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I

An Overview of the Study

SELF-STUDY: The Effect of a Season of Shakespeare in Prison

What is Shakespeare in Prison?

Founded in 2012, Shakespeare in Prison (SIP) is a prison arts program operating within Detroit Public Theatre, a nonprofit professional theatre company. Twice a week for forty weeks, facilitators from SIP meet for two and a half hours with a group of people incarcerated at Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility (WHV), in Ypsilanti, Michigan. During this time, from September to June, the ensemble (defined to include both incarcerated members and facilitators) reads, discusses, rehearses, and performs one play by William Shakespeare, then breaks for twelve weeks in the summer. The ensemble meets in the auditorium in the WHV programs building, which has a traditional, proscenium-style stage, and in classrooms when the auditorium is unavailable.

SIP is self-supporting and funded by grants and donations. The program's staff has grown from a single facilitator working with no stipend to as many as eight facilitators, including a full-time Director and a part-time Assistant Director. In 2017, SIP expanded to Parnall Correctional Facility (SMT), a men's prison in Jackson, Michigan, and, in 2017 and 2018, ran workshops in youth facilities in Monroe, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties. In 2018, SIP began the pilot of a post-release program, Shakespeare Reclaimed, for alumni of the program who are no longer incarcerated.

The stated mission of SIP is to "empower incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people to reconnect with their humanity and that of others; to reflect on their past, present, and future;

and to gain the confidence, self-esteem, and crucial skills they need to heal and positively impact their communities." More information can be found at Detroit Public Theatre's website.

The Purpose of the Study.

We set out in 2016 to explore and document measurable outcomes for SIP, focusing on accurately and rigorously describing the actual work that goes on in the ensemble, rather than relying on downstream consequences or side effects as the only measures of success. Additionally, we wanted our data to come verbatim from participants as much as possible, mitigating our natural biases as facilitators and members of the ensemble.

The Question.

At the core of the study was our frustration with the limited metrics and vocabulary for discussing our work—the process, its effect, and its value—within the context of prison arts programs. Our research centered around a single question, which reflects our attempt to fill that gap.

How does one season of Shakespeare in Prison impact the ensemble member's sense of identity in the correctional context?

The Study.

During the 2016-2017 season, the SIP ensemble tackled *Richard III*, one of Shakespeare's history plays. Loosely based on actual events in late 15th century England, *Richard III* follows its titular character as he lies, schemes, and murders his way to the throne. As the play's other characters fall for Richard's many ruses, Shakespeare paints an uncompromising picture of the ease with which some manipulate, and the ways in which others are manipulated; themes that go to the very heart of the challenges many incarcerated people face.

Facilitators conducted all data collection, research, and analysis with guidance from a number of professionals well-versed in fields including theatre, psychology, sociology, and criminal justice.

This document describes our theoretical framework, works chronologically through the 2016-2017 season, profiles three women whose identity development was both representative and well-documented, and offers some conclusions and suggestions for further research.

We also hope that this study begins to define a language of value for prison arts programs. We have only just begun to answer our own questions in a satisfying way, and there is ample room for further study.

II

The Framework of the Study

THE TWOFOLD PROCESS OF SIP: Theatrical and Operational

At the outset of the study, we posited that there are two different but interconnected processes at work during a season of Shakespeare in Prison: the *theatrical* process and the *operational* process. Though we believed we had observed these processes at work in previous seasons, we did not know the frequency or depth with which they occurred, the specific interplay between the two, or how they could be documented and organized into a working model of the program.

The theatrical process arises from the performative, literary, and analytical part of the program. It includes analysis of the text and characters, creation of the imaginary world of the play, identification with characters and situations in the text, identification with other ensemble members' interpretations, and everything else that is related specifically to stagecraft, performance, and intellectual/emotional inquiry based on the text. Put another way, the theatrical process includes the things that give SIP its *specific* character, different from a hypothetical, generic support group with a hypothetical, generic collaborative project to complete.

The operational process, by contrast, arises specifically from membership in the ensemble and collaboration with other members. It includes perseverance, conflict management, supporting other members, identifying with other members, attending meetings, collaborating within the ensemble, overcoming the fear of performing in front of peers, and meeting the challenge of memorizing lines and learning stage movement.

The two processes affect one another and act together differently on different people *at the same time*—while one member is sharing a moment of deep, personal identification with a character in the play (theatrical), another member may share that she found the first woman's vulnerability compelling and her honesty brave (operational), and still another might reflect in her journal that she felt connected in that moment both to the character (theatrical) *and* to the woman who shared a personal anecdote or revelation (operational). We assume that some admixture of these processes is operating at all times.[1]

MEASURING PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT: Narrative Identity and Turning Points

One of the primary motivations for undertaking this study was to rigorously define and measure the *direct* impact of participation in SIP on the personal growth of individual members.[2] To do this, we needed to start looking for existing theoretical models in the branch of psychology called identity development.

It is perhaps self-evident that a program based in prison would be deeply concerned with questions of identity: Who am I? What am I? Where have I been? Where am I going? With whom and what do I identify? Was my crime an aberration or a natural part of my life? What

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[1] We have further divided these processes into subcategories for specificity; in the interest of brevity, they are not detailed here. Several examples are included in Appendix C. More information is available on request.

[2] That is, the primary effects, like personal growth, as opposed to the important downstream results of those effects, like a reduction in disciplinary infractions or a low recidivism rate.

A Note on Recidivism

Recidivism is a vitally significant metric for assessing the work of any group in a prison, and SIP has tracked it carefully for years. But looking at recidivism alone also paints an incomplete picture of the program's effects. Its binary nature obscures context and individual considerations. Recidivism indicates nothing about *why* or *how* a person returned (or managed not to return) to prison. And recidivism rates are silent about ensemble members serving lengthy sentences, especially life—if they are in prison, they cannot recidivate—so another metric is needed to describe their experiences. Participants' recidivism rate will continue to be one of the primary measures of SIP's success, but this study focuses on illuminating the direct impact of SIP on its members.

(good/bad/neither) am I capable of? For our purposes, the answers to these questions, taken together, create an ensemble member's identity.

The theory of *narrative identity* describes this process well. Narrative identity theory conceives of a person's identity in terms of how that person interprets her memories in the telling of a story. In a 2013 article in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Dan McAdams and Kate McLean outline the idea: "Narrative identity reconstructs the autobiographical past… in such a way as to provide a person's life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning." The development of narrative identity, they go on to say, derives from the human instinct for making meaning out of stories: a person gives more weight to some memories and less to others, invests some memories with negative meaning and some with positive meaning, and in refining their ability to *tell* those stories, can begin to alter their narrative identity.[3]

This process is not isolated to memories. Each person similarly interprets her present circumstances and her visualizations of the future, imbuing not only the past but the present and future with meaning. According to the theory of narrative identity, these interpretations define a person; in aggregate, they create a sense of capability and incapability, agency or powerlessness, self-worth or worthlessness. McAdams and McLean put it simply: "Through narrative identity, people convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where their lives may be going in the future." In other words, people *are* the story they tell about themselves.[4]

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[3] McAdams, D. P., & McLean, K. C. (2013). Narrative identity. Current Directions in Psychological Science,22(3), 233–238. doi:10.1177/0963721413475622

[4] This entire section, by necessity, is written in grossly simplified terms. A fuller accounting of our theoretical framework, with bibliography, is available for the reader inclined to delve into it.

These stories can change, and how and why they change is central to describing the effect of participation in SIP. Narrative identity naturally evolves over time, as a person goes through life and makes new memories, but researchers describe moments when a memory rapidly undergoes reevaluation. A once-positive memory can suddenly be recast in a painful light; a formerly unimportant memory can take on unexpected meaning. These moments of reorientation are often called *turning points*, especially when a person takes negative or traumatic memories and reorients them to be positive and empowering. Significantly, turning points can cause a reinterpretation not only of the affected memory, but of a person's present circumstances and envisioned future; therefore, the turning point can take on greater significance than the memory itself. It is through turning points that a person's entire narrative identity can shift rapidly and substantially: if people are the story they tell about themselves, then changing that story quite literally changes their *selves*.

This study hypothesizes that participation in SIP—through both theatrical and operational processes—provides participants with extraordinary opportunities to initiate positive turning points and that those turning points occur frequently for a large proportion of SIP members. The study tracks narrative identity development with a particular emphasis on the turning points throughout the season. It pays particular attention to the explicit and implicit development of narratives that emphasize empowerment and connection in favor of disempowerment and alienation.

THE RING: The Operational Process and Narrative Identity

The operational process is a powerful force driving narrative identity development in SIP. Through it, participants forge empathetic connections with other ensemble members, discover abilities that help them recast themselves in empowering terms, and develop a sense of responsibility to and ownership of the ensemble—all of which extend to include their identities beyond their membership in this program.

One of the program's prime directives is to create a strong sense of emotional and physical safety in the ensemble, embodied in the symbolic ring of positive energy that participants conjure at the opening of every session and dispel at the close. A strong, empathetic connection between members is both a driver of this safety and a result of it. They open up about themselves, sometimes in ways that have not felt safe in other contexts, and they often vocally identify with other members' experiences. All the while, they are literally telling and retelling their own stories, and others in the ensemble may help them reinterpret their own lives and circumstances. "I don't see you that way," is a common response to an expression of brokenness or low self-worth.

At its best, the ensemble also helps its members discover and define themselves by their strengths. Participants often say things like, "This is the first time (or the first time in a long time) that I've felt good at something," or, "Why don't you do this task? You're really good at it." Over time, many members begin to redefine themselves along those lines: as a director, a playwright, a master of logistics, or simply as "smart." On an even more basic level, participants can alter their narrative identities simply because of having overcome the operational challenges that face everyone in the group: reading a 400-year-old play, memorizing dozens or hundreds of

lines, committing to a nine-month collaboration with twenty other people, and, finally, performing in front of a crowd. “If I can do that,” members frequently reflect, “what else can I do?”

And for many participants, identifying strongly as a member of SIP is itself a turning point. We pay close attention to participants’ sense of ownership and assumption of responsibility for the ensemble. This manifests in many ways, from sacrificing personal desires for the ensemble’s benefit (“I really wanted to go to an event, but this is important to me”) to protecting the group’s integrity (“It makes me mad that some people don’t take this seriously”).

THE STAGE: The Theatrical Process and Narrative Identity

There are many ways one could approach narrative identity development. Indeed, there are several other programs in prison that take direct approaches to SIP’s stated goals: therapy, creative writing workshops, support/aid groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, core Michigan Department of Corrections programs like Beyond Violence, and others. SIP necessarily differs from some groups for the simple reason that facilitators are not therapists or social workers. But a crucial difference between SIP and those programs is analytical interpretation of *someone else’s* story, which is intrinsic to the study of literature, and empathetic identification with *someone else’s* characters and situations, which is intrinsic to theatrical performance. But, one might ask, how do those facts help identity development? How could living with someone else’s story help a person tell her own story?

To answer the question, we turn to a branch of literary theory developed in the 1960s that helps bridge the gap between the literary analysis SIP members do and the identity development

they demonstrate. Reader Response Theory approaches literature with the assumption that each reader will understand each text differently because of her own perspective and identity. This foundational concept is central to the way SIP approaches Shakespeare's plays: not as rarified works of high culture, but as something that anyone can access, interpret, and enjoy.

In fact, the implications of Reader Response Theory for SIP go beyond the plays themselves. The theory tends to define "text" broadly, including not only literature and other written material, but any subject matter that someone might interpret. Certainly, reading and discussing Shakespeare's *Richard III* is an act of textual interpretation, but, according to the theory, so is watching and responding to another ensemble member's performance or conceptualizing a costume based on a character's personality (since clothing can be interpreted just like a book). McLean also wrote that hearing others' stories can serve as a "text" for reevaluation, as the exchange of narratives affects each person's interpretation.

Furthermore, as Raymond Mar, Joan Peskin, and Katrina Fong wrote in a 2011 article in *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, "the textual interpretation itself becomes a part of the ongoing development of the reader's identity."[5] In other words, a reader brings her identity to the text, but the text may also affect her identity. For (an overly simplistic) example, a person who reads an op-ed with which she vehemently disagrees brings her political identity to reading that text—she is likely hostile to it. But if the op-ed is especially persuasive, it may cause the reader to re-evaluate her views, and therefore her political identity, and therefore her hostile relationship to the text. A subtler version of the same thing is at work when SIP ensemble members read Shakespeare.

[5] McLean, K. C., & Mansfield, C. D. (2011). To reason or not to reason: Is autobiographical reasoning always beneficial? New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 2011(131), 85–97. doi:10.1002/cd.291

As for the performative work of SIP, this study must rely on observations and careful extrapolation. Despite the mountain of anecdotal evidence gathered over several decades in studies of pedagogy and applied theatre, there is no directly relevant empirical research on the link between theatre participation and identity development. But we hope it is not such a great leap to assume that, if there is a dialogue between a text and the identity of the person reading it, there may exist a similar dialogue between that person's performance—her *embodiment* of a character—and her own identity.

If empathetic connection with other people is a hallmark of the operational process of SIP, its theatrical corollary is connection with a fictional character or situation ("This is just like when I was addicted," or, "My ex was manipulative like that"). This study assumes that something like Reader Response Theory operates in the realm of performance, not just textual analysis: that in telling a character's story through performance, a person may also tell her own. Indeed, some of this study's strongest Reader-Response-type observations are made during performances, not during reading. Rigorously exploring the link between identity development and theatre participation is an exciting avenue for future research, but it necessarily falls outside the scope of this study[6].

[6] Again, the theoretical framework is abridged for the purposes of this document, and a fuller description is available upon request.

III
Methodology

DATA COLLECTION

We gathered data for this study from four sources: surveys, journals, focus groups, and facilitator observations. Participants either created pseudonyms for themselves or were simply known as "Woman A," "Woman B," and so forth, which is how they are known throughout this study.

Surveys. Each SIP participant was given an anonymous survey with questions about her demographics (education level, age, race/ethnicity, and other identity groups), about her role in the group, about the three most important events in her life, and about how she defines her past, present, and future self. The full text of the survey, which was given twice, may be found in Appendix A.

Journals. Each SIP participant was given a notebook to write in and asked to use that space to reflect on the program and its effects on them. These journals were collected periodically by facilitators, providing not only crucial data and context but also giving us otherwise inaccessible insight into the development of the ensemble's most introspective members.

Focus Groups. Four times during the season, SIP participants, in a group, were asked questions about their past, present, and future selves. In each of these focus groups, which were conducted by SIP facilitators, the specific questions changed slightly to reflect the ongoing process of the season (e.g. asking about performance only after the performance), but all were designed to elicit responses that would indicate the degree of narrative identity development and

would tease apart the theatrical and operational processes. The questions may be found in Appendix B.

Facilitator observations. Facilitators kept real-time field notes during each ensemble meeting and gathered three times during the season to create a retrospective observation as a group. The field notes were our most prodigious source of data; they included descriptive observations ("Participant X was really brave today"), narrative observations ("After Participant X performed her monologue, Participant Y commented on her bravery"), and, most importantly, direct quotations ("Participant X performed her monologue; Participant Y shouted, 'Oh my God, that was so awesome and brave!'"). All efforts were made to capture quotations verbatim, but, in the absence of recording devices, facilitators were limited by the necessity of writing the quotes by hand.

ANALYSIS

The central mechanism utilized for the qualitative data analysis was a system of coding developed by the facilitators and applied to all empirical data, whether collected directly from the participants or derived from facilitator observation. The coding system first divided statements and behavior into *theatrical* and *operational*, then further subdivided until we could categorize any event with the specificity we desired. For the purposes of this report, we will describe in detail only the large-scale interplay between theatrical and operational processes, rather than dwelling on all the subtle gradations we explored in our analysis. Interested readers may find a fuller description of our coding system in Appendix C.

In the next section, we describe the effect of a season in SIP on narrative identity development. As much as possible, we use the participants' own words. The benefit of using verbatim quotations is the empirical specificity it brings to abstract concepts like "identity development" or "problem-solving." The risk is that our findings may seem anecdotal. While remaining cognizant of that possibility, we hope the reader will trust that we did not pick unrepresentative examples, but rather the words and moments that most clearly embodied the general process revealed in our data.

IV
Case Study Narrative

This season of Shakespeare in Prison broke more or less naturally into three phases. Each one offered new opportunities for narrative identity development, and each saw a distinct interplay between theatrical and operational processes.

While examples here are drawn from many different participants, there are three women who "anchor" this narrative, in an attempt to make clear the many different ways in which a season of SIP can operate on an individual. One, "Violetta," embodied the transformative potential of the theatrical process. Another, "Rabbit," showed the similar power of the operational process. A third, "Lady Jane," was exceptional for her dramatic change over the course of the season—a true metamorphosis—that was the result of a complex interplay of the two processes.[7]

This study first describes each stage of the season using examples from around the group, then analyzes the impact on individual members' identities through the three women profiled.

INITIAL CONDITIONS: The First Survey

"Violetta" was a white woman in her mid-forties, new to SIP, and serving the final year of a short (less than five-year) sentence. She had been previously incarcerated for similar durations. She listed "addict" as an additional identity group, and she shared during one of our first meetings that she "suffers from borderline personality disorder." The three most important

[7] All three women were chosen for the emblematic nature of their experiences, but it is important to note that they came from a relatively small pool of participants for whom we had enough data to complete a full individual profile. It is among the many limitations of this study that these profiles are not more representative of the demographics of this ensemble in terms of race/ethnicity and age. For more detail, see the "Limitations" section of Part V.

events in her life were all connected by loss: being abandoned by her mother, the death of her father, and the removal of her children from her custody. Asked to define her past, present, and future selves, self-esteem was "Violetta's" benchmark for herself: she saw herself as someone whose low self-esteem had negatively influenced the choices she made and held her back from doing what she wanted to do, and she envisioned a future of "100% self assurance and wont Let no one stop them from Believing in themselves."

"Rabbit" was in her second year of SIP, having joined midway through the previous season. She was white and in her late thirties, serving a longer sentence (more than five years) and a few years away from parole eligibility. Her important life events centered around her children, their births and their removal; as she wrote, "Losing my kids helped save me from addiction and saved them as well." She described her past self as hurting ("a person full of burden & pain, struggling to survive") and contradictory: "wild" and "crazy" but also "lost" and "empty"; "a liar" and "manipulative" but also "loyal" and "selfless." Her present and future selves she defined by "hard work" and "discipline" in addition to the positive characteristics of loyalty and selflessness she attributed to her past self.

"***Lady Jane"*** was a white woman in her early thirties serving the second year of a life sentence without the possibility of parole. Never explicitly referring to the crime for which she was incarcerated, she defined her past by her instrumentality—"I let my husband tell me what to do and put me down," she wrote—and her present self by a desire to be less passive: "I cant let a man, or anyone tell me how to feel, or how to think now…." Just as importantly, her description of her future self was surprisingly untethered from the likely reality of her sentence. She said she wanted to, "1. raise kids 2. own restaurant/bake shop 3. Write book."

At each stage of the season, this narrative will revisit these three women to describe the impact on their identities.

PART ONE: Reading
September, October, November[8]

The first part of the season, roughly ten weeks long, was naturally concerned with introductions. New ensemble members "met" the group, and returning members needed to adjust to the fresh faces. The ensemble read the play together for the first time and "met" the characters. Reading was done aloud with no predefined roles—anyone could read for any character—and we stopped frequently to check for comprehension, re-read, and discuss.

In terms of narrative identity, the effect of the theatrical process over the first ten weeks was muted. It served mostly to unearth ensemble members' existing narratives through identification with characters and situations in the play. Almost immediately, though, the operational process created enormous breakthroughs in the narrative identity development of some of the women as they worked to overcome preconceptions about Shakespeare, other ensemble members, and themselves.

Members' identification with the text was often quite explicit. "I relate to Richard," a woman said during a meeting[9], "All my life, my family would tell me that I was bad, so I acted bad. It gave me an excuse to do vile things." Another related to Richard differently, specifically from her perspective as an African American woman: "When I was little, people would say mean things, and that's why I know how to fight. [...] If I felt not dominant, not number one, if you

[8] Months, like the "phases" themselves, are to give a general guide; these phases and their timing are not prescribed, nor is there a rigidly defined transition from one phase to another.
[9] Unless otherwise specified, verbatim quotations from our sessions come from contemporaneous facilitator field notes.

were stronger than me, then I would attack you physically. And that's how I feel Richard is. I see him holding in things that have hurt him and amplifying it out onto everyone else." Another, speaking of Richard's manipulative wooing of Anne, said, "I can actually identify with this scene: it reminds me of the first time my ex beat my ass [...] then we got drunk and he gave me such a sweet line and I fell for it." There were dozens of such statements.

Not every act of identification was retrospective or negatively charged. As a participant wrote in her journal, the play contained good models for a future self as well: "I read again. It was so cool. I loved this piece because Elizabeth stands up for herself. I want to always stand up for myself. I'm not used to standing up for myself. It's going to feel good when I do, I know it."

Operationally, the first challenge was establishing the group's sense of connection and trust. Some women took to the ensemble naturally: "Shakespeare is amazing and I Really do feel a Connection with the Group already!" wrote one woman after the third meeting. For other new members, the initial reaction was less enthusiastic. One wrote in her journal, "I'm having flashbacks from freshman year of high school. The clear and unpleasant display of hierarchy within this group."

More common than interpersonal issues, though, was the theme of meeting the challenge of public speaking, usually accompanied by a sense of relief and, quite often, with an affirmation of the ensemble's support. In fact, it was often this very process that helped alleviate any initial lack of trust between members. The following excerpt from a journal entry is representative of the dozens of examples of this trend:[10]

[10] Indeed, meeting the operational challenges of language and public speaking was the second-most commonly observed event in the first ten weeks of the case study, after textual analysis (since our primary activity was reading the text). For readers interested in more detail about the interaction of theatrical and operational processes over the course of the season, we have compiled both numerical and graphic overviews of those data, available on request.

> I have so many things going on inside of me; so many difficult & uncomfortable feelings—How was I going to set all of that aside & perform?
> How I did it, I don't know. I fell into Anne, I immersed myself in the scene, forgot about [myself] & I went for it. Had I sat there & not participated I wouldn't have felt good about myself. [I] wouldn't have won. I would have walked away, walked back to my unit, a loser. I am usually ruled by my emotions, but tonight I proved to myself that Im in control. Its an amazing feeling.
> Shakespeare is not a competition. Its inspiration. And that comforts me. [Identifies members of the group] —they inspired me & I was encouraged by their great performances.

It is worth pausing briefly to note the explicit beginnings of a shift in narrative identity in this entry. The author's *past self* would have "walked back to my unit, a loser." She pushed her *present self* to get up and perform, which began to forge a new story: "Im in control." It can take many, many such moments to make a shift in narrative identity, but this was an auspicious beginning.

The three women profiled in this study each underwent distinct but substantial changes during this time.

Violetta. Violetta's development in the first part of the season was dramatic. Her fear of performance was readily apparent to facilitators. Still, she threw herself into reading in front of the ensemble early. She got up to read aloud from the play for the first time on September 16, after which she wrote in her journal, "I was so nervous my heart was fluttering like a thousand butterflies where unleashed with the words that were spoken, then I felt mortified Let down like I bombed." The next week, Violetta read again and reflected aloud, "I felt like I was going to puke. I was nervous, shaking… but it felt really good." Throughout this time, she was drawn to characters and situations that reminded her of her own life—loss, bereavement, and betrayal.

Still, she still wrestled with the self-doubt that dogged her. A videographer had come (with advance warning) to an October session, and Violetta had skipped SIP that evening. "I

cried for a few minutes in Shakespeare," she reflected in her journal the next week. "I was sharing about How I was upset with myself for not being there for the video recording [...] due to my fear that I would look dumb and fail somehow." Her conviction that she would "make the group look bad" and her decision to "opt out" were expressions of the past self that she was trying hard to change.

What kept her in the group at this point was the vocal support of the other ensemble members. After her first time reading, she wrote, "after class several of my classmates told me How well I Read and Got into character and Wow it made me feel Great!!" After weeping in front of the group in October, she wrote, "When I started crying tonight, [two other participants] gave me Encouragement telling me I was the shit."

If the story of Violetta during the early months of SIP is rooted in the safe, open culture of the ensemble, it is not only because she was a beneficiary of it; she also helped create it. In late October, as this phase was beginning to wrap up, she ran into another SIP member outside the programs building. That woman described seeking mental health treatment for the first time ever and, as Violetta wrote in her journal, "she thanked me and said it was only because of my openess and Honesty in group that gave her Confidence to seek help. I told her thats Why I do it."

What's more, this incident helped Violetta begin to lay out a more specific vision of her future self, one defined less by low self-esteem than by an empowering sense of ability and possibility. "This is one of my Goals," she wrote in that same journal entry, "is to Be a advocate to Educate ppl about mental illness!!"

Rabbit. A natural leader, Rabbit's journey during the first part of this season was about assuming a leadership role in the ensemble. Other members who share her dynamism led through their talented acting or incisive analysis of the text; Rabbit's place was more operational. She was a confidant and a mediator, and she led by example of her enthusiasm and reliability. At the same time, she was disarmingly open about her own shortcomings and vulnerability, which encouraged others to follow her lead.

In the first few months, facilitators observed her having one-on-one conversations with other members, doing a lot of work to help them feel at ease. "[Prison] is not a place we can often Let our guard down and be open," she wrote in October, after a woman confided in her about feeling hurt by something another woman had said about people serving life sentences. "I felt honored that she confided in me," Rabbit wrote. "She even said she felt very 'comfy' talking with me and that was really special."

Other members noted this development as well, always gratefully. Rabbit was able to use her position as a "veteran," as participants refer to members who have completed a previous season, to add weight to her statements. When one of the women was feeling betrayed by another member, she wrote in her journal, "I almost quit the group at that point. [...] Then one of the veterans [Rabbit] came to me on the walk one day and said they believe I had a lot of talent and try no matter what the rumor is."

Already, by the first facilitator group reflection, we were describing Rabbit as "*the* leader of the group now," and "a master of the operational process." Still, we wondered, would this process continue to dominate her identity development, or would it find more balance with the theatrical?

Lady Jane. "First day of class!" began Jane's journal. "I really do need something that is going to pull me out of my comfort zone, out of this shy shell I've had all my life." Her first entry concluded with an expression of the anxiety that had often paralyzed her: "Do I think I'll be able to do all this with out getting RED!?!?"

Jane was continually preoccupied with "getting red"—her face flushes dramatically when she is nervous or embarrassed—which she used as a proxy (and barometer) for those feelings. A month into the program, she wrote in her journal that she "managed to read without getting all red"; still, her shyness, anxiety, and trepidation were hallmarks of her participation. Jane never gave voice to any of this during group meetings. Without her journal, facilitators would have been almost entirely in the dark about her development throughout the season.

Much of the first three months of SIP for Jane was about continually pushing her "comfort zone," a phrase she used frequently in her journal. In the language of narrative identity, what Jane called her "comfort zone" was a nearly perfect stand-in for her past self. She had defined herself as shy, timid, and lacking agency. Anything that moved her away from those self-ascribed characteristics was defined as leaving the "comfort zone," and was unequivocally desirable. Nearly every aspect of participating in SIP was a challenge to Jane's "comfort zone," from speaking in public to being around strangers to the prospect of portraying a character on stage.

Of special note for Jane was a series of conversations in early October. During discussion of a scene, some ensemble members described people serving life sentences as "like Richard" (selfish, manipulative, bitter). Jane did not speak up during that conversation or subsequently, when one of the other self-described "lifers" read a response. But, as usual, her journal gives

insight into her thoughts: “After the read of 3.7 we somehow got onto the very unhappy subject of Lifers,” she wrote on October 14. “I cant understand why this makes me so upset, except for the fact that I am one. I am scared I don’t know how to tread on this subject.” Near the end of the entry, she described the conflict between her timid past self and the bold self she envisioned in the future: “Do I say how I really feel or should I stick to my quiet self.”

As with Violetta and Rabbit, the effect of the first ten weeks or so of participation in SIP on Jane’s narrative identity was almost wholly operational: she was building trust, overcoming shyness and anxiety (“getting red”), and trying to begin embodying a new, bolder self.

After the ensemble finished reading the play to the end, in the second half of November, participants were familiar with the language, characters, and situations. Then the theatrical process could begin its work on the narrative identity of the ensemble members.

PART TWO: Casting and Character Development
December, January, February

After reading slowly through the play once, the ensemble began gearing up to assign characters for the show. Casting in SIP is always done collaboratively, with as little facilitator input as possible—ideally, none—and a strong emphasis on process over result. Operationally, casting the play is a milestone: it is the first time during the season that the ensemble must make major, complex decisions as a group, something that comes up more frequently as performance nears. By the same token, casting is the culmination of the first, exploratory phase of the theatrical process (trying out different characters and looking at the play as a whole) and the beginning of a second, focused theatrical phase that centers on deep, empathetic connection to *one's own* character.

Casting the play can be an emphatically positive moment of ensemble cohesion. It is a moment of double ownership: they come together in (operational) decision-making to move the ensemble forward, and each make a (theatrical) commitment to a character.

For many of the ensemble members, the lead up to casting was when the theatrical process began to affect their narrative identity. The prospect of focusing so completely on a single character sometimes forced another level of identification, as when a woman wrote in her journal, "This year the only character that spoke to me was Anne. I do not like her or the decisions—poor decisions—she made. But then again, I don't like my past, nor the decisions I made." Another woman wrote before casting, "So of course I want to be Richard and hes king but the guy never shuts the fuck up it seems." She went on to suggest to herself, "Maby I should work on only saying what I must and shuting the fuck up the rest of the time."

Deciding to commit to a single character can be hard for some members, but the act of considering which characters they'd like to play leads naturally to self-reflection. One woman wrote over the course of more than a month of journal entries about her connections to Anne ("She is in great pain from the loss of her husband, but foolishly agrees to be with Richard to her demise. Oh how I can relate to her forgiving and foolish ways"), Margaret ("Her curses are phenomenal! She's a bit bitter, I'm a bit bitter"), Elizabeth ("Elizabeth stands up for herself. I want to always stand up for myself"), and the Dutchess ("I really think her bitterness is misunderstood"), which is the role she wound up playing.[11]

Operationally, too, casting brought the processes that began in the first part of the season to a head. The ensemble members relied on each other to make decisions with the entire group in mind, to be honest and open, and not to take casting decisions personally. Naturally, this led to some tension. Following a group discussion, one woman wrote in her journal, "I asked how you go forward when you [and] someone else want the same role, [and one of the facilitators said] you'll get the role you need, not always the one I want. [and] I was feeling that, because sometimes the Gods, the universe, powers that be… well they do for us what we can't for for ourself." A veteran member felt differently, writing, "Those of us who have been here for years have proven our commitment and I don't think it's odd that we want the larger roles. The next year, the previous 'new' girls will get larger roles." Still another wrote, "I just would like everyone to get the role they would like to play and I can just wait because I know one day I will get my chance if I put a little more into it. I'm getting there." It is worth noting that these explicit

[11] It is worth noting briefly that the first three of these thoughts refer to the past self ("Anne is foolish and forgiving just like I was"), present self ("Margaret is bitter just like I am"), and future self ("Elizabeth stands up for herself just like I will stand up for myself").

reflections on the casting process were largely confined to the women's journals, in their efforts to "keep the peace" in the ensemble.

In the weeks that followed casting, the women began digging into their roles. For some, this process allowed for deep examination of their identities through a fully theatrical process. The woman playing Anne sometimes worked out acting ideas in her journal. "Even in Anne's first monologue what should be an emotional meltdown turns into a power tirade," she mused. Then, her analysis of Anne's monologue led to a personal revelation: "OH MY GOD! I just made a connection. My crime—ALL about feelings. I took a life—not just any life but the life of [a loved one]." Gone were Anne and Anne's monologue—those had been access points for self-reflection. "I was in the midst of a deep depression," she continued. "Hurt, betrayed [...] Just deep in my feelings. So deep I couldn't see or breathe. I wanted to die, not take a life, especially not [my loved one]."

For many participants, though, the weeks following casting were more about the operational aspects of the program, or even the effects of the program on their lives. "Well, went to class feeling like crap for some reason and I didn't want to be involved," wrote one woman, "but then [one of the facilitators] came and talked to me. [...] I havent had a real conversation like that in a very long time. I know alot of very smart people but I havent talked with anyone who is NOT in prison or knows that much about it. [...] I am so thankful that I have met all these people that I hope are apart of my life now." Even those who were disappointed in the roles they got began to fold the process into their own stories. One member wrote after casting, "I was really torn about which part I wanted [...] At first, I didn't want to read for Elizabeth because

[another ensemble member] wanted the role but a voice kept pushing me to do it because I've played roles like Margaret before. Elizabeth is new for me and I'm looking forward to it."

Violetta. The casting and character development phase of the season was actually important to Violetta because of something totally unrelated to choosing and embodying a character. She is a curious person and interested in history, and because *Richard III* is based loosely on true events, Violetta found herself naturally drawn to learning more about the backstory of the characters and situations in the play. A helpful staff member gave her some printed summaries of the Wars of the Roses and encyclopedia entries on the main characters, Violetta studied them and, one day shortly after casting, presented some interesting information from her research to the ensemble. After sharing what she had learned, she passed out copies of the encyclopedia entries for each character to the woman playing that character. The others were delighted and effusive in their thanks for her work.

When Violetta was done sharing, facilitators put a name to what she had done: dramaturgy. She did not know it, but there is a long theatrical tradition of having someone on a production's team to learn and share about the context of a play. A dramaturg in a professional theatre studies history, manners, costume, language, music, dance, and whatever else the company needs to create an accurate, authentic production. That simple push began a major change in Violetta's identity—a turning point.

"I also found out tonight I am good at Dramaturgy," she wrote that evening in her journal. "Lovin it I love to research things who would have thought." Indeed, her tone when reflecting on her new role was usually one of surprise. Violetta shared with the group that she had quit school in eighth grade, so her status as "resident dramaturg" was wholly

unexpected—she had always thought of her curiosity and ability to retain historical details as strange and self-indulgent. In a moment, she redefined that part of herself to be a source of confidence, empowerment, and purpose.

A month later, a facilitator noted that "our dramaturg arrived with materials she'd gathered about various historical aspects of the plot." Violetta had chosen one of the articles specifically for the woman playing Lady Anne because, Violetta wrote, that woman had "said she was struggling with finding out if she was really a victim or a villain."

Again, a few weeks later, Violetta wrote that "I Brought all sorts of dramaturgy stuff and had it all Laid out when everyone came in and to my surprise Everyone stoped by the table and started Looking for info that pertained to their parts." Actually, she was so excited by this affirmation of her importance that she took requests that evening: what did other ensemble members want to know that she could help them find out? This development marked yet another change in Violetta; rather than simply looking for information that she found interesting or trying to intuit what others might find useful, she was positioning herself as an expert, as a person whom other people could come to for help.

Casting defined Violetta's "role" in the ensemble, though she took on only a minor, unnamed part in the play. In a shockingly short time (seven weeks), she went from enthusiastic but lost to positioning herself in a job that she was better at than anyone else in the room—a job that would not have crossed her mind before because of her own perception of herself as uneducated.

Importantly, this massive change in her happened almost entirely within the realm of the theatrical process of SIP. She was reading the play, seeking context for it, helping others connect

with their characters, and literally occupying a position that exists in professional theatre. The final phase of the season would see further development in Violetta, but she was the first participant this season to undergo such a dramatic transformation.

Rabbit. There was a lot of consternation around casting this season—more than in most others. It's hard to know why this was, but Rabbit was key to holding the group together during this time of stress.

One new member found herself up against a longtime member for a role. "So now I am completely intimidated," the new member wrote in her journal. "I really want the part yet I know she does too and this is her last year. I do not like to ruffle feathers yet my few friends said go for it anyway." The longtime participant is a respected ensemble member, but she can take things personally and be sharp and cutting in her manner. The new woman felt exposed: "Then some rumors came along that she was trying to gather votes before we even try-out. This pissed me off. I then again began to feel a bit like an outsider being new to the ensemble. [...] I felt like I wasn't going to stand a chance no matter what happened."

Rabbit, speaking with the authority of a veteran member, came to the rescue. Several days later, the new member wrote, "[Rabbit] came to me on the walk one day and said they believe I had a lot of talent and try no matter what the rumor is. She said she is voting for the best person not her friend gathering votes. So I did." In the end, "Yay! I got the part!"

As she was putting out fires, Rabbit knew exactly what she was doing. In her journal, she wrote, "a person or two who have been in S.I.P. should let go of entitlement issues, and let 'equality' rule. Someone who has been in for a few years + doesn't show up consistently this

year and feel they deserve a certain role—well, your not setting the bar for that." She concluded, "it's what you put in, not how long you've been here."

Furthermore, Rabbit was beginning to look at casting as an opportunity to honor the work done by a new crop of participants—she was excited not so much by what it meant for her or any single woman in the group, but by what it meant for the ensemble as a whole. "The new members," she wrote in her journal, "well they are showing up, great attendance and I'm excited to see it. a few people from last year have less than desirable work ethic/attendance, so it is cool to see some members who seem to be serious + very dedicated."

This entry exemplifies Rabbit's growth in the ensemble, which was almost completely operational. Although she put herself in the running for the two largest roles in the play, she shared that she did it "to challenge myself," rather than because of a particularly strong empathetic bond with the characters themselves. She ended up playing Buckingham, Richard's right-hand man, but her comments and journal entries throughout the season rarely mentioned that role. Instead, she came to be very active in keeping the group together and pushing her own boundaries.

As she was doing this, she was explicitly working towards bringing her present self more in line with her aspirational future. Her journal entries frequently begin, "I'm learning to be," "I'm trying to be," "I hope one day to be." And she specifically mentioned the operational aspects of SIP as her "saving grace." In particular, the fact that people relied on her to make the performance work gave her a sense of purpose: "[SIP] keeps my focus on completion of a goal—the play is important, and knowing that other people are counting on me, it helps outside of group in the times when I have impulses, to think of what I'll lose and having this group, well

it gives me something to care about, to focus on + put effort into, it fills the empty void that prison creates."

Lady Jane. "Friday. Audition day. OMG so nervous. I just have to do it. I don't know how but I'm going to make it some how. I am scared that people will think I'm not good enough or something like that, but when I checked in EVERYONE told me its ok to feel like that. Its normal so hopefully I'll make it."

Before casting, Jane's journal had given us insight into her internal struggles in SIP, but there were few outward signs of what was going on with her—or even of engagement. So everyone was surprised when she leapt up to audition for two roles. A facilitator wrote, "[Jane] had expressed extreme anxiety about auditioning, then volunteered to read. Everyone cheered as she stood and walked into the playing area. After she read, a longtime ensemble member said, 'You don't even seem like you have anxiety!'" Another facilitator wrote, simply, "☆ [JANE] IS AUDITIONING!!!☆ TWICE!"

Having faced her fear of public speaking—and after hearing the words of affirmation from members of the ensemble—Jane's excitement was palpable. "Ok… so auditions were awesome. I think I killed it." A few days later, when the ensemble was deciding on roles, she wrote, "So super excited for this day, I didn't know I could be so happy to find out who I am playing." Her enthusiasm even seemed to bleed into a desire to take on more and more work. "I am kinda kicking myself for not doing more but this is my first time so I'll be ok. I know next year I will try for more."

Jane's progress in this phase was not about defining a "role" for herself in the ensemble, as Violetta's and Rabbit's was. It was foremost about facing her fears, seeing herself as someone

who is capable of performing, capable of overcoming anxiety, not hamstrung by embarrassment or trauma. More subtly, she also started envisioning a future for herself through SIP ("next year I will try for more"), a future that looked less grim than her previous imaginings.

Still, Jane's despair was understandably pervasive, especially as the holiday season approached. The winter months sent her into a deep depression that saw her sometimes retreat completely from the activities of the ensemble. She found some solace in conversations with facilitators and other ensemble members apart from the group, but her journals over the winter revealed the depths of her sadness.

"Do I have a future," she wrote in her journal in late November, "or is it all that I see, 4 walls, a door, a bunkbed? Same stuff Ive looked at for 2 years already?" And the reality of her life sentence was only part of what weighed on her. "Will I ever be ok for real?" she asked. A few days later, she wrote "I was walked all over and used and left for dead [...] I don't know how else to think about my life."

PART THREE: Staging and Performance
March, April, May, June

The culminating event of a season of SIP is, of course, the performance. Ensemble members are responsible for memorizing their lines, learning their blocking (movement on stage), deciding on costumes and props, and helping with scene transitions. The ensemble as a whole is responsible for defining the overall look of the show, cutting the play down to 90 minutes, and working through any logistical challenges posed by the performance.

Although the staging and performance phase might seem clearly theatrical, we noticed a marked shift in our data *away* from theatrical concerns and into operational ones. By this time,

most of the explicitly theatrical work, such as textual analysis and identification with a character, have been done. By contrast, the complexity of putting on a performance creates numerous challenges for the ensemble to solve together. Individual women still experienced growth through the theatrical process, and there was inevitable interweaving of the processes throughout, but the ensemble as a whole experienced a shift towards the operational.

Performance. We performed three times before an audience of prisoners and staff. The shows were chaotic and messy by professional standards, but audiences were without exception warm and encouraging, even when actors made mistakes onstage. They would even applaud when an especially glaring error was accompanied by an especially heroic "save."

Putting on a show in front of an audience is categorically different from anything else in the SIP experience, which is part of why it makes such a crucial capstone to the season. For many ensemble members, speaking in front of a group of strangers is one of their greatest fears. For others, the fact that "the show must go on" can be hard to reconcile with their perfectionism—an actor in performance cannot stop to fix her mistakes, she can only move on to the next thing.

Performing *Richard III* crystallized the experience of SIP and was a decisive turning point for many ensemble members. It was both an individual challenge and an ensemble challenge; each person was responsible to support the group, and the group was responsible to support each person. Some shared that they "didn't get it" until performance, when they felt they understood "what it was all for." Members reported feeling especially connected to one another, to the ensemble as a whole, and to the larger Shakespeare in Prison endeavor after performing.

This feeling of connection extended to the audience, including both inmates and staff. One woman, whom facilitators observed "was beaming" throughout the season's final meeting, said, "I prejudged. I didn't think [the inmates in the audience] would comprehend what we were doing and how hard we worked. But that lady at lunch was naming characters. I was floored… And officers stopped me and said they'd caught a few minutes and thought it was fantastic. There's an officer that never spoke to me before—she seems frightened of us in the unit. But she came up to me [...] and said, 'That was great.'"

The performance is also a natural milestone for members who make it through the season. In this season and others, many women have said that they "always quit things" they start. We noted after our end-of-season recap how many women had shared that they "almost quit" or "wanted to quit" or "wished they could quit." Universally, they felt a sense of pride and accomplishment at having overcome that narrative about themselves. One woman, who had initially stayed in the group only out of a sense of obligation to the other members, said that Shakespeare in Prison was one of the first things she had finished in her entire life.

Violetta. The ensemble almost lost Violetta in the late winter. She was going through a difficult time in her housing unit, which she talked about in the ensemble. She was subsequently put in protective custody ("PC," which is in solitary confinement) and removed from the group's roster. The ensemble was crestfallen, as Violetta had become an integral part of the group, but another woman took her small part and we moved on.

Unexpectedly, Violetta rejoined the group some weeks later. It is unusual for members who go to solitary confinement for any reason to be placed back on the roster before the next season, but everyone was happy to see her back. Equally surprising was that she didn't want her

old character back; she volunteered to take a more central one that had recently been vacated. She had lost her journal when she'd gone to protective custody and used its replacement solely as a tool for line memorization, so it's hard to know what her reasons were, but taking a larger role seemed to deepen her connection to the play and the ensemble.

By the time she rejoined, we no longer needed a dramaturg, so Violetta threw herself into the role of Hastings, one of the lords betrayed and killed by Richard. From this point on, the theatrical process began to work an entirely different type of change on her. Rather than connecting to the play through research and context, she dug into her empathetic connection to her character.

In addition to the thrill of seeing a woman give a speech who doubted her ability to perform any but the smallest roles a few months ago, we were impressed by her connection to Hastings. Hastings's fatal flaw is his credulousness; even when the *audience* sees that he will be betrayed, *he* remains oblivious and loyal. The result is a memorable scene in which Richard surprises him at a meeting by ordering his death. As he is led off to die, Hastings delivers a final speech to the audience, saying, "I, too fond, might have prevented this."

"He's like me," Violetta said to a facilitator during rehearsal. "I'm smart, but I'm absent-minded. So is he: smart, but not paying attention." It was first of all remarkable that she had come to define herself as "smart," when she had perceived her lack of education as a defining characteristic before. But more impressively, she went on to tell the facilitator that "I'm growing out of the character," explaining that she saw herself as moving on to a new and better phase of her life—a new and better phase of her identity.

Rabbit. Her mastery of the operational—and, especially, interpersonal—aspects of the program reached its apex as performance neared. Her concern for the ensemble's well-being was increasingly apparent, as were her efforts to hold the group together as there was some unexpected attrition in the final weeks of the season.

"I'm really excited + proud to see this years new members, how well some are doing, how dedicated they are," she wrote in her journal in late April. A few sessions later, when facilitators were delayed in their arrival at the auditorium more than an hour, Rabbit took charge. Performances were coming up, and everyone was worried about losing precious rehearsal time, so Rabbit organized the ensemble to get work done on their own rather than continuing to wait. When the facilitators finally arrived, the workspace Rabbit created was so focused and dynamic that there was no need to jump in and take over. "She was giving notes," a facilitator noted, "organizing the rehearsal, and holding others accountable in a very humble but clear manner, and she seemed to hit that balance perfectly."

"[The facilitators] got in late," wrote Rabbit of the same day, "and what was so cool was I had got everything started, circled up and we were mid scene when they got in, it felt very good to know we can work as a group and be responsible especially for how much we'd got done already when they got there." After that day, Rabbit fell naturally into that role, noting the next day that "I laughed because I felt like such a bitch but we all need direction so I guess it was cool."

At the same time as she was becoming the group's strongest leader, she was gaining personal confidence. "I was thinking, well, 3 yrs ago I wouldn't have been able to be so open," she wrote in her journal in late May, just before performances, "+ to think I would be accepted

let alone have been appreciated for my experiences. The ppl in our group have taught me that and I'm so grateful for that. [...] I used to spend so much time lying trying to manipulate situations, people, events and these days I would never sacrifice my integrity for material gain or any other reason."

At the very end of the season, Rabbit reflected on her journey over the past several years. "I came from seg," a facilitator recorded her saying ("seg" is short for "administrative segregation," often called "solitary confinement"). "Before that, it was five or six years away from my kids getting taken," and she had been addicted to drugs and suicidal. "I didn't believe I could leave this place a different person," she said. But now, "I feel like I could leave and be someone new."

Lady Jane. In the late winter, facilitators noticed that Jane, while still quiet, often had excellent ideas about staging. She seemed to have an intuitive grasp of the basics of direction. When a facilitator commented on this to her, she was pleasantly surprised; being a director was definitely not part of her identity, past, present or future. That evening, she journaled, "I was really involved today. [The facilitators] complimented me on being involved & how I could be a director. I want to be up there and jump feet first. Super excited."

Her chance to "jump feet first" came a few weeks later. Another member who'd been cast in the role of Clarence unexpectedly left the ensemble, which led, as always, to a group conversation about how to handle the loss—in particular, who would play Clarence?

During this conversation, Jane leaned over to a facilitator and whispered, "I'd like to play Clarence." The facilitator replied, "I think you should say that to the group." When she did, the

entire group burst into applause—it was a major achievement for someone who was afraid to read aloud a few months before.

"I took on the roll of Clarence! OMG! What did I do?" she wrote in her journal that evening. Then she talked herself down: "It's ok. I can do it. I wanted to have some more parts and this is where I get them." Almost immediately, she took to the process, integrating it into her ideas about her future self, albeit with trepidation: "I actually really like this," she journaled, "and will continue to do this the next few years. I wonder if this is something that other people see me doing?"

The lead-up to performance for Jane was fraught. Despite her enthusiasm, her stage-fright would sometimes overtake her, and she had trouble getting the confidence to walk onstage without her script. So it was a bit of a surprise when, during the final dress rehearsal, she did exactly that. She was flustered—her face was certainly red, her greatest fear—and she skipped large parts of the scene. When she got off the stage, she collapsed into a chair and started to cry. Rabbit and another ensemble member went straight to her to ask what was wrong.

"That sucked!" she said. "I forgot all my lines. I suck."

Rabbit, a facilitator, and a few others talked her down from her despair. Within a few minutes, she was calmer, less red in the face, and more positive. She played a few other minor roles in the play, and she threw herself into them, as if she had purged her embarrassment with that one scene. During the rest of the performances, she was solid.

"THE PLAY WAS AWESOME!" Jane scrawled across an entire page of her journal after the final performance. "I had so much fun! I LOVED this play the best. I felt like I was

100% on top of my game. [...] I have people stopping me on the walk way and at chow telling me I did amazing. I love that feeling, I can’t wait till next year and the next play.”

V
Analysis and Conclusions

FROM DISEMPOWERMENT TO EMPOWERMENT: The SIP Process

Whether their growth came from identification with a theatrical role or from the operational work of holding the ensemble together through tough times—or simply from the challenge of showing up twice a week, for nine months, to do something that intimidated and scared them—the ensemble members of Shakespeare in Prison grew over the course of the season. Specifically, we found that, when asked questions about themselves and their narrative identities, the ensemble members who participated in the study almost universally moved from identities of brokenness and disempowerment towards identities of capability and empowerment. For some, the change was subtle, but of the 21 participants from whom we have compelling data (field notes, journals, and/or small group discussion), 17 showed considerable growth.[12]

Analysis.

After the season ended, we developed the coding system in Appendix C to track the interplay of theatrical and operational processes over the course of the season, as well as to track the ways in which members were engaging with those processes—intellectually, empathetically, or emotionally. After coding our notes and their journals and reflections to create an aggregate profile of how ensemble members interacted with the ensemble as a whole week by week, we combed through all of our data for each member to look for qualitative signs of narrative identity development. A fuller description of our data analysis is available on request.

[12] Of those who showed more subtle development, most were "veteran" ensemble members who had experienced dramatic growth during one or more previous seasons.

That done, we decided to create narrative profiles of three women, each of whom was representative of one of the ways in which participation in SIP can affect a member's narrative identity. At the same time, we wanted to be sure that we did not "cherry-pick" women who had undergone unusual development in their identities. Violetta, Rabbit, and Lady Jane were exceptional in their articulateness about the process (and consistency journaling—more on that in the "limitations" section), but not unrepresentative in the degree of change they experienced.

Limitations.

This study has many limitations, not least of which is the fact that the research was done by the facilitators. We are not trained researchers, and, more importantly, we are not removed from the process. Throughout the season, we were clear with ourselves that our responsibility was to be facilitators first and researchers second. This naturally meant that there were times when our ability to take detailed field notes suffered because there was more pressing work for us to do as facilitators, another reason why ensemble members' real-time journal reflections proved so crucial. There are many examples of this, but the easiest to identify at the outset was that our note-taking became very thin indeed as the performance date neared, since we were all playing roles in the show.

Other significant limitations that bear mentioning here have to do with the nature of a prison theatre ensemble. Membership is not constant throughout the nine-month season; as mentioned in the narrative, attrition is inevitable. Some of that is in our members' control, some not—and, while some members are removed due to disciplinary infractions, others depart for constructive reasons, such as beginning a parole-readiness program or academic class with a conflicting schedule. And since membership in the ensemble is voluntary and contingent on

being and remaining at a certain "security level" at the prison, there is undoubtedly a degree of self-selection that makes it difficult to generalize our findings—it is hard to know the extent to which the "type" of person who enrolls in and sticks with SIP is already predisposed to narrative identity development, and there is no "control" group and no way to know what the identities of our members would have been like after nine months of doing something other than SIP. The ensemble is also a very small sample size for this sort of study.

Finally, it is a particular limitation of the three narrative profiles that they are not demographically representative of the ensemble as a whole, which was broadly representative of the prison's population in terms of race and ethnicity. So it was with some reluctance that we selected three white women for the profiles. Ultimately, the decision was made for us by the available data—they were the ones who completed the entire nine-month season, clearly embodied the processes at work, and who journaled enough to allow us to make explicit connections between our observations and their own senses of self. Taken together, they were also somewhat older than average. They were, however, representative in terms of the lengths of their sentences (one under five, one more than five and less than 20, one life), length of time in the ensemble (one "veteran," two new members), and educational attainment.

There are numerous other limitations to this study. A fuller discussion is available on request.

The Processes Over Time.

We found that, in the 2016-2017 season of SIP, there were three distinct phases in the subjective experiences of ensemble members. These phases, outlined in the narrative, roughly

divided the season up into the following thirds: Reading, Casting and Character Development, and Staging and Performance.

The Reading phase was marked by a focus on the theatrical process, as ensemble members read and discussed the play. Their responses to the play were intellectual (interpretation of the text), empathetic (connection with a character or situation), and emotional (feelings elicited by the text or by performances). All three levels of response, especially intellectual and empathetic, both helped elicit pre-existing narratives from participants and set the stage for changes in those narratives.

Beginning with casting the play, the operational process began to work more in tandem with the theatrical. More exactly, the operational and theatrical processes traded off, with most weeks exhibiting a high degree of either one or the other, depending on the activities of those sessions. During Casting and Character Development, participants were connecting more deeply with their chosen roles (theatrical), but were also becoming more concerned with the logistics of rehearsal and with the importance of taking care of the entire ensemble's needs (operational).

Staging and Performance, despite its inherently theatrical nature, saw the primacy of the operational process arise, especially in the final six weeks. During the staging process (working out blocking and helping participants embody their characters truthfully), the theatrical and operational processes converged as the group tackled all the challenges required to build a production. During the final six weeks, as the ensemble rehearsed and put on the show, the operational process dominated.

Figure 1 represents the changing proportion of aggregated facilitator codes over time for the entire ensemble. While the graph at first may seem chaotic, the trends described above are easily distinguishable in it.

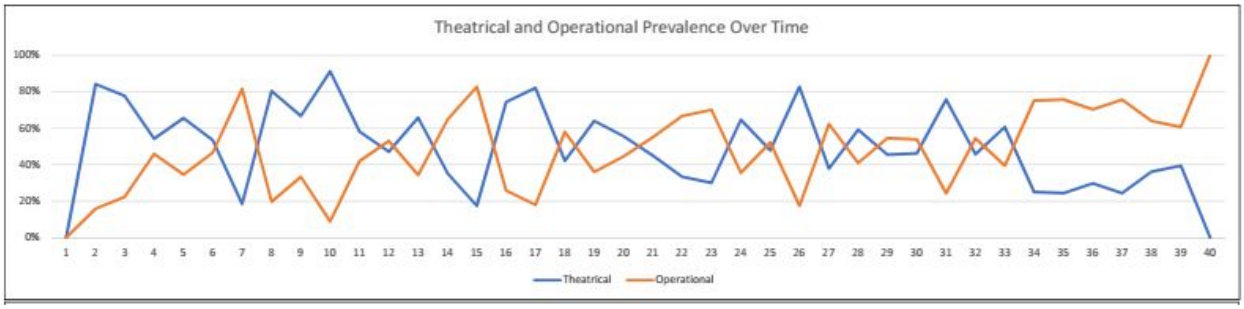

Fig. 1. Weekly proportion of process codes (Theatrical/Operational). The first 14 weeks correspond to phase one and are dominated by the theatrical process. Casting occurred in week 15, and the next 12 weeks (through week 26), phase two, are defined by a complex interplay of the two processes. The final 14 weeks are phase three, and are increasingly dominated by the operational process. Performance occurred in weeks 38 and 39.

Large spikes in the graph usually correspond to some single event; for example, a productive but emotional conversation about "lifers" in week 7 was entirely operational (unrelated to *Richard III*, Shakespeare, or theatre). Week 10 included a focus-group discussion that explicitly asked participants to identify their past, present, and future selves with characters from the play. Week 15 was casting. Weeks 26 and 31 were the occasion of lengthy text-based conversations about how to stage the play. A full accounting of those key moments in the season is available on request.

What this meant for individual ensemble members is that, although the theatrical and operational processes are both constantly operating to some degree, there are times in the season when a participant who inclines to the theatrical process will experience the effects of SIP participation more intensely than someone who inclines to the operational, and vice-versa. And for those who experience development on both ends, there is a shift in those processes that can facilitate further growth.

Conclusion.

We found that participation in a season of Shakespeare in Prison has the potential to profoundly change an ensemble member's identity through two distinct but interrelated processes. The ensemble members who chose to participate in this study all had a qualitatively positive experience, many exhibited a marked shift from disempowerment to empowerment in narrative identity, and a few underwent transformational change over the course of the season.

Of the women profiled in this study, Rabbit and Violetta fall into the first camp—Violetta faced her fears and found a unique role for herself; Rabbit discovered and developed her role as a leader, coach, and guide. Both experienced substantial change in their identities, and both were able to articulate that change by the end of the season. Their narrative identities had shifted; Violetta could say, with confidence, "I am a dramaturg," "I am smart," "I am funny and supportive." Rabbit could say, with confidence, "I have self-esteem, self-worth, accomplishment," "[unlike my past self], I would never sacrifice my integrity," and "I am in charge and taking initiative." This sort of development was not universal, but it was extremely common among participants.

Lady Jane transformed herself. Her initial responses to our queries were marked by a combination of cripplingly low self-esteem and detachment from the reality of her life sentence. She went from being withdrawn and nearly silent to being one of the most active participants in the ensemble. She even turned her greatest fear into a gift: asked after the performance what her gift to the group was, Jane replied, "redness in my face and a good attitude." "I didn't think I'd be able to do it, but I killed it, and I love it." She began thinking about her future with SIP, envisioning all of the other challenges she would face in the group. "It really is a family," she

said in the wrap-up meeting. “Gives me a lot of things to look forward to in the years I’m gonna be here.”[13]

A FINAL NOTE: Towards a New Language of Prison Arts

What “is” SIP?

At the outset, this study was a little quixotic and ambitious. By the end, it was a good deal more so. We began with a frustration that we had no data-driven way to describe our work, and we naively approached the season believing that, with our best efforts at diligent note-taking and analysis, we could gather those data and present them as a portrait of a season of SIP. In short order, we realized that it could not be so simple—we needed to create a new orientation for our thinking, a new paradigm for our analysis, and a new vocabulary to describe the work that we do.

This is a common problem for prison arts practitioners. “It’s not about the Shakespeare,” we (and ensemble members) often find ourselves saying. SIP sits somewhere in the undefined space between theatre and social work—we are neither artists nor clinicians when we walk into the circle of the ensemble—but that was as much as we could definitively say. “We don’t ‘do’ theatre,” we say. “We aren’t teachers, this isn’t a class—this isn’t therapy, and we aren’t therapists.” We knew what SIP was *not*; we did not know what it *was*. Completing this study did not completely fill that gap, but it gave us a start.

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[13] It is outside the boundaries of this study but worth noting that Jane’s transformation continued, and she subsequently become a strong, vocal leader in the SIP ensemble. She took on a much larger role in the 2017-2018 season (Malcolm in *Macbeth*), and she was much more assertive in voicing her opinions about staging. In the 2018-2019 season, she settled into her role as the “resident director,” sitting to the side of the stage and giving notes to actors (the apotheosis of her journey in the theatrical process), and she also became one of the two or three women most involved in the operational challenges of addressing conflict in the ensemble and taking care of other members when they needed help.

The goal of SIP has always been to empower its members through reading, grappling with, and performing plays by Shakespeare. We find that the mechanism by which this happens is best described through the combination of Narrative Identity Theory and Reader Response Theory described in this study. If "empowerment" refers to the recasting of one's narrative identity in empowering terms, then the success or failure of SIP's program is defined by the extent to which it offers an environment and ethos conducive to the development of empowering narratives within individual people—moving from "I am broken" and "I can't do it" to "I am strong" and "I can do it."

That movement is most often evinced in specific moments, like Violetta's identification (and subsequent self-identification) as a dramaturg, Rabbit's realization that she is a leader, or Lady Jane's decision to take on substantial speaking role. But, we have noticed anecdotally, those shifts towards empowerment, agency, and capability often bleed over into other aspects of our participants' lives. That is a subject for another study, but worth mentioning here.

We hope that this study, though limited and specific to SIP, will help give prison arts practitioners some language to describe the direct effect of their programs. As important as downstream outcomes are—low recidivism rates, reduction in disciplinary infractions, etc.—we need a way to describe what our programs actually *do* to effectively express their value. If our ensemble members are more successful after participation in SIP, we posit, it is because SIP empowers them to define themselves as successful people.

APPENDIX A: Written Program Survey

Demographics

- Level of education
    a. Middle school
    b. Some high school
    c. High school diploma
    d. Some undergraduate (college)
    e. Undergraduate degree
    f. Some graduate school
    g. Graduate degree
    h. PhD
- Age (open response)
- What race/ethnicity do you identify with? (open response)
- Are there any other groups with which you identify? (open response)

Past self

I had a history of making bad decisions before the crime for which I am now in prison.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
For how long? (open response)

Who I have been in past is an obstacle to who I am now, or who I want to be.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

My past relationships are in the way of who I am now or who I want to be.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Comfort zone/contribution to a group

I have worked together in a group before.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

My opinions have been valuable in that group.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

People find me difficult to work with.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

I express my thoughts and feelings freely.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

I have done theatre or performed in front of people before.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

I feel confident with my reading ability.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

I have stuck with something long term to accomplish a goal.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
How long?

Future

It is a long time before I will be released from prison.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

I have the tools I need right now not to come back to prison.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

I am gaining the tools I need not to come back to prison, but I don't have them yet.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

I worry about how people will think of me after I am released.
Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Present

- Pick five words to describe yourself. (open response)
    - Pick one word that most represents you. (open response)
- Pick five words others would use to describe you. (open response)
    - Who were you thinking of when you responded? (open response)
    - Pick one that most represents you. (open response)

APPENDIX B: Questions for Focus Groups

Focus group 1.1 (beginning of season).

- What brings you to SIP?
- What is your gift to the ensemble?
- What do you hope to get out of SIP?

Focus group 1.2 (several weeks into season).

- Think of your past self.
    - Choose up to 10 events in your life that changed you.
    - Choose the 5 most important.
    - Choose the 3 most important of those.
    - Write a few lines as to why these changed you, and why you chose these as the most important.

- What do you do on a day to day basis now?
    - Choose up to 10 things that are happening in your day-to-day life right now.
    - Choose the 5 most important.
    - Choose the 3 most important of those.
    - Write a few lines as to why this is the most important aspect of your life and how you think they have changed you for the better or worse.

- Imagine your future self. What is happening/what are you doing in the future?
    - Choose up to 10.
    - Choose the 5 most important.
    - Choose the 3 most important of those.
    - Write a few lines as to why these are the most important things you do and why

Focus group 2.1 (written)

- Describe your past self.
- Describe your present self.
- Describe your future self.

Focus group 2.2 (oral): Where do you see yourself in Shakespeare's characters past, present, future, and why?

- Who would your past self have most identified with and why?
- Who do you identify with the most right now and why?
- Who do you aspire to be like and why?

Focus group 3.1 (written) (8-9 weeks out from performance):

- Describe your past self.
- Describe your present self.
- Describe your future self.

Focus group 3.2 (oral):

- How would your past self be doing at this point in the process?
- How are you doing at this point in the process?
- How do you think you'll be doing after the performance?

Focus group 4.1 (written)

- Describe your past self.
- Describe your present self.
- Describe your future self.

Focus group 4.2 (oral)

- What brought you to SIP?
- What is your gift to the ensemble now?
- Did you get what you wanted out of SIP?

APPENDIX C: Coding System

The system used to code facilitators' field notes and subsequent written reflections was created at the beginning of our data analysis. It articulates our understanding of the theatrical and operational processes—both where they diverge and where there are similar features—refining the code so that each event, observation, and verbatim quote could be placed within these processes without significant debate.

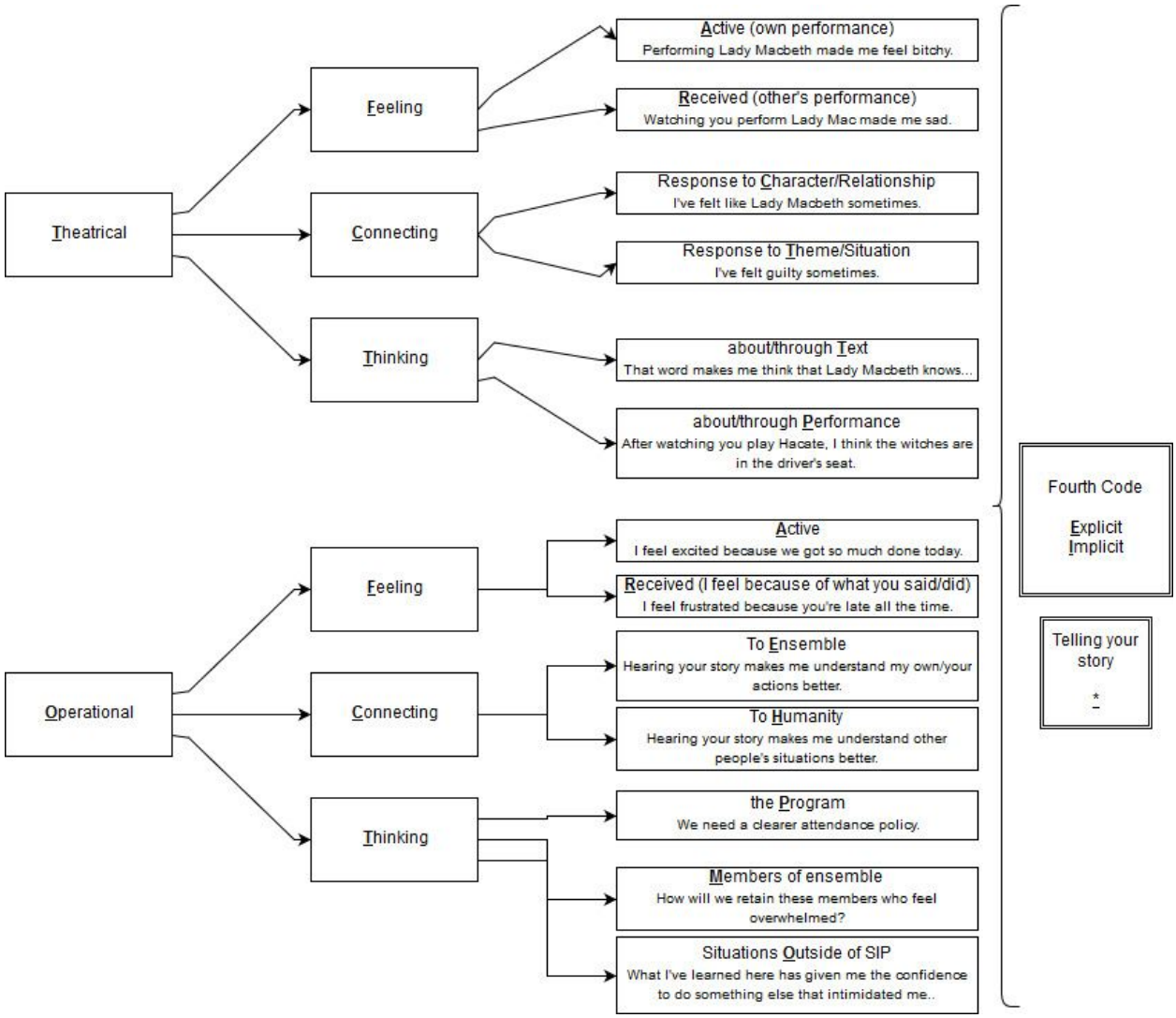

Fig. 2. Coding system as diagrammed by facilitators for data analysis.

For each relevant piece of data, we first asked which process was at work: Theatrical or Operational? We then asked whether the participant's response was emotional (Feeling), empathetic (Connecting), or intellectual (Thinking). From there, we subdivided the code for greater specificity:

Theatrical

1. Were the participant's feelings:
    a. Active (due to her own text-related action)?
        i. "When *I* performed this monologue, it made me feel sad."
    b. Received (due to another person's text-related action)?
        i. "When *you* performed this monologue, it made me feel sad."
2. Was the participant connecting:
    a. To a Character or relationship in the text?
        i. "This *character* reminds me of *who I was* in my past"
    b. To a Theme or situation in the text?
        i. "This *scene* reminds me of *something I experienced* in my past."
3. Was the participant's analysis:
    a. About/through the Text?
        i. "*That line* makes me think this character has a plan."
    b. About/through Performance (including reading aloud)?
        i. "*The way you read that line* makes me think this character has a plan."

Operational

1. Were the participant's feelings:
    a. Active (due to her own action in the ensemble)?
        i. "When *I* solved this problem, it made me feel excited."
    b. Received (due to another person's action in the ensemble)?
        i. "When *you* solved this problem, it made me feel excited."
2. Was the participant connecting:
    a. To the Ensemble (the people in the room)?
        i. "Hearing *your* story makes me understand *my own* actions better."
    b. To Humanity (the people outside the room)?
        i. "Hearing *your* story makes me understand *another person's* actions better."
3. Was the participant's analysis about:
    a. The Program (its operation)?
        i. "We need a stricter attendance policy."
    b. The Members of the ensemble (unrelated to the play itself)?
        i. "We need to make sure these members don't feel overwhelmed."
    c. Situations outside of SIP (i.e., in their housing unit)?
        i. "What I learned here helped me manage conflict with my bunkie."

The final code indicated whether this was a participant's Explicit statement or an Implicit observation by the facilitators. When appropriate, facilitators also included an asterisk (*) to indicate the ensemble member's telling of her own life story.

The following two examples, taken from the narrative, illustrate this system in practice:

> "He's like me," Violetta said to a facilitator during rehearsal. "I'm smart, but I'm absent-minded. So is he: smart, but not paying attention."

Here, Violetta clearly articulates a realization that is both about her character and herself. This is the Theatrical process at work, the expression is one of empathy (Connecting), it is in response to a Character, and the statement is a direct quote (Explicit). Violetta also tells part of her life story. The code for this data, then, is "TCCE.*"

> A facilitator wrote, "[Jane] had expressed extreme anxiety about auditioning, then volunteered to read. Everyone cheered as she stood and walked into the playing area. After she read, a longtime ensemble member said, 'You don't even seem like you have anxiety!'"

Despite this example's occurrence during auditions, the noteworthy event illustrates a specific feature of the Operational process. Jane's bravery provokes an empathetic response (Connecting) from fellow Ensemble members. As no one is quoted articulating that specific feeling, it is recorded as Implicit; the complete code being "OCEI."