly important role in creating an inclusive and informative environment for those who are less experienced in musical theatre.

Understanding and Interpreting the Stories

Gadamer (2006b) states that a true sense of understanding is specific to a targeted language. The specific language for this research is *musical theatre speak*. A language in which the participants were very fluent. Even if it had not been requested that the participants provide a piece of musical theatre as a representation of their experience of the pandemic shutdown, they still would have used *musical theatre speak*. It is just the organic nature of this community to talk using musicals as a reference, guiding light, metaphor, or example. This prompted a need to

extend the term *hermeneutical understanding*. Even with the first extension of hermeneutics in which the written and spoke text moved from biblical text only, to texts outside the bible, especially the academic text, there was this whole world of communication that had not yet been included in hermeneutics. Not recognizing texts outside the written and spoken words left a gap. Therefore, I proposed extending hermeneutics to include spatial, visual, and movement texts of communication. Additionally, in the musical theatre community these non-verbal and non-written texts carry as much credence as merely written and spoken texts do. By speaking in the local language, it heavily influenced how these stories were heard and understood.

Organizing the Stories

Laverty (2003) postulates that there is not just one truth of knowledge in a text, but that it is influenced and disseminated by the cultural flare. This postulation heavily influenced the experimentation of multiple purposeful ways to organize the data. Simply including quotes in the data reporting provided accurate information. However, circling back to the intent of the storyteller participants, direct quoting lacked cultural disseminating flare. Simply including quotes diluted the intent of their stories. Their stories needed to live inside a story-like environment. Davey (2017) shares that hermeneutics equally expands and disrupts established knowledge. By using the novella-script it simulated disruptive skills of the participants that generated a controlled disruption for the reader (Dave, 2017). Gadamer (2006a) states that art is, “marked by an immediate presentness in time and at the same time by a rising above time” (p. 58). This story-like environment was a culmination of immediate presentness of each participant, then rising above time to be rearranged and reorganized in a purposefully simulated timing format. Hence, the idea of multiple settings and shared conversations by the participants, who have never, to the researcher’s knowledge, met in real life, was born.

Creating an Inclusive and Informative Environment

Gadamer (2006a) believes that art is a truth statement, meaning that it tells, or exposes, the cultural truth and understanding. Discovered throughout the data reporting process was the need to include this tacit understanding that is really only familiar to those who participate in musical theatre. The report needed these truth statements so that the hermeneutical understanding of these stories made sense. However, just including these truth statements made the reporting informative but a bit shallow and dry. Gadamer (1992) also shares that art communicates the unnamable, that which cannot be described but that which is deeply understood. By describing the scenes of the novella-script, the spatial placement of the participants, and their physical interactions and movements, this unnamable feeling created a deep understanding of the emotions of this experience. It exposed and shared the truth of the stories. Additionally, Kristin Bernadett Lansbury became the truth sayers. She shared this hermeneutical understanding that is really only familiar to those who participate in musical theatre. By describing her detailed costumes, physical attitude identifiers, and stage movements, she was sharing the unnamable understanding.

Extended-Extended Hermeneutics

As mentioned in chapter two, even verbal art such as theatre and music, have nonverbal text in visual, spatial, and movement communication. The placement of the participants on stage for the scenes is an excellent example of this extended-extended non-verbal textual communication. In scene three, where the participants entered the stage at different times, casually taking a seat near one another on stage, and making eye contact as they spoke brings a certain understanding of being unchoreographed and unrehearsed. This visual and spatial text

creates this energy that matches the topic which is the continuation of the shutdown. Broadway professionals were kind of put in this holding pattern.

The most powerful nonverbal communication was in scene four. The participants started in a straight line upstage evenly spaced across the stage. They each shared a thought about questioning their career choice. Then, in unison, everyone took one step forward. They repeated this process until they were teetering on the edge of the stage. The visual and movement text created this feeling that was uncomfortable and startling. Adding to this, the seemingly disjointed yet tangentially connected verbal text created an intentionally, challenging truth-stating scene.

The last example of nonverbal text in the previous chapter is a combination of the first and last scenes. In the first scene, the tight circle in the center of the stage where everyone faced out and they were back to back from one another, introduced each participant individually and their big break on Broadway. In the last scene, everyone returned to the exact space with the exact minimal movement. Everything comes full circle. Everything circles back to self.

Those not well versed in musical theatre might not have recognized these spatial, visual, and movement texts. However, as Gene shared, “You would miss it if it was not there.” You might not know what it is, but you would sense or feel that something in the performance was missing.

The Impact of this Research

There are three areas that this research could have impactful influence: 1) adult learning and the disorienting catastrophic event that forces self-evaluation and the iterative process of transformation, 2) the importance of the safe space for difficult conversations, and 3) the arts format as the ideal speech situation.

COVID, Pandemics, Catastrophic Events, and Shutdowns

The research illustrates adult learning and the disorienting catastrophic event that forces self-evaluation and the iterative process of transformation. Although this research was based on the effects of the longest, by far, shutdown of Broadway, these results could be influential or inspiring in other areas of extended disruptive challenges. Broadway has not had a complete shutdown of a comparative length in historical record. Prior to the pandemic shutdown, the longest shutdown was 25 days during a union strike. This research holds important analysis especially for comparative situations such as the extended shutdown of learning venues during the pandemic. Both Broadway and academic venues were completely halted and created this ghost town environment. Not only were the shows of Broadway absent, but so were the daily interactions, the consistent communal connections, and the relocation of living arrangements. Academic spaces also lost the daily interactions and consistent communal connections, however, the shutdown did not have a direct effect on relocation of living arrangements. This was unique to Broadway. There is a process to the learning and coming to terms with the transformation.

This research may have an impact on the ways adults learn in extended disruptive situations that force new ways of managing and navigating problem solving and norming. Although this research was based on the COVID pandemic, this data lends important information for other extended disruptive events such as adjustments caused by drastic political changes in policies and laws. These types of disruptive events may have similar challenges in discovering that problems cannot be solved in the normal ways, experiencing insecurity in understanding announcements from leadership with instructions and information, and finding ways to sustain a work-life balance while navigating the cyclical iteration of establishing a new norm.

The Importance of the Safe Space for Difficult Conversation

This research made great strides for paying attention to the importance of the ideal speech situation. This space was where difficult personal truths could be shared free of judgement. Joseph started many of his responses to questions by giving an expected answer that was fairly void of unique personal experience. The ideal speech situation inside the video conference cocoon, invited the participants to respond in an authentic, personal, and meaningful way. The spatial textual communication created this inviting genuine safe milieu. This was a powerful surprise that could be purposefully intentionally created and used in multiple narrative inquiry research methodologies.

Art as an Ideal Speech Situation and Hermeneutical Understanding

There is protection in being able to safely hide inside the façade of art. It is protective yet powerfully communicative. When standing within the art, if the participant is concerned that there may be pushbacks, blame, or disagreement in these difficult conversations, there is an opportunity to feel protection by laying the difficult conversation directly in the art. In this way, art acts as a protective barrier. Additionally, arts-informed practices are organic to social communication as it is common to refer to lyrics in a song, a character of a streaming show, or the plot of a movie when describing an experience or event.

The term, *arts-informed*, was intentionally used in the above statement. During this research, it was discovered that a clarification was needed between the terms, *arts-based* and *arts-informed*. Saldaña (2003) and Barone and Eisner (2012), experts in the field of using art as a platform for research, predominantly used the term, *arts-based*, and most often conducted arts-based activities. Saldaña (2022) conducted a workshop at a professional conference that heavily

relied on arts-informed ways by using film clips as a purposeful engaging way to teach research methods. However, he never referred to this as an *arts-informed* method.

To fill this gap, the following clarifications and distinctions were intentionally created. An *arts-based* format means that the growth, interruption, disorientation, and data are drawn when creating the art. *Arts-informed* has two definitions, each with some nuances. One definition of *arts-informed* is when a piece of existing art is used as a tool to accurately and purposefully communicate something that would otherwise be ineffable. A nuance of this would be that the researcher could use a piece of existing art as a representation to push a concept, awareness, discussion, or discourse. Another nuance, and the one that was used in this research, is that the participant can provide a piece of art that represents their communication. This nuance, referred to above that is common in our everyday language, is a primitive use of an *arts-informed* communication. A second form of an *arts-informed* format is when an experienced artist uses their art form as representation of communication. Here, the nuance of the communication is not necessitated by the creation of the art. The experienced artist fluently speaks in their art language. Therefore, the growth, interruption, and disorientation are not originating from the creation. This is a unique clarification that may need teasing out when used as a research method.

Recommendation for Future Research

Based on this research, data were collected surrounding this specific event which was additionally influenced by numerous remarkable political and social events. Furthering this, data from other political and social events or issues could be collected through the first nuanced arts-informed method described above. Such as using a controversial musical as the prompt for collecting data on opinions of an event or issue. By using existing art in this way, the responses will be more safely situated on the art instead of directly between the participants. This could be

conducted as a small group discussion so that data between participants could be collected through transcripts from recording the discussion, written anecdotes by the participants, and observational researcher notes. A full disclosure of the structure of the research methods would need to be included in the consent. One good example was provided by Gene, *La Cage aux Folles* (Molinaro, 1978) could be used to push a conversation about equality for the Queer community. Along with the previously mentioned attention to the explanation of methods in the consent, additional planning for de-escalation would also be necessary.

This research discovered a gap in the distinction between arts-based and arts-informed research. Based on this, the more finite distinction of an arts-informed research in which the participant creates a piece art in their professional genre as part of the data collection, would further aid in exploration and deeper definition of this distinction. One way this can be used in this particular community is to ask that the participants create a song, dance, or theatre piece that represents their experience of an event, focusing not just on the disorientation but including other phases of Mezirow's iterative perspective transformation. Even though an art product is being created, the art product is their normal professional mode. Therefore, the artmaking is not pushing the meaning-making, it is used to communicate that which occurred. This may be one of the most comfortable arts-informed ways of creating data for the participants. However, it can be more time consuming, and intellectually and emotionally consuming, than using existing art as a representation. Additionally, this may be a little more exposing than relying on *musical theatre speak* through existing art to represent a hermeneutical understanding. This is because the created art – movement, vocals, and acting – come directly from the participant. Rather than relying on art created by a third party creator as a vehicle of communication by the participant.

When using art as a way to collect or report data, distinguishing between arts-based and arts-informed ways is important and purposeful. Art is contagious. For this research, once the arts-informed data was collected, it strongly affected how the data needed to be reported. Let the art lead the way.

Finale

The purpose of this study was to explore how the pandemic shutdown affected Broadway professionals. Through the lens of epistemology (Crotty, 1998), this study used the conceptual framework of perspective transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978/2003; 1997; 2000), independently and uniquely supported by communicative action theory (Habermas, 1964; 1970; 1984; 1991) and extended-extended hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1980, 2006a, 2006b). An understanding of the perspective transformative learning theory is critical for academia because of the attention to the continued negotiation of contesting norms of understanding and problem solving in adult learning (Mezirow, 2000). Additionally, the support provided by the ideal speech situation (Habermas, 1984) and the extended-extended hermeneutical interpretation (Gadamer, 2006a) creates a more meaningful understanding. Integrating these three theories brings about a shared tacit understanding born from a safe cocooned environment when sharing experiences of the disruption caused by a disorienting dilemma. The findings of this research revealed that using an arts-informed narrative inquiry (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Kim, 2015; Saldaña, 2016) laid the foundation for providing this ideal speech situation where, organically, *musical theatre speak* provided a protective barrier for sharing these disorienting experiences caused by the shutdown. Additionally, using an arts-based reporting format by integrating the individual interview transcripts of the participants into one combined stage presentation made the findings more digestible. The helpful hermeneutical guidance of Kristin Bernadette Lansbury quickly provided

tacit understanding that otherwise would have been ineffable (Barone & Eisner, 2012). This way of data reporting and intentional hermeneutical inclusion helps reach the masses by making scholarly findings more meaningful in an important and unique way (Cole & Knowles, 2007).

This research attempts to fill the gap between the clarification of the terms, *arts-based* and *arts-informed*. Although both terms were previously used in academic research, a distinction had not been clarified, causing the terms to sometimes be used interchangeably (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Saldaña, 2016). By making a distinction between these terms, the methods of data collection and reporting could be clearly and purposefully structured. Second, this research attempts to fill the gap connecting the three theoretical frameworks that purposefully support one another. Mezirow's (1978/2003; 1997; 2000) perspective transformative learning theory was influenced by Habermas's (1964; 1970; 1984; 1991) communicative action theory. Using an arts-informed narrative inquiry pushed the need for a hermeneutical understanding of the *musical theatre speak* (Dilthey, 2002; Gadamer, 1980; Ricoeur, 1977). Third, this research attempts to fill the gap of communicative text to include nonverbal text. Specifically, to include the spatial, visual, and movement text as organically understood in social contexts. Mezirow (2000) refers to the importance of understandings which are bound in our history and shared language, which for this research is the *musical theatre speak*.

Through this research, I have been changed by witnessing the incredible stamina, courageous resistance, determined accountability, remarkable self-reflection, and extraordinary resilience of my participants during this once in a lifetime experience. As art so often does, it is created and lives as a representation of social existence and pushes, forces, teases, demands, the development of a social consciousness. Through this research, as Elphaba and Glinda sing,  *I have been changed for good.*  (Wicked the Musical, 2016).

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