

Copyright
by
Megan Anne Nevels
2015

**The Thesis Committee for Megan Anne Nevels
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:**

**OUR Stories of L.A.: Youth Constructing Counter-Narratives through
Devised Performance**

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Megan Alrutz

Joan Lazarus

Charles Anderson

**OUR Stories of L.A.: Youth Constructing Counter-Narratives through
Devised Performance**

by

Megan Anne Nevels, B.A.

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2015

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the amazing group of participants that created this work. You inspire me every day to push boundaries and ask questions and to create change in my own community as you are in yours. I also dedicate this to the cities of South Central and Inglewood: thank you for raising me, for raising your young people, and for raising your communities.

Acknowledgements

I thought I knew my heart. Where it wanted to go. Where it wanted to fly.
But it wasn't until I put pen to paper that I realized.
My heart has only ever stayed one place.
It might stray, find a friend to visit,
But it always comes back

Home.

Home is the place where my mom sings you are my sunshine and my sister plays with
my hair.

Home is the place where my dad's spirit resides, forever with a smile.

Home is the place where I first realized that theatre could save.

Home is the place where theatre saved me.

Home is the place where I always come out alive, no matter who has died.

Home is the place where I learned to teach and home is the place where I learned to
reach.

Home is the place where those Fremont kids reside; those kids who make me laugh, make
me cry, make me fine, make me try.

Home is where I will go.

Home is where I need to be.

This work is spurred by a lifetime of being told what my city is like, who walks these streets, and how they live their lives. This work comes out of growing up being told that home wasn't my home, that how I remembered it couldn't be true, couldn't be real. But most of all, this work comes out of the past four years of knowing and learning from a group of amazing young people I first met at Fremont High School through the Unusual Suspects Theatre Company. I want to acknowledge this theatre company and thank them for taking me under their wings and introducing me to the amazing ability theatre can have for creating community and cultivating social change. Without them, I would not have met the incredibly bright and talented group of young people who were a part of this project and process. I do this work because I have experienced the life shifts that theatre can create and I have seen the ripples it can enact in communities.

I'd also like to thank the community at the University of Texas at Austin that fostered so much of my intellectual growth, as well as my growth as an applied theatre facilitator. Thank you to my committee members for supporting me along this process and for taking the time to engage with me in this research. To Dr. Megan Alrutz, you are my mentor and I am continuously inspired by the work that you do and the seeds of knowledge and inspiration you plant in all of us. To Joan Lazarus, thank you for providing the love and guidance necessary to successfully move through a graduate school process. To Charles Anderson, your work pushes me to think differently and more critically about performance and about the world around me. Thank you to Roxanne Schroeder-Arce, Coleman A. Jennings, Lynn Hoare, Ruramisai Charumbira, and Dr. Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez for challenging me, guiding me, and pushing me to be my best practitioner and researcher self. Thank you also to my DTYC cohort; I am so thankful that we got to go on this journey together and every day I am thankful to witness your work and the significant changes you are already having on the work and the world.

I could not have done this without the support and love of my family. Mom, you are more than just a matriarch, you are all that a parent can and should be in one human body. I would not know how to question the world and its assumptions without you and the work you do in museums. Thank you for all of the sacrifices you made to give us the opportunities to succeed. Dad, I know that you are proud of who I have become and although you are no longer with us, the experience of you informs everything I do. Kate, I could not have asked for a better sister. Your beauty and confidence to take on the world inspires me every day to expect more out of myself and those around me. To my love Nelson, you are smart and kind and wonderful and coming home to our life every day has made all of this worthwhile. Thank you for joining me on this journey; I am excited to join you on yours next.

Abstract

OUR Stories of L.A.: Youth Constructing Counter-Narratives through Devised Performance

Megan Anne Nevels, MFA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Megan Alrutz

In movies, television, and music, South Central Los Angeles is portrayed as a place made up of gang violence, poverty, and failure. Young people of color every day construct their identities based on the messages they receive and through their own lived experiences. Media perpetuates specific stereotypes that inform people's understanding of South Central, but youth voices are rarely heard. This thesis explores how autobiographical devising as counter-storytelling can provide a space for young people to disrupt stereotypes. Through playbuilding as a qualitative research method, the author examines how autobiographical devising can be used to build a critical counter-storytelling community among young people, while providing a space to share their stories with each other, with their communities, and with outsiders. The document examines three devising activities as sites for disruption of stereotypes and the possibilities of public performance as a call to action. The study finds that through an interaction with dominant narratives and the consequent sharing of counter-narratives, or the stories from the margins, the youth participants pushed against problematic

stereotypes through the simultaneous embodiment and interrogation of particular stereotypes, the sharing of acts of kindness, the creation of frozen and spoken images that aim to place youth perspectives into the dominant narrative, and the staging of their lives and ideas for an audience. The document concludes with a discussion of the future possibilities of the work in research and practice, as well as a discussion of what an applied counter-storytelling theatre model can provide practitioners within and the fields of Applied Theatre and Critical Race Theory.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Background and Significance of This Study	5
Devising as an Applied Theatre Practice.....	7
Disrupting Dominant Narratives and Participating in Counter-Storytelling	10
Significance of the Project and the Study.....	11
Methodology.....	13
Overview of Chapters	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review	19
Youth and South Central in Media	19
Autobiographical Devising.....	25
Chapter 3: Countering Stereotypes through Storytelling	29
A Theoretical Understanding of Stereotypes	30
A Cycle and a Process	35
The Expectation of South Central	40
August 6 th , 2014: Devising Public Service Announcements	42
A Tour as Disruption	45
In Opposition to Violence	50
The Right Thing to Do: An Act of Kindness	51
Acts of Kindness as Stories of Resistance.....	53
Bodies: Transform/ation	56
Bodies Telling Stories	59
Performance, Taking Action, and Creating Change.....	62
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION	70
Major Takeaways	72
Reflection on the Model	77

Future Possibilities	78
For my Own Practice	78
For Research	80
In Conclusion.....	80
Appendix A: <i>Your View, Our Eyes</i> Script	83
Appendix B: Sample Session Plan: First Day	103
Bibliography	107
Vita ..	112

List of Tables

Table 1: My Research and Devising Process	15
--	-----------

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is fall of 2011 and we are getting ready to start our session for the day. The group is setting their backpacks on the seats in the auditorium and the chatter is lively. Caleb nervously approaches me and asks if he can ask me a question. "Of course," I say and we go to a quiet corner. "Do you think you could give me a ride home?" he asks. I haven't yet discussed a situation like this with my supervisors; I'm not sure if I'm allowed to drive students home. He senses my hesitation and adds, "I accidentally wore a red shirt the other day and now some gang members are following me home." Without even thinking, I respond, "Yes, of course."

*Years later, I relay this story to a friend, one of many people in my life who have never stepped foot in South Central Los Angeles, and the first thing she says is, "Wow, and you felt safe to drive him around?" Unsure if she was implying that it wasn't safe to drive in the area, that it wasn't safe for **me** to be there, or that it wasn't safe to drive **him**, I say, "Of course, why wouldn't I?"*

While working with a group of high school students in South Central Los Angeles (SCLA or South L.A.¹), I became acutely aware of the images people have of the city and its residents. As illustrated in the above story, my interactions with friends and peers about my work inevitably led to questions about how I could feel comfortable and safe in a place that I call home. It seems that many of them have one singular image in mind

¹ South Central was officially renamed South L.A. as an attempt to remove the negative connotations. But although it is legally known as South L.A., its residents continue to call it South Central. In this document I switch between the two names, as my participants did throughout the process.

when they hear the name “South Central.” The conversations and moments surrounding this single image of this particular place spurred me to pursue the work and research documented in this thesis. The students I worked with at Fremont High School in South Central, who later became the participants of my MFA thesis project, inspired and continue to inspire me to think more critically about how our city is portrayed. With this study, I attempt to understand and examine more deeply the theatre that young people devise to address and envision change within their communities, and thus how theatre can facilitate discussions and movements towards significant societal shifts. I employ methods for counter-storytelling and autobiographical devising to engage young people in theatre for social justice and study what happens when those young people come together to create original theatre through personal storytelling. With this study, I aim to identify how the creation of counter-narratives through theatre can spark the dialogue and action necessary to enact social movements within a community.

Growing up in Inglewood, California, I have become accustomed to hearing how shocking it is that I, a white blonde female, would ever find myself in ‘such a bad area.’² But even though I lived in a primarily “black neighborhood” for much of my life, my experiences differed greatly from my neighbors due in no small part to my whiteness. My family did not have any negative interactions with law enforcement; in fact, the local police (whose headquarters were on the corner of our street) were very attuned to our

² Although Inglewood and South Central are separate cities, they are next door to one another and because they bear many similarities, they are often together in the same thought.

needs and keeping us, the white family, “safe.” My older sister was often pulled over and asked what she was doing in this neighborhood. “I live here,” she’d say. I highly doubt black families were questioned about belonging, and their interactions with police were rarely as warm and welcoming as ours. I am able to say that I lived in Inglewood, but I did not live it as people of color do. As I have grown older, I have not only become more aware of the stereotypes attributed to young people living in South Central L.A. (SCLA), but also of how much I myself internalized those stereotypes. Like people I know who have never been to Inglewood or South Central, I too called the neighborhood I grew up in ‘the ghetto.’ Failing to understand the implications of my language, I perpetuated certain prescribed stereotypes about the place and its residents.

Although I feel comfortable driving through South Central, day or night, I did not know what to expect four years ago when I helped lead an after-school performance program through the Unusual Suspects Theatre Company at a local high school. All I knew about the school was how it is portrayed in media: a failing education, high dropout rates, and school district laws against wearing the red and blue of the Bloods and the Crips (two infamous warring gangs). Although I grew up in the area, I had the privilege of attending a private school that further separated me from the lives and experiences of those living around me. Walking into Fremont High School, I did not know what the students would be like, but I found a group of generous, open, funny, smart, and driven young people. The students were not the Black and Latin@ men and women the world consistently sees in the news and rap videos. They were not unwed teen parents,

criminals, or lost to the world of gangs. These students disrupted my own assumptions about young people from South Central each day and the image I had of my neighborhood as ‘the ghetto’ began to shatter.

That same group of students, who I later worked with on this research study, serves as a constant reminder that not everyone in SCLA fits the negative stereotypes portrayed by movies and music. In designing my research study, I realized how strongly I felt about changing people’s perceptions about SCLA through a critical examination of how it is portrayed in media. In both the project and study, the term ‘media’ focuses specifically on popular works of art about South Central, with a particular eye on music, movies, and television. With this goal in mind, I decided to focus this project on the construction of counter-narratives, or stories that don’t fit the dominant narrative, through devised, autobiographical performance. While reading *Storytelling as Social Justice* by Lee Anne Bell, it became clear that what I hoped for my participants was the creation of a ‘critical counter-storytelling community,’ meaning a multiracial community of storytellers who “expose, dissect...and transform” issues of race and racism into “new imaginaries” (Bell 20). As Bell situates critical counter-storytelling in educational contexts with teachers and students, I wanted to create a project that took critical counter-storytelling outside of traditional classroom spaces. Through this project, I was excited to explore how theatre can facilitate the creation of a critical counter-storytelling community with young people. What does it look like when theatre is applied to a

theatre-making process and how does it affect the counter-narratives shared within the cultivated community?

I began this project with the research question, *what is the experience of youth using drama to construct counter-narratives about home?* As I coded my data after the project, I identified the interaction with and disruption of stereotypes as a significant theme in the participants' work and engagement. Thus, in this study I provide a detailed analysis of specific moments within our devising process in order to answer the following research question: *how does autobiographical devising as counter-storytelling provide a space for young people to disrupt stereotypes?* I found that through an interaction with dominant narratives and the consequent sharing of counter-narratives, or the stories from the margins, the youth participants pushed against hegemonic narratives through the simultaneous embodiment and interrogation of particular stereotypes, the sharing of acts of kindness, the creation of frozen and spoken images that aim to place youth perspectives into the dominant narrative, and the staging of their lives and ideas for an audience.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

I believe that young people's stories, experiences that move beyond discourses of youth as dangerous or criminal, need to be included in discourses about Los Angeles and youth of color living there, and given a space to be shared and celebrated as valid and important. As a tool for disrupting hegemonic narratives, storytelling can operate as an act of social justice. In *Storytelling for Social Justice*, Bell identifies stories as "one of the

most powerful and personal ways that we learn about the world...as human beings we are primed to engage each other and the world through language, and stories can be deeply evocative sources of knowledge and awareness” (16). In other words, stories are how we communicate and learn about each other and the world around us. The telling of stories, and specifically those that fall into personal narrative, help us organize moments into “some sort of whole; we give form to the understanding of a purpose in life” (Langellier 267). Stories are how we make meaning, finding connections between our own experiences and those of others. I further Bell’s definition of a counter-storytelling community to include a focus on the act of remembering, the creation of counter-narratives, and young people sharing their voices. In the construction of the project, I drew on Bell’s ideas of social justice-focused critical discussion intended for participants to learn from one another, but the critical counter-storytelling community we created in the room was made by and for the youth participants and came out of an engagement with personal memory and an intention of performance. In this study, I draw on the fields of Applied Theatre, Critical Race Theory, and Identity Theory to examine how critical counter-storytelling can be achieved through autobiographical devising with youth. In the following two sections, I provide background on devising as an applied theatre practice, on counter-storytelling as a tool for pushing against dominant narratives, and on the connections between stereotypes and identity formation.

Devising as an Applied Theatre Practice

Drawing on scholarship from Helen Nicholson, James Thompson, and Philip Taylor, I define applied theatre as the practice of drama and theatre in non-traditional theatre settings with a focus on community and social change. According to James Thompson, applied theatre happens in “communities...where [theatre] is least expected” (xv). Inherent in Thompson’s definition is an intentionality around access, as well as assumptions and expectations about who is exposed to theatre and how. Theatre can be considered an experience of privilege; access to professional theatre does not exist everywhere and thus is not considered a part of daily life for many. In her book *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*, Helen Nicholson argues that applied theatre can bridge these gaps by “developing new possibilities for everyday living rather than segregating theatre-going from other aspects of life” (4). Applied theatre aims to make theatre and the creation of it accessible, not based on privilege or power. In their edited volume of essays, scholars Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston write the following about the intentions of applied theatre:

Frequently those who engage in applied theatre are motivated by the belief that theatre experienced both as a participant and as audience, might make some difference to the way in which people interact with each other and with the wider world. For both practitioners and participants there may be an overt, political desire to use the process of theatre in the service of social and community change. For other practitioners and participants, the intention is less overt (but potentially no less political in its effect) and concerned with using theatre to draw attention to or reveal the hidden stories of a community. (9)

In other words, applied theatre stems from an understanding of the possibilities theatre has when it extends beyond its conventional walls and finds itself in community-based spaces.

In my own applied theatre work, I bring both of the intentions named by Prentki and Preston: I employ theatre as a tool for engaging communities in social change and I use theatre as a medium for sharing the stories of a community. As an artist, practitioner, and activist, I define social change as the significant shifts in the structures and behaviors normalized by society. For me, this can look like a variety of things: ending the school-to-prison pipeline and taking profit out of prisons, law enforcement and the justice system valuing black and brown bodies as they do white bodies, ending violence to queer or non-conforming bodies, and shifting problematic representations of people of color, both male and female, in popular media. I see social change as more than just working towards equality; it is an intentional, critically engaged, and structural movement towards the decentering of whiteness in the systems running this country. At the heart of this project and study are my core values of justice for all people of color and respect for and value of youth voices.

For my project, I engage with these core values through Bell's Storytelling for Social Justice model and counter-storytelling. Thompson argues that "applied-theatre programmes can be a vital part of the way that people engage in their communities, reflect on issues and debate change...[and] can be central to different groups' experiences of making and remaking their lives" (xvi). For Thompson, applied theatre is not just the

bringing of theatre somewhere it might not have been before, but offers tools for organizing community and engaging people in discussion and mobilization towards change. Thompson's core values of social activism and community engagement in applied theatre underpin the creation of this project, the work that happened in the room with my participants, and in the consequent research study.

This project engaged with applied theatre through devising, or the creation of an original theatrical performance. Devised theatre is sometimes an applied theatre practice, but does not always have to be. Mia Perry defines devised theatre as "the creation of original work or the deconstruction of dramatic texts by groups of theatre artists, often in collaboration with visual art, creative technologies, and other forms of performance such as music and dance" (65). Devised theatre, then, has no one prescribed idea of performance; the creative process is collaborative and draws on multiple modes of thinking, imagining, and creating to develop an original experience for its audience. It can be silent or full of narrative text, still or comprised entirely of movement, generated by an idea from a group member or current events, or from an already existing text. In her seminal text, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, Allison Oddey describes the process of devising as "the fragmentary experience of understanding ourselves, our culture, and the world we inhabit" (1). Oddey's description does not point to devised theatre as the creation of art for art's sake, but rather as a process of engaging with all the parts that make us human in the space with other human beings. It is a creative process that forces us to step inside and outside of ourselves together and alone,

and then share a glimpse into the process with others. When intentionally connected to Applied Theatre, devising moves beyond creating a new piece of theatre, and often focuses on cultivating community, dialogue, and/or some of kind of change through the creation of new work.

Disrupting Dominant Narratives and Participating in Counter-Storytelling

While devised theatre was the mode for counter-storytelling, personal memory and narrative were the main sources for the performance material. The youth participants did not simply create original performance pieces about their past experiences. Instead, they devised scenes and monologues around both their lived experiences and the assumed lived experiences, such as involvement with gangs, that are perpetuated by the dominant narrative about SCLA. A dominant narrative, or the master story told about a particular place or people, is often created by a system or group in power. The act of creating or perpetuating a dominant narrative is also an act of silencing other narratives, and can often include a forced forgetting of a group or society's memory. On the other hand, counter-narratives, or stories that offset the dominant narrative, are the result of rewriting a master narrative to include often-silenced voices or marginalized people and experiences. These counter-narratives are at the core of counter-storytelling and can take on many forms, but as Hirsch and Smith argue, all include testimony and witness (12.) Scholar Susan A. Crane describes “witnessing [as] a lived experience; it is an awareness of receiving another’s testimony and of having the impact of that experience remain as part of one’s historical knowledge” (1382). In other words, the two exist together and

impact both the teller and the listener. Testimony and witnessing played important roles in the creation of this applied theatre project; through devising, the youth participants witnessed one another's stories, and as their testimonies of identity and location were staged and performed, the audience was put into role as witnesses as well. By placing their stories on stage, the youth participants used their voices and bodies to push against the dominant narratives about South Central and reveal their own, often hidden, counter-narratives.

Bell names the stories of the dominant narrative as “stock stories,” and those that “coexist alongside...but often remain in the shadows” as “concealed stories” (23). In this study, I aim to share and explore the concealed stories that came up in this project. These stories ‘talk back’ to the dominant narratives that might not necessarily represent the voices and experiences of a particular group of people. According to Langellier, the telling of personal stories “may legitimate dominant meanings or may resist dominant meanings in a transformation of meanings” (271), something I had to keep in mind throughout the project, as I never knew what stories would find their voice in the room.

Significance of the Project and the Study

Much of the work in the U.S. around young people sharing their own stories takes place within creative writing programs. And although some theatre companies and youth organizations focus on youth staging their own stories, most do not name counter-storytelling explicitly as an intention or piece of their mission. Counter-storytelling, according to Bell, is deeply rooted in critical engagements with power and privilege (21).

In work with young people, I envision counter-storytelling as a tool to cultivate an awareness and interrogation of systems and structures that aim to define youth identities. I am interested in what changes when a program states the importance of sharing counter-narratives. How does this intentionality bring critical engagement with social and legal systems of power to both the process and product?

With this project, I wanted the young participants to be able to name the social justice, or change, the project was working to achieve. If, as applied theatre practitioners and teaching artists, we do not offer the space for the young people in our programs to recognize and interrogate the social situations that need to be changed, social change will not happen. I hope that through my examination of different ways that young people used drama to disrupt the dominant narratives aimed at silencing them, practitioners and young people in the field can offer more significant and lasting opportunities for social change. By working with L.A. youth of color to expand and deepen representations of their lives, I hoped to offer a space for people to acknowledge, interrogate, and change their own assumptions about youth of color, and to be called to action to alter dominant narratives and include more and varying perspectives, experiences, and voices in popular media. I also hope to add to the existing scholarship about applied theatre and Critical Race Theory by combining them as a lens for examining and sharing the youth experience. There is much research available about counter-storytelling with youth and about applied theatre projects with youth, but in my research I discovered a gap pertaining to youth performances of counter-narratives. With my study, I aim to fill this gap through the

presentation and theoretical analysis of what happens when young people stage critical counter-stories and how they disrupt stereotypes through devising and performance

METHODOLOGY

For this study, I worked with 14 participants, aged 17 to 22 years old, in a devising project at a local library. The participants chosen for the study were past participants of an after-school playwriting and performance program I co-taught at their high school in SCLA with The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company in 2011 and 2012. I recruited through Facebook and email and anyone interested in the project was invited to join. For this devising project, I facilitated three theatre sessions a week for three weeks. The project culminated in a final sharing or performance for participants' family members, peers, and invited community members. Each session lasted two to four hours, depending on the needs of the group at the time. I began each session with a check-in activity, followed by a warm-up game, an exploration activity, a devising activity, and an end-of-session reflection. For example, on the first day of our project (see Appendix B), I led the group through a thumb check in³, followed by two theatre games, Hey! and Yee Haw!⁴, aimed at warming up the participants' bodies, voices, and imaginations. We then moved through a discussion about the project and the expectations around their participation. I then led them through an activity called Role on the Wall in which they

³ A thumb check in asks participants to use their thumbs to share how they are feeling (the spectrum between up and down representing the spectrum of good to bad). This activity provides a space for sharing without explanation and asks group members to gauge how the rest of the group is doing.

⁴ Hey! is a well-known theatre game, but my knowledge of Yee Haw comes from the Drama-Based Instruction website through the University of Texas' Drama for Schools professional development program, citation provided in the Works Cited.

explored the messages that young people, in general and specifically themselves, hear and experience when trying to figure out their futures. The participants then identified specific words or phrases from the activity that resonated with them and split into pairs to share personal stories inspired by the word or phrase. I then led the group through a devising activity in which each pair created a short scene exploring the previously shared story. We reflected on each short performance, and then the session ended with a guided written reflection in their journals.

I employed a *Playbuilding as Qualitative Research* methodology⁵ to explore my initial research question, *what is the experience of youth using drama to construct counter-narratives about home?*⁶ and thus the devising process provided much of my data. As described by Joe Norris, playbuilding is a form of qualitative, arts-based participatory research, which invites everyone in the room to work together as actors/researchers/teachers (A/R/Tors) to generate, interpret, and perform data through dramatic processes (40). The art-making process itself is the tool to examine how young people reconstruct personal and communal narratives through research, storytelling, and performance. In Norris' methodology, participants move through a process of research, synthesis, exploration, refining, scripting, rehearsal, and then performance (40). In the context of my project, our process was informed by Norris' and looked like this:

⁵ I consider autobiographical devising to be a form of playbuilding with an intentional focus on personal memory.

⁶ This research question allowed me to gather different forms of data and engage in a thematic analysis in order to find what I wanted to focus on in the study.

Research and Data Generation	Participants explore and perform personal stories about self and home. Participants engage in research and arts exploration of stock stories and representation of home in media.
Data Collection	Collect all data—participant research, artifacts from drama work (performed stories, written work from journals, image work, etc.)
Synthesis, Exploration, and Refining	Identify themes and moments for further exploration
Scripting and Rehearsal	Develop script for live performance
Performance	Share performance with community members, peers, and invited guests.
Reflection	Reflect on the process during a post-show focus group.

Table 1: My Research and Devising Process

This process generates both the performance and the data to be studied. I identified the artifacts from the playbuilding process (i.e. the written scenes, monologues, photos and videos taken of the devising, etc.) as possible data. In other words, the data I analyzed came into the room through the various source activities I guided them through, such as poster dialogue (Drama for Schools⁷), image work (Boal 176), individual and group storytelling (Norris 42), as well as the writing and staging of monologues and scenes. The participants each kept a journal for generating stories and other performance material, taking notes during research and discussions, and recording their reflections. All of the written work that the participants created during the process became part of the data set, which I later coded and analyzed for key themes and assertions. I kept a

⁷ My facilitation of this activity is informed by my work with Drama for Schools, but the activity itself does not originate with DFS.

reflective journal to document significant moments or phrases from each session, as well as my thoughts and feelings after each session. In this journal, I focused my reflections on how participants addressed normalized ideologies and messages and how they shared their stories, while staying open to the ways in which their work might have fulfilled popular expectations of youth of color.

As I looked at the youth's written documents and my reflections on my own experience in the work, I looked for specific moments when the participants engaged with and pushed back on majoritarian stories through the sharing of personal stories. Additional data came from still photos and recorded video from our sessions, the script of the final performance, and the recorded video of the performance. In each of these sources, I again looked for moments where the youth named or performed dominant and counter-narratives, this time through body, movement, and voice. I also audio recorded the post-performance reflection/focus group with the participants in order to document how the youth moved through the devising process, how they articulated the ways the project affected them, and what their understandings were of media's portrayal of South Central and the importance of their stories.

The main research question of this study, *how does autobiographical devising as counter-storytelling provide a space for young people to disrupt stereotypes?* developed from a thematic analysis of the data which led me to identify stereotypes, and moments of working to disrupt them, as a key part of the youth experience. Early on, the youth began to use the word stereotype and/or discuss the particular images or messages perpetuated

by the media about young people of color and of South Central. I analyzed the written documents (journals, poster dialogue responses, and the final script) to identify how the participants were talking about stereotypes in media. I analyzed the visual documentation (still photographs, videos from the sessions, and the video of the final performance) to examine how stereotypes were represented and interrogated through their already racialized and stereotyped bodies. I also analyzed the audio recording of the group reflection to explore how the youth understood their work in the context of their community and its potential impact. Through these three areas of analysis, I determined that I would go back to the data and study how recognition and disruption of stereotypes played out in the youth's devising and performing of autobiographical stories.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In this thesis, I explore how autobiographical devising as counter-storytelling can provide a space for young people to disrupt stereotypes. This chapter provides the background and significance of the project as an applied theatre practice rooted in counter-storytelling focused on the sharing of counter-narratives, as well as an overview of my research methodology. In Chapter Two, I provide the reader with the theoretical underpinnings of the study in order to illustrate the effects media can have on the perpetuation of dominant narratives and the ways in which young people interact with these stereotypes through the lens of identity theory. In this chapter, I also provide the necessary background knowledge on autobiographical devising as counter-storytelling in order to understand what each offers the other and how the project and study are framed. I then include a literature review of the various theoretical and practice-based ideas

underpinning this study, including theories on youth in media and autobiographical devising. In Chapter Three, I analyze three specific devising activities that correspond with Bell's steps for exploring story (stock, resistance, and emerging/transforming), as well the final step of action change in order to show how the youth participants engaged with and disrupted stereotypes through autobiographical devising and performing. In the final chapter, I argue for autobiographical devising as a tool for applied theatre and Critical Race scholars to explore race and story through the body and identify embodiment as a site for identity negotiation, devising as narrative disruption, and performance as a call to action as major takeaways of this study. I also examine how my future practice and research are informed by this work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Jalen and Cris sit together on one side of the room. I instruct the different pairs of participants to share with one another the words they wrote down after viewing a clip from the movie Menace II Society and listening to “How to Survive South Central.” As they read aloud what is written in their journals, Jalen brings up the way the young child in the movie clip is dressed and how he behaves as the shooting happens. “He looks like a mini-gangster,” Jalen says to Cris. “It’s as if he’s bound to end up like the rest of the them. Like that’s the only life he can lead.” Cris nods in agreement and they continue sharing out their observations to one another. Even though I’ve watched Menace II Society many times, it never occurred to me that the little boy on his tricycle might be read in such a way. I walk away to listen to another pair’s discussion, but I keep coming back to Jalen and Cris’ discussion. Is that what mainstream media and society want young people of color to believe? That what they see is all they will ever know? That they are bound to end up like what is around them? As I watch the participants share stories about their experiences and their dreams for the future, their answers to the questions are clear: No.

YOUTH AND SOUTH CENTRAL IN MEDIA

Every time I turn on the television, I am bombarded with news reports and TV shows about the ‘immoral lives’ of young people. According to Henry Giroux, “there is a long history in the United States of youth, particularly those of color, being associated in the media and by dominant politicians with a rising crime wave” (14). As a result of

these problematic representations, Giroux argues that society views young people as “a generation of suspects” (16). Scholar and educator Shawn Ginwright argues, “popular notions of urban youth have led the public to believe that young people create more problems than possibilities” (82). This belief has led to a “notion that young people, particularly urban youth of color, are a menace to society and therefore need to be controlled and contained” (Ginwright 82). As Ginwright and Giroux both argue, young people, especially those of color, are imagined to be problems rather than assets. It is not surprising then that young black and Latino men are sentenced to prison and shot by the police far more often than white men (NAACP). Death and incarceration are effective ways to contain and control (Ginwright 82) that prove immediate and long lasting. In the following section, I examine forms of media, specifically looking at music, movies, and news reports that use images of violence to perpetuate the widely accepted image of young people of color as destructive and problematic.

Hood films [a genre made famous by films like *Boyz ‘N The Hood* (Singleton), *Menace II Society* (Tyger Williams), *South Central* (Steve Anderson), and *Blood In Blood Out* (Jimmy Santiago Baca)] provide consumers with a single and problematic picture of SCLA with a particular eye towards the representation of blacks and Latinos as violent and poor. According to media scholar Celeste Fisher, hood films portray the neighborhoods as consisting only of “dilapidated buildings and noisy, overcrowded housing projects” (xiii), single mothers and absent fathers, never-ending gun violence, and completely separated from the rest of the city, contextualized by the surrounding

white affluence. If there are white people, they are well-intentioned teachers who overcome racial difference to create change (i.e. *Dangerous Minds*). The stories that are told about the smart, young men determined to ‘get out’ usually end with death; the moral of the story is that no one can get out (i.e. Ricky in *Boyz in the Hood*). Even comedies such as the *Friday* series, made famous by Chris Tucker and Ice Cube, present South Central neighborhoods as places where, if violence isn’t happening, then nothing is happening. Nationwide, but especially in L.A., news reports about South Central focus on deadly shootings and the failing education system. I remember as a very young child seeing constant coverage of the Rodney King case and the subsequent L.A. Riots. The obsessive reporting of what happened in L.A. in 1992 helped to further define the city as the epicenter of police brutality. Growing up, not a day went by when I didn’t see the face of a young child killed by a stray bullet during a gang standoff on my television. The narrative of South Central as the homeland for gang activity also continues to define L.A.

In her chapter “Gangsta Culture—Sexism and Misogyny: Who will take the rap?” bell hooks points to the blame placed on Black artists for perpetuating problematic self-images through rap music (hooks 135). In the case of South Central L.A., rap music plays a large role in the way that outsiders view the community and its residents. hooks does not forgive artists for using offensive images in their work, but instead argues that “the sexist, misogynist, patriarchal ways of thinking and behaving that are glorified in gangsta rap are a reflection of the prevailing values in our society, values created and sustained by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks 135). In other words, the work of these

artists needs to be analyzed in the historical and social context within which they exist. hooks speaks primarily about sexist and misogynistic imagery, and although her analysis can be extended to violent images about growing up ‘in the ghetto,’ she does not address how particular ideas about people of color are perpetuated through the glorification of gang violence.

The music business has a strong influence on how people perceive South Central. Hip hop and rap artists such as Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, The Game, and the late Tupac Shakur glorify the violence associated with growing up in ‘the ghetto.’ One of Ice Cube’s most famous songs, and the unofficial theme song for *Boyz ‘n the Hood*, “How to Survive in South Central” provides steps for staying alive in South Central, saying “South central ain’t no joke/Got to keep your gat at all times motherfuckers/Better keep one in the chamber and nine in the clip god damnit” (82-84). He also writes, “So be alert and stay calm/As you enter, the concrete Vietnam/You say, the strong survive/Shit, the strong even die, in South Central” (Ice Cube). From South Central, Ice Cube has the right to speak about his hometown however he pleases, but his work falls into the trap of romanticizing violence. Kendrick Lamar, the newest prodigy of Dr. Dre and a talented rising star in hip hop, is a more recent voice in the music business creating lyrics about what it is like to live in South Central. His song “Compton” expresses great pride in his city, “Compton, Compton/Ain’t no city quite like mine” (Lamar 10). But Kendrick Lamar still focuses on the violent aspects of Compton rather than the assets there: “So come and visit, the tires screeching/Ambulance, policeman/Won’t you spend a weekend

on Rosecrans nigga/Khaki crease and crime increasing on Rosecrans nigga” (“Compton” 19-21). Even his song about men from South Central who made it out, “Black Boy Fly,” ends with the line “When 2 niggas making it out had never sounded logical/3 niggas making it out, that’s mission impossible/So I never believed the type of performance that I could do/I wasn’t jealous cause of the talents they got/I was terrified they’ll be the last black boys to fly/Out of Compton” (Lamar 83-88). Similar to the messages presented in films, a lot of music suggests that it is nearly impossible to not only leave, but to survive a life in SCLA.

I do not mean to suggest that artists like Ice Cube, Kendrick Lamar, and John Singleton create work to perpetuate problematic images of South Central and young men of color. In fact, John Singleton made *Boyz ‘n the Hood* as a graduate student in order to truthfully tell the story of his city; he “just wanted to put a young, black, male experience of Los Angeles up on the screen” (Ridley n.p.). Although the pieces examined above intend to provide a realistic view of South Central, the image put forth of a city destroyed by violence and poverty becomes the only one. In her TED Talk on the danger of a single story about people of color, writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche said,

All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. (12:56)

When only a single story is told, supported by the dominant group within society, that single story continues and grows and reproduces itself. This single story is the one that

society supports because it perpetuates negative images of people of color. This single story is seen and ingested by all, including those who are marginalized and the subject of the story.

In an interview published in her book *Outlaw Culture*, bell hooks talks in depth with rap artist Ice Cube about how young people internalize these images and develop a deep self-hate. Ice Cube says,

I think violence has become a way of life, and I think black people have always carried guns to protect ourselves from white men. And I think white men themselves can't integrate, but they're really gonna pump this self-hate so that the guns will never be pointed up, but will always point inward toward each other. (Ice Cube quoted in hooks 159)

Here, Ice Cube suggests that the more that young people of color ingest and digest the violent images shown to them through media, the more they will turn the violence on themselves and each other. Their interview also suggests that the cultivation of a sense of self-love as a strategy for reversing these troubling effects and creating change for youth and people of color (hooks 148). Although I agree that self-love is a positive tool for individual change, I assert that one cannot blame a 'lack' of self-love for violence within and against communities of color. The systems and structures that support the creation of a dominant narrative and the consequent marginalization of people of color must be dismantled. Performance can offer an exciting opportunity to share stories from the margins and spark dialogue among all different communities in order to disrupt internalized images and to enact significant change.

In this study, I examine autobiographical devising as a strategy for disrupting and reconstructing the dominant narrative⁸ by providing a space for young people to engage in performance and create positive change in their communities. Drawing on Lee Anne Bell's theories of counter-storytelling, I engage youth in autobiographical devised performance-making as a tool for shifting youth perspective and understanding.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DEVISING

In this study the participants moved through an autobiographical devising process. I define autobiographical devising as the creation of an original theatre performance through the sharing and staging of personal stories and memories. The performance reflects the experiences of the performers. The term autobiographical devising stems from autobiographical performance, which scholar Wendy S. Hesford refers to as a form of performance concerned with the self and its place within historically and societally determined narratives (xxiii). On the origins of autobiographical performance, Deirdre Heddon writes,

autobiographical performance was regarded by women as a means to reveal otherwise invisible lives, to resist marginalization and objectification and to become, instead, speaking subjects with self-agency; performance, then, as a way to bring into being a self. Autobiographical performances provide a way to talk out, talk back, talk otherwise. (3)

hooks expands this definition of autobiographical performance beyond communities of women to include “oppressed people resist[ing] by identifying themselves as subject, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story”

⁸ As defined in Chapter 1, a dominant narrative is the master story told about a particular place or people, often created by a system or group in power.

(hooks quoted in Heddon 3). While these ideas have great potential, Wendy Hesford warns us that “simply add[ing] or celebrat[ing] the voices and histories of oppressed groups does not necessarily alter the way the center is read or affect the political core of power;” rather, she reminds readers that we need to analyze power and difference at the intersections of identity markers (xxvii). When constructing this study, I wanted the youth to engage in a critical interrogation of the dominant narrative, exploring who historically decides what the narrative is, and how it impacts their own lives and the lives of others in their communities. Hesford points to the ways that engaging with autobiography can help people “refuse the boundaries and identities imposed by dominant groups” (xxiv). Combining performance and autobiography offers space for those boundaries and identities to be challenged in multiple ways, through both writing and performance. Although this study draws from critical ideas from autobiographical performance, I prefer the term autobiographical devising because it invites attention to the ways stories are constructed and created and focused on the process of sharing stories rather than on the final project.

Theatre and performance provide us with an opportunity to engage with our own memory, either as part of the collective memory in the story, or through the relation of a personal memory to the action on stage. On memory, Helen Nicholson writes,

The process of embodying and sharing memories can create the conditions for new ways of thinking and feeling...Connecting to the past through recalling personal memories is also a process that invites people to make sense of the present, to locate their lives in relation to public events, and to share and reevaluate their cultural beliefs, values and aspirations. In this way, memory is

intimately connected with the complexity of personal and cultural identities (“Re-Locating Memory,” 268-273).

Nicholson asserts that an engagement of memory not only provides an opportunity for the storyteller to interrogate their identity, past, and present, but it also allows for the receiver or viewer of a story to engage in a self-reflective conversation about identity, culture, and conditions of being. This connection between the teller and receiver of a story points to ideas about individual and collective memory and remembering. What if one person’s remembering provides a view contradictory to the experience of the receiver? In this, assumptions about another’s experience and identity rub up against actual lived experiences. In the relationship between hegemonic structures and ideas in society (read: power and privilege) and people of color, it is in the pushing against assumptions that change can happen. Anna Green addresses this issue by identifying the tension inherent in remembering because in practice, the memories of individuals often challenge the collective accounts designed to create unity, or in other words, the dominant narrative (41). She argues that oral historians and practitioners studying memory should give focus to the memories of individuals as possible sites of resistance (Green 43). These sites of resistance play an important role in counter-storytelling, as they are one of the types of stories with which participants can engage.

The creation of this project was heavily informed by an understanding of how South Central and young people of color are constructed in media and how members of both the in and out-groups (i.e. dominant and marginalized) ingest messages about identity. Through an engagement with personal memory and storytelling, the work in the

room became what Green calls a “site of resistance” (43). In the choosing and facilitation of the various devising activities, I entered with a clear intention of interrogating and talking back to dominant narratives. In the following chapter, I engage with the theoretical understandings of autobiographical devising as a form of counter-storytelling and the possibilities for performance to dismantle perpetuated images in media.

Chapter 3: Countering Stereotypes through Storytelling

It is Monday August 11th, two days after the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and I am unsure of what will happen when we gather for our fourth session. Should I lead a discussion about the shooting and the following protests? Or will the group want to spend two hours not thinking about it? I set up the room as I have for previous sessions and wait for the participants to arrive. When we are all finally together, there is an undeniable weight in the air. As we get into our beginning circle, I notice that the black males in the group have tense shoulders and furrowed brows. Their eyes look swollen and they tell me they haven't slept; they tell me they are exhausted and angry. We all are, but they tell me they feel it in their bones and their chests. We spend some time reflecting aloud and the conversation turns to the words used in the news to describe Mike Brown: Thug. Criminal. Hoodlum. Dangerous. "It's the same shit we heard about Trayvon Martin," Derjuan says to the group. "It's always the same," replies Caleb. We all agree, because it's true; those are the same words we continue to hear. I want to ask them how it feels to hear these words said about young men who look like them. I wonder: Will these words make their way into their work today? Will the devising activities I have planned for today provide a space for us to question and speak back to how these young black men are pictured and spoken of on the news?

The youth's responses to the media portrayal of Mike Brown after his death point to ways young people of color are consistently seeing one-sided representations of youth of color in media. In the above moment, Derjuan and Caleb began to identify some of the

negative stereotypes presented about black youth, although as our group research showed us, similar and equally detrimental stereotypes exist about Latin@'s as well (Nevels). In this chapter, I examine how the youth participants in this project engaged with stereotypes, such as those named above, through our autobiographical devising process (or the creation of an original theatre piece which pulls directly from personal experience and story) in order to understand how this form of devising can help youth disrupt stereotypes. I begin with a theoretical analysis of stereotypes about young people of color perpetuated by media, the effects such stereotypes can have on youth identity and experience, and the use of counter-storytelling to disrupt normalized and problematic narratives. I then offer a detailed description of our devising project, which aimed to support counter-storytelling and the disruption of hegemonic narratives about youth of color. I then analyze three moments within our process to show how counter-storytelling through autobiographical devising provided opportunities for youth to recognize, interrogate, and disrupt stereotypes, as well as some of the ways our process fell short of my intended goals.

A THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes, defined as “a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing” (Webster n.p.), are created and perpetuated by systems and structures dependent on the maintenance of difference (racial, gendered, sexual, etc.) (Silverman 372). In other words, stereotypes exist to make sure that groups and individuals with identity-based privilege maintain their power. White supremacy, for

example, relies on pejorative stereotypes and the systemic oppression of communities of color. Stereotypes more often exist about marginalized groups of people; and although there are stereotypes about groups with power and privilege (i.e. white, male, or straight), they do not have the same detrimental effects on representation and beliefs, or systemic identity-based oppression.

On stereotypes, race and media scholar Charles Ramirez Berg argues “since any group’s history is vast, complex, and variegated, stereotyping grossly simplifies that out-group experience by selecting a few traits of the Other that pointedly accentuate differences” (16). These stereotypes are constructed in opposition to the constructed positive traits of whiteness, which serve to further define white, and other privileged identities, as normal and/or ideal. On the effects of stereotyping, Berg points out “stereotypes flatten, homogenize, and generalize individuals within a group, emphasizing sameness and ignoring individual agency and variety” (16). According to Berg, stereotypes take voice and experience away from the individual, much in the same way a dominant narrative marginalizes and silences groups of people through the privileging of the stories and history of those in power (16). Underlying this project is the belief that stereotypes play a key role in the support and perpetuation of a dominant narrative, or the master story told about a particular place or people, by continuing to present one-dimensional and often negative images of those on the margins of society. If a stereotype, or a single story about minorities is all that someone experiences, then the image and ideas set forth by the stereotype inevitably becomes the only understanding of that

minority or group. To this end, this thesis also concerns itself with how the constant witnessing of stereotypes about their own lives shapes how young people understand themselves, and thus, how devised, autobiographical performance work can help disrupt both how they view themselves and how they are viewed by society.

Many theorists and researchers show that stereotypes can have a major impact on how young people construct their own self-image, and that their understandings of self are in direct relation to how they perceive and are perceived by others. Erik Erikson poses identity as “a process of simultaneous reflection and observation . . . by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them” (22). According to Erikson, the construction of identity moves cyclically from the outer to the inner; the experience of others affects the experience of self, and vice versa. Erikson also contends that when negative stereotypes are imposed on a person, that person might take on those same negative qualities and characteristics (303). Psychologist Margaret Beale Spencer also argues that stereotypes contribute to how young people view and evaluate themselves, and they construct their self-image and identity in response to the stereotypes they identify in others and that others identify in them (819). Other theorists, such as Oyserman, Grant, and Ager contend that youth also construct their identities in the terms of the ideal self they want to be and the feared self they want to avoid. Therefore, it seems critical for youth to understand stereotypes and where they come from as a way to

combat the possible negative impacts on their identities. Berg further points to the importance of learning about stereotypes in his book, *Latino Images in Film*:

The first beneficial result of learning about the process of stereotyping is that this knowledge makes it easy to detect stereotypes. The second is that once a stereotype is spotted, it becomes easier to see beneath its surface and understand how and why it works. (23)

In order to disrupt stereotypes, youth first need to see and recognize them. One cannot stop or change stereotypes without knowing or understanding where and how they exist. Narratives of hierarchy based on racial inequality or difference teach youth that they fit into a prescribed box of traits. These assumed traits, or stereotypes, help to main the status quo by further defining communities of color by how they are different from the white majority.

For this study, I looked to critical race theory (CRT) to analyze and understand the work created in the room and its implications. Scholar Richard Delgado describes CRT as a theory that “contains an activist dimension” (*Critical Race Theory* 7). This activism “tries not only to understand our social situation but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better” (*Critical Race Theory* 7). CRT scholarship looks to counter-storytelling, which scholar Richard Delgado describes as the method of telling the stories that come from the margins of society and are not often told (2415), as a way to disrupt the status quo and express the experiences of people of color. According to Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman, these “minority perspectives” have the ability to “challenge the dominant group’s accepted truths” through “narratives, testimonies, or

storytelling” (5). CRT scholar T.J. Yosso writes that the sharing and gathering of stories has the ability to “challenge social and racial injustice by listening to and learning from experiences of racism and resistance, despair and hope at the margins of society” (171). In opposition to dominant white narratives, these counter-stories provide space for people of color, and their allies, to connect and relate along experience and to share strategies for resistance. Delgado argues that counter-storytelling is not only beneficial for people of color; it also asks listeners from the majority to address their own privilege and critique how they benefit from stock stories (2439).

I believe that theatre offers not only a rich space for the sharing and receiving of stories, but for cultivating a counter-storytelling community. Heddon argues that autobiographical devising asks participants to exist in a “critical stance in relation to some of the dominant or commonsense assumptions students might hold about their immediate world” and through “the self-reflection required in the making of autobiographical performances,” the critical discourses surrounding one’s identity “undoes the fixed, table and ‘given’” (17). Heddon suggests that autobiographical devising moves performance into an intentional dialogue with dominant discourses, and thus unpacks and breaks down what has been assigned by society. Projects, such as the one studied here, utilize performance and storytelling to undo the internalization of stereotypes and to engage youth in dialogues about identity. According to Rolón-Dow, CRT scholarship has always relied on written recorded data for the sharing of stories. Her work examines digital storytelling as an alternative process for counter-storytelling. Her

article “Race(ing) stories: digital storytelling as a tool for critical race scholarship” offers an exciting look at how images can act as vessels for story, and when paired with recorded interviews, become a methodology for critical research and scholarship about race (Rolón -Dow 162). There is a large body of research connecting embodied learning, performance, and pedagogy which aims to recognize the body as a site of learning and knowledge, separate and in connection with verbal language. Mia Perry and Carmen Medina argue that it is “useful to examine how the body in pedagogy works as a site of cultural inscription where norms, practices, and symbols are inscribed by the body and for the body” (63). For them, the body simultaneously creates meaning and is embedded with meaning; discourses (cultural, political, etc.) are inscribed on the body. In my own research, I identify the body as an exciting opportunity for understanding and interrogating dominant narratives, the stereotypes in them, and how youth both reflect and push against the embedded discourses. In the project described below, counter-storytelling was both a verbal and embodied practice. The participants shared personal stories in the devising process and performance, as well as physicalized the various stereotypes they found and how they felt about their representations.

A CYCLE AND A PROCESS

My project followed the structure of Lee Anne Bell’s Storytelling Project, which she outlines in *Storytelling for Social Justice*. In Bell’s work, she invites teachers to move from telling Stock Stories to Concealed Stories, followed by telling Resistance Stories

and Emerging/Transforming Stories, before finally engaging in Action Change, or the creation of counter-storytelling communities within their schools.

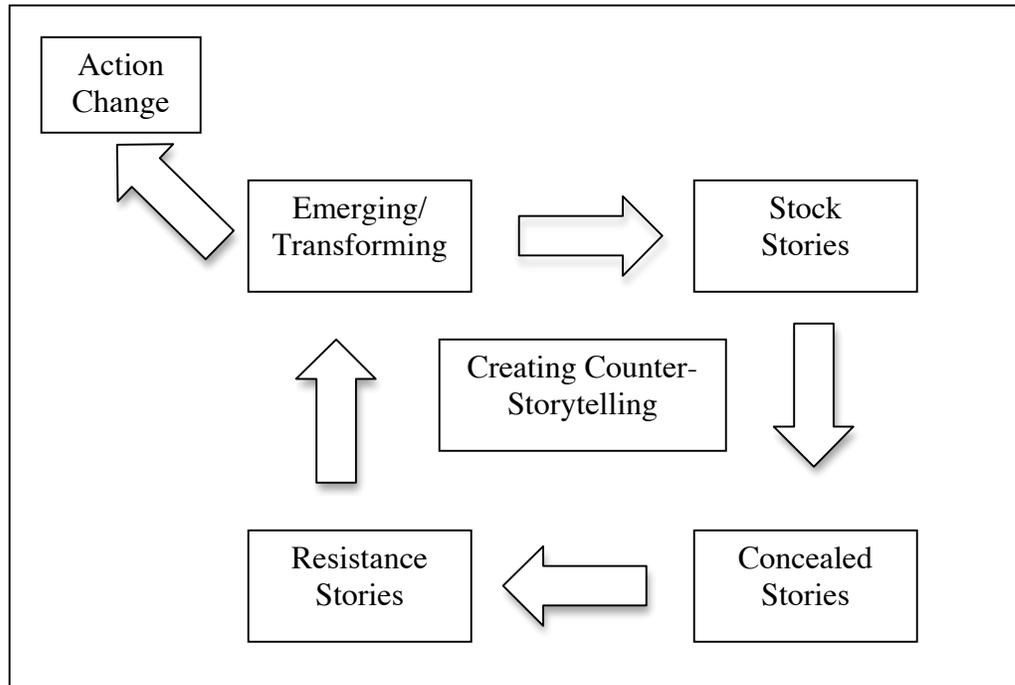


Figure 1: Bell’s Storytelling Project Model (20)

Bell identifies this process or structure as the different ways people “talk and think about race and racism in the United States” (22). They begin with what they know from what they’ve been told (stock stories, or the dominant narrative) and then move through a process of learning about experiences and stories that are in opposition to the dominant ones, resulting in a critical understanding of racism that encourages social change. It is a model of using counter-storytelling, a method of research and inquiry from Critical Race Theory, to engage diverse groups of people in conversations about how they experience and witness racism.

As illustrated in the figure above, the Storytelling Project Model is a cycle that can continue through the story types or move into action change. The first step of the model begins with “stock stories,” which are the “tales told by the dominant group” (Bell 23), normalized through history and institutions of society. Participants start with the study of these stories in order to identify the ways in which the dominant groups are represented and how those representations support racism. The second step, “concealed stories,” looks specifically at historical stories from the margins. These might include poetry, music, or literature, but they are all stories of historical figures resisting racism (Bell 24). The third step, “resistance stories,” moves through lesser-known moments of anti-racism; these stories can look like oral histories from the community or the tales of family members and friends (Bell 25). The cycle can then move into “action change” or back through the story types, indicating, as Bell writes, “the need to stay mindful and open to new stories as we continue to learn about racism and its effects on diverse communities” (26). I see these two moments occurring simultaneously; we should never stop telling, listening to, and analyzing the various stories, nor should we ever stop trying to move towards change.

Through the engagement with the various story types, the participants thought through how others experience the South Central narrative, how they are believed to fit in it, and how they see and experience South Central in their own lives. Bell’s model for storytelling incorporates drama strategies for sharing and acting out stories, but it is not designed to create a cohesive performance for an audience. Expanding upon this counter-

storytelling model, I moved Bell's cycle into an autobiographical devising process as put forward by Joe Norris: research, exploration, scripting, and performance (Norris 40). Within the research step of the devising process, the participants explored the various types of stories and from their research and exploration, created and scripted various monologues, scenes, and stage pictures. In some ways, Norris's performance step coincided with Bell's step of Action Change. As the youth shared their stories with an audience, as well as when they later reflected on how the project affected their understanding of self, their world, and their futures, an intention and belief in their abilities to enact change within their communities was more fully realized.

Early in the devising process, the participants moved through the research step as we watched clips from movies and television and listened to music about South Central in order to identify the dominant narratives at play in popular media. We then moved into devising exercises that asked participants to embody their research and create physical representations of the stock stories they found present in the clips and songs explored. They then identified the stereotypes they wanted to focus on in their own theatre pieces. They wrote monologues and created group scenes that either introduced and acknowledged the stereotypes at play in their lives or pushed against them. They engaged in storytelling activities that asked them to reflect on their concealed stories, or the moments that defined them, both positive and negative, and share stories of resistance of people in their lives. Other activities included creating stage pictures and group poems in the final storytelling step (emerging/transforming) that expressed how the group felt

about the stereotypes and how their lives either did or did not match them. At the end of our project, participants invited family members and members of their community to witness the entire performance that included a montage of individual pieces, all expressing the participants' connections to how South Central and youth of color are portrayed in media. I then led a talk back with the audience and the participants about the devising process, the audience's responses to the performance, and the participants' reactions to the project. Post-performance, the participants and I gathered together to reflect on their experience in the project and what we all learned from it. Participants shared what they took away from the project, and what they hoped to say and impact through their performance work.

During the process of working with the youth, I gathered data about the participants' experience through looking at the youth's daily journal reflections, documenting my own observations and reflections on our work together, and visually and otherwise documenting the work through photos and videos of our rehearsal process, video of the final performance, the final script, and an audio recording of the reflection. I analyzed the data, paying attention first to any references to the dominant narrative (a key tenet of counter-storytelling) and identified the engagement of stereotypes as the main theme of my analysis. In choosing which activities to dive deeper into for this study, I chose three that exemplified both Bell's intentions and my own in the project. Each of the following moments represent what the story types offered the devising process and how the addition of theatre to the storytelling model furthered the participants' engagement

with dominant and counter-narratives. In the following sections, I offer a descriptive analysis of the different ways that the participants interacted with the story types as laid out by Bell and examine how the devising activities provided various entry points into interacting with and disrupting stereotypes.

THE EXPECTATION OF SOUTH CENTRAL

In her work with teachers, Bell identifies the telling and unpacking of stock stories as the first step to dismantling racial inequality (4-5). In her Storytelling Project, she works with participants to examine broad-based narratives about the American experience, such as the narrative of equal opportunity based on hard work and determination, and then moves into what those stories tell us about race and racism in America (Bell 31). For this devising theatre project, I wanted to keep Bell's intended examination of racism, but chose to narrow the focus of the youth's research to address narratives about where they live. Because we were in an autobiographical devising process, I wanted to focus their counter-storytelling on the participants' immediate contexts and personal experiences. Heddon comments that "places, like the bodies located in them, are embedded within and produced by historical, cultural and political vectors" (112). In other words, dominant narratives also define and mark, and are defined by and marked by, location. My hope was that an interrogation of the stock stories of their communities, coupled with stock stories perpetuated by the media, as well as discussions about racism in their own lives could lead into larger dialogues about racism in America.

In order for the participants to move through an autobiographical devising process to form counter-narratives, they first needed to engage in a research process about the dominant narrative. The participants viewed and analyzed the stock stories about their own life experiences. For example, they found TV news clips online specifically about their neighborhoods or areas and identified what narratives were being told through reporting. In the various large and small group discussions, the focus of the conversation kept coming back to the messages, or stereotypes, they saw reappearing, again and again, in the various films, news reports, and songs presented to them. They found representations of young people of color as violent, uneducated, inviting of police brutality, and a danger to one another and to society at large. The participants then created theatrical interpretations of the stereotypes and talked back to the dominant narrative through the creation of character and story. Embodiment, defined here as the physical expression of an idea with the body, offered them an opportunity to try on the stereotypes associated with their bodies and identities. They role-played what one-dimensional representations or stereotypes look and feel like on actual living human beings. Then, through the style of satire the participants performed and interrogated the problematic humor, asking the audience to confront their own assumptions about young people of color, and more specifically, those living in South Central. In the following section, I analyze one of the devising activities that I facilitated and the resulting performance piece in order to illustrate some of the ways the youth disrupted stereotypes

about young people of color presented in media through the combination of embodiment and satirical performance.

August 6th, 2014: Devising Public Service Announcements

A description:

In their group, Caleb, Jalen, and Jeovannie choose to focus on movies and film to look at how South Central L.A. is represented. They already had notes written in their journals from the whole group viewing of *Boyz 'n the Hood* and *Menace II Society*, so they asked me what other movies to watch. I offer them some suggestions and tell them that they can look up lists online to find movies about a certain subject. After looking up lists and writing down my suggestions, they choose to watch clips from *American Me* and *Blood In Blood Out* as their additional films for research. Jeovannie is Latin@, Jalen is black, and Caleb is half of each, but reads as black. They tell me it is important to all three of them that they watch an equal amount of films about each racial identity in their group. They pull up clips from the two movies on the iPad and watch silently before discussing what they saw happen. Both movies focus on Latin@ gang members, and the topic of violence and revenge is very prevalent. I provide each group with a blank piece of chart paper for note-taking and Jeovannie grabs a marker and writes “Gangster.” I give the room the instruction to begin identifying the messages they want to address in their Public Service Announcement, a theatrical

version of short films aimed to provide an audience with specific information. I write on a large post-it note the three guidelines for their pieces:

- 1) Pick a genre: comedy, drama, after-school special, or Breaking News!
- 2) Pick a goal: to make people laugh or to make them cry
- 3) Pick a purpose: to educate S.C. residents or to educate outsiders

Jalen, Jeovannie, and Caleb choose their guidelines (comedy, to make people laugh, and to educate outsiders) and begin to stage their Public Service Announcement, “Tour of South Central.”

Jeovannie enters and walks to the audience. He says to us, “Hello my name is Jeovannie Cabral and I’ll be your tour guide today to surviving South L.A.” Caleb enters as Jeovannie introduces him, “Today my little friend Tyrese, we’ll be following him around on his daily basis.” Jeovannie tells us that Tyrese woke up to an exciting email saying that he has been accepted into college. Caleb pantomimes reading something on his computer and throws his hands in the air and claps with excitement. Jeovannie asks us, the audience, to give Tyrese a round of applause for his accomplishment. Jeovannie continues, “Let’s follow Tyrese and see what he’s doing.” Caleb pulls out his cell phone and Tupac begins to play. Jeovannie informs us that Tyrese is listening to hip hop and attempts to pronounce Tupac Shakur’s name but never gets it right. Jeovannie leads us along, letting us know that the next part of Tyrese’s day is meeting up with his friend Jamal (played by Jalen) and as they clasp hands and bump shoulders, Jeovannie

tells us that their handshake requires “very very very very complicated technique.” Caleb and Jalen move to the floor on their knees as Jeovannie says, “So to pass their time in the *hood* they play a game called Craps...they’ll play for a while, they’ll play their rent money, they’ll gamble anything away.” Caleb and Jalen pantomime throwing dice and collecting their winnings. The two stand up and repeat their handshake as Jeovannie informs us that “Tyrese has to go home, it’s getting late and in the hood it’s not safe to be out this late. For example, because of the scenario we’re about to see.” Caleb and Jalen walk off to either side of the stage. As Caleb enters again, we learn that Tyrese is on his way to tell his mom about his exciting college news. As he walks home, he bumps shoulders with Jalen playing a gang member. Here is a transcript of the dialogue that followed:

JEOVANNIE: So sometimes if a gang member want to know where you’re from, he would say:

JALEN: Where you from?

JEOVANNIE: And Tyrese would say:

CALEB: Hey man I don’t bang man (as he puts his hands in front of his face)

JEOVANNIE: And if the gang member don’t believe you he would say:

JALEN: I don’t believe you.

JEOVANNIE: And that’s when you gotta run.

Caleb turns on his feet and throws his hands out, saying “Hey man whatever man” as he begins to run away. Jalen puts his hand in the air in the shape of a gun. Jeovannie says “And if you don’t run fast.” Jalen then moves his hand as if he is shooting and Caleb falls to the ground. Jeovannie ends the scene with a thank you

to the audience for coming on the tour, a hope for surviving South L.A., and an invitation to grab complimentary pepper spray on the way out (Journal reflection #4 and *Your View Our Eyes*).

A Tour as Disruption

Based on the plot points I witnessed in this scene, such as the response to getting into college and the encounter with a gang member, I identified the themes and stereotypes within the piece as violence and low expectations of young people of color. The group identified the prevalence of gang violence as the main stereotype to address. Caleb represented the recurring image of the young person of color in South L.A. who wants to get out but can't, no matter how hard he tries. He carried the character of Ricky from *Boyz n' the Hood* with him as he moved through his day, mimicking Ricky's death which coincided with his passing of the SAT's in the film. As an audience member, I read the character of Caleb's Tyrese as the token young person of color who actually cares about school and family and doing the 'right thing.' He was the opposite of how society often thinks about, portrays, and treats young men of color; as an audience member, I wanted to root for him. As I look back at the video of "Tour of South Central," I notice the innocence or naivety that Caleb presents as Tyrese. The character seems unaware of the systems that make acceptance into college so rare for students in his neighborhood. He seems to just accept that walking around late at night is not what he is supposed to do without questioning why that narrative exists. Tyrese seems to move through his day as part of a machine that dictates what a young black man should do.

Through the abrupt ending of the performance and Jeovannie's nonchalant thank you to the audience, it is presented as normal for the young black man to be shot to death at the end of the day.

As I look back at this moment, I am struck by the weight of this piece, created just a few days before the death of Mike Brown. The character of Tyrese represents all of the lives of color cut short by violence and how stories of death are normalized. His death does not come as a surprise, as we are set up to understand that running into a gang member is common, and yet I was still quite effected by the abruptness of his end. There was no time for the audience to process his death before moving on to Jeovannie's final moment in the performance. When Jeovannie finished speaking, the piece was over. Caleb stood up from his death position and we heard nothing more about Tyrese. As an audience member I wanted his death to be acknowledged in a sincere way; I wanted it to mean something to Jeovannie the tour guide. But there was no accountability. No one was held responsible except Tyrese; he knew not to be out at night and that he could run into a gang member. Although as a group we did not explicitly reflect on how this scene related to greater issues regarding violence against bodies of color, in re-watching the video of their performance, I see many parallels between Tyrese's death and those of young people of color committed every day. As I do with current violence against bodies of color, I wanted the systems and positions of power supporting racism to be held responsible, but only Tyrese was to left to blame. In this moment, the participants talked

back to the dominant narrative and as an audience member, I felt an intense need to intervene and seek justice.

As the body most easily identified as black, Jalen embodied the two-dimensional gang member character whose only defining characteristic was a propensity for violence. As he speaks, his voice is monotone and has no emotional depth. As I read the performance of this particular moment, I saw that he could have acted out the opposite as the loud “ghetto” young black man. But instead, he made his gang member character robotic: predictable, calculated, and unresponsive. When he spoke, his only lines were exactly what Jeovannie prescribed (as seen earlier in the dialogue transcript;) Jeovannie tells Jalen exactly what to say in the moment. Even when he moved to shoot Caleb’s character, his arm merely moved up and down. There seemed to be no thought or intention behind it. As he shot, it appeared as though this is what he is programmed to do. Watching the piece again, this representation of a gang member follows many portrayals we see in mass media; as presented, they have no soul, no humanity, and there is no rhyme or reason to why they are a part of a gang. This representation erases the history of police brutality in underserved areas that sparked the early creation of gangs and the critical scholarship about the intense feeling of brotherhood and community that attracts many young men and women to gangs. As I watched “Tour of South Central,” I didn’t feel the need to understand Jalen’s character; he isn’t even named. He is simply the one who ends Tyrese’s chance at getting out of South Central. The performance piece as a

whole, and this particular character, suggest to the audience that youth have only two options in life: either kill or get killed.

Jeovannie reflected later that he had a difficult time with the research part of the process because he felt that he was being asked to judge his peers. By viewing media clips through another set of eyes, the act of naming out stereotypes was the same as replacing those stereotypes on their bodies. When I asked him to speak some more to that feeling, he said, “I hated that day so much cause you were like ‘just get into it Jeovannie,’ and I’m like no, cause there’s a reasonable explanation to this” (Jeovannie). Being a part of the community created in the room, he does not see his peers with the same kind of judgment as might an outsider. But on the day of our research, I asked him to jump to an untrue conclusion, a stereotype, when he already knew the more nuanced answer. When asking a young person to detect stereotypes, how do we achieve this end without perpetuating the labeling of stereotypes on bodies? How can we achieve the same goal without sub-consciously encouraging a deeper internalization of said stereotypes? Through this activity, I learned that the process of recognizing and naming stereotypes can be very useful in determining what parts of the dominant narrative the participants want to disrupt. But in the future, I need to be more cognizant and intentional about addressing how society upholds certain stereotypes and the effect that naming out stereotypes can have on the participants and build in time to step out of role and unpack the experience of acting out the stereotypes. Taking the time to really dig into what they felt and experienced, both performing and watching, could help participants develop

more language for addressing stereotypes. I also wonder, what does it look like for participants to embody other stereotypes or images in their bodies that aren't necessarily associated with their own identity markers? What does it mean to wear 'white?' Or to wear what they want associated with their bodies? In the future, I would like to have the participants try on more of their own images of self. They did this briefly through a performed 'machine' about the moments that made them who they are, but more embodiment of their own self-image could help counter the experience of stereotypes.

Although the participants gained a greater understanding of prevalent stereotypes about South Central (Derjuan, Caleb) this step of the process is not without problems and challenges. One of the key tenets of a critical counter-storytelling community is the intentional engagement with and disruption of systems and structures of power (Bell 5). Unfortunately, I did not take enough time with the participants to address the issue of systemic racism and how it is supported by the perpetuation of stereotypes. The youth were aware of how differently people of color are portrayed than white people, but it was not discussed explicitly. A more thorough understanding of how stereotypes function and further marginalize people of color would have deepened the participants' research and devising processes. If provided with a greater context for their work, they could be better prepared to engage the audience in more critical conversations. Two participants wrote down messages about women in their journals, such as "Bitch" in Cris' journal and "Don't trust any girl" in Caleb's. But we did not have a direct conversation during this activity about the portrayal of women and how problematic stereotypes affect women's

lives. Later in the project, two of the female participants devised a scene about the portrayal of women, but I wish I had engaged the group in a discussion or embodied exploration to break down stereotypes about women and the ways that race and gender prove intersectional. In future iterations of this project, I will attend to identifying systemic and individual forms of racism, sexism, and homophobia (all three experienced by members of the ensemble) and their underbelly of white heteronormative patriarchy. According to Delgado, critical race theory is founded on “feminism’s insights into the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collections of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination” (*Critical Race Theory* 5). Although we worked together to discuss how certain images become normalized through media, I did not take the time to focus on the relationship Delgado references, and in the future, I would like for the participants to come away with not just the ‘what’ of stock stories, but the how and why as well, in order to more fully understand how to not only disrupt stereotypes, but disrupt systems as well.

IN OPPOSITION TO VIOLENCE

Resistance stories challenge racism and can come from many different sources, such as the family, personal community, or the community at large. In Bell’s Storytelling Project, participants might explore stories of resistance from history or their own communities, but within my project, we focused on stories from the participants’ family members in order to ground the work in personal experience. The participants in this project decided to explore acts of kindness as an opposition to the narratives of danger

and violence perpetuated in media about youth of color. Their ideas about acts of kindness took shape as performed monologues and scenes. For the participants that wanted to create a scene, I asked them to share with one another the story they came up with and choose one to focus on. I then asked them to write down the basic plot of the story (i.e. the beginning, middle, and end) and the important and necessary moments in order for the story to move along. Together, they wrote a dramatized version of the original story and included as many characters as were in their small group. They then divided the parts up and created their final blocking for the scene. In the following section, I describe and analyze the scene “The Right Thing to Do,” devised and performed by Elias, José, Rodrigo, and Ernesto, in order to show how through performance, they were able to embody the story and stage their own act of resistance. I analyze this particular story because it stages a negotiation between how one self-identifies and how one is identified by society; the story of a family member shifts and becomes an act of resistance by José himself.

The Right Thing to Do: An Act of Kindness

A description:

José (as Sam) and Rodrigo (as DJ) sit on a folded table with wheels and are pushed on by Elias. Elias parks José and Rodrigo stage left facing the audience. Rodrigo asks José, “So what are you going to get at the store?” to which José responds, “We’re just getting some snacks and supplies.” As Rodrigo and José go

to stage left where Ernesto waits as a cashier, Elias enters on his own table on wheels. As he walks stage left, a green piece of paper with the number 600 written on it falls out of his pocket to the ground. Rodrigo and José return to the stage with a box of granola bars. José notices the paper on the ground and picks it up. He and Rodrigo are shocked to discover that it is in the amount of \$600. José asks Rodrigo what to do and they both agree it's best to wait. Fifteen minutes go by and Rodrigo decides to sit back on the table and José remains outside. Another ten minutes pass by and José joins Rodrigo, expressing that they have been waiting for a long time. Rodrigo reminds him "Wait, that's a lot of money. Someone wouldn't be carrying it around for no reason." José agrees and steps outside again. As he stands in front of the table, he shifts his weight from side to side, rubs his head and his face. He says to himself, "Fuck! That's a lot of money. I could do a lot with that. On the other hand, I don't know if I can live with it having it on my conscious." He moves to the ground and kneels on his left knee. He clasps his hands together in front of him and looks up towards the ceiling.

JOSÉ: Dear God, DJ and I just found \$600. I'm very confused about what to do with it. I really want to take it, but I'm not that kind of person. I mean, if I drop that kind of money, I would want someone to return it to me. Please God, I'm gonna wait five more minutes, but if no one shows up, I'm gonna leave. (*He stands up*)

Ernesto puts a loaf of bread into a paper bag and hands it to Elias, telling him the total amount for the groceries. Elias reaches into his pocket, but quickly removes it, pats his hands on his legs where all four pockets are. He looks around where he

is standing and tells Ernesto, “I can’t find my money. Let me just go look outside real quick. I’ll be right back.” Elias walks downstage to where his table is parked. He drops to the ground and crawls around, looking in all directions, moving his hands around underneath the tables.

SAM (José): Sir, are you looking for something?

ELIAS: (*He stands up*) Yes, I’ve lost my money. I had the money for the food and half of my rent. I’ve lost my hard earned money.

SAM (José): How much was it?

ELIAS: It was around \$600.

José turns away from Elias, pulls the green paper out of his pocket, and moves it around his hands. He looks at the paper for a minute, looks up towards the ceiling, and then turns back to Elias. José looks at him and says “I think I found your money sir. You dropped it next to our car.” He hands the money to Elias who thanks him with a handshake and a hug. Elias gets back onto his table and José breathes in, releases it with a smile, and goes back to his table. They are both wheeled off as the scene ends. (Journal Reflection #6 and *Your View, Our Eyes* 7-9)

Acts of Kindness as Stories of Resistance

In her discussion on the Storytelling Project, Bell writes, “resistance stories expand our vision of what is possible and form the foundation for ongoing creation of new stories that can inspire and direct antiracism work in the present” (61). For the participants, in thinking about how they combat negative stereotypes, they identified kindness as a method of pushing against what is expected of them as people of color. For

the youth, performing an act of kindness to a stranger embodied everything that is in opposition to violence. To resist racism is to be the exact opposite of how society expects you to behave. Looking back at “The Right Thing to Do,” I am struck by the negotiation that José’s character had in deciding what to do with the money. In moments he seemed to represent what the audience might expect a young male of color (Latino) to do, but then quickly switches to who he really is. I read the line “I really want to take it, but I’m not that kind of person,” as a representation of the push/pull relationship young people have between how they are told to behave and how they think they should behave. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the stereotypes and images perpetuated in media can have a significant impact on youth identity so that young people sometimes adopt aspects of the stereotypes. In this moment José acknowledges that taking the money is what society constantly tells him he WILL do, (i.e. it is not a choice, it’s just the way it is), but that is not what he wants to do. His own definition of his identity trumps how others define him. I see this as an act of resistance against racism. This single moment in the scene becomes an embodied and enacted example of how young people might cultivate their own sense of self, as they want to be seen and understood by others. But this moment also points to the inevitability of interaction with stereotypes, as José’s negotiation between expectations of society and of self does not feel like the first time.

While this resistance story is not José’s story, it could be. The negotiation of identity in relation to society is something that young people experience daily. They see pictures of people who look like them in media, whether they are positively represented

or not. People are constantly told how to behave and dress and how those choices reflect their place in the world. By society's terms, young people of color often have no choice in which prescribed box of traits to inhabit, because they are not meant to make their own choices and exist as they want in the world. Systems of power intend for people of color to live silently in the margins. But a character like Sam shows that society's expectations of people of color as passive can be challenged. Resistance moments can look very different and the performance of Sam's expresses to young people that they don't have to always follow the path laid out for them by racist systems of power.

In a future project, I would provide more space for the participants to explore resistance stories from outside of their communities. By situating the work in only immediate contexts and relationships, I missed an opportunity to expand the conversations and include other perspectives and a deepened understanding of history. As is true for Bell's work, I am interested in engaging youth participants in research about major activists, artists, and leaders of color and process for examining how that knowledge might affect their envisioning of the future. Although the sharing of personal and communal stories of resistance provided an opportunity for the youth to relate to one another, I failed to encourage an understanding of larger parts of history and society. In the future, I would also take time for participants to gather oral histories of their families and communities about experiences of racism and the challenging of that racism. Oral stories are a key tenet of CRT and of counter-storytelling, but I did not incorporate this methodology into our process. The stories they explored were acts of kindness

experienced by family members and friends, but they did not specifically embody stories related to moments of racism or racial violence. I would love to have participants embody their familial and communal history and interrogate how their identities are negotiated in response to and in the context of their community. This project would benefit from a more cohesive integration of individual and systemic oppression within stories. Despite these missed opportunities, the sharing of personal stories within our group and staging them for an outside audience brought counter-storytelling out of the devising sessions and into the community. The performance of these resistance stories invited audience members to reflect on their own stories and to envision an antiracist future along with the performers.

BODIES: TRANSFORM/ATION

As discussed in *Stock Stories*, the body carries incredible potential for the sharing of stories. Bell defines emerging/transforming stories as those constructed to “challenge stock stories, build on and amplify concealed and resistance stories and take up the mantle of antiracism” (75). In other words, these particular stories push against the dominant narrative and support and expand upon oppositional narratives. They are a continuation of the concealed and resistance stories but are situated in the participant’s own personal experience. Emerging/Transforming stories are the stories of how the participants resist racism and push back against stereotypes and dominant narratives. In the case of my project, the youth’s emerging/transforming stories built upon the recognition of stereotypes, the retelling of resistance stories in the community, and

became an opportunity for the youth participants to discover how they fit within both the dominant and the oppositional narratives about South Central and people of color. In the following section, I look at stage pictures, or frozen images created with the body, as a useful devising strategy for embodied storytelling, in order to show how autobiographical devising can support the intentions of counter-storytelling. As the bodies of people of color are marked by stereotypes and racist systems of power, it is important for bodies to become tools for enacting and telling story.

In the activity leading up to the following stage picture, I presented the participants with a phrase that represented one of the stereotypes they identified in media, such as “South Central? Isn’t everyone there really dangerous?” I instructed the participants, one at a time, to create a frozen statue of how that phrase made them feel. After they created their image, they created a line of text and vocally performed what their statue might say. In the following example, I offered the following stereotype for the youth to respond to: “But they’re all criminals. I hear that everyone there is a criminal.” Several of the youth created dynamic images that expressed their personal truths in contrast to the image of criminality. Here I describe what I saw as I revisited the photographs of the participants’ tableaux titled Criminal.

A description:

On the left half of the image, Jalen stood facing the audience. His left hand covered his mouth and his right hand pointed towards the audience. He was slightly leaned back and to the side. Next to him Derjuan stood with his legs

slightly separated with his hands placed in front of his chest. His hands rested in fists with each middle finger pointed up. His head was tilted to the side and his gaze rested gently on the audience and the corners of his mouth pointed down. On the floor in front of Jalen and Derjuan, Jeovannie's knees were on the ground and he sat back on his heels. His shoulders hung slightly forward and his hands were on his thighs. His head jettied forward a bit and his face held a similar look to Derjuan. Next to Derjuan stood Maria, body faced to the side with one foot in front of the other. She held her hands up, about sixteen inches apart, palms faced towards one another. Her head cocked to the side, her eyebrows were slightly furrowed, and one side of her mouth pointed up. Behind her José stood with the right side of his body facing the audience, his head tilted back, and his right arm pointed directly at the audience. His index finger was up.

On the floor in front of him, Rodrigo and Ernesto kneeled. Ernesto, on his knees leaning forward, had his hands covering his face. His head hung forward and his entire upper body fell forward towards the audience. Rodrigo knelt on his left knee facing Ernesto. Only the back of his head could be seen as he turned towards Ernesto. His right arm rested on his bent right knee and his left arm draped around Ernesto's shoulders. Behind them, Caleb stood with his legs separated, shoulders hung forward. As he hung his head, his left hand covered his eyes. Next to him, Elias stood with his back mostly turned towards the audience. His arms were crossed and his shoulders hunched slightly forward. His head was

pushed forward and down, away from the audience. Cristian was the final piece of the image, facing the audience. His weight was on his right leg as his left leg came forward. He leaned back with his index fingers pointing towards his chest. His eyebrows were furrowed and his head tilted slightly to the side. (Criminal)

As I looked at the image, I saw a mixture of disappointment, amusement, and defiance. There were bodies hunched over with downcast eyes. There were bodies standing upright with the chests out, strong and proud to defy the image of 'criminal.' There were bodies leaning towards the audience, both challenging and laughing at the voice heard. In the picture, a group of black and brown bodies respond to the stereotype of criminality and share their truths on stage. It is unclear if their responses are directed at the audience or the recorded voice, but both feel implicated in ascribing a stereotype to the bodies on stage.

Bodies Telling Stories

Even before they added any dialogue or text, I observed rich storytelling in the stage pictures alone. With their images, the participants used their bodies to respond to the stereotype of being a criminal; the various embodied responses seem to reveal information about each person's life experience. The different individual statues create compelling stories as they are presented against one another. Jalen's seemingly amused statue stands in stark contrast to Jeovannie's defeated one. The particular cement of Jalen's hand and the leaning of his body mimicked the experience of laughter, while Jeovannie's hunched shoulders and hanging head portrayed a feeling of helplessness. The

placement of Jalen's hand in connection with his leaning back signaled to me that he found the accusation of being a criminal to be a joke. José's statue, relatively similar looking to Jalen's in composition, gave off a more defiant feeling. His face looked tense and ready to explode with words and his body position communicated the act of stopping someone from speaking. If the image came to life, I imagine his pointed finger would begin moving back and forth as if to say "No." His weight leaned forward and signified movement, like if he were to move he would continue towards the audience and shake his finger in their faces. Rodrigo's arm placement around his brother's shoulder and his facial expression, along with the direction of his body suggests that he is comforting his brother. The tilt of Rodrigo's head towards Ernesto's signifies an intentional act of listening and Ernesto's covered face implies crying or trying to hide from something. Just from the body positions, Ernesto's intention is unclear, but he appears to have a negative and visceral reaction to the voice's claim of his criminality.

When the youth add text to the frozen images, new dimensions are added to the body images. Intentions are made clear and the bodies are given the choice to speak. With his finger pointing out at the audience, José says "No. That's what you think." He follows through with his defiance toward the stereotypes I named in the statement. Jalen laughs and tells the audience, "Do I look like a criminal to you?" He invites the audience to see the ridiculousness of the statement with a hearty laugh, but with the pointedness of his spoken line and his pointed finger, he implicates the audience. Although the voice did not come from them, they still need to be told the truth, his truth. With his hands over his

face, Ernesto says, “I’m not a criminal,” and his brother responds, “I believe in him.” With the addition of the spoken text, this moment becomes less about one man comforting another. Instead, one person is supporting and building up the beliefs and the confidence of another. This moment, or scene, revises the reading of two brown bodies on stage—it invites the audience to move away from stereotypes of despair or hopelessness, and toward images of strength and resilience. Rodrigo sits at the same level as his brother and professes his belief that Ernesto is not a criminal, and neither is he.

Bell argues that emerging/transforming stories “enact continuing critique and resistance to stock stories” (75). The choices that the participants made with their bodies in this project became a form of active resistance to the dominant narrative. They moved to physical positions that embody not only their responses to stereotypes, but also their critiques of it. Jalen’s frozen statue, showing surprise and amusement, and accompanying line of dialogue, suggest that the belief that he is a criminal is placed on him by society and not by his own accord. He does not move or behave like a criminal, yet his body is marked with the assumption that he is one. Emerging/transforming stories also signify the “capacity to act in alignment with one’s dreams towards a better future” (Bell 76). Maria’s line of dialogue, “Seriously? High School diploma,” coupled with her statue of holding her hands out in front of her, reveals to the audience that she is holding a high school diploma in her hands. She chose to share her accomplishments and her path for the future as her resistance to the assumption of criminal activity. Rodrigo shows us that he

and his brother will not end up like criminals because they are not criminals, and their kneeling bodies comforting one another tell me that not all brown bodies are criminal.

The analysis of stage pictures as a devising strategy points to the capacity of bodies to tell stories, with or without text. Although I did utilize the construction of stage pictures as storytelling, I wish I had used more movement-based strategies to share emerging/transforming stories. The stage pictures shared with the audience how the participants' bodies reacted in a moment in time, but non-verbal movement could provide an interesting space to explore stories of how young bodies of color move through the world and how they actively carry or push against stereotypes through activity. Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholarship pays close attention to how bodies of color are marked with stories and histories, therefore it is important for CRT scholars to document bodies as stories, in addition to written text. Stories are told not just through written or spoken text, but can be performed through the body. If we privilege the body as we do written text, we can expand and deepen our analysis of the lives of young people of color by naming the body and its experiences as valid and worthy of knowing. When we engage only with words in research, we disconnect the brain from the body and silence physical experience.

PERFORMANCE, TAKING ACTION, AND CREATING CHANGE

In Bell's model for anti-racist storytelling, participants can move from emerging/transforming stories to action change, or repeat back through the storytelling process in order to dive back in deeper and explore more stories (as shown earlier in

Figure 1). Bell defines action change as “taking a stance against racism and positioning [oneself] as [a] responsible agent of change” (108). In her work, action change can look a variety of ways. As her work happens with teachers and is focused on the context of education, action change looks like cultivating a counter-storytelling community within the classroom, leading the Storytelling Project Model with other teachers and fellow peers, and engaging further with other of Bell’s programs. In this final section and conclusion, I argue that performing for an audience, as the participants in this devising project did, is another tool for action change.

Bell’s project structure “provides tools for developing a critical lens that can be applied to many areas of analysis and thus engage people in critical learning for social justice” (26). In other words, the process of moving through and critically examining the four story types provides participants with the confidence and ability in analyzing race and racism in other areas of life, unexplored in the project. The discussions had and the dramatic pieces created in Bell’s projects remain experienced and witnessed only by the participants, instead of being shared with an audience as we did. So, how is the action change furthered when the tools and critical learning are shared with an audience?

For this project, the youth performed for an audience on August 23, 2014 and the audience became witnesses to the participants’ stories. I introduced the project and its participants before the performance began. After they performed, I then led a talkback between the audience and the participants that included time for questions and

appreciations. The audience and participants then had an opportunity to meet and mingle over refreshments and potentially deepen their connections with one another.

The youth shared experiences with one another in our different theatre sessions, but putting their lives and communities on stage for an outside audience added an extra layer of responsibility for the participants. As we were focused on disrupting stereotypes about South Central and young people of color, the participants felt a responsibility to present their work without further perpetuating the stereotypes against which they worked. But the responsibility was not placed only on the participants performing. The audience was tasked with the job of becoming witnesses to the participants' work and of receiving their stories. As Heddon points out, "live autobiographical performance takes place not only in shared time, but also in shared space" (5). It is within this shared space that dialogue is able to happen; a "direct and immediate address to the spectator" occurs and possibilities for discussion are opened (Heddon 6).

But as discussed earlier in the chapter, one cannot disrupt something without first recognizing it. In the performance, there was one moment of intentional audience interaction that aimed to ask the audience to identify for themselves stereotypes about black males. I briefly describe the piece "Audience Response" below:

A description:

Jeovannie enters and stands center stage with Jalen and Caleb on either side of him. Jalen is wearing his glasses and a nice looking sweater, and stands upright with perfect posture towards the audience. Caleb, on the other hand, wears large

headphones around his neck, a black hoodie, and baggy black jeans. He leans back with his hands clasped tightly in front of him with his head cocked to the side. They hold these positions for the entirety of the scene. Jeovannie steps in front of the two men and towards the audience. He speaks:

JEOVANNIE: Before we start our performance, we'd like to do a little experiment and I need your help to do it. Next to me are two average young men from South la, who at first glance look very different from one another. Let's take a look at the young man to my left first. *He points the audience's attention to CALEB.*

Jeovannie asks the audience to silently look at Caleb. He guides their reading of his body with questions like, "What is he wearing?" and "What is his facial expression saying?" He then prepares the audience for interaction by telling them that he is going to ask them a few questions and just to shout out their answers. As he asks questions like "What words might you hear to describe this man?" and "What about him might make someone think that?" the audience is encouraged to ground their analysis in Caleb's physical appearance. Jeovannie shifts the audience's focus to Jalen and leads them through the same series of questions. The audience ascribes words like 'thug,' 'gangster,' and 'drop out' to Caleb, and 'student,' 'put together,' 'nerd' to Jalen. Once both men have been described, the following happens:

JEOVANNIE: So what we have just named out are the different ways young men of color can be stereotyped because of how they look. But here's the important part. These two men you see are the same person.

JALEN and CALEB: If they gunned me down...

JEOVANNIE: Which story do you think they'd tell? (*Your View, Our Eyes*)

They exit.

In this interaction, Jeovannie asked the audience to come up with stereotypes without feeling like they were being identified as believers of the stereotypes. Although the audience was not asked to state their own beliefs, they named out loud the ways in which others (read: mainstream society) judge young people of color by how they look, rather than how they behave or what they have accomplished. Jeovannie prepared the audience to see how those stereotypes can be disrupted when young people share and perform their stories. This act of asking an audience to identify the stereotypes locates performance as action change. Delgado argues, "hearing stories invites hearers to participate, challenging their assumptions, jarring their complacency, lifting their spirits, lowering their defenses" (2440). The performance of explicitly personal stories, especially when coupled with direct audience interaction, moves listening from the passive to the active. Audience members are asked to participate and engage in reciprocity of energy and respect with the performers.

When an audience witnesses counter-storytelling, the stories presented on stage cannot be unseen or unheard. They cannot un-witness the performers sharing their personal experiences or the ways they resist racism in their daily lives. Oral history scholar Lynn Abrams argues that “storytelling of any kind...is a social activity which cannot take place without an audience” (132). The power of counter-stories is strengthened when an audience of witnesses is present. Sherry Marx furthers Abram’s argument and suggests that the accessibility of stories is what makes counter-storytelling such an effective tool for change. According to Marx, “if a wide variety of people are able to comprehend complex and often esoteric legal issues through first-person narratives told in absorbing ways, many people can then actively respond to these issues” (165). But witnessing goes beyond merely listening or absorbing a story. Witnessing requires a deep openness to different; it “does not take sameness, but rather difference, as that which is most valuable between self and other” (Jolles 147). In the context of our performance, the audience will always have the experience of witnessing the youth disrupt certain stereotypes about their bodies and lives. I cannot say how the people in our audience engaged with what they saw when they exited the performance space, but I believe the experience offered an opportunity to critically engage with media and the notion of stereotypes. Although the above piece felt like a more organic way to put the stereotypes into the space, I wish we had explored more moments of intentional audience interaction in order to identify specific strategies for social change within their communities. For performance as action change to remain sustainable and move and

grow beyond the performance space, I believe that the audience needs to be engaged more throughout and encourage them to become a consistent and important player in the disruption of stereotypes. Working more specifically with other forms of performance committed to audience interaction, such as Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre or a Theatre-for-Dialogue model, might allow for the participants to explore a more reciprocal relationship with the audience.

After the audience left, the participants and I reflected on the process and what they took away from it. When asked what will stick with him from the process, Jalen responded, "the sense of feeling that we did something to sort of try to better the community" (Reflection). Caleb immediately followed up, "we did something for the community um, to tell people that we're more than just bad people, we got dreams and we have the right to chase them" (Reflection). Derjuan expanded upon Caleb and Jalen's thoughts by pointing to the interaction with stereotypes; "to try to show people that, like, stereotypes aren't true and to try and go the opposite of them" (Reflection). All three participants' responses speak to the powerful possibilities that counter-storytelling has when it is performed. Their feelings of bettering their community and going "the opposite" of stereotypes stemmed from the experience of performing their stories. In their responses I read community as their greater community, and not just the one we created in the room. In this way, performing became action change as well, as they identified themselves beyond performers and as significant members of their communities. Through the research, devising, and performance steps of the process, the participants became more aware of their place within their community and the roles they play in creating significant and lasting social change. Performance provided them the opportunity to

challenge and disrupt stereotypes through the eyes of other people. The autobiographical devising process offered them tools to creatively and actively share their stories and experiences with others and affect change. Although it was only performed to a small group of people, the participants asked an audience to challenge their own assumptions and shared how their lives, bodies, voices, and stories disrupt stereotypes on a daily basis.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

The participants stand in a straight line on the stage. Fresh from the sharing of their play, “Your View, Our Eyes,” every single one of them wears a smile. I stand to the side, guiding the audience through a series of questions about the moments, ideas, and images that stood out to them. One audience member tells the audience that they are leaders and pillars in their community. Another calls the work courageous and vulnerable. A hand raises and I point to her. She begins to tell the room about growing up in the neighborhood and says, “a lot of people don’t know about South Central, about the beautiful thing South Central has because they don’t take the time. And it’s up to us to pave that way and you’re doing it the right way because it starts with taking care of yourself and loving yourself. And what you did on stage today is showing how much you love yourself and your community.” The participants nod with smiles and in that moment, to me, they look taller. Later in our private reflection, the words used by the audience come up in our conversation. The youth describe themselves as “pillars” and they say they are “determined to follow their dreams.” They tell me that they want to tour the play for high school students who need to see people who look like them. They tell me and each other that kids in South Central need to see their stories on stage. I begin to imagine the effect such a tour could have on the youth of South Central, on the adults in their world, on the youth who only see this place on their TV screens, and on theatre as a whole. What if theatre became a place for young people to disrupt stereotypes? What if these youth got to be the ones to make that happen?

As I look back on my research study and on the work that the participants created, I am struck by not only the participants' vulnerability and willingness to jump into the project, but also by my immense desire to continue and expand upon this work. Diving deeply into the data and placing it in conversation with Applied Theatre and Critical Race Theory, I see the places where the discussions should have been more critically-engaged and where bringing in more historical and social contexts around representations of communities of color were necessary. But I also found moments that provided new and exciting ideas about the practice of autobiographical devising and counter-storytelling. In this final chapter, I aim to address both my major takeaways and successes with the research in this particular study, as well as the moments and ideas I would like to focus on in the future. I will reflect on the project model I used, what I believe it offers students, facilitators, and the fields of Applied Theatre and Critical Race Theory, as well as how my own practice as a theatre practitioner and scholar continues to be informed by this devising process with young people.

This study argues for the use of theatre and performance as research in Critical Race scholarship and advocates for the body as an important and critical site for counter-storytelling and an understanding of where stories come from. As discussed in Chapter 3, counter-storytelling is a key tenet of Critical Race Theory and a majority of stories come from written and aurally recorded accounts. Educational scholar Rosalie Rolón-Dow argues for digital storytelling to be considered an important and useful new tool for Critical Race scholars in “initiating conversations about the raced experiences of youth

and can provide valuable knowledge for those working towards greater racial justice within education contexts” (159). Although her work focuses on digital image as story, her argument also holds true for the work of the participants in my project. Through autobiographical devising, the youth engaged in critical conversations about race and shared counter-stories about their life experiences. Both the physical script and the performed work provide worthwhile and relevant information for scholars about how young people engage with dominant narratives and stereotypes, and how they push against and disrupt the narratives in their daily lives. This project also brings together Critical Race and Applied Theatre scholarship to share how autobiographical devising and counter-storytelling can benefit from the intentional engagement with one another. With this research study, I aimed to provide Applied Theatre practitioners with knowledge about counter-storytelling and how this key aspect of critical race theory supports a youth devising ensemble. Autobiographical devising provided activities and tools for the youth participants to use as they explored how their own stories could live on stage, but counter-storytelling added the immensely important element of critical thinking with an intention toward disrupting racism. With this document, I hope that both Applied Theatre and Critical Race scholars and practitioners begin to bridge the two methodologies for both research and practice about, for, and with young people.

MAJOR TAKEAWAYS

This research document was driven by two key questions: *How can theatre facilitate the creation of a critical counter-storytelling community with young people?*

and *How does autobiographical devising as counter-storytelling provide a space for young people to disrupt stereotypes?* Both questions stem from my deep and intentional engagement with the work of Lee Anne Bell and her Storytelling Project model. Focused on critical counter-storytelling and drama activities as tools for anti-racism, Bell's work aims to bring teachers from diverse backgrounds and identities together to break down narratives of race in America and develop action plans for creating significant change in their communities (108). My applied theatre project was informed by the structure of Bell's Storytelling Project Model as the participants in our devising project moved through an exploration and interrogation of stock, concealed, resistance, and emerging/transforming stories. This study expanded upon Bell's work through the intentional focus on South Central, the use of autobiographical and theatrical devising, and the moving of drama activities into the creation of an original performance piece later shared with an audience.

Through my analysis of Jalen, Jeovannie, and Caleb's performance piece titled "Tour of South Central," I learned that the embodiment and performance of stereotypes makes clear the one-dimensionality of stereotypes and how they are intended to flatten identities. As an audience member, it would not have been the same if I only witnessed the reciting of stereotypes and messages from media. The trying on of stereotypes and the use of humor when doing so asked me to imagine these characteristics on the participants' bodies. But through reflection, this activity also brought up important questions for me as a theatre practitioner: can this work still act as social justice if I ask a

young person to wear a stereotype? What expectations did I place on the participants to become, even if only for a moment, the stereotypes they actively combatted in their daily lives and identities when I invited them to create Public Service Announcements? What values was I putting forth by asking them to embody stereotypes through a very white form of performance? Although “Tour of South Central” helped me as an audience member to contextualize and familiarize myself with the stereotypes associated with young people of color, the performance left me thinking about my ethical responsibility as a practitioner focused on social justice and youth agency, particularly as a white woman.

In opposition to the stock stories was the youth’s engagement with resistance stories as they chose to focus on acts of kindness to combat stereotypes of violence. To them, society and media expect them to be violent. As José acted out the story he shared of a family member, he negotiated his own identity in relation to society’s expectations. In character, he straddled the line between what he thought was the right thing to do and what the world thinks he will do. As he grappled with the choice of what to do with the found money, he moved between society’s expectation of theft and both his own and the character’s core value of honesty. In real life, young people of color straddle this same line, with expectations of society and of self on the two sides. As the character of Sam gives the \$600 back to the man, two acts of resistance are staged for the audience: one as Sam chooses the right path over the most useful path, and another as José places his racially marked body on stage to tell his story. The staging of this moment became a

space for José to express his own negotiation of identity as a brown body. But although critical race theory might agree that José's body on stage pushes against dominant narratives, I can't help but wonder how my own ideas of right and wrong, violence and kind, are shaped by my positionality. I supported the focus on 'acts of kindness' as resistance to violence, but how is kindness a construction of the dominant society? As a white body, I am able to argue for kindness as a strategy against racism because my body is not subjected to violence. How are dominant ideologies of right and wrong perpetuated when a brown body advocates for kindness against racism?

The participants explored emerging/transforming stories as they staged their own personal experiences and beliefs. Creating stage pictures as a group made up of individual frozen statues provided an opportunity for the youth to share both their responses to particular stereotypes and how their personal experiences pushed up against and opposed the dominant narrative. From this activity I learned that strong and detailed storytelling can happen without narrative text, and with an emphasis on bodies alone. As the participants built the group stage pictures on stage, their bodies told specific stories to the audience. Without words, the audience members read the bodies for clues through placement, gesture, facial expression, and composition. When text was added, my readings of the images were either validated or challenged as the participants' revealed the thoughts behind their physicalities.

As discussed in the previous chapter, one cannot disrupt something without seeing or knowing it first. By sharing their work on stage, the participants led the audience

through the process of recognizing stereotypes about South Central and youth of color. In this way, performance offered the audience an opportunity to develop or see an understanding of what the youth aimed to disrupt and push against. The participants' stories cannot be unheard or unseen once they are staged. The work and the performance placed the participants' stories into the audience's own narratives about South Central; their image of South Central could then shift and morph to include the youth's stories. With this work I hope that the constructed image of South Central not only shifts, but changes, and that the youth stories dismantle society's portrayal of the city and its young residents. The performance of story, along with intentional audience interaction and a post-show talkback, moved the storytelling process towards action change. This performance was a step towards sparking dialogue and change within the community and its members. The participants reflected with me after the project that they want to perform *Your View, Our Eyes* for high school students in SCLA because it is important for young people to see people who look like them on stage, dealing with the same issues of identity and representation. Although we did not address what role I might have in such future endeavors, I hope that their work from this project moves beyond me. Although I brought this particular group together, I did not create the performance. They did and it is them who should decide what comes next. It is not up to me to determine the best next steps for action and I strongly believe it is important for all applied practitioners to acknowledge where their place in a community and in a project begins and ends.

REFLECTION ON THE MODEL

This project offers youth, facilitators, and the fields of Applied Theatre and Critical Race Theory a model for approaching autobiographical devising and critical counter-storytelling. My model builds on Bell's Storytelling Project Model and offers a space for youth to have their experiences performed and seen as valid. Theory around stereotypes discussed in the previous chapter shows us that young people, and especially young people of color, are prescribed set characteristics for their various identity markers (Berg16). In this study, autobiographical devising activities provided a space for young people to explore alternate possibilities of identity and experience as they critically engaged with stereotypes and where they come from. My project model offers young people a space to interrogate their surroundings and the media they ingest daily. In a highly media driven world, this project model invites young people to step back and take a deeper look at what they see in television and movies and what it means. The youth in this project expressed that they had not viewed films like *Boyz 'n the Hood* or *Blood In Blood Out* as possible vessels for stereotypes, and they ultimately gained tools for examining other pieces of media in the future. Through autobiographical devising with an intention toward counter-storytelling, youth are able to interrogate messages perpetuated through media and share, and possibly replace harmful messages, with their own stories through a theatrical and accessible form.

As this model explicitly engages popular forms of media, one does not necessarily need to be from South Central in order to facilitate. Although I grew up in a part of South Central, this project was designed so that the expertise and knowledge came from the

participants. The research portion of the project asked the youth to identify messages and stereotypes and those became the guiding questions and building blocks for the work. Autobiographical devising asks participants to become the leaders in their process, and validates their truth and knowledge.

This project model can be adapted to fit other neighborhoods or cities and their particular contexts and stereotypes. The guidelines for the project are designed to look at media and the ideas that get perpetuated about people and places. Although I provided a laptop and two iPads for the participants to use, most of their research happened on their phones. By engaging youth in media they already know and have access to, facilitators can open up possibilities for furthering participant engagement with the material. This project model can be picked up and remounted in any space and therefore allows facilitators to lead this kind of project anywhere.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

For my Own Practice

As a white, privileged female, I began this process with an awareness of the stories and histories my body carries with me wherever I go. My personal story of also growing up in South Central allowed me to engage in the conversations through my own experience, but it did not excuse me from being critically-engaged with the history and privilege inherent in my own identity markers. Even though a key part of my identity as a facilitator and scholar is the critiquing of whiteness and the systems of power that support it, I did not engage in these conversations enough with my participants. I cannot speak to

the participants' experiences, but I did not personally experience any tense moments when our identities pushed against each other. In fact, they frequently told me that I am black just like them. Each time I made sure to say that I am in fact white and my whiteness plays a role in systems of racism; that in fact, my whiteness equals access and privilege. Looking back on these moments, I wish I engaged them in more critical discussions about what it means for a white person to 'be black.' What do blackness and whiteness mean to them? What does it mean to me? How did they see my identity markers living in the space and how do mine exist next to theirs? I attempted to voice my strong beliefs about the acknowledgment and celebration of difference, but in the moments when I was told that I am not white but black, an opportunity was missed to interrogate messages about difference.

The events surrounding Ferguson and the death of Mike Brown also played a large role in the work that was created and we discussed how different life is for a person of color than for a white person. Although these critical discussion moments provided exciting and new entry points into disrupting dominant narratives, they did not happen as frequently nor as deeply as I think was necessary. In this project, I became too focused on making sure we created solid performance pieces for the sharing and that multiple stories and experiences were represented. In the future, I would like to shift our goals to include more in-depth contextualization for the work and engage the participants in conversations around power, privilege, socially constructed identities and systems, whiteness, and how all of these concepts form oppression and continue to marginalize communities of color.

For Research

Moving through my data, I found myself drawn to two ideas that I would like to explore further in future research. First, I would like to engage the audience in research questions pre- and post-performance. While writing this document, I had several hunches about what the audience experienced, but I did not have the data to support or discuss them. I know what I saw as an audience member, but I was explicitly involved in the creative process and read the participants' work through a very specific lens. For future iterations of this project, I am interested in how audience feedback might inform both my understanding and the participants' understanding of the work they created, as well as provide a deeper understanding of if and how performance shapes an audience's knowledge or views about a particular topic. Second, I would engage more critically with my reflections on the process, with a focus on my facilitation as a white female. As I am always aware of my positionality, I see an exciting opportunity in this project to unpack my experience as a facilitator through the lens of whiteness and how that affects my sense of belonging and how I am received in the South Central community. Research tends to focus on the relationship between the facilitator and the participants, but I would be excited to explore how my role as facilitator interacted with my presence in the community.

IN CONCLUSION

In this study I explored and examined an autobiographical devising process intended to bring together counter-storytelling and performance in order to engage youth

participants and audience members in dialogue about social and community change. Through my data analysis, I identified an interaction with and disruption of stereotypes as one of the participants' significant experiences in the project. By illustrating the ways in which youth of color can disrupt and dismantle stereotypes through devising and performance, I hope that more applied theatre facilitators will intentionally engage with counter-storytelling in their work with young people. I argued for the body to be recognized as a significant site of resistance and storytelling and hope that more theatre practitioners intentionally engage critical race theory as not only a research tool, but as an underpinning to their projects. Through this process I learned that not only do young people confront stereotypes on a daily basis through media, they constantly negotiate their own identities in relation to society expectations of them. In this project I witnessed young people of color push against and talk back to the dominant narratives that marginalize them and try to silence their voices. Through the staging of their stories, the participants inserted their voices into the discourse on South Central and youth of color and said to the audience and to society: THIS is who I am; these are OUR stories of L.A.

It's a week before the project performance and a notification pops up on my Facebook feed. I see a personal message from Jalen: "Can this be in the show?" Attached to the message is a monologue titled Ice Pick. So far, Jalen has created beautiful work and I assume that the attached monologue will be worth including. "The whole Ferguson stuff was getting to me, wanted to write about it," he says in the next message. I am now both nervous and excited. I am nervous because I care so deeply for this person and I've seen how much Ferguson has affected him. But I am excited because I know that if anyone can write a piece about it, it'd be Jalen. I open the document and read:

I'm a young black man. The other day a cop car passed by me. My palms started to sweat and my heart started to race. No, I'm not in a gang or violent. Wasn't carrying any illegal substances on me or anything. So why was I scared? Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown. All of these are names I am sure have heard of and let's be honest, maybe some of you here are sick of hearing those names being tossed around so often. "It can't be that hard to be black." "It's not like you are going to get shot by the police." Words that should comfort me I guess but explain to me how am I supposed to believe that when all I see on TV is the death of me. You don't know what it's like to be young and black with different targets on your back. When suddenly the people that swore to protect you are on tv executing people that look like you. To be confined by these walls that this concrete jungle known as the ghetto has built around me, and instead of having a sledgehammer, I'm handed an ice pick. But please don't shed a tear. This is not supposed to be a boohoo story. Cause see I'm currently in film school holding a 4.0 GPA with two jobs. So watch me and watch me closely as I turn this ice pick into a sledgehammer and break free.

Appendix A: *Your View, Our Eyes* Script

Audience Response

JEOVANNIE, JALEN, and CALEB enter and stand center stage, JALEN and CALEB on either side of JEOVANNIE.

JEOVANNIE: Before we start our performance, we'd like to do a little experiment and I need your help to do it. Next to me are two average young men from South LA, who at first glance, look very different from one another. Let's take a look at the young man to my left first.

JEOVANNIE points the audience's attention to CALEB.

JEOVANNIE: Looking at this young man, really take in how he looks. What is he wearing? What is his facial expression saying? What about how he is standing? Now I'm just going to ask you a few simple questions and I'd like you to answer them out loud. No need to raise our hands here; just shout out your answers. Our director will be typing up your answers on the screen. Okay, let's begin.

What words might you hear to describe this man? How do you think others would describe him? *JEOVANNIE repeats back what he's hearing.* What about him might make someone think that? *Have audience name out what it is about his appearance that implies these stereotypes.*

Thank you. Let's turn to the young man on my right. We're going to do the same thing. How do you think others would describe him? *Repeats back what he hears.* What about him might make someone think that? *Have audience name out what it is about his appearance that implies these stereotypes.*

JEOVANNIE reads out loud all of the words on the board for each young man.

So what we have just named out are the different ways young men of color can be stereotyped because of how they look. But here's the important part. These two men you see are the same person.

JALEN and CALEB: If they gunned me down...

JEOVANNIE: Which story do you think they'd tell?

JEOVANNIE, JALEN, and CALEB exit.

Media Collage

A collection of clips from movies and TV generated from group research.

After video ends, JOSE and ERNESTO enter to center stage.

Straight outta Compton

JOSE as the cameraman and ERNESTO as the reporter. ERNESTO stands in front of JOSE with a microphone. JOSE holds a video camera.

JOSE: Okay, you're on in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. *He points to ERNESTO.*

ERNESTO: Welcome to Straight Outta Compton where a terrible tragedy has just happened. A little boy was shot in a drive by, down the street a woman was attacked, over there drug deals are happening. Everywhere you turn, something awful is happening.

RODRIGO as the GANG MEMBER enters wearing a red bandana on his face, holding up a gun and aggressively approaches ERNESTO.

RODRIGO: What the fuck are you white people doing here? This is my fucking hood! Give me your fucking money.

RODRIGO pushes ERNESTO to the ground, who gives him his wallet.

JOSE: Hey why don't you do something productive with your life and get a job?

RODRIGO: This is my fucking job. *He shoots JOSE who drops to the ground. To Ernesto, THIS IS MY HOOD. He exits.*

ERNESTO runs off. JOSE gets up and exits as JEOVANNIE enters.

My City

JEOVANNIE: My city can be dangerous. It's also ghetto as hell. It may be dirty but it's still the shit. You may have an interesting day and make a friend. My city is my home but it random as hell. I guess it's how you portray it.

JEOVANNIE walks to downstage right.

Tour of South Central

JEOVANNIE: Hello, my name is Jeovannie Cabral and I will be your tour guide today to surviving South LA. Today we will be following my friend Terrell throughout his day.

CALEB enters as TERRELL. Terrell today woke up to a college acceptance email.

CALEB is excited. Let's follow Terrell to see what he's doing.

CALEB walks across the stage listening to Tupac Shakur on his phone.

JEOVANNIE: So Terrell is listening to something we call HIP HOP, to a very famous rapper named...Tupac Shakuru? So Terrell meets up with his friend Jamal and they do a very complicated handshake that uses a lot of technique. You have to have some time in the hood for that. *JALEN enters as JAMAL and bumps shoulders with TERRELL. It is not complicated at all.*

JEOVANNIE: So, to pass their time in the hood, they like to play a little game called Craps where they gamble their rent money away. *JALEN and CALEB play craps on the floor.* So they say bye, Terrell has to go home because it's getting late and it's not safe to walk down the street at night in the hood. For example, because of the scenario we're

about to see. *JALEN as JAMAL exits.* Terrell is minding his own business, walking down the street about to tell his mom about his beautiful new career path. And he runs into a gang member. *JALEN enters as GANG MEMBER.* Sometimes, if a gang member wants to know where you're from, he'll say:

GANG MEMBER: Where you from?

And Terrell would say,

CALEB: Hey man, I don't bang man.

And if he don't believe you he'll say,

GANG MEMBER: I don't believe you.

And then that's when you gotta run. *CALEB turns to run.* And if you don't run fast...

JALEN shoots CALEB.

So yeah, have a nice day, survive LA. You can get your complimentary pepper spray on your way out.

JEOVANNIE, JALEN and CALEB exit as ERNESTO enters.

Our Times

ERNESTO: When I was a child, I had dreams of becoming an actor; I was playing outside of my house, with my own imagination. I had gone to different parks and places, spending time with my family in South Los Angeles. I was happy, but there were times that I was scared of going to places. As I was growing up, I have heard shootings, police sirens, and arguments. I was in a park one night where I saw a gangster getting shot several times in the alley. The gangster survived, but I didn't want to go to places at

night. I grew up, and I was playing soccer again with my friends, and one of my friends got punched by a gangster that didn't show up by himself. I honestly wanted to fight back for my friend, but I didn't because I didn't know if he had a weapon on him. We called the cops, and I felt kind of secure. But I was afraid to call the cops because of what I've seen on television about police brutality. In the media I see South Los Angeles like a bad place, in music, in movies. And some stuff is true, but bad things are not the only things that happen in South Los Angeles. There are positive things. There are people giving money to those that are in need; there is happiness within families supporting each other and having great times at special events; and the most important thing is that people have made it far and came from South L.A. Danger is everywhere, not only in South Central, and there is also happiness that we can all express.

ERNESTO exits. ELIAS, JOSE, AND RODRIGO enter.

The Right Thing to Do

(ELIAS as ELIAS, JOSE as SAM, RODRIGO as DJ)

DJ and SAM drive to downstage center.

DJ: So what are you going to get at the store?

SAM: We're just getting some snacks and supplies.

DJ and SAM go into the 99cent store. ELIAS arrives at the parking lot, drops the cash and enters the grocery store. DJ and SAM exit the store and walk to their car.

DJ: Hey, these snacks are really good. It's a good thing we came here.

SAM: I hope they last.

DJ: Not with me around.

SAM: Hey dude! Look! Someone dropped money.

DJ: Really? Where did you find it? What was it at?

SAM: Next to that car.

DJ: How much is it?

SAM: I don't know, let me check. OH SHIT. You're not going to believe me. It's \$600.

DJ: That's a year's worth of granola bars.

SAM: What should we do?

DJ: I don't know man. I got a lot of granola bars on my mind but I think the right thing to do is wait.

15 MINUTES LATER.

DJ: Hey I'm gonna wait for you in the car.

Sam: I'll see you inside.

10 MINUTES LATER.

SAM enters the car.

SAM: You know I think we should just leave. We've been waiting too long.

DJ: Wait, that's a lot of money. Someone wouldn't be carrying it around for no reason.

SAM: You're right. I think we should keep waiting. Let me just step outside.

SAM steps outside the car.

SAM: Fuck! That's a lot of money. I could do a lot with that. On the other hand, I don't know if I can live with it having it on my conscious. *He kneels down to pray.* Dear God,

DJ and I just found \$600. I'm very confused about what to do with it. I really want to take it but I'm not that kind of person. I mean, if I drop that kind of money, I would want someone to return it to me. Please God, I'm gonna wait five more minutes, but if no one shows up, I'm gonna leave.

Scene shifts to the grocery store.

CASHIER: Ok, your total is \$86.

ELIAS: Ok. *He reaches into his pocket and begins to panic.*

CASHIER: Is everything ok sir?

ELIAS: No, I can't find my money. Let me just go look outside real quick. I'll be right back.

ELIAS goes back to the parking lot and begins to look around, panicking.

SAM: Sir are you looking for something?

ELIAS: Yes, I've lost my money. I had the money for the food and half of my rent. I've lost my hard earned money.

SAM: How much was it?

ELIAS: It was around \$600.

SAM: I think I found your money sir. You dropped it next to our car.

ELIAS: Thank you so much.

They shake hands and hug.

END SCENE.

ELIAS, JOSE, RODRIGO, and ERNESTO exit.

South Central Machine

CRISTIAN, ELIAS, JOSE, JALEN, ERNESTO, DERJUAN and RODRIGO enter. CRISTIAN stands downstage left. The others get into position as the machine. RODRIGO: craps. ERNESTO: graffiti. JALEN: beer. JOSE: smoking. DERJUAN: gun.

CRISTIAN: Have you ever wanted to become a gangbanger but don't know how? Are you bored at home in your small town in Minnesota and have dreams of being from the hood? Well this is the perfect product for you! This machine will help you become the ideal thug of South Central. Let's see how it works! *He turns the machine on.*

CALEB enters as a small child and goes through each station of the machine, mimicking each person and receiving a token. As he exits the machine, he walks to downstage center and acts out each learned behavior.

CRISTIAN: Thanks for joining us! Only \$19.99 and you're a real deal gangster!

JALEN steps forward and the rest exit.

Ice pick

JALEN: I'm a young black man. The other day a cop car passed by me. My palms started to sweat and my heart started to race. No, I'm not in a gang or violent. Wasn't carrying any illegal substances on me or anything. So why was I scared? Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown. All of these are names I am sure have heard of and let's be honest, maybe some of you here are sick of hearing those names being tossed around so often. "It can't be that hard to be black." "It's not like you are going to get shot by the police."

Words that should comfort me I guess but explain to me how am I supposed to believe

that when all I see on TV is the death of me. You don't know what it's like to be young and black with different targets on your back. When suddenly the people that swore to protect you are on tv executing people that look like you. To be confined by these walls that this concrete jungle known as the ghetto has build around me, and instead of having a sledgehammer, I'm handed an ice pick. But please don't shed a tear. This is not supposed to be a boohoo story. Cause see I'm currently in film school holding a 4.0 GPA with two jobs. So watch me and watch me closely as I turn this ice pick into a sledgehammer and break free.

CRISTIAN, JENNIFER, and MARIA enter as JALEN exits.

Hungry veteran

RODRIGO: It was a Wednesday when my friend Jose, my brother Ernesto and I wanted to eat. Across the street from Ascot Library there is a restaurant "Golden Ox." That's where we decided to eat. We ordered a family pack which comes with 4 hamburgers, 4 fries, and 4 sodas. There were four combos but it was only 3 of us. So we ate, had a good time talking and sharing different conversations. We were all full; the extra combo did not fit into our bellies. As we were deciding who was going to take the extra combo home, we took a look outside the window. It was a man that had a look of hope that was lost; nobody paid attention. We saw the man holding a poster that said: "Navy veteran need food." We right away knew what to do. We got a bag to go, packed up the extra combo and gave it to the man. The man was really happy. He said "you are really nice thanks for the food." The look on his face said a lot. His face changed from sad to happy,

his eyes from dry to watery from happiness even his posture changed from leaned over to standing up straight. He knew that there are people out there that care.

RODRIGO exits as CRISTIAN enters.

Dreams

CRISTIAN: What are dreams you ask? Dreams are things you want to become or you want to accomplish. My dream is to become a detective in New York but there are always negative people that say “you live in south LA you will never make it.” It doesn’t matter where you live or where you come from it matters how hard you work and the effort you put in. Hard work will get you to the places you want and you can proof people wrong. There are famous people who come from South LA that made to the top. This is not my only dream, I also want to be able to buy things for my mom that she never had. I want to prove to my mom that I can make my dreams come true, and that she did too much for me already and now its my turn to give her what she deserves. My biggest dream is to live in New York with my partner and wake up everyday doing what I love, solving crimes that aren’t solved. People will think that my dreams are worth nothing because of the place I live but have you ever thought that everyone that lives is different, that they have dreams like all the people in the world and we can also make a change. I’m going to accomplish my dreams by graduating from high school and going on to college, working hard to get where I want to. Believe in yourself and you will accomplish anything you put your mind too. People will always give you negative comments but you got to use those

comments to get stronger and continue on your road to success, they will stay behind and see you achieve. This is my dream!!!!

CRISTIAN exits.

Dangerous, Uneducated, and a Criminal

VOICE: South Central? Isn't everyone there really dangerous? Like, it would NOT be safe for ME to go there, right?

Everyone enters and finds their first position.

CRISTIAN:

CALEB: Oh really though?

JENNIVER: I don't understand.

JALEN: Glasses. Really?

DERJUAN: Try me.

ELIAS: Why?

JEOVANNIE: That's disappointing.

MARIA: Ha. Sure.

ERNESTO: Feeling guilty.

RODRIGO: Not at all.

JOSE: Really?

VOICE: But they're super uneducated. They don't graduate high school; they'll never go to college.

Actors move to their next positions.

DERJUAN: Malcolm X.

JENNIFER: You don't know me.

ELIAS: We'll see about that.

JEOVANNIE: Ugh. *Waves hand "no."*

ERNESTO: *Laughing.* That's funny.

JOSE: I go to school.

JALEN: My GPA begs to differ.

CRISTIAN: I guess. *Shrugs.*

CALEB: That's not what my diploma says.

RODRIGO: I am in college.

MARIA: College student and a good job.

VOICE: But they're all criminals. I hear that everyone there is a criminal.

Actors move to final positions.

ELIAS: That's not true.

CALEB: Why me?

JEOVANNIE: Are you serious?

ERNESTO: I'm not a criminal.

RODRIGO: I believe in him.

JOSE: No. That's what you think.

JALEN: Do I look like a criminal to you?

JENNIFER: Are you stupid?

CRISTIAN: Look at me.

MARIA: Seriously? High School diploma.

DERJUAN: Fuck. You.

DERJUAN steps forward. When he begins to speak, all others exit.

Broken record

DERJUAN: I'm just living in reality

Trying to make it to my dreams

Because I feel like acting is my destiny

You see I'm coming from a place where terror run the streets

Whenever you walk outside you don't know if it's gonna be the last time you breathe

Now everybody's wish is to die in their sleep

So they won't have to feel pain nor suffering

But living in south central la everything's not all great

But it's not all bad either

Some of the most successful people came from our area
Snoop dog, the Williams sisters, nick young, ice cube, the game, and a man who just
became a billionaire Dr. Dre
Now of course paving the way wasn't as easy as baking a cake but they did what they had
to do to get to a better place
And now they put they gangbangin days away to make sure their family straight
The la riots had a key message
Even what's going on in Ferguson
Another innocent life being killed
The more we try to heal the more it seems like we fail
And they don't want us to protest for what we believe in
We just are supposed to pretend I guess put a blindfold over my eyes and try to disguise
the lies they tell us everyday on channel 9 and everything will be fine
I'm sick of seeing mothers of our color cry
Mike Brown the latest victim
Sounds like a broken record Huh
Well that's the same goddamn disc we been to listening to over the past years
Its a shame we gotta live in our own city in fear
I'm guessing they think we're deaf
Or we just supposed to move on to the next
Good luck with that because I'm not stopping till we are at rest

DERJUAN exits as JEOVANNIE enters.

Sandpaper

JEOVANNIE: I guess you can say I did have a tough life here in L.A. but it wasn't because of criminal activity or the way I was raised. It was because of ignorant people who just wanted to mess with me. I was bullied; I'm gay if you can't tell. Everyday was challenging for me, I had to be careful going and coming from school. I was always afraid of bumping into my tormentors. I never really got a break; this was a daily routine. I once was chased into a liquor store close by, I was beat up and left there. They didn't care, they did it front of my little brothers. Also they once even threw a chair and it landed on my head. I never made this known to anybody. I was kicked out of school. So I was left with the new school-new you attitude. I grew a thicker skin and I promise myself to never let anyone bring me down.

And I learned that it's those precise moments that make us who we are.

There's a quote I would like to share;

"When life makes you have to put up with mean and hateful people, just think of them as sandpaper. They may scratch you or rub you the wrong way but eventually you'll end up smooth and polished. And the sandpaper? It's just going to be worn out and ugly."

JEOVANNIE exits and all other actors enter.

Me Machine

Actors take their positions. RODRIGO and JOSE stand ready to throw a football.

JENNIFER read to garden. DERJUAN ready to bow. JALEN ready to draw. CALEB ready to play the drums. ERNESTO and ELIAS ready to play video games. MARIA ready to cook. CRISTIAN stands downstage left to address the audience.

CRISTIAN: Welcome again. We just got a very exciting new product to share with you.

This machine will remind you all of the moments that define you. If you want to remember all the moments and people that have made you who you are, this is the product for you. Let's see how it works! *He turns the machine on.*

Actors in the machine begin their sounds and movements. After a few moments, CRISTIAN turns the machine off.

CRISTIAN: Lucky for you, this machine is free and anyone can have one.

CALEB steps forward as all others exit.

The Boy

CALEB: It's a normal Saturday, cartoons and cereal for the young boy. Hours pass before the boy hears constant screaming and yelling. He opens his door and enters the living room. The young boy walks in on his dad shaking his mother while the grandmother, brothers, and sister try to pull him off of her. The dad sees the young boy staring at him with fear, then soon lets go of her and walks out of the house, never seen again. This is a typical South Central day for most of his friends. Since that day, he promised himself to never be anything like his father. His three laws were: 1. Always

respect women, they have it hard as it is. 2. Family is everything; don't ever let anyone harm them. 3. Get an education and treat his mom to everything she never had. He has since then grown up and is doing pretty well for himself. He was the first person in his family to graduate high school and his going to college. He has 2 jobs is able to treat his mom the best he can. That moment forever changed his life, not every moment in South Central has every bad outcome. South Central has its disadvantages, but no matter what your surroundings, you can still make something out of yourself.

ERNESTO and CRISTIAN join CALEB on stage.

Family is...

CRISTIAN: Family is love.

ERNESTO and CALEB run in slow motion towards each other into a hug.

CALEB: Family is important.

ERNESTO is crouched on the ground, sad. CRISTIAN comforts him.

CALEB: It's comfortable and compassion.

ERNESTO: Family is arguing and headache.

CALEB pantomimes shouting at CRISTIAN while he covers his ears.

CALEB: Family is fight and protect.

ERNESTO aggressively approaches CRISTIAN.

ERNESTO: Hey where you from? *CRISTIAN tries to get away. ERNESTO grabs his arm.* Where you from? I'm talking to you! *CALEB enters and approaches ERNESTO.*

CALEB: Get off my brother, man.

ERNESTO: What are you gonna do about it?

CALEB punches ERNESTO.

CRISTIAN: Family is support, forever, and strength.

ERNESTO: Caleb Stoneham.

CALEB stands next to ERNESTO, holding up his diploma and shakes his hand. They pose for a photo. CRISTIAN holds up a sign that says "CONGRATS SON!"

They exit. MARIA enters.

Spring Breeze

MARY: Today, I remembered... Today, I went back to the place that I was already forgetting. Tears, sadness and compassion were seen in my eyes. I felt a little puzzled going back to the beautiful spring breeze. Windows open, kitchen counter filled with all-purpose flour and milk. The smell of chocolate mint cookies in the air. The sink full of dishes that I knew I had to wash before my mom came in and started to scream about what a mess the house is, when technically it was only the kitchen. My cousin laughing at the fact that even the cat had flour in his face. Milk spilled on the floor and eggshells on the table. Today, I remembered joy, family, and my cousin. Her kindness, love, and most importantly, her presence. Even though she's not here today, even though I know she's in a better place, I miss her. And I know she knows she's not forgotten. Because she might be gone, but her dreams and goals remain with me. I love you Karen.

MARIA exits as ELIAS enters.

Help me out

ELIAS: Me and my family were heading back home on a Saturday afternoon from the park. My dad decided to take us to eat Chinese food. When he parked the car we saw that the restaurant was full. But we also noticed a man outside with tattered clothes in a yellow rain jacket. The man did not look particularly clean. But what stood out to us is that he was looking for leftover food inside a trash can right outside of the restaurant's door. The man looked really hungry; it was evident he had not eaten a proper meal in days. We all felt sorry for his struggle. But in a spontaneous flash, without warning, our dad was already outside near the hungry man. We were still observing and having empathy for the man from inside the car. We saw our dad put his hand on the hungry man's shoulder and said a few words. We could not hear what he said, but in the following moment, I saw my dad entering the restaurant with the hungry man. I got out of the car and followed inside. I noticed that my dad paid for a full meal for the hungry man's choice. After we got our meal we sat down. We noticed the hungry man sat a few tables down. That was when my heart felt warm. I noticed the man was praying for his meal. There is where I noticed, with almost tearing eyes, a pure act of kindness.

DERJUAN, JALEN, and RODRIGO join ELIAS on stage.

Home is...

DERJUAN: Home is where the heart is.

ELIAS, JALEN, and RODRIGO laugh as if watching TV.

DERJUAN: But home can also be where the drama takes place.

ELIAS and RODRIGO silently argue while JALEN covers his ears.

DERJUAN: Home is where some of your finest memories are created.

DERJUAN stands in front of the screen while ELIAS pantomimes marking his height.

RODRIGO holds a sign that says 2001. JALEN replaces DERJUAN and the new height is "marked." RODRIGO holds a sign that says 2014.

DERJUAN: Home is where you feel comfortable.

DERJUAN takes off his shoes and sits down on the floor. The other 3 make joking faces as if it smells.

DERJUAN: Home is also where you feel at peace.

All 4 actors hold up peace signs.

Our home.

DERJUAN: Our home is the Staples center.

ELIAS: Our home is friendship.

JALEN: Our home is sanctuary.

RODRIGO: Our home is family.

The rest of the cast enters one-by-one.

ERNESTO: Our home is memories.

CALEB: Our home is the ghetto.

CRISTIAN: Our home is forever.

JOSE: Our home is the people I grew up with.

MARY: Our home is my parents' unconditional love and support.

JENNIFER: Our home is a place where you cherish one another.

JEOVANNIE: Our home is our home.

END OF PLAY.

Appendix B: Sample Session Plan: First Day

First Session, August 4th 2014
Los Angeles, CA

Today's Focus: Who are we? What messages do we hear about who we are?

6:00-6:20 Warmup and Group Check-in

Thumb Check In (5 minutes)

We're going to start each session with a thumb check in so that we can let the group know how each of us feeling and what energy we're bringing into the work. We're going to use our thumbs to gauge how we're feeling. So a thumbs up is the best you can be and thumbs down is the worst you can be. Using your thumb, how are you feeling today? Group puts their thumbs up. Take a look around the circle. Think about what you can do today to make someone's day better. If you see someone with their thumb down, rub shoulders with them a little more today and give them some extra love.

Hey! (5 minutes)

We're going to do a quick warm up to get our bodies moving and get us back into the space together! If I am the one starting, I will make eye contact with someone, go towards them, and together we will jump and double high five while saying, "Hey!" Any questions? Let's try it out.

Begin with walking. Then move to moving more quickly across the circle. Once group has the activity down, move into two or three rounds going on at the same time.

Finish game, *Great! Why do you think it's important for us to start with a game like this? What does this offer us as an ensemble?*

Transition: *Seeing as I have been in Texas these last few years, we're going to play another game called Yee Haw!*

Yee-Haw! (10 minutes)

So there are different actions to help move this game along. The first is sent around the circle. This one is Yee-Haw! and you bend your arm and send it towards the person to your left. Model Yee-Haw. If you want to keep sending this action around the circle, you just keep sending it in the same direction. Practice sending Yee-Haw around the circle. If you want to change the direction, you say Hoe Down, as you pull your arms up and bend

your knees. Model Hoe Down and practice sending Yee-Haw and Hoe Down around the circle. If you want to have the energy go in the same direction but make it skip a person, put your arms above your head like a roof and say Hay Barn. Model Hay Barn and play with the three actions around the circle. If you want to send the energy across the circle, point to someone across from you and say Gungslinger! Model Gungslinger and practice the four actions around the circle. The final action you can do is Rattlesnake. If I were to send Rattlesnack, I would act as if I'm sending something underneath the feet of a person next to me. The whole group will jump as if a snake is being sent under their feet in a circle. As the sender, I am the last person to jump and the next person starts a new pattern. Model Rattlesnake and play game with all of the actions.

Once group has played game successfully for a few rounds, what does this game ask you to do? Why might we play this at the beginning of a devising process? What was your job as an individual? What was your job as a part of the group?

Transition: Thank you for playing those two games with me! We are going to sit in a circle and spend about 10 minutes talking about the project and what it will entail.

Group Discussion (10 minutes)

- We will work for two weeks and then spend the final week putting our performance together and rehearsing for the final sharing.
- As we discussed when we met to talk through the consent forms, we are going to be exploring how South Central is shown in media and then explore your own stories and experiences of growing up here.
- I am going to be leading you through a variety of activities to create different performative pieces for the performance.
- Journals: these are for writing down any reflections during or after each session, for any research we do during the project, and for writing down any monologues or scenes that you come up with.
- Discussion about expectations and conduct: *What are some rules or guidelines we might create for our work together? What are words that describe the ways we as an ensemble should behave and treat each other?* Scribe on a large post-it.

Transition: We are going to start today by exploring how you think of yourselves and how others think about you.

Role on the Wall (20 minutes)

Group Role on the Wall:

Put up large post-it with a drawn figure.

As a group we create a role on the wall for an 18 year old, maybe someone who is trying to figure out their future. Let's start with what's going on inside of this person. What are they thinking? What feelings might be experiencing? What do they want? What are their dreams? Scribe ideas on the inside of the figure.

Now let's think about what's going on outside of this person. What are the things they are hearing from other people? Movies? Tv shows? What might be happening that is affecting this person? Are there any other messages being given to this person? Is there anyone supporting this person? What might they be saying? Is there anyone really causing problems for this person? What might they be saying? Scribe words and phrases on the outside of the figure.

Now let's connect what's going on inside with what's going on outside. Draw lines between what things on the outside might be affecting or causing what's happening on the inside.

Transition: Now that we've done this activity as a group and have thought through together what a young person might be experiencing, you are going to create your own role on the wall.

Individual Role on the Wall:

Participants will create a role on the wall for themselves (without their names).

Gallery Walk (5 minutes)

Papers are placed in a circle and the group walks around them spending a few moments taking in what each person wrote.

What words are sticking out to you? What do we notice about what the group has written? Are there any similarities? Are there any differences? What does this tell us about our group and what people your age might be going through?

Story Generating with partners (5 minutes)

First pick a role that is not yours, and find a space in the room. Read through what the person has written and choose a word or phrase that resonates with you. Think of a story inspired by that word or phrase. Join the person closest to you and you will take 2 minutes each to share your story with your partner.

Short Devising (10 minutes)

With your partner, you can choose to focus on one story, or if your stories are similar, combine the two into one. Before we start creating short performance pieces, discuss with your partner what stands out from each of the stories and what you want to focus on. Why is the story important to share out? To share out the stories with the group, we are going to create short performance pieces.

Requirements:

No longer than a minute
At least 1 frozen image
At least 1 line of text
1 moment of repetition

Sharing Out (10 minutes)

Each pair shares their short devised pieces with the larger group. After each pair:
Popcorn out an imagine or a moment that stuck out to you.

Reflection (15 minutes)

Thank you for all of your work today and your willingness to jump right in. We are going to end by reflecting in your journals.

Give 5 minutes to respond to each prompt:

“Something that surprised me...”

“One thing that was difficult...”

“I am excited to...”

Finish with passing out of consent forms to anyone who still needs one, cleaning up the space, and going over the time for the next session.

Bibliography

- Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "The Danger of a Single Story." TED. July 2009. Lecture.
- Bell, Lee Anne. *Storytelling for Social Justice: Connecting Narrative and the Arts in Antiracist Teaching*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.
- Berg, Charles Ramirez. *Latino images in film: stereotypes, subversion, resistance*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001. Print.
- Boal, Augusto. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. London: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Caleb. Student Journal. 6 Aug. 2014.
- Caleb. Reflection. 23 Aug. 2014. Audio recording.
- Crane, Susan A. "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory." *The American Historical Review* 102.5 (1997): 1372-1385. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Jan. 2013.
- Criminal. Photograph. 11 Aug. 2014
- Cris. Student Journal. 6 Aug. 2014.
- Delgado, Richard. "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative." *Michigan Law Review* 87.8 Legal Storytelling (1989): 2411-2441. *JSTOR*. Web. 03 Mar. 2015.
- Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press, 2012. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*. Web. 21 Apr. 2015.
- Derjuan. Reflection. 23 Aug. 2014. Audio recording.

- Drama for Schools. "Poster Dialogue." *Drama-Based Instruction*. University of Texas at Austin, n.d. Web. 05 Apr. 2015.
- . "Yee Haw." *Drama-Based Instruction*. University of Texas at Austin, n.d. Web. 05 Apr. 2015.
- Erikson, Erik. *Youth, Identity, and Crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1968. Print.
- Fisher, Celeste A. *Black on Black: Urban Youth Films and the Multicultural Audience*. Panham: Scarecrow, 2006. Print.
- Ginwright, Shawn and Julio Cammarota. "New Terrain in Youth Development: The Promise of a Social Justice Approach." *Social Justice* 29.4 (2002): 82-95.
- Giroux, Henry A. *Youth in a Suspect Society: Democracy or Disposability?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.
- Green, Anna. "Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates." *Oral History* 32.2, Memory and Society (2004): 35-44. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 Jan. 2013.
- Heddon, Deirdre. *Autobiography and Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.
- Hesford, Wendy S. *Framing Identities: Autobiography and the Politics of Pedagogy*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1999. Print.
- Hirsch, Marianne and Valerie Smith. "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction." *Signs* 28.1, Gender and Cultural Memory (2002): 1-19. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 Jan. 2013.

hooks, bell. *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Print.

Ice Cube. "How to Survive in South Central." *Death Certificate*. Priority Records, 1991.

MP3.

Jalen. Reflection. 23 Aug. 2014. Audio recording.

Jeovannie. Reflection. 23 Aug. 2014. Audio recording.

Jolles, Marjorie. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* by Kelly Oliver. *SubStance* 34.2 Issue 107 (2005): 146-153. *University of Wisconsin Press*. Web. 01 May 2015.

Lamar, Kendrick. "Black Boy Fly." *Good Kid, M.A.A.D. City*. Dr. Dre, 2012. MP3.

---. "Compton." *Good Kid, M.A.A.D. City*. Dr. Dre, 2012. MP3.

Langellier, Kristin M. "Personal Narratives: Perspectives on Theory and Research." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 9 (1989): 243-276. *Taylor and Francis Online*. 05 Jun. 2009. Web. 06 Mar. 2014.

Marx, Sherry. "Critical Race Theory." *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* 1 (2008): 163-167. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 26 Apr. 2013.

N.A. *Your View, Our Eyes*. 23 Aug. 2014. Print.

NAACP. "Criminal Justice Fact Sheet." *NAACP*, n.d. Web. 05 Apr. 2015.

Nevels, Megan. Journal Reflection #4. 06 Aug. 2014.

Nevels, Megan. Journal Reflection #6. 12 Aug. 2014.

- Nicholson, Helen. "Re-Locating Memory: Performance, reminiscence and communities of diaspora," in *The Applied Theatre Reader*. Ed. Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston. New York: Routledge, 2009. Print.
- Norris, Joe. *Playbuilding as Qualitative Research: A Participatory Arts-Based Approach*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast, 2009. Print.
- Oddey, Allison. *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Perry, Mia. "Theatre and Knowing: Considering the Pedagogical Spaces in Devised Theatre." *Youth Theatre Journal* 25.1 (2011): 63-74. *Taylor and Francis Online*. Routledge, 25 Apr. 2011. Web. 22 Feb. 2014.
- Ridley, John. "'Boyz N The Hood' Rings out, 20 Years Later." *NPR*. NPR, 8 July 2011. Web. 10. Apr. 2014.
- Rolón-Dow, Rosalie. "Race(ing) stories: digital storytelling as a tool for critical race scholarship." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 14.2 (2011): 159-173. *Taylor and Francis Online*. Routledge, 25 Jan. 2011. Web.
- Silverman, Rachel E. "Stereotypes." *Encyclopedia of Gender in Media*. Ed. Mary Kosut. Los Angeles: Sage Reference, 2012. 372-375. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 05 Mar. 2015.
- Yosso, Tara J. *Critical Race Counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano Educational Pipeline*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Zamudio, Margaret M., Caskey Russell, Francisco A. Rios, and Jacquelyn L. Bridgeman.

Critical Race Theory: Education and Ideology. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Vita

Megan Nevels holds a B.A. in Theatre with an emphasis in performance from Pitzer College in Claremont, CA. Megan holds a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree in Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities. She has been a featured playwright and spoken word artist at various festivals and events in Los Angeles, Claremont, and in Durban and Cape Town while studying abroad in South Africa. Megan has worked as the Coordinator for ActOne, UCLA's summer youth acting program, as well as a teaching artist throughout the Los Angeles area and at ZACH Theatre in Austin, TX. For over ten years, she has engaged with people of all ages in theatre and creative writing workshops and camps. Most recently, as an applied theatre practitioner, Megan led programs in schools, public libraries, museums, and juvenile justice centers. Her work focuses on the power of theatre, storytelling, and creative writing in cultivating lasting and sustainable social justice and change. Megan currently lives in Los Angeles, CA and is the Associate Educator of Teacher Programs at the Skirball Cultural Center and Museum, where she develops and leads professional development programs in arts integration for classroom teachers.

Permanent email: megan.nevels@gmail.com

This thesis was typed by Megan Anne Nevels.