“Creating Ourselves as a Work of Art”: A Grounded Theory Exploration of Constructing Individual and Collective Identities Through Theatre

By

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Abstract

Constructing a flexible and coherent identity impacts the way we live our lives and our mental health. We begin most actively developing our identities in adolescence around dominant cultural identity portrayals, but these generally reflect the experiences of groups with greater privilege. Thus individuals who hold historically marginalized social identities may have greater difficulty constructing their identity due to the limited representations available. However, constructing a coherent individual and social identity may be protective against minority stress. For youth from historically marginalized communities, programs that allow young people to access a wider array of community identities and try out different ways of enacting their own identities may be especially impactful, such as theatre programs that allow young people to create and perform communal stories based on their experiences. However, little research has investigated the long-term impact of participating in such a theatre organization.

The present study explores a theatre group for youth who identify as diverse with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity, and the ways participants believe their involvement impacted their lives. Through grounded theory interviews with 15 participants, 9 core themes emerged outlining the transformative process within the organization, including having positive experiences related to their social identities, developing interpersonal connections, engaging in self-expression, learning about themselves and others, and ultimately feeling healed and empowered. These themes echo the tenets of programming within the field of positive youth development and social justice youth development, but also highlight the importance of being able to find and express one's individual and collective voice.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Modern North American society is fascinated with the concepts of self and identity. This is evidenced by the fact that according to the PsychInfo database in the past 100 years there have been over 87,400 peer-reviewed articles published with the word "self" in the title, and 19,600 with the word "identity." Even more telling is that 62% of the "self" articles and 75% of the "identity" articles were published within only the past 15 years. Identity is a complex facet of the self that may feel stable and intrinsic to the individual in the moment, but which many theorists consider to be socially constructed and enacted (Ewick & Sibley, 1995; Somers, 1994).

1.1 Literature Background

1.1.1 The Complexity of Identity Construction

Through my work on this dissertation, as well as psychotherapy with many clients, I have come to appreciate the complexity of identity. Indeed, the way an individual acts from moment to moment is impacted by a complex array of intersecting factors (Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003). Rather than embodying a single, stable self, each individual is polyphonic and heteroglossic, meaning that they contain multiple different imagined perspectives within themselves that are in constant dialogue with each other and that are shaped by context and language (Bakhtin, 1929/1973; Hermans, 2001). The way individuals interpret and act upon these perspectives varies depending on specific situations occurring at particular moments in time within specific contexts (Park-Fuller, 1986).

Humans are constantly attempting to understand the world through detecting patterns and attaching meaning (Kurzman, 2008). Therefore if you ask an individual to describe who they are, it is highly unlikely that they will describe the inner dialogue between their multiple shifting viewpoints. Rather, they will likely describe important moments in their life, organizations to

which they belong, and social identities that are meaningful to them. This represents what psychologist and philosopher William James describes as the "me" or "self-as-known," sometimes also referred to as "self concept" or identity (Hermans, 2001; James, 1890; McAdams, 1996).

When individuals reflect on themselves, rather than perceiving disparate perspectives and actions disconnected across time and context, they search for patterns and meaning and construct an identity out of selected memories most relevant to their understanding of self in the present moment (McAdams, 1996; Rappaport, 2000). This construction of identity applies not only to individual identities, but also to the integration of social identities into an individual's personal identity. Social identities are those that are based on a socially meaningful category (e.g. race, sexual orientation; Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010), and include the internalization or rejection of characteristics and traits dominant cultural portrayals associate with those social identities. In contrast, collective identity is an individual's sense of "we-ness" with a particular group or social identity (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010).

1.1.2 Integrating Marginalized Social Identities

For individuals who perceive themselves as holding marginalized identities, identity construction and re-construction can be especially problematic because the dominant social identity scaffolds and representations available are often narrow, negative, or written for them by others who do not share the identity (Rappaport, 1995). However, because identity construction is an active process, individuals and collectives can challenge hegemonic social hierarchies by constructing empowered social identities for themselves (DiFulvio, 2011; Ewick & Sibley, 1995; Wexler, DiFluvio, & Burke, 2009). Indeed, integrating an authentic social identity into one's personal identity has been associated with numerous mental health benefits for individuals with

marginalized identities, including higher self-esteem (Phinney, Cantu, & Curtz, 1997), lower levels of depression (Yasui, Dorham, & Dishion, 2008), fewer conduct problems (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2011), and higher rates of high school completion and college attendance (Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman, 2003).

1.1.3 Dominant Cultural Identity Portrayals of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity

Individuals generally construct their own personal sense of social identity based on models provided by dominant cultural portrayals of that social identity. However, this can be problematic when there are limited portrayals. For example, for many years the main social identities available for individuals who identify as diverse with regard to sexual orientation and gender diversity (SOGD, for further explanation of this acronym, see the terminology section within this introduction) were those of immorality or pathology. These portrayals depicted SOGD-identified people as sinners or sick (Green, 2014; Hammack, 2005; Herek & Garnets, 2007; Scasta, 1998). Today this representation is still apparent in many communities (Boulden, 2001; Hammack & Cohler, 2011; Herek & Garnets, 2007) and its influence is still present in some widely used diagnostic manuals, like the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Problems* (ICD-10; Cochran et al., 2014).

A SOGD identity representation that has risen to prominence since the 1980's is that of personal struggle and success (Hammack & Cohler, 2011). This representation highlights the difficulties SOGD individuals experience as well as their ultimate ability to overcome those difficulties. Specifically, this portrayal acknowledges that modern American culture is pervasively heteronormative, giving advantage to individuals who identify as straight and cisgender while reducing opportunities for those who identify as SOGD, and exposing SOGD-identified individuals to acts of discrimination and victimization (Berlan, Corliss, Field,

Goodman, & Austin, 2010; Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Butler, 1993; Smith & Shin, 2014). This systemic oppression has been linked to poorer mental and physical health outcomes for SOGD individuals, including higher rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and substance use (D'Augelli, Grossman, Salter, Vasey, Starks, & Sinclair, 2005; Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Frost, Lehavot, & Meyer, 2015; Meyer, 2003). Despite these challenges, most SOGD-identified individuals achieve similar levels of well-being to straight and cisgender people (Saewyc, 2011). Through leveraging community resources and social support, SOGD young people demonstrate substantial resilience and positive adaptation (DiFulvio, 2011; Herrick, Stall, Goldhammer, Egan, & Mayer, 2014; Rosario et al., 2004).

This struggle and success representation of SOGD identities is still one that resonates with many individuals, but a more recent SOGD social identity scaffold that has emerged is that of emancipation (Cohler & Hammack, 2007). In this process, individuals de-center the SOGD identity from their personal identity, choosing non-categorical labels to describe themselves (Bockting, Benner, & Coleman, 2009; Coleman & Fountain, 2014; Factor & Rothblum, 2008). SOGD-identities are increasingly understood to represent constructs that are fluid (Diamond, 2008), continuous (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953), multilayered (Butler, 1990; Diamond, 2003), and synergistic with other identities (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). In the emancipatory representation, individuals who identify as SOGD describe themselves first and foremost as whole individuals, with a SOGD social identity as a facet of difference that does not make them anything other than normal (Coleman-Fountain, 2014; Ghaziani, 2011).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although the emancipatory SOGD identity portrayal is emerging as a new scaffold for individuals to draw from, modern North American society remains heterosexist and minority

stress continues to have a pernicious effect on the well-being of many SOGD-identified young people. In particular, many SOGD-identified young people describe feeling isolated and threatened at school (Wexler et al., 2009), and experience difficulty finding social support and mentorship, especially related to SOGD identities (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). This means that during adolescence, the period when individuals are most actively constructing their identities, many SOGD-identified young people may have difficulty identifying an authentic social identity scaffold to inform their identity construction process (McAdams, 1996).

Positive youth development programs that encourage meaningful youth participation may be one way of fostering positive social and personal identity construction and well-being for SOGD youth. In particular, youth theatre companies in which the young people write and perform pieces based on their own experiences might be especially effective. Youth theatre has been found to help young people take risks in a safe space and try on new roles and perspectives (Halverson, 2010b, Hughes & Wilson, 2004). By working together to create a performance, young people gain a shared sense of purpose as well as social support and mentorship from other group members, all of which have been indicated to be protective factors against minority stress (Baams, Grossman, & Russell, 2015; Doty, Willoughby, Lindahl, & Malik, 2010). Through crafting pieces based on the experiences of the group and embodying other people's identities, they are also likely to engage in the active process of constructing their own identity. However, little is known about the ways in which SOGD-identified individuals perceive participating in such a theatre organization to impact their sense of self and well-being.

1.3 Purpose of the Present Study

The existing literature indicates constructing a coherent identity may be a protective factor against minority stress for individuals from marginalized communities (Beale Spencer,

Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001; Payne, 2000; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Phinney & Chavira, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007; White & Epston, 1990), including SOGD communities specifically (Crawford, et al., 2002; Halpin & Allen, 2004). This includes not only individual identity, but also social identity (DiFulvio, 2011; Mankowski & Thomas, 2000; Wexler et al., 2009). However, little research has explored the long-term impact of the unique process of engaging in identity construction through collectively reflecting on shared experiences in a group theatre context.

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to develop a theory explaining how performing in an autobiographical SOGD youth theatre group impacts performers' individual and social selves. More specifically, what key aspects of being involved in such a group do former participants feel were central to their growth and well-being, and in what ways do they believe they have changed as a result of their participation? It was our hope to inform future program design through using retrospective interviews with former youth theatre performers to develop a rich theory outlining the most impactful core elements of the experience.

1.4 A Note about Terminology

This project is primarily concerned with individuals who identify as diverse with regard to sexual orientation and gender. Due to the powerful impact of language on social reality, it is important to establish shared meanings of terms used, and to use terms that are as relevant yet inclusive as possible.

The term "homosexual" first appeared in print in 1869 in a German pamphlet protesting a proposed anti-sodomy law (glbtq.com, 2004). However, this term is problematic because it combines several distinct concepts including sexual attraction to individuals of one's own gender, a personal identity associated with that pattern of attraction, and sexual behavior acting

on that attraction (Halperin, 2000). Equally challenging is that it implies a strict dichotomy between those who identify as heterosexual and those who do not (glbtq.com, 2004).

To address these concerns, a variety of acronyms have come into use to encompass as inclusive a spectrum of gender and sexual diversity as possible, including LGBT or longer variants like LGBTQQIP2SAA (i.e. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, asexual, allies; Hulshof-Schmidt, 2013). Due to the unwieldy nature of the ever-expanding acronym, other broader acronyms have been proposed, including GSD to stand for "gender or sexual diversities" (Crowley, 2013) or the slightly more specific phrase "sexual orientation and gender diversity" that is currently gaining adoption within the American Psychological Association (Benjamin, 2014) Thus, for the purpose of inclusion, in this paper the phenomenon of identifying as not straight or not cisgender will be referred to as SOGD to represent "sexual orientation and gender-diverse," with more specific labels (ex. transgender, gay, lesbian, etc.) used as necessary.

Additionally, it is common to refer to individuals as belonging to "the LGBT community" (e.g. The White House, 2014), implying there is one monolithic group to which all individuals who identify as SOGD belong. The concept of a unitary SOGD community grew out of the Stonewall riots of 1969 and the HIV/AIDS crisis, which made strong collective responses necessary for individual survival (Beck, 2015). However, since that time increasing visibility, acceptance, and assimilation of some SOGD identities into "mainstream" American culture has meant that the experiences of individuals who identify as SOGD often differ from person to person based on the other social identities with which their SOGD status intersects (Beck, 2015; Weststrate & McLean, 2010). Because there is no one "SOGD community," when referring to all

individuals who identify within the umbrella of SOGD identities, I will use the phrase "communities" to denote the regional, local, and individual variability in experience.

Finally, throughout this report I will be using the pronoun "they" in singular form to be as gender-inclusive as possible. Technically according to the American Psychological Association style guide (APA, 2009), this is grammatically incorrect. However, it is a clear and efficient way of denoting a non-specific person whose gender identity is unknown without making assumptions or reinforcing the gender binary through the use of "he or she" (Lawler, 2005). Although the APA has not yet recognized this form of pronoun use, writers throughout history have used it, including Jane Austen, Lewis Carroll, Edith Wharton, and William Shakespeare (Lawler, 2005), and in recent years the English Oxford Dictionaries have also adopted this use of the pronoun "they" (Soanes, 2012).

Other terms that appear throughout the manuscript include:

- Sexual orientation: This refers to the gender of the individuals to whom an individual feels most often sexually and romantically attracted (APA, 2011). Often it is considered to be a consistent, enduring, categorical pattern (Diamond, 2003). However, recent research indicates many individuals experience a substantial amount of variation in their sexual orientation over time (Diamond, 2008), and sexual orientation may be a continuous rather than a categorical facet of identity (Kinsey et al., 1953)
- Gay: Typically this term refers to men who are attracted to other men, although at times it is used to refer more broadly to all individuals who are attracted to individuals of their own gender (APA, 2011).
- Lesbian: Women who are attracted to other women are described as identifying as lesbians (APA, 2011).

- Bisexual: Individuals who are attracted to other individuals who identify as men or women are referred to as bisexual (APA, 2011). Other terms that have become used more recently include “pansexual” and “omnisexual” to specifically deemphasize the dominant gender binary and denote attraction to individuals across the continuum of genders (bisexual.org, 2013).
- Straight: This term refers to individuals who are attracted to other individuals who do not share their gender identity, specifically men who are attracted to women and women who are attracted to men (APA, 2011).
- Sex: This indicates a person’s biological status based on indicators such as reproductive organs, genitalia, and sex chromosomes (Budge, Katz-Wise, Tebbe, Howard, Schneider, & Rodriguez, 2013). The categories used most frequently to describe a person’s sex are “male,” “female,” and “intersex” (APA, 2011). This is a category that an individual is generally placed in at birth by parents or medical professionals.
- Gender: This reflects the culturally specific social construct that describes the norms, traits, and roles assigned to men and women (Budge et al., 2013).
- Gender identity: This refers to a person’s internal experience of their own gender and their awareness of being a particular gender (Budge et al., 2013).
- Transgender: This term refers to individuals who do not experience congruence between the sex they were assigned at birth and their gender identity (Budge et al., 2013). They may identify their gender identity outside the dichotomous man-woman social construction of gender, or may identify with a gender that is within the dichotomy but is not the one they were assigned (Budge et al., 2013).

- Cisgender: This refers to people who experience congruence between the sex they were assigned at birth and their gender identity (Steinmetz, 2014).
- Non-binary: This term indicates individuals who identify their gender identity to be outside the dichotomous cultural construction of gender (Hesse, 2014). Other terms that some individuals use to denote gender identity outside of the binary include "genderqueer," or "agender" (Hesse, 2014).
- Queer: This term was considered to be pejorative but has since been reclaimed by SOGD-identified individuals to denote identification outside societal norms for sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Hesse, 2014; PFLAG, 2015).

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

"From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art" (Foucault, 1997, p. 262).

Does the above quote fit your experience of self? Your ability to reflect on this is indicative of what philosopher and psychologist William James referred to as the "I," or the reflexive capacity of the self (James, 1890; Leary & Tangney, 2011; Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010). Specifically, this awareness of self comes into being through interpersonal interactions, because they encourage us to consider ourselves from the perspective of others (Owens et al., 2010). What you are reflecting on when you consider your self is the "me," or the object of that reflection, also commonly referred to as the "self-concept" (James, 1890; Leary & Tangney, 2011; Owens et al., 2010; Rosenberg, 1979). Identity is one aspect of self-concept and can be defined as "self-ideas abstracted from one's biographical details and framed in terms of broader social categories" (Owens et al., 2010, p. 479). This includes a personal identity drawn from life experiences and categorizations (e.g. "I am Sarah's sister"), and membership in a social identity category (e.g. "I identify as White") or in an actual social group (e.g. "I am a member of the University of Wisconsin - Madison counseling department"; Owens et al., 2010).

Many theorists have proposed models of personal, social, and collective identity formation, including specific models describing the potential trajectories of individuals' racial (Cross, 1971), sexual (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1979), and gender identities (Katz, 1979). Although these stage-based models may fit well for some, they also carry implicit assumptions about how identity should look and develop (Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen, & Lindahl, 2013; Eliason,

1996; Talburt, 2004). Other theorists posit identity development occurs in a non-linear and idiographic manner through the construction and integration of personal narratives (Bruner, 1991; Coleman-Fountain, 2014; Rappaport, 2000; Somers, 1994).

Youth who identify as diverse with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity may have particular difficulty crafting an integrated social identity because the dominant culture of modern North American society generally renders such individuals invisible or pathologizes them (Weststrate & McLean, 2010). In contrast to those dominant portrayals, new representations of SOGD social identities are emerging including those of struggle and success and emancipation (Hammack & Cohler, 2011).

Research indicates crafting a coherent identity contributes to overall well-being (Pennebaker, 2000), and that identifying in a positive manner with a social identity can be especially important for individuals who hold marginalized social identities (Rappaport, 1995). Autobiographical theatre has been used for decades in therapy and community activism to promote greater self-awareness and empowerment (Bailey, 2006; Boal, 1974/2000; Moreno, 1946). However, little research has explored how participants in autobiographical youth theatre perceive their participation to affect their identity expression and overall well-being. The present study seeks to better understand how youth performers in such a group continue to reflect on its impact in their lives years after their participation.

2.2 Identity

The concept of identity is often taken for granted because of its ubiquity within modern culture. However, it is one that is definitionally ambiguous (Bilgrami, 2006; Fearson, 1999). In the past 200 years and since the 1960's in particular, concepts of the self and identity have increased in prominence in philosophy, research, and popular culture (Ewick & Silbey, 1995;

Somers & Gibson, 1994; Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003). The term has been used in such diverse contexts that at times it becomes so flexible and diffuse that it is no longer a useful concept for analysis, while at others it represents something so narrowly and rigidly defined that it fails to capture lived experience (Anthias, 2002; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Indeed, it can mean both similarity between individuals, as in the case of a shared social identity, as well as distinctiveness within an individual that is presumed to be consistent and continuous over time (Fearson, 1999; Tirandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003). Thus theories of identity and selfhood center on the extent to which individuals experience themselves as essentially the same from one situation to the next while also being both different from and related to others (McAdams, 1996).

2.2.1 Constructivist Identity

Although the simplest definition of identity may be "how one answers the question 'who are you?" (Fearson, 1999, p. 11), this question would be answered differently in different contexts. Postmodern theorists argue that identity is fluid and constructed, which stands in contrast to the Cartesian model of self that assumes a unitary and central "I" (Hermans, 2001). Identity is, instead, an individual process of being and becoming that is constantly renewed, confirmed, or transformed through social interactions (Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003). It is multifaceted, self-reflexive, and contextually dependent.

Polyphony and heteroglossia. To represent the many-selfed person, psychological theorists have adopted the concepts of "polyphony" and "heteroglossia" from the work of the philosopher and linguist Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1929/1973; Hermans, 2001). Polyphony speaks to the idea that each individual has many different voices and perspectives within them that enter into dialogue as an individual enacts their identity (Park-Fuller, 1986). A representation of this might be the common image an individual attempting to make a decision based on the discussion

between a devil and an angel sitting on each shoulder. Heteroglossia, or "other-languaged-ness," refers to the idea that there are also layers of cultural and contextual meaning in every internal and external dialogue (Bakhtin, 1929/1973; Francis, 2012; Park-Fuller, 1986). There are specific ideologies and forms of language that are inherent to our different social positions and interacting internal voices, and that are specific to our lived moment in time and space (Bakhtin, 1981; Kraus, 2006; Park-Fuller, 1986). Thus the broader context and specific situation play a constant role in impacting the meanings conveyed by the many internal "voices" within an individual (Park-Fuller, 1986).

When the "I," or self-as-knower, is reflecting on the "me," or self-concept, it is therefore not from a generic fixed perspective, but rather from the perspective of many imagined, internalized viewpoints. As our internal perspectives shift across the lifespan and from one situation to the next, so too does our understanding of who we are and how we should act in order to remain self-congruent. At times we are aware of these dynamic inner perspectives, such as when seem to literally hear the voice of a loved on inside our head encouraging or discouraging a particular action (e.g. "did you triple check that you packed your passport?" asks internal Mom). However, much of the time these perspectives are functioning just below our awareness so that we perceive our actions to be informed by a continuous and coherent personal identity that we can reflect on with a unitary reflexive self.

Making sense of postmodern identity. We know that despite the complexity of identity, people do use it to make sense of and direct their daily lives from one moment to the next (Anthias, 2002; Bruner, 1987/2004). Lev Vygotsky suggested that cultural practices, like language, mediate thought and impact the way individuals represent reality (Bruner, 1991), which social scientists in the 1980's expanded upon to explain how individuals represent the

reality of selfhood through the cultural conventions of narrative (Bruner, 1991; McAdams, 2006; Somers, 1994). Narrative may, in fact, be the way in which all individuals construct and make meaning out of their lives and identities (Bruner, 1987/2004; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; McAdams, 1996; Somers, 1994), such that "many observers of contemporary social life argue that it is a coherent and vivifying life story that best provides the modern adult with that quality of selfhood that goes by the name of *identity*" (McAdams, 1996, p. 299). A narrative identity, or life story, incorporates an individual's reconstructed past, present, and expected future (McAdams, 1996).

2.2.2 Social Identity and Collective Identity

Like individual identity, the concepts of social identity and collective identity have been used in a wide array of fields, defined in a variety of ways, and subjected to many of the same conceptual critiques (Fominaya, 2010; Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010; Poletta & Jasper, 2001; Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003). Generally, the idea of social identity has been studied in such contexts as self-concept, symbolic interaction and role-based identity theories, and social identity theory, while that of collective identity has been explored in studies of politics, culture, and social movements (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010).

Social identities are those based on socially defined categories, such as race or sexual orientation (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010). The label assigned to a social category assumes an underlying entity that differentiates individuals within and outside the category by virtue of being essential to a particular category, and also implies a set of implicit or explicit rules of membership that indicate how typical members of the category behave and think (Fearson, 1999). Often these categories are considered to be natural and unchanging facts (Fearson, 1999). In contrast, collective identity is an individual's sense of connection with a

broader institution or community of which an individual is a member and their sense of moral, cognitive, and emotional similarities and connections with that organization or population (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Swann, Jetten, Gomez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012).

Thus, an individual can have both a social identity and a collective identity referring to a similar facet of themselves. For instance, I identify as a woman. My social identity as a woman includes my personal incorporation of societal messages of womanhood related to being empathetic and emotionally expressive, while rejecting other societal messages such as being submissive or focused on physical attractiveness (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010). I also have a strong collective identity as a woman, based on my feeling of belonging to women's rights organizations and the broader national and international population of women and our universal efforts to secure equal rights and opportunities (Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

The concept of the particular social identity in question may first have been constructed by people outside the category but it must also be accepted by those to whom it is applied in order to become part of a collective identity (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). For example, according to Marvel Comics, an international peacekeeping agency initiated the concept and character makeup of a group to be known as "The Avengers" but after joining that group, the members within it also identified being Avengers as part of their identities. In contrast, within the *Harry Potter* series individuals with some "muggle," or non-magical, ancestors are referred to by those with only magical ancestors as "half-blood" or "mudblood." However, the individuals to whom the terms are applied do not tend to refer to themselves as such or to identify strongly and distinctly as part of a collective of non-pureblood wizards. Thus they may still have a social

identity as muggle-born wizards as labeled by society at large, but they do not have a collective identity as such.

2.3 Impact of Personal Social Identity Construction and Integration

The way in which an individual integrates a social identity into their personal identity has been suggested to be an important source of resilience for individuals who hold marginalized social identities (DiFulvio, 2011; Wexler et al., 2009). In general, people with a high level of group solidarity are less likely to want to alter their group membership (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Specifically, the theory of optimal distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991) posits that individuals need to experience balance between their levels of group affiliation and individuality. According to this theory, individuals with marginalized identities find that balance through embracing the marginalized identity as part of a collective (Brewer, 1991; Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010). This allows them to benefit from the distinctiveness conferred by owning their marginalized identity while also keeping them from being "too distinct" as the only representative of that identity (Brewer, 1991; Leonardelli et al., 2010). Research has indeed found that connecting with a social identity promotes life satisfaction and positive mood, even when the social identity an individual is identifying with is an imaginary one (e.g. wizards or vampires; Gabriel & Young, 2011).

2.3.1 Mental Health Benefits of Social Identity Integration

A strong sense of belonging with one's ethnic or racial group has been found to have a positive impact on mental health and academic achievement (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007). Specifically youth with stronger incorporation of ethnic identity into their identity narrative have been found to have higher self-esteem (Phinney et al., 1997; and vice versa, Umaña-Taylor et al., 2008), lower levels of depression and externalizing and internalizing behaviors (Yasui et al.,

2008), and higher rates of high school completion and college attendance (Chavous et al., 2003). Re-envisioning a social group's history in a way that valorizes and values social identity, local culture, and language has also been suggested as a way to promote mental health for indigenous populations (Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011).

The positive impact of integrating a social identity into a personal identity appears to be true for SOGD-identified individuals as well. People who describe integrating their SOGD identity more fully into their personal identity have indeed been found to report fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression, fewer conduct problems, and higher self-esteem (Rosario et al., 2011). This appears to remain true when integrating more than one social identity, as research has indicated African American gay and bisexual men who demonstrate greater integration of both ethnic and SOGD identities report higher self-esteem, stronger social support networks, greater life satisfaction, and less psychological distress (Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, & Soto, 2002). Similarly trans youth of color described developing their ethnic and gender identities as a source of resilience (Singh, 2016). These changes in identity integration over time predict better mental health both cross-sectionally and longitudinally, even when controlling for family and friend support, negative social relationships, and stress related to SOGD identity (Rosario et al., 2011). Thus social identity integration, in and of itself, appears to have the potential to confer mental health benefits.

There are several potential mechanisms that could explain how integration of a positive social identity into a personal identity could promote overall well-being. Two specific pathways suggested for how integrating SOGD identity confers such benefits are through giving new meaning to individual experiences and through providing scaffolding for individual identity construction (DiFulvio, 2011; Herek & Garnets, 2007; Rosario et al., 2011).

2.3.2 Social Identity as a Source of Purpose

Not only do social identities provide structure for the construction of personal identities, but they also allow individuals to depersonalize experiences of stigma and interpret them instead from the perspective of larger social justice concerns (DiFulvio, 2011). Thus identifying as part of a collective of other individuals who identify as SOGD can help give youth a sense of purpose and power over their own stories through spurring them to take action against structures of inequality (DiFulvio, 2011; Wexler et al., 2009).

Young people who internalize a positive SOGD social identity may feel a stronger sense of purpose than those who do not due to the motivation to address inequality. In general, youth who express purpose, a stable intention to accomplish something that is meaningful to both themselves and the world at large, tend to describe having more consolidated and coherent personal identities and a deeper sense of life meaning (Burrow, 2010; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). This connection between overall meaning-making in life, higher order purpose, and social identity coherence persists beyond adolescence into adulthood and often leads to more generative contributions to society across the lifespan (Damon et al., 2003). Youth who have a strong commitment to their social identity also generally have a stronger sense of purpose, which is associated with a greater sense of personal agency, hope, and overall well-being (Burrow, 2010). Specifically, enacting a SOGD identity associated with activism has been associated with an increase in sense of self-empowerment (Gray & Demarais, 2014). Indeed, engaging in social movements based on social identities may be an especially effective way to construct meaningful personal identities because doing so provides space to explore different ways of being through emphasizing resistance to dominant institutions (Kurzman, 2008).

The feeling of purpose and empowerment associated with an integrated SOGD identity may buffer the negative impact of minority stress on mental health. Recent research indicates the feeling of being a burden uniquely contributes to depression and suicidal ideation (Baams et al., 2015). Therefore by offering an opportunity for SOGD individuals to not only feel connected to others but also to contribute to something larger than themselves, the incorporation of a SOGD identity into an individual identity may help promote psychological well-being for SOGD-identified individuals (Baams et al., 2015).

2.3.3 Cultural Social Identity Portrayals as Personal Identity Scaffolds

As community psychologist Julian Rappaport (2000), argues, "shared narratives are the currents in which our individual lives move down the river of time. They are resources that empower or impede. They give our lives direction and meaning" (p. 6). Social identity narratives are particularly important for the individual identity construction process because they provide support and structure around which an individual can craft their identity, especially during adolescence and times of substantial change (Hammack, 2008; Kuper & Mustanski, 2014; Rappaport, 1995). These structures can be sources of oppression or empowerment for individuals.

Constructing an identity that is independent from but related to the identities of other individuals within the social category allows individuals to construct a multifaceted social and personal identity for themselves (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005). This personal and social integration creates coherence out of sometimes conflicting aspects of categorical identities, which some theorists argue is essential to positive self development because "being able to acknowledge and embrace contradictory and emergent selves (and contradictory experiences) is a significant accomplishment of modern personhood" (Anthias, 2002, p. 497).

Crafting individual and social identities can also actually subvert oppressive hegemonic identity portrayals by bearing witness to what goes unexpressed within those dominant representations in a way that highlights the particularity of individual experiences, and by providing models of more varied identity representations for others to choose from in constructing their own identities (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). Both the fields of community psychology and narrative therapy argue that in order for an individual to truly integrate empowering revisions to their identity, they must be surrounded by other individuals who recognize that revised sense of self (White & Epston, 1990; Rappaport, 2000). Thus being part of a community may not only help support the construction of an empowered identity, but may also be necessary to sustain it (Rappaport, 2000).

2.4 Challenges with Social Identity Conceptualization and Construction

2.4.1 Critiques of the Categorical Conceptualization of Social Identity

Although there are many potential benefits of integrating an authentic social identity into one's personal identity, some theorists feel that by focusing on a single category at any given moment, it runs the risk of over-determining other experiences and differences based on that one category (e.g. gender over-shadowing race or class) and does not effectively move society toward greater inclusivity (Anthias, 2002; Sommers, 1994). They suggest the categories of identity are socially constructed and contextually and situationally located (Anthias, 2002; Eliason, 1996; Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003). This means they shift over time due to human thinking, discourse, and action (Cox & Gallois, 1996; Fearson, 1999). Additionally, this categorical approach may not fully represent experience, especially because each individual's identities necessarily intersect, creating unique experiences specific to the individual (Rowe,

2014; Somers & Gibson, 1994). Thus fixed social categories do not fully capture the complex lived experience of identity (Anthias, 2002; Bregman et al., 2013; Saewyc, 2011).

Critics of the categorical approach to understanding social identity also feel it reinforces and reifies the differences between identities that are the basis for inequality in the first place (Butler, 1990; Bernstein, 2005; Talburt, 2004). Such categorical approaches to social identity are seen as being essentializing, in that they approach identity as an underlying and immutable quality (Somers & Gibson, 1994). For example, emphasizing the value of traits traditionally ascribed to women rather than denigrating them in contrast to those ascribed to men (e.g. relationality vs. independence) may be intended to shift the current gender hierarchy. However, such an effort further entrenches not only the idea that there are traits specific to each gender, but also that gender itself is a natural and fixed entity (Butler, 1990; Somers & Gibson, 1994).

Rather than representing a specific category into which individuals can be placed, theorists suggest social identity is both a process and a product (Fominaya, 2010). Those who do not identify with the social identity in question respond to it as if it is a stable entity that encapsulates the entire population of those who do (Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003). However, the use of categorical social identity labels may allow individuals to create a space where they feel they belong and efficiently convey information to others about who they are (Coleman-Fountain, 2014). Those within that social or collective identity, though, are constantly redefining its identity as they engage in boundary work to determine its essence, or what the category is and what it is not (Fominaya, 2010; Holland, Fox, & Daro, 2008; Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003).

2.4.2 Social Identities as Multifaceted and Performed

Each individual construction of a social identity is one of many possible interpretations, and individuals may express different versions to themselves and to others in different contexts

at different times, making the social identity "plurivocal" (Brown, 2006). Social identities are, like personal identities, accounts of identity-salient events occurring over time and therefore are essentially vehicles for describing and explaining how a particular social category or collective has evolved (Brown, 2006). These descriptions and explanations are fictive in that they are subjectively constructed based on recalling specific memories, resulting in inconsistencies and omissions (Brown, 2006). As individuals and the larger group weave a social identity, the members of the group perform variations of that identity by acting in ways that conform to the constructed identity scaffold (Butler, 1988; Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009).

Feminist philosophers like Judith Butler have applied this theory specifically to the social identities of gender and sexual orientation. As described in the terminology section of the introduction, "gender" refers to the socially constructed categories that are generally perceived to correspond to biological sex (APA, 2011). Many believe the characteristics ascribed to gender have their basis in biology. However, others argue that because gender is socially constructed, it is not in and of itself a fact. Biology may influence each individual's predisposition toward particular traits, but the expression of those traits and the gendered meaning ascribed to them are socially determined. Therefore it can be said that the acts of gender create the idea of it; Gender is "real only to the extent that it is performed" (Butler, 1988, p. 527). Those enacting gender come to believe in it and then perform gender according to that belief, so over time we have tacitly and collectively agreed to perform distinct polar genders (Butler, 1988; 1990). Thus gender identity performance is both an individual choice and imposed by society (Butler, 1988). Sexual and gender identity are ongoing continuously reinvented performances, rather than unitary entities to "discover" (Butler, 1993; Eliason, 1996; Johnson, 2015). Because gender and

sexual orientation are constructed out of a series of acts across time, they can be transformed by shifting the relationship between the acts that constitute them (Butler, 1988; 1990).

2.4.3 Culture's Impact on Social Identity

Identities are highly susceptible to the influence of culture, interpersonal interactions, and even language itself (Bruner, 1987/2004). Because "all cultures seek to reproduce themselves" (Butler, 1990, p. 73), every society tells stories in specific formats, with characteristic roles, plotlines, and deep structures that people unconsciously incorporate into their own self-stories so that they can mesh with the stories around them and be understood by others (Bruner, 1987/2004; Ewick & Silbey, 1995; Madigan, 2011; Mahalik, Good, & Englar-Carlson, 2003; Poletta, 1998). These dominant cultural stories are over-learned and communicated through mass media and social institutions that intersect with the lives of most individuals so that they serve as the background for personal identity construction (Rappaport, 1995, 2000).

The process of identity construction consists of individuals appropriating those shared cultural portrayals of social identities into their own identity, and the modification of those social identity representations or creation of new ones in opposition to the existing ones (Rappaport, 2000). Although each individual crafts a unique identity, they scaffold it around dominant portrayals of identities within their culture so their own identities ultimately reflect prevailing beliefs about what types of selves are possible within that culture (Bruner, 1987/2004; Hammack, 2005; Howard, 1991; Somers, 1994; White & Epston, 1990).

2.4.4 Identity Oppression

Within a culture not all identities have equal representation, value, or power (Coleman-Fountain, 2014; Foucault, 1978/1990; Hammack, 2008; Hermans, 2001). Dominant groups in

society craft master identity narratives for their own group and groups with less power so that those narratives reinforce the existing power differential (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). We craft our own identities based on interactions with others, which take place within this power differential. In this way hierarchies are integrated into our personal identities, which unconsciously further constrains our interactions in society to conform to those hierarchies (Bitter et al., 2009; Foucault, 1978/1990; Hermans, 2001). An example of how this impacts individuals implicitly is the oft cited priming effect studied by Steele and Aronson (1995), in which individuals who are reminded of a marginalized social identity they hold prior to engaging in a task tend to perform that task in accordance with the dominant stereotypes of that identity (e.g. women perform worse on math tests; Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

For those who lack power, the social identity representations for them to use as scaffolds of their own identity are negative, narrow, or written for them by others (Rappaport, 1995). For example, within much of current American society, heterosexuality is perceived to be normative, to the extent that individuals are assumed to be heterosexual until they "come out" (Coleman-Fountain, 2014). This presumption of heterosexuality structures everyday interactions and renders sexual orientation and gender diverse (SOGD) identities problematic, something in need of explanation and management (Coleman-Fountain, 2014). The representations of identities that are available for SOGD-identified individuals have historically been connected with immorality or pathology (i.e. negative) or stereotypes (i.e. narrow, e.g. if you are a gay man that means you are effeminate; McCormack & Anderson, 2014), which have generally originated from individuals who do not identify as SOGD (i.e. written by others, e.g. Freud's theory of arrested sexual development).

As they are told and retold with concrete details and slight personal variations these dominant identity representations create a feeling of polyvocality that increases emotional identification with the dominant representation and protects it from critique (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). This subtly reinforces the hegemony that shapes social interactions (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). Because these dominant social identity portrayals function through implicit claims about truth, they evade debate and challenge, making it difficult for individuals to escape them or find alternative personal or social identities with which to replace them (Ewick & Silbey, 1995; Rappaport, 1995).

2.5 Social Identity Scaffolds for SOGD-Identified Individuals

As previously described, social identity portrayals can be important as scaffolds around which to construct individual identities and as sources of personal meaning making and purpose. However, because individuals construct their social identity based on the representations available within their cultural context, it can be challenging for individuals to construct positive social identities for themselves if they hold identities outside that dominant social group (Hammack & Cohler, 2011; Rappaport, 1995; Weststrate & McLean, 2010). The SOGD identity representations that are available are, like all identity representations, specific to the individual's temporal, spatial, and cultural location (Weststrate & McLean, 2010). Historically, they have been linked to conspiracy and even threat to civilization as a whole (Ayoub, 2014). However, social identity scaffolds that are most accessible for SOGD individuals within our current American society include those of immorality or pathology, struggle and success, and emancipation (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Hammack & Cohler, 2011; Hammack et al., 2009; Talburt, 2004; Weststrate & McLean, 2010).

2.5.1 Immorality and Pathology

One SOGD identity representation that is still pervasive within modern American culture is the story that SOGD-identified individuals are choosing an "immoral" lifestyle. In patriarchal Western societies, women were largely believed to not have sexual feelings and there is little record related to women's sexuality (Weiss, 2004). With regard to men, although same-sex desire and sex acts were generally accepted in ancient Greek and Roman society, early texts satirized and criticized men who behaved in a traditionally feminine manner, including those who enacted feminine cultural roles as well as those who took the receptive role in intercourse (Weiss, 2004). The view that same-gender sexual attraction is immoral stems from Judaic laws that prohibited non-procreative sexual acts (Scasta, 1998). In fact, for the majority of history sexuality was not associated with specific identities, but rather defined solely with regard to specific sex acts. It was not until the 1860's that the terms and differentiation between a "homosexual" and "heterosexual" identity arose (Blank, 2012).

Beginning in the 18th century, gender performance and sexual orientation were often conflated, in that men who engaged in sexual acts with other men were assumed to be more effeminate (Stryker, 2008b; Weiss, 2004). By the 19th century, public gender performances became more sharply differentiated along male and female lines, with legal prohibitions against both enacting a public gender role at odds with one's sex assigned at birth as well as engaging in same-sex sexual acts (Stryker, 2008b; Weststrate & McLean, 2010). Thus, until very recently in our nation's history, this social identity representation of immorality was strongly reinforced through legal prohibitions (Weststrate & McLean, 2010), and to this day is a prevailing belief for many individuals (Green, 2014) and in many faith communities (e.g. Catholicism; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006).

Within medical communities, this view began to shift in the late 19th century. In the 1880's German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing argued same-gender sexual attraction was actually the result of a "psychical disturbance" within the disease model, making it a topic appropriate for scientific study (Hammack, 2005; Herek & Garnets, 2007; Foucault, 1878/1990; Krafft-Ebing & Klaf, 1965). Similarly, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs published a biological theory accounting for people who had "a female soul enclosed within a male body" (Stryker, 2008b, p. 37). Although some medical researchers of the 19th and early 20th century viewed diversity of gender identity or sexual orientation as part of the normative biological continuum, such as Magnus Hischfeld who famously coined the term "transvestite," many viewed it as a form of pathology (Stryker, 2008b). A series of theories about the origins of these "pathologies" arose (Eliason, 1996), including Sigmund Freud's belief that same-gender sexual attraction indicated arrested development (Butler, 1990; Chodorow, 1978; Kirkpatrick, 2000), and the historically popular belief that same-gender sexual attraction represents an inversion of the biological norm (Peplau, Spalding, Conley, & Veniegas, 1999).

Throughout the 1960's, researchers continued to support the idea that same-gender sexual attraction is a form of mental illness through conducting research with clinical populations of gay-identified men (Scasta, 1998). Due to this pathology model of same-gender sexual attraction, homosexuality was not removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM) until 1972 (Maher et al., 2009), and still remained in the DSM as "Ego-Dystonic Homosexuality" until 1986. Although the American Psychological Association has since issued policy statements indicating it is not a mental illness and that there is not enough evidence to support the use of therapy to change sexual orientation (APA, 2011), the view that same-gender attraction represents a form of mental illness is still held within segments of the US population (e.g.

"Homosexuals… frequently show a breakdown in several of the developmental stages leading to heterosexuality, particularly attachment to and gender identification with the same-sex parent and good-enough connection with same-sex peers, leading to needs for same-sex affection and affirmation that become eroticized," Whitehead & Whitehead, 2008, p. 88; Herek & Garnets, 2007). Additionally, the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Problems* (ICD-10) used by the World Health Organization, only removed homosexuality from the list of mental disorders in its latest edition, published in 1990 (Cochran et al., 2014). It still includes diagnostic labels such as "ego-dystonic sexual orientation," "sexual maturation disorder" with the core diagnostic feature of questioning one's gender or sexual identity, and "sexual relationship disorder" (Cochran et al., 2014).

Meanwhile, "Gender Identity Disorder" was included in the DSM for the first time in 1980, based on the work of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, which was largely responsible for providing transgender healthcare (Stryker, 2008b). In part, this diagnostic category was created in an effort to facilitate insurance coverage of medical gender confirmation procedures as a medically necessary, although it has not been consistently successful in doing so (Lev, 2013; Stryker, 2008b). In the current DSM-5, the emphasis on diagnosis shifted from gender nonconformity to distress about gender identity, with the current diagnosis termed "Gender Dysphoria" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Drescher, 2013). Additionally, the diagnosis "Transvestic Disorder" remains controversially in the DSM-5 in the paraphilia category (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) and the American Psychiatric Association both affirm that transgender and gender-nonconforming people are not inherently disordered, and both argue that including Gender Dysphoria as a DSM-5 diagnosis improves access to care for

transgender individuals and have made efforts to make the language describing that diagnosis as non-stigmatizing as possible (Drescher, 2013). However, its inclusion in the DSM-5 also means that transgender individuals will continue to be labeled with a mental illness (Drescher, 2013; Lev, 2013). Additionally, the diagnostic definition focuses on discomfort with one's body rather than on the negative consequences of societal prejudices and norms, which continues to emphasize the pathological social identity representation by locating gender dysphoria within the medical model (Johnson, 2015).

Because these are such a negative portrayal, many individuals who feel same-gender sexual attraction or gender discordance choose to silence these social identities within themselves (Weststrate & McLean, 2010). In the context of prevalent pathology or immorality representations, individuals might still attempt to achieve social mobility through constructing public identities more aligned with the dominant heteronormative social identities. Such strategies might include minimizing SOGD affiliation, such as avoiding all SOGD activity or living separate SOGD and "mainstream" lives (Cox & Gallois, 1996). This was especially true in older SOGD generations, for whom immorality or pathology were the only available cultural representations of SOGD social identities (Weststrate & McLean, 2010), but it continues to be true for many individuals today (Boulden, 2001; Hammack & Cohler, 2011; Herek & Garnets, 2007). Research suggests that the stress of actively concealing a stigmatized identity and maintaining different private and public selves contributes to increased psychological distress (Sedlovskaya et al., 2013).

2.5.2 Struggle and Success

A SOGD social identity representation centered on overcoming oppression began to come into prominence following the Stonewall Inn riots of 1969 and the collective campaigning

for AIDS awareness (Herek & Garnets, 2007; Talburt, 2004; Weststrate & McLean, 2010). Those who came of age in the 1970's and 80's therefore grew up in an era that emphasized the struggle and loss of SOGD individuals, as well as their success in effectively mobilizing for change and forging strong communities (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Rowe, 2014; Weststrate & McLean, 2010). This has resulted in a SOGD cultural representation of risks that are overcome by successful "out" and proud individuals (Talburt, 2004), also known as the "struggle and success" portrayal of SOGD identity (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Hammack & Cohler, 2011).

Like the immorality and pathology portrayal, it focuses on the challenges associated with SOGD identities. However, unlike those representations, the challenges SOGD-identified individuals face are not attributed to sources within the individual, but rather are understood to result from the living in a heterosexist society (Cohler & Hammack, 2007). The struggle and success identity scaffold has great popularity currently, perhaps because it parallels the dominant North American narrative of achievement and "rags to riches," as well as the redemptive life story pattern identified by Dan McAdams in which individuals make positive meaning out of experiencing difficulty, which appears to be associated with overall well-being and generativity (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001).

SOGD discrimination and victimization. This identity scaffold is still one of the most prevalent within our society due to the very real struggles SOGD-identified individuals continue to face. Although much national and global progress has been made in recent years toward greater acceptance of individuals who identify as SOGD (Flores, 2014), those who are part of SOGD communities still frequently face daily microagressions, acts of discrimination, and oppression (Nadal et al., 2011; Pizer, Mallory, Sears, & Hunter, 2012; Szymanski & Henricks-Beck, 2014). Numerous studies have found high rates of victimization for SOGD-identified

individuals (Berlan et al., 2010; Birkett et al., 2009; Conron, Mimiaga, & Landers, 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012). In a recent meta-analysis with over 500,000 participants, 55% of SOGD individuals reported experiencing verbal harassment, 41% reported experiencing receiving poorer treatment due to their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, and 28% reported having been physically assaulted (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012).

Additionally, many SOGD youth experience disproportionately negative treatment in school compared with their straight and cisgendered peers (e.g. stronger penalties for public displays of affection) and are more likely to skip school or engage in fights to protect themselves from physical threats, which often results in being "pushed out" of school and experiencing criminal sanctions (Johnson, Singh, & Gonzalez, 2014; Kosciw et al., 2012; Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015). Youth who identify as SOGD also report high levels of social isolation, particularly young SOGD individuals in rural areas (Smith, 1998; Wexler et al., 2009; Yarbrough, 2003). It can be difficult for SOGD-identified individuals to find social support due to peer and familial rejection (Bockting, Miner, Romine, Hamilton, & Coleman, 2013; Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009). Many SOGD individuals do not have access to role models who share their sexual orientation or gender identity (Bird, Kuhns, & Garofalo, 2012; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). This can have negative implications on individuals' physical and mental health as they navigate the process of exploring a SOGD identity. It also reinforces the dominant heteronormative cultural stereotypes through limiting exposure to more authentic and nuanced SOGD identity enactment an thereby making it difficult to construct a persona SOGD identity different from those portrayed in dominant society (Bird et al., 2012).

SOGD individuals who also hold other marginalized identities often must contend with multiple forms of oppression and discrimination (Poteat, Mereish, DiGiovanni, & Koenig, 2011;

Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Thoma & Huebner, 2013). In fact, experiencing both racism and anti-gay discrimination has been found to have an additive effect on the increase in experience of depressive symptoms (Thoma & Huebner, 2013). In particular, transgender and non-binary and bisexual individuals experience high levels of discrimination both within the dominant culture and within many SOGD communities (Rosario, Reisner, Corliss, Wypij, Frazier, & Austen, 2014; Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011). This is believed to be associated with the high levels of depression and anxiety often found among transgender and bisexual-identified individuals (Baams et al., 2015; Bockting et al., 2013; Budge, Adelson, & Howard, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012; Morris, McCormack, & Anderson, 2014).

Systemic oppression and minority stress. SOGD-identified individuals experience not only direct discrimination and stigma, but also systemic oppression. Modern society in the United States is commonly recognized as heteronormative or heterosexist, in that through formal and informal policies and messages it systemically and ubiquitously gives preference and advantage to individuals who identify as straight and cicgender while disadvantaging those who identify as SOGD (Butler, 1993; Smith & Shin, 2014). Additionally, there are numerous rights and protections that are not universally afforded to SOGD individuals in the United States, including marriage equality and protection under state anti-hate crime and nondiscrimination laws, which contributes to individuals' experience of stress (Herdt & Kertzner, 2006; Mays & Cochran, 2001; Riggle, Rostosky, & Danner, 2009).

Living in such a heterosexist society can result in greater risk for physical and mental health concerns for those who do not identify as heterosexual (Frost et al., 2015; Meyer, 2003). Meyer (2003) defines minority stress as "the excess stress to which individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position" (p. 3). This

stress results from automatic negative self-appraisals in comparison to the dominant culture, as well as chronic socially based systemic barriers individuals from marginalized groups must overcome above and beyond the general stressors faced by all individuals (Meyer, 2003).

Social stressors related to minority stress theory have been linked with poorer mental and physical health outcomes for SOGD individuals (Frost et al., 2015; Meyer, 2003; Riggle, Rostosky, & Danner, 2009). Recent research indicates minority stress may result in higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation specifically because it causes people to feel they are a burden to friends and family due to the stigma associated with SOGD identities (Baams et al., 2015). Research has also linked SOGD discrimination with higher levels of substance use, and risky sexual practices, in addition to depressive symptoms, and suicidality (D'Augelli et al., 2005; Espelage et al., 2008; Marshall et al., 2008; Mays & Cochran, 2001). High rates of victimization in school have been associated directly with increased levels of depression and suicidal ideation, risk for sexually transmitted diseases, HIV, and mental health symptoms in general (Russel et al., 2011). For individuals who identify as transgender, research has indicated a connection between social stigma and experiencing psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and somatization (Bockting et al., 2013; Budge, Rossman, & Howard, 2014).

Success despite struggle. Despite the stigma and rejection faced by SOGD individuals, however, most achieve similar levels of well-being and health to their straight and cisgender peers (Saewyc, 2011). Protective factors, like supportive family and friends, school connectedness, and involvement in SOGD-related organizations, have been found to buffer the impact of minority stress and victimization (DiFulvio, 2011; Saewyc, 2011; Rosario et al., 2004). For instance, although overall there are higher rates of anxiety and depression in transgender youth, more recent studies found that transgender children who are socially transitioned and

supported in their gender identity have normative levels of depression and only slight elevations in anxiety (Connolly, Zervos, Barone, Johnson, & Joseph, 2016; Olson, Durwood, DeMeules, & McLaughlin, 2016). Therefore rather than focusing entirely on the challenges associated with SOGD identity, the struggle and success identity scaffold champions the success of the individual over oppressive societal forces (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; DiFulvio, 2011; Estefan & Roughley, 2013). In particular, the strength of the SOGD "community" is often highlighted as an important source of support to promote resilience in young people in the face of external oppression (Ghaziani, 2011). This has sometimes resulted in a strong "us versus them" framework with regard to individuals who identify as straight and cisgender (Ghaziani, 2011).

Resilience, or the process of learning to draw from personal and community strengths to adapt positively in the face of adversity, is often a key concept in these struggle and success social identity representations (Herrick et al., 2014; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). One prominent example of this type of representation is the "It Gets Better Project" started by author Dan Savage (ItGetsBetter.org, 2014), which seeks to offer hope and inspiration to SOGD-identified youth through sharing the personal stories of individuals who overcame stigma and bullying to live satisfying lives. Another prototypical example of the struggle and success narrative is the "coming out" story (Rowe, 2014), in that an individual chooses to share their sexual orientation or gender identity with others in order to be more fully congruent with their felt identity, despite the risk of social and familial rejection.

Indeed, much recent research has centered on the resilience of SOGD individuals. In qualitative interviews with transgender youth of color, participants described numerous sources of resilience supporting adaptation in the context of racism and trans-prejudice, including evolving development of their own gender and ethnic identities, recognizing power imbalances

between adults and youth, advocating for themselves, connecting with SOGD youth community, and using social media to validate and affirm their identities (Singh, 2013). Rather than focusing only on challenges associated with identifying as SOGD within modern society, the study of resilience also highlights positive aspects of identifying as SOGD. Research participants have identified numerous positive qualities related to their SOGD identities, including feeling free from society's definition of roles, having greater compassion and empathy for others as well as more insight into themselves, creating their own families of choice, having strong interpersonal connections, being involved in social justice work, belonging to a community, and being honest and authentic (Riggle, Whitman, Olson, Rostosky, & Strong, 2008).

2.5.3 Emancipation

Although a clear indication of progress toward greater societal acceptance, the "struggle and success" representation of SOGD identity still places emphasis on SOGD-status as a focal aspect of identity (Hammack & Cohler, 2011). The centrality of this portrayal no longer resonates with many young people who began to craft their social identities during or following the 1990's (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Talburt, 2004). Since that time, public attitudes toward SOGD individuals has improved dramatically (Flores, 2014; Kosciw et al., 2012). This means not all SOGD youth experience negative social reactions to their identities or have difficulty accepting and integrating that identity, even though SOGD-identified young people are raised in families and communities that are unlikely to normalize their identity, as might be more common for youth from marginalized racial or ethnic backgrounds, (Rosario, et al., 2011).

They may also have more diverse models of SOGD identities to draw from due to the increasing visibility of SOGD-identified individuals, and the wider array of life course options they are able to envision for themselves due to increasing societal tolerance and globalization

(Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Ghaziani, 2011; Herek & Garnets, 2007; Rowe, 2014; Schneider & Dimito, 2010; Weststrate & McLean, 2010). This corresponds with the construction of a social identity representation that features muted distinctions and more permeable boundaries between individuals who identify as SOGD and those who identify as straight and cisgender (Ghaziani, 2011; Hammack et al., 2009).

Shift toward non-categorical identity labels. Although many individuals in SOGD communities continue to identify with typical sexual orientation and gender identity labels (e.g. "gay," "lesbian," etc.; Glover, Galliher, & Lamere, 2009; Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009), some research indicates younger generations of SOGD-identified individuals are less likely to adopt such labels to describe their sexual orientation or gender identity (Bockting et al., 2009; Coleman-Fountain, 2014; Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Savin-Williams, 2005; Wilkinson, 2009). Instead, youth are using identities like "queer" or other labels that indicate fluidity or resistance to traditional categories (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Johnson, Singh, & Gonzalez, 2014; Russell et al., 2009; Saewyc, 2011).

This non-categorical approach to sexual orientation and gender identity reflects a desire to de-center those facets of identity and acknowledge the intersectionality and individuality of individuals' social identities (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Coleman-Fountain, 2014; Diamond, 2003; Glover et al., 2009; Kraus, 2006; Weststrate & McLean, 2010; Wilson, 1996). It also recognizes the vast variability in experience of romantic and sexual attraction, sexual behavior, biological sex genotypes and phenotypes, gender performance, and gender identity.

Sexual orientation as a continuous construct. Indeed, modern psychological theory about sexual orientation and gender diversity indicates sexual attraction and gender identity are more complex and fluid concepts than previously considered and thus may not fit well into stage

models of development or categorical distinctions. The dichotomous approach to sexual orientation (i.e. gay vs. straight) began to shift in 1938 when Alfred Kinsey conducted one of the first large-scale, systematic studies to explore the continuum of sexual attraction (The Kinsey Institute, 2013). The findings of this study were published in Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin's foundational work, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948), which found that 37% of the men in his sample had engaged in sexual behaviors with other men, and 13% of men and 6% of women identified as predominantly attracted to people of their own gender, indicating same-gender attraction was far more common than previously thought (Scasta, 1998). Perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of Kinsey's work was that he presented same-gender sexual attraction as a normal variation within a continuum of sexual attraction (Kinsey et al., 1948; Scasta, 1998). Not only might sexual orientation be conceptualized along a continuum, as proposed by Kinsey, but so might gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, and sexual behavior (Center for Gender Sanity, 2009; Glover et al., 2009).

Sexual desire, sexual attraction, and identity fluidity. To add further nuance to the understanding of SOGD identity, although they are frequently conflated, sexual desire and romantic attraction can also be considered separately because they are functionally independent of one another (Diamond, 2003). Sexual desire, or who you feel the impulse to have sexual contact with, is driven by the evolutionary goal of reproduction, while attraction, or who you want to become emotionally intimate with, is driven by the goal of attachment or pair bonding (Diamond, 2003). Sexual attraction appears to be increased by the amount of time spent with a given individual and physical contact with them, while sexual desire is often more fixed, which helps explain the prevalence of same-gender romantic relationships at all-boys and all-girls

schools between individuals who might otherwise be primarily sexually attracted to the opposite gender (Diamond, 2003).

Sexual fluidity appears to be a common phenomenon (Diamond, 2008; Dickson, van Roode, Cameron, & Paul, 2013; Katz-Wise, 2015). The development of sexual orientation is believed to be diverse and multiply determined, and biology, culture, and an individual's changing patterns of sexual arousal over time are all important aspects of it (Peplau et al., 1999). A longitudinal study by Lisa Diamond following 89 women over ten years found that most of the participants experienced changes in their patterns of sexual attraction (Diamond, 2008). Slightly less than half of the sample reported moderate changes in their attractions, and one quarter reported significant changes without having previously endorsed such a nonexclusive attraction pattern (Diamond, 2008). Diamond (2008) therefore concluded, "sexual orientation can have an inborn basis and yet still permit variation in desire over time" (p. 161). More recent studies have similarly found sexual fluidity to be a prevalent phenomenon, particularly for sexual minority individuals. A longitudinal population-based study of adults between ages 21 to 38 found that 3-4% of men and 12-16% of women described changes in sexual attraction, and 1.4% of men and 2.6% of women described changing their sexual identities (Dickson, van Roode, Cameron, & Paul, 2013). Meanwhile a different longitudinal population study found that individuals who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual were more likely to shift their identities over a 10-year period than those who identified as straight (Mock & Eibach, 2012). Some research has reported fluidity in sexual attraction in up to 64% of women and 52% of men who identify as sexual minorities, with women identifying with a wider range of sexual identities (Katz-Wise, 2015).

Along with sexual orientation, gender is increasingly recognized as a multifaceted concept (Butler, 1990). In many societies the socially constructed category of gender includes

two identities, "man" and "woman," which are assumed to have emerged naturally from categories of biological sex that are often perceived to be dichotomous (Butler, 1993; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). Broadly, the concept of gender is based on culturally accepted ideals of what it means to be a man or a woman (Butler, 1990; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). However, the contextual enactment of gender is highly complex and dependent on cultural, situational, and personal factors. In terms of individual factors, the enactment of gender is often impacted by the sex one was assigned at birth, how one presents to the world with regard to stereotypically masculine or feminine dress, as well as an underlying feeling of identifying with one or more genders (Factor & Rothblum, 2008). Many individuals identify as fluid with regard to gender identity or as a gender identity outside the binary of "male" and "female," such as queer or omnigender (Factor & Rothblum, 2008).

Intersectional identities. Sexual orientation and gender diversity is usually studied as an identity facet by itself and thus the subtext of the "struggle and success" narrative is that risk and protective factors are experienced similarly by all individuals who identify as SOGD (Wexler et al., 2009). However, sexual and gender identities intersect in complex and synergistic ways across diverse contexts with numerous other identities, including race, religion, ability status, and socioeconomic status (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016; Purdie-Vaughs & Eibach, 2008; Thoma & Huebner, 2013; Wilson, 1996). Some researchers have pointed out the ways in which focusing on the common identity portrayals related to struggle and success may continue to marginalize other non-SOGD identities (Diamond, 2003; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). For instance, Lisa Diamond's work has highlighted the ways in which men's patterns of sexuality have historically been considered normative and have therefore received the most attention

within psychological research, overlooking fluid patterns of attraction that may be more common in women (Diamond, 2008).

Additionally, common sexual identity models do not align well with the experiences of many indigenous SOGD-identified individuals (Wilson, 1996). In many Native American cultures it is not conceptually valid to separate gender identity or sexual orientation from other aspects of identity, which is why some individuals use the term "two-spirit" to affirm the interrelatedness and holism of the individual (Wilson, 1996). In many Native worldviews there is greater emphasis on ambiguity and transformation, rather than binary categorization, and therefore there is less expectation that identities will be static across life, or that individuals will "fit" into a specific identity category in all ways (Lang, 2016). Additionally, for many, the two-spirit identity or other specific indigenous gender classifications are seen as important forms of liberation from the acculturation to colonial conceptions of gender and sexual orientation that was historically forced on Native people (Lang, 2016). Thus by identifying as two-spirit or another indigenous gender identity, individuals inherently affirm their connection to their Native community (Lang, 2016).

Similarly, many African American men who have sex with men may not identify within popular gay culture, instead choosing to self-identify as "down-low" (Martinez & Hosek, 2005). This identity is distinct from the gay identity commonly presented in research and popular culture, which is based on White norms, in that individuals who identify as down-low often maintain long-term relationships with women and publically present in accordance with current norms of masculinity and "straightness," while also engaging in sexual relationships with other men (Martinez & Hosek, 2005). For individuals who identify as down-low, the coming out social identity scaffold is unlikely to fit well with their own social identities (Purdie-Vaughns &

Eibach, 2008). It is worth noting that this social identity is not only not well represented within the most common struggle and success portrayal for SOGD identities, but also that when it is discussed at all within empirical literature, it is often in the context of epidemiology and preventive research for sexually transmitted infections (Ford, Whetten, Hall, Kaufman, & Thrasher, 2007). Thus individuals with marginalized ethnic identities may be further marginalized through the invisibility and ongoing pathologizing of their SOGD identities.

Meanwhile, social class is also an important identity factor that shifts the way individuals may experience and enact sexual and gender identities (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016). This is, in part, related to differences in access to resources, such that those with lower socioeconomic statuses may not have the resources to access SOGD communities or to live in the urban or suburban areas that tend to be more accepting (Barrett & Pollack, 2005). However, there are different cultural assumptions about gender roles based on social class, which may also impact the way individuals perceive themselves and their place in the community (Barrett & Pollack, 2005). Although there has been little research on the ways identity development may differ depending on socioeconomic status for SOGD individuals, having a higher socioeconomic status has been found to promote resilience for transgender individuals (Bariola et al., 2016), and research has found that men from lower socioeconomic statuses are less likely to identify as gay or participate in socially visible SOGD community activities (Barrett & Pollack, 2005).

To address these gaps in the understanding of intersectional SOGD identities, some researchers are proposing new more specific models. For instance, a theoretical model has been proposed to describe the development of intersecting identities of bisexual youth of color (Chun & Singh, 2010), and several qualitative studies have begun to explore specific intersecting identities. These include the experience of being gay, Jewish, and male (Schnoor, 2006), and

African American, female, and lesbian (Bowleg, 2008) as well as investigating the relationship between sexuality, asexuality, and ability status (Kim, 2011), and the experience of invisibility due to multiple intersecting stigmatized identities (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

Normalization of SOGD identities. In addition to acknowledging the variability within SOGD identities and their intersections with other social identities, the SOGD social identity portrayal of emancipation also speaks to the increasing perception of SOGD identities as "normal" (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Ghaziani, 2011). Much anthropological and psychological research has indicated that expression of sexuality and gender is very culturally specific (Davis & Whitten, 1987; Wilson, 1996). In 1951, Ford and Beach found that same-gender sexual behavior or cross-gender identification was normative for at least certain classes of individuals in 64% of societies around the world (Davis & Whitten, 1987; Kirkpatrick, 2000; Peplau et al., 1999; Towle & Morgan, 2002). In the United States since the 1980's, SOGD-identified individuals have become increasingly presented as "fully human" and the psychological and moral equivalent of straight and cisgendered individuals, so that SOGD individuals may no longer try to deny difference or "pass as normal" but rather claim ordinariness (Coleman-Fountain, 2014). In a narrative exploration of the memories of over 200 SOGD-identified individuals, Weststrate and McLean (2010) found that people who came of age in the 1980's described discrimination as systemic and governmental, while young people who grew up later were more likely to focus on personal discrimination and the expectation of being able to participate in canonical rites of passage, like prom. Rather than defining their identities in contrast to dominant society, these youth have integrated their identities into it with more fluid and inclusive conceptualizations of sexual identities (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Ghaziani, 2011; Weststrate & McLean, 2010).

This is not to say that in expecting to be viewed as ordinary, SOGD-individuals constructing emancipatory identities wish their identities to be ignored. Although American society holds more positive attitudes toward SOGD individuals than ever before (Flores, 2014), there is a new form of heterosexism in which anti-SOGD opinions are silenced but not eradicated due to changes in what is considered acceptable to publically express (Ghaziani, 2011; Smith & Shin, 2014). The reduction in blatant statements of anti-SOGD attitudes results in the assumption that SOGD individuals no longer experience discrimination (Smith & Shin, 2014). Some well-meaning straight and cisgender individuals respond by adopting an attitude of universal dignity that claims "difference blindness" with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity (Smith & Shin, 2014). This erasure of SOGD identities reinforces the heteronormativity that is already dominant within our society and fails to address very real differences and difficulties still experienced by SOGD-identified individuals. Thus there is tension between the desire for assimilation and diversity, or the desire for recognition of difference, normalization of that difference, and an identity beyond difference (Ghaziani, 2011). The emancipation social identity scaffold for SOGD individuals ultimately speaks to the pursuit of ownership over their own identity in which they can define their own social identities outside the historically negative or deviant readings of those identities (Coleman-Fountain, 2014).

2.6 Strategies for Fostering Authentic Identity Construction and Integration

In this way our current society offers three primary models or scaffolds of SOGD social identities: immorality and pathology, struggle and success, or emancipation. The first two of these have a strong emphasis on negative aspects of SOGD social identity, whether due to the belief that such an identity is immoral and inherently unnatural, or to the focus on societal oppression contributing to poorer functioning. Thus youth who are exposed primarily to the

immorality and pathology identity representation may be more likely to hide or repress their SOGD social identities, which is likely to have negative mental health repercussions. Although the model of struggle and success for SOGD identities does ultimately emphasize overcoming the odds to live a rewarding life as an "out" individual, it still portrays a narrow representation of what an individual's identity and personal trajectory will look like. Therefore for many youth it too may provide insufficient scaffolding to support personal construction and integration of an empowered and nuanced SOGD social identity.

In contrast, the emancipatory SOGD identity representation centers on individual expression and meaning-making and thereby allows for greater authenticity and flexibility as an identity construction scaffold. Although this SOGD identity portrayal of emancipation is gaining recognition in popular culture, it still is predominantly limited to niche programs and communities and tends to be overshadowed by the earlier popular SOGD identity portrayals. Through engaging in communities and organizations where identity exploration and construction is encouraged and supported, youth may gain greater access to this particular identity portrayal, which may help support their own SOGD social identity development and overall well-being. Positive youth development programs, social justice youth development programs, and autobiographical youth theatre groups may be specific avenues for accessing and developing personal identity around such empowered SOGD identity scaffolds.

2.6.1 Positive Youth Development Programs

Positive youth development is a strength-based perspective on adolescence rooted in developmental systems theories that views young people as assets to society that can be developed, rather risks to be managed (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). These programs cover a wide range of goals within the "Five C's" of competence, confidence,

connections, character, and caring (Bowers, Li, Kiely, Brittian, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010; Lerner et al., 2005), with explicit objectives including everything from problem-solving skills to emotional awareness, from social competence to spirituality (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Positive youth development programs promote healthy navigation of adolescence, have a youth-centered atmosphere of hope and empowerment, and provide opportunities for young people to pursue their interests and practice new skills (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Programs that do foster caring, character, connection, competence, and confidence, have been associated with decreased rates of depression and risk-taking, and increased contribution to the community (Jelicic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2007). Most pertinent to the present study are those that foster self-efficacy, promote social bonds, and encourage the development of clear and positive identity (Catalano et al., 2004).

Meaningful youth participation is a type of positive youth development program that is posited to be especially effective at fostering a sense of purpose and the construction of social identity (Oliver, Collin, Burns, & Nicholas, 2006). In particular, such programs can be helpful for young people from historically marginalized populations because they allow for a reframing of the hegemonic deficit model that is so often applied to such youth (Halverson, 2010b). Such programs have been found to be most effective when they address multiple areas of positive development and provide a structured curriculum or structured activities that are delivered over a period of nine months or longer (Catalano et al., 2004). In order for youth to be engaged in what would be considered "meaningful participation" in a positive youth development program, they must be undertaking an action that has a purpose they believe in, have the agency to make decisions and the resources and skills to carry the action out well, and work with others with whom they feel a sense of belonging to complete the action (Oliver et al., 2006).

2.6.2 Social Justice Youth Development Programs

Some have critiqued the theory of positive youth development because its emphasis on individual behavior and change fails to acknowledge the oppressive context in which many youth live (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). They propose an alternative approach called "social justice youth development" based on the concept of praxis developed by educator Paulo Freire, which includes raising the critical consciousness of young people and engaging in social action to promote change (Cammarota, 2011; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002).

These programs seek to promote self-awareness in relation to one's own identity, social awareness to critically consider their community, and global awareness encouraging empathy with oppressed people around the world (Cammarota, 2011; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). The goal of such programs is not only action, but also healing and resilience for the participants (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright & James, 2002). Elements central to social justice youth development programs include analyzing power dynamics of social relationships, placing identity at the center of the program, encouraging systemic change, fostering collaborative group actions, and valuing youth culture (Ginwright & James, 2002; Wagaman, 2016).

Numerous programs for youth from historically marginalized groups have been based on these principles and have been found to support positive identity development and community engagement. For example, in a program for Asian American youth, young people demonstrated increased understanding of their own racial and ethnic identities as well as a stronger sense of social justice responsibility and community engagement (Suyemoto, Day, & Schwartz, 2014); while in a media literacy program for Native youth, participants expressed increased ethnic pride and greater awareness of societal inequalities (Johnston-Goodstar & Sethi, 2013); and finally in a

program for SOGD youth, increased critical consciousness and community engagement were also associated with increased youth empowerment (Wagaman, 2016).

2.6.3 Theatre as a Forum for Youth Development

Youth theatre in which young people write and perform their own pieces is one potentially powerful form of meaningful participation and social justice youth development. Youth theatre in general has been found to help young people explore and express feelings, take initiative, and take risks in a safe space (Hughes & Wilson, 2004; for alternative perspective, see Freeman, Sullivan, & Fulton, 2003). When the performances explore topics connected to their own lives, youth involved with theatre are also more likely to become more involved in the local community (Hughes & Wilson, 2004). Theatre may be especially helpful in promoting identity construction and enactment because it provides social support necessary for buffering minority stress and allows young people to try out different roles and ways of being. This allows them to act in ways that are more congruent with who they feel they are, and receive direct support and appreciation for enacting those new constructed identities (Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Wernick, Kulick, & Woodford, 2014).

Theatre as a space for social support. Youth theatre groups can also provide an important source of social support, which has been found to buffer the negative effects of minority stress (Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005). Higher levels of peer and family support for SOGD-identified individuals have been associated with lower levels of suicidality and depression (Budge et al., 2014; Friedman, Koeske, Silvestre, Kerr, & Sites, 2006), and better psychological well-being (Bariola et al., 2016; Waller, 2001). SOGD-identified youth with more family and friend support experience less depression, fewer conduct problems, and higher self-

esteem (Rosario et al., 2011), whereas social isolation and low social status in peer networks has been linked with more depressive symptoms (Hatzenbuehler, McLaughlin, & Xuan, 2012).

In particular, research indicates it can be especially impactful for individuals to obtain social support specifically related to their SOGD identity through connecting with SOGD communities (Rosario et al., 2011), and through discussions about exploration and expression of identity or experiences of anti-SOGD bias (Doty et al., 2010). Sexuality-specific social support has been associated with identifying confidently as SOGD and feeling positive about that identification (Bregman et al., 2013). Gay-Straight Alliances and other school-based student clubs related to affirming the collective SOGD identity have been found to help young people feel safer at school (Kosciw et al., 2012) and peer support from other transgender-identified individuals has been found to moderate the association between social stigma and psychological distress for people who identify as transgender (Bockting et al., 2013). For transgender individuals, feeling a strong sense of belonging to the transgender community has been found to mediate the relationship between the strength of transgender identity and overall well-being (Barr, Budge, & Adelson, 2016), and having more frequent contact with SOGD peers has been associated with greater resilience (Bariola et al., 2015). Being "out" to a greater number of supportive individuals has also been linked with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and sexual identity distress, and higher levels of positive affectivity and self-esteem (Jordan & Deluty, 1998; Russell, Toomey, Ryan, & Diaz, 2014; Wright & Perry, 2006). Youth theatre groups that encourage participants to construct pieces related to SOGD identities may therefore be especially effective at minimizing the psychological impact of stigma and discrimination because they offer a space to provide and receive social support specifically connected to SOGD identities (Rowe, 2014; Wernick, Kulick, & Woodford, 2014). Participants in one study of a SOGD youth theatre

program found just that; participants described building positive interpersonal connections and an empowered community through sharing and bearing witness to stories of marginalization (Wernick, Kulick, & Woodford, 2014).

Theatre as an opportunity for trying on new roles. Not only does engaging in SOGD-related youth theatre encourage well-being through providing a sense of purpose and social support, but it also fosters personal and social identity construction through encouraging young people to try on new roles and perspectives in the context of intentionally and literally performing different identities (Halverson, 2010b). In his theory of the "imaginary audience," David Elkind posited that adolescents believe themselves to be under constant observation by peers and adults, which causes them to feel self-conscious and act in ways that conform to group norms (Galanaki & Christopoulos, 2011). Ironically, however, engaging in theatre in which youth take on multiple different roles in front of an actual audience may act as an exposure intervention that reduces anxiety about enacting more nonconforming forms of self and increases awareness of previously unnoticed narrative elements in their own lives.

The dramatic arts have the unique power to make discourses visible that would otherwise normally escape attention (Cahill, 2010). These can include socially silenced discourses, like the experiences of individuals with marginalized social identities, as well as more literally silent discourses, like internal monologues. In theatre, performers and authors engage in perspective taking from different societal positions in order to take on different roles (Cahill, 2010; Halverson, 2010b). This intentional role enactment can help actors become more aware of when they are enacting identity scripts aligned with dominant narratives, and to then use imagination to engage in a collective process of rewriting that script to create new possible ways of being (Cahill, 2010; Hughes & Wilson, 2004). Imagining oneself differently may be at the core of

theatre's power to transform because through embodying imagined selves, the actors have the chance to feel what it might be like to live that self in reality, and this makes the imagined self seem a more viable possibility (Cahill, 2010).

Theatre as an opportunity for constructing flexible identities. Newer waves of theatre not only allow the performer to try on different roles, but also to intentionally craft their own identities through selectively re-envisioning personal memories (Rydberg, 2012). In numerous youth theatre programs around the country, youth work independently or in small groups to reflect on life experiences they would like to share with an audience and then engage in writing or improvisation exercises to shape them into performance pieces (Bazo, 2008; Halverson, 2010a; Rydberg, 2012). This may have positive impacts on the mental health of the participants, because research indicates there are health benefits to crafting stories about one's experiences (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). This active process of reflecting on and editing one's own stories and memories may also have a particular impact on the identity construction process of adolescents, though, because it is in adolescence that young people are believed to begin seeking patterns in their lives and selectively consolidating them into an identity (McAdams, 2006).

Individuals generally construct identities that will help them adapt to their current context (Matto, 1998; Meichenbaum, 1993), but sometimes people construct identities that are adaptive in one important context but not in others, which causes distress or poorer functioning in those other contexts (e.g. in *The Lion King,* Simba's "no worries" identity enactment serves him well while living in the oasis, but is no longer effective when circumstances require him to take on more responsibility; Payne, 2000). In order to be best suited for coping with the diverse challenges and situations of life, it is important for individuals to construct identities that are

coherent but also flexible, that recognize difficulty but also highlight the individual's ability to navigate the difficulty effectively (Madigan, 2011).

If an individual is having trouble crafting a more nuanced and flexible agentic identity, they may seek therapy, which can help provide the scaffolding for them to do so (White & Epston, 1990). However, the youth theatre context may present a naturally therapeutic opportunity because during the drafting of theatre pieces, the specific memories of individuals are often combined to form a hybrid narrative. Explicitly joining their stories with that of the collective may encourage the construction of especially strong social and collective identities, and may also support the construction of more flexible and strength-based personal identity through the active incorporation of other possible versions into one's own story.

2.6.4 Types of Theatre-Based Interventions for Personal Growth

Theatre has long been used as an intentional intervention to promote personal growth and shift oppressive dominant identity portrayals (Snow, D'Amico, & Tanguay, 2003). In *Poetics,* Aristotle states that the function of theatre is to induce catharsis, or purge the spectators' souls of deep feelings (Aristotle, 1994). In this sense, theatre has been used to promote mental health since ancient Greece. In America, drama was incorporated into programs designed to foster problem-solving and social skills for recent immigrants in the 1880's, and since 1945 "drama therapy" has used self-expression in role-playing and improvisation as a catalyst for personal change (Bailey, 2006; Johnson, 1982).

Psychodrama is one specific approach to fostering personal transformation through theatre. Jacob Moreno originated this group therapy approach in the 1920's based on the idea that acting in the moment to connect spontaneously with another in a meaningful way could produce catharsis (Moreno, 1946). The techniques used in psychodrama encourage examining

and renegotiating the roles individuals play in their daily lives through acting out different possibilities and giving voice to previously voiceless experiences, like inner thoughts or imagined others (Corey, 2004; Weiner, 1975). A psychodrama session generally includes a warm-up activity to establish trust and group cohesion, an action stage in which participants work through past, present, and anticipated situations, and a final stage of sharing and discussion in which participants express how the enactment affected them and attempt to find closure and meaning after the performance (Barbour, 1972; Weiner & Sacks, 1969). A meta-analysis of 25 empirical studies assessing the efficacy of psychodrama found a large effect size (d = .95), slightly higher than the effect size found for the effectiveness of group therapy in general (d = .50-.70; Kipper & Ritchie, 2003).

A second approach to engaging in transformative theatre emerged in the 1950's when Brazilian dramatist and philosopher Augusto Boal began an experimental theatre group to promote individual and collective empowerment associated with the emancipatory tenets of Paolo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed (Brown & Gillespie, 1997; Johnson & Emunah, 2009). His interactive theatre productions sought to destabilize the status quo by making audience members more aware of their place in the societal system and helping them develop the self-efficacy to change it (Boal, 1974/2000). He also harnessed the power of theatre to promote individual change for the actors themselves (Johnson & Emunah, 2009). He asserts that through enacting roles in theatrical productions individuals and communities can begin to overcome their fears and become aware of alternative options and existing capacities to address challenges (Johnson & Emunah, 2009). Thus, in line with the concept of identity performance, Boal (1995) argues "the human being not only 'makes' theatre; it 'is' theatre" (p. 13).

Impact of theatre programs. Research indicates that through supporting the collaborative crafting and enacting of new roles in front of an audience, such theatre programs can help performers improve their self-image and self-confidence, reduce their sense of stigmatization, increase socialization and interpersonal skills, improve perspective-taking ability, connect with and build a community, and expand their overall sense of self (Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Larson & Brown, 2007; Malin, 2015; Snow et al., 2003; Wernick, Kulick, & Woodford, 2014). For example, in a sample of 450 youth in organized programs, those participating in fine arts activities reported higher rates of experiences fostering self-knowledge (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003). Another drama education program implemented in Australia with 123 participants reported significant growth in role-taking ability, vocabulary, and improved self-concept, especially for students who entered the program with low self-concepts (Wright, 2006).

Because of the transformative power of theatre, programs that encourage performers to write and perform role-plays or pieces based on their own experiences have been implemented in a wide variety of settings with a wide variety of participants. Such programs have been implemented with Palestinian children living in refugee camps (Nassar, 2006), Vietnamese mothers interested in teaching their daughters about HIV (Cahill, 2010), Canadian adults without stable housing (Hamel, 2013), forensic patients in the Netherlands (Smeijsters & Cleven, 2006), medical students engaging in ethical dilemmas (Brown & Gillespie, 1997), inpatient psychiatry patients (Emunah & Johnson, 1983), recent immigrant adolescents in Montreal (Rousseau et al., 2007), Native youth in Canada (Fanian, Young, Mantla, Daniels, & Cahtwood, 2015), and older adults with dementia (Jaaniste, Linnell, Olerton, & Slewa-Younan, 2015).

In recent years theatre groups have emerged across the United States that support SOGD-identified youth as they craft and perform pieces based on their experiences (Bazo, 2008;

Conway, 2011; Rydberg, 2012; Wernick, Kulick, & Woodford, 2014). These participatory theatre groups have been found to shift audience perceptions of SOGD-youth and increase their commitment to intervene when witnessing anti-SOGD bullying (Wernick, Dessel, Kulick, & Graham, 2013). Importantly, they have also been posited to empower SOGD-identified youth and to support identity construction by allowing space to collectively craft and embody identities that are detypified, or no longer based on stereotypical assumptions about SOGD individuals (Halverson, 2010a; Rydberg, 2012). Through supporting the dialogical construction of flexible and empowered alternative personal and SOGD identities, such youth theatre programs may not only promote the empowerment and well-being of the specific individuals in the program, but also promote a fundamental shift in the dominant social identity portrayals within our society.

2.6.5 Rainbow Revolution of Madison

One such organization that supports positive youth development through self-expressive theatre is Rainbow Revolution of Madison[*]. In 2000, Rainbow Revolution was founded through the partnership of a 13-year-old SOGD youth activist and an established local playwright and director (Rydberg, 2012). Thus from its inception Rainbow Revolution was based on a model of youth leadership to create a space for performing the stories of queer youth. A team of adult mentors helps provide structure and support for the youth, and the young people elect their own Youth Artistic Committee, artistic director, music director, and dance director. Currently, Rainbow Revolution is funded through community partnerships including Art and Soul Innovations, Mukti Fund, and PFund.

Their production calendar corresponds with the academic year, such that young people begin attending Rainbow Revolution meetings in September. By November they must commit to

[*] Name of organization changed to protect anonymity of participants

being full members of the production team and attend meetings regularly. Meetings begin with theatre warm-up exercises to encourage group cohesion, spontaneity, and creativity. Youth then divide into small groups to discuss ideas for sketches to include in the production drawn from their own life experiences. Each week students are divided into different groups, so they have the chance to build relationships with everyone on the team, between 30-45 youth total. Each group chooses one idea to deepen and expand into a piece from that discussion, and brainstorms ways to convey that idea effectively. The small groups then reassemble into the large group to share the sketches they have created, and the large group works to further refine the ideas. Over the course of the year, youth decide which pieces to focus on and work together in small groups to finalize the scripts. In March, they hold auditions to select which pieces will be in the final performances, and which youth will play roles in them on stage.

During April and May, the team visits local schools and performs shortened versions of the final production. They also engage in talkback discussions with audience members after performances to provide education about the Rainbow Revolution process and about experiences of SOGD-identified youth. At the end of May, Rainbow Revolution runs dress rehearsals for the complete show and then stages a weekend of four performances at a community theatre. Because it combines elements of positive youth development programs with group autobiographical theatre production, Rainbow Revolution may be a particularly effective and supportive context for SOGD youth to explore and develop their own individual, social, and collective identities.

2.7 Rationale for the Present Study

SOGD-related youth theatre productions hold promise for fostering individual and social identity construction (Halverson, 2008). However, there have been calls in the field for additional research to explore interventions that promote and build on the strengths of SOGD

individuals (Mustanski, 2015), as well as research to explore how individual identities intersect across the lifespan with social identities (Fominaya, 2010; Halverson, 2008; Hammack, 2005; Mustanski, 2015), and the role of collective meaning-making in mediating the social context of SOGD youth (Wexler et al., 2009). The present study seeks to address some of those gaps in the literature to better understand how SOGD-identified individuals perceive the process of crafting group narratives based on personal memories to have impacted their sense of self and their overall well-being, and which aspects of that process they felt were most impactful.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Initial Research Design

3.1.1 Overall Research Perspective

A paradigm consists of the propositions within an individual's worldview that explain reality and how it is perceived, and thus a researcher's paradigm of inquiry informs their work by shaping their research focus and the methodology used to explore it (Annells, 1996). This paradigm of inquiry includes how a researcher understands the nature of reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology), which in turn affects the process by which they believe research should be conducted (methodology) and the degree to which they believe personal values should play a role in that process (axiology; Creswell, 2007).

I situate myself within a social constructionist paradigm, specifically symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism has its roots in the work of philosopher, sociologist, and social psychologist George Herbert Mead, who posited that people's social behaviors are governed by their conception of themselves, which they in turn define through the perspectives they believe others have of them and the social roles and expectations that are associated with those perspectives (Annells, 1996; Turner, 2013). Mead's student Herbert Blumer refined Mead's interactionist theory. He coined the term "symbolic interactionism" to refer to the perspective that human beings are unique in their ability to interpret each other's actions and respond to the meaning ascribed to those actions rather than the actions themselves (Blumer, 1969). According to this viewpoint, humans act toward things (including objects, other people, institutions etc.) based on the meanings they have for those things, which are derived through social interactions (Annells, 1996; Blumer, 1969). Humans use and modify those meanings

through interpretative processes as they encounter and interact with things in their daily life (Blumer, 1969).

According to Mead and symbolic interactionists, humans construct meanings not only for external phenomena, but also for themselves (Stryker, 2008a). One way in which we construct our sense of self is through role-taking. A role is a meaningful unit comprised of a collection of behavioral patterns that are associated with a particular societal status (e.g. doctor), an informal interpersonal position (e.g. leader), or a value (e.g. honesty; Turner, 1956). Because roles are made up of behaviors, they are enacted rather than occupied (Turner, 1956). The roles enacted allow us to predict how others are likely to expect us to act, and how they might respond to those expected actions based on their own enacted roles (Blumer, 1969; Turner, 1956). This active and reflexive process of role-taking thereby shapes our behavior and our sense of self in comparison with others (Blumer, 1969).

Broadly, the social constructivist symbolic interactionist perspective assumes that people create social realities, including selves and societies, through ascribing meaning to individual and collective actions (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore I believe multiple realities exist that are co-constructed through our lived experiences with others and that are mediated through shared symbols and language (Creswell, 2007). This means we cannot separate ourselves from our knowledge or from the reality underlying it because we are subjectively and interactively connected with the mental constructions that constitute reality and knowledge (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Research projects themselves are therefore inherently situationally specific representations of reality that are co-constructed by the researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2014).

Research is a process of subjective and recursive interpretation of interactions between researchers and participants that allows for creation of knowledge in the form of a more complex and informed consensus understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thus the researcher's position and perspectives must be acknowledged and taken into consideration as an essential component of the research reality (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2007). Their viewpoint affects not only the initial direction of inquiry and interactions with participants, which in turn affect the data that is collected and analyzed, but it also affects the very facts and ideas they are able to identify within that data (Charmaz, 2014). For instance, when attending a concert, a professional musician would note very different themes than an individual who studied social psychology, which would be different from the themes observed by an individual with a background in event planning. All three people would be impacting the very patterns they were observing by virtue of their presence at the concert, and all three of their final interpretations would reflect valid representations of the reality of the concert. However, each interpretation would be constrained by the perceptual frame of the individual making the observations.

This social constructivist lens is particularly appropriate for the present project because the project is concerned with the way in which young people construct meaning and identity through engaging with Rainbow Revolution. Through writing and acting narratives based on lived experiences of group members, the youth enact diverse roles, their own as well as those of others, and thus refine and redefine their sense of self.

3.1.2 Initial Research Questions

The existing literature indicates constructing a coherent identity may be a protective factor against minority stress for individuals from marginalized communities and may support mental health in general (Beale Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001; Payne, 2000;

Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Phinney & Chavira, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007; White & Epston, 1990), including for SOGD communities specifically (Crawford, et al., 2002; Halpin & Allen, 2004). This includes not only individual identity, but also social identity (DiFulvio, 2011; Mankowski & Thomas, 2000; Wexler et al., 2009).

The purpose of the present grounded theory study is to develop a theory explaining how performing in an autobiographical youth theatre group impacts performers' individual and social selves. Namely, what key factors do former participants in a SOGD youth theatre group identify as having been important in their growth and well-being and in what ways do participants perceive themselves to have changed as a result of their participation in the group? We also seek to explore in what ways these factors might be similar to or different from those outlined in the literature regarding positive youth development and other strategies for supporting the development of positive identities for historically marginalized youth.

3.2 General Methodology

Because this is a new direction in the study of youth development and social identity, there is no existing theory to explain the process through which individuals make meaning out of such theatre group engagement. We therefore used constructivist grounded theory methodology to create a rich and multifaceted theory based on the perspectives of individuals who have experienced the process (Creswell, 2013).

3.2.1 Grounded Theory Background

Grounded theory was born out of the divide between quantitative and qualitative methods used in sociological research in the 1960's (Charmaz, 2014). Although participant observation was a popular form of inductive qualitative research in the 1940's, there was no explicit theoretical or systematized approach to collecting or analyzing such data (Charmaz, 2014). By

the 1950's, advances in quantitative methods inspired a rush to test unconfirmed sociological theories, which led to a reduction of emphasis on qualitative methods and theory development (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2012).

Sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss argued that the quantitative research being conducted was too speculative and deductive and that quantitative and qualitative inquiry are essential to generate and verify functional social science theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). However, they also acknowledged that the qualitative methods practiced at the time were not systematic enough to allow for verification (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) Therefore in their foundational text, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research,* Glaser and Strauss outlined a systematic approach to conduct qualitative research and generate theories that were grounded in the interpretive realities of individuals in social settings. This approach drew on both Glaser's postpositivist quantitative training and Strauss's background in pragmatism and symbolic interactionism (Charmaz, 2014; Suddaby, 2006).

3.2.2 Constructivist Grounded Theory

The objective of grounded theory is to inductively and iteratively generate theories from data to represent participants' complex constructions of lived experiences in social contexts (Fassinger, 2005; Floersch, Longhofer, Kranke, & Townsend, 2010). The theories developed through grounded theory research should be enduring, relevant across contexts, and capable of guiding action (Duchscher & Morgan, 2004). Although the initial conceptualization of grounded theory was partly rooted in the postpositivist worldview of quantitative methods (Annells, 1996; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006), in the 1990's scholars began applying grounded theory methods in research based in constructivist philosophical assumptions (Charmaz, 2014). As Charmaz

(2014) argues, "these [grounded theory] strategies are, in many ways, transportable across epistemological and ontological gulfs, although *which* assumptions researchers bring to these strategies and *how* they use them presuppose epistemological and ontological stances" (p. 12).

Constructivist grounded theory is best suited for attempting to understand the processes by which individuals construct meanings out of intersubjective experiences (Suddaby, 2006). It posits that we are part of our own study, and thus we construct our grounded theories through the lens of our experiences and perspectives in interaction with those of our participants (Charmaz, 2014; Mills et al., 2006). Therefore the purpose of research is not to discover a theory that emerges from the data, as proposed by Glaser and Strauss, but rather to offer an "interpretive portrayal" of the topic under study (Charmaz, 2014). Because the investigator is the mediator of the information, different investigators might develop different perspectives of the same phenomenon, each of which may be valid (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988). However, by staying close to the data, these differences in perspective will derive from emphasizing different aspects of the data, and therefore investigators may differ in the scope of the emerging theory rather than differing in level of credibility (Rennie et al., 1988).

Elements of constructivist grounded theory research. There are nine key elements of conducting a constructivist grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2014). These include (1) engaging in a simultaneous iterative process of data collection and analysis, (2) analyzing processes and actions within the data rather than themes, (3) constantly comparing codes within and across participants, (4) using data to develop new conceptual categories, (5) systematically analyzing data and conceptual categories to establish inductive abstract categories, (6) constructing a theory rather than describing or applying a theory, (7) using a theoretical approach to sampling,

(8) looking for diversity within the identified categories, and (9) attempting to develop a category rather than address a particular research topic (Charmaz, 2014).

Grounded theory is especially useful in counseling psychology because it allows for a nuanced and rich exploration of experiences of diversity and oppression, thereby supporting the advance of social justice initiatives (Fassinger, 2005). As Fassinger (2005) asserts:

> Grounded theory holds as its core tenet the construction of theory out of lived experiences of participants, and as such, it integrates theory and practice in ways that few other approaches can boast, constituting a methodological exemplar of the scientist–practitioner model. Indeed, if grounded theory is integrated further with a critical paradigm focused on oppression and power, it comes closer than any other approach—quantitative or qualitative—to exemplifying a science-practice-advocacy model of professionalism in counseling psychology (p. 165).

Grounded theory precedent with related topics. Grounded theory is an appropriate methodology for this particular project because not only does it correspond with the philosophical underpinnings of the project, but it also has previously been used to address related research questions. Researchers have used grounded theory to explore the development of youth leadership identities (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005), and how theatre involvement promotes emotional development (Larson & Brown, 2007) and youth initiative (Hughes & Wilson, 2004). More specific to this population, grounded theory has been used to understand how young SOGD individuals develop their sexual identities (Stevens, 2004) and how they navigate the visibility of those identities (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003). It has also been used to identify patterns in how SOGD students develop not only their sexual and gender

identity, but also how those identities are connected with developing an identity as a student leader or activist (Renn, 2007).

3.3 Setting the Stage for the Present Study

3.3.1 Our Initial Research Team

Our initial focus group research team consisted of myself, Dr. Stephen Quintana, and two counseling psychology masters students, one who was an incoming student at the beginning of this project, and one who was completing her first year in the program. This team was involved in conducting the pilot focus groups and analyzing focus group data. Because this project is based on social constructivism, which posits reality is co-constructed between individuals and influenced by societal hierarchies (Hays & Singh, 2012), we feel it is essential to be aware of the personal characteristics and biases we each bring to the team that may affect the way the data is interpreted (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013). The following description of the team members is intended to provide context for the perspectives we each brought with us to the process of constructing this research project.

I identify as a white, cisgender female, who is "straight-ish," and have been a strong accomplice to SOGD communities for many years. In addition to engaging in SOGD advocacy, I have worked with young people of all ages from diverse backgrounds, including kindergarten and high school students in Romania, elementary and middle school students with emotional and behavioral disorders, and young immigrant adults. Thus my primary clinical and research interest is in exploring and promoting mental health for marginalized young people, and particularly those who identify as SOGD.

Dr. Quintana is a professor in the Counseling Psychology department who is in his 50's and was the only member of the initial research team who identifies as cisgender male. He also

identifies as mostly heterosexual and as multi-ethnically fluid between Latino and white. His research focuses on youth identity development as well as how therapy and youth development occur in a nexus of interpersonal relations. He therefore brings to the team decades of experience in dialoguing with children and youth about how they see themselves, how they assume others see them, and how they make meaning out of their sociocultural addresses and experiences. Since entering the UW-Madison Counseling Psychology doctoral program four years ago, I have worked with Dr. Quintana as his advisee and have conducted qualitative research with him regarding immigrant youth narratives and the development of social justice consciousness. Dr. Quintana has also been consistently dedicated to promoting social justice for marginalized populations at UW-Madison through coordinating the campus-wide Diversity Dialogues program and chairing the Diversity and Social Justice Committee in the Counseling Psychology department.

One of the two masters students on the focus group research team is in her early 20's and identifies as white, heterosexual, cisgender, and female. She studied psychology and women's and gender studies as an undergraduate and is about to enter a doctoral program in counseling psychology. The second masters student identifies as white and queer. She is in her early 30's and has a background in studying and practicing veterinary medicine. Both students reached out to Dr. Quintana or myself to inquire about becoming involved in research that focused on sexual orientation and gender, and we met with them to discuss the project and gauge their suitability for conducting focus groups based on past experiences, interest level, and interpersonal style.

Biases. In our earliest meetings and throughout the process of coding focus group data we made an intentional effort to reflect on and attend to the biases we brought with us. Several

potential areas of bias we identified were those related to theatre, youth work, and SOGD communities.

Theatre. All focus group team members had varying levels of prior involvement with the performing arts, from heavy involvement as a performer during childhood through early adulthood, to working behind the scenes on stage crew, to only occasionally attending theatre performances or not being especially interested in theatre in general. This diversity of past experience within the team allowed us to have some familiarity with common theatre references and processes, while also allowing us to have completely fresh perspectives on the theatre production process as well. One area of bias that emerged in our discussions was a potential negative bias some of us held toward "theatre people" and individuals who enjoy being the center of attention, particularly with regard to how those individuals can sometimes come across as superficial or socially exclusive. At times we noted that this bias became activated during our interactions with the youth of Rainbow Revolution. However, we tried to be aware of moments when this was the case and to separate our own past experiences from the experiences we were having with the youth at that moment. This allowed us to help us reflect on our bias. However, it is possible that the automatic reactions we had to their interpersonal presentation may also be ones those youth experience from others in their lives, which thereby influence the way they are able to move through the world and construct their identities and they therefore also provide useful data.

Youth work. Although our focus group team had a range of levels of involvement and interest in theatre, we were unanimous in our enthusiasm for engaging with young people. Two members of the team are parents themselves, with children in elementary school through college. All four of the team members had also worked professionally with young people in a range of

settings including international orphanages, hospitals, community mental health programs, forensic facilities, and elementary through young adult public school classrooms in the United States and Europe. Overall, the team felt great enthusiasm for working with young people and fascination with the developmental processes. The most apparent theme in our team's biases related to youth work was that all members of the team perceive youth as frequently silenced and misrepresented by adult society. We also all expressed the assumption that young people have immense capacity for imagination, growth, and change, which makes them capable of adjusting to incredible adversity in ways that may be more or less likely to foster positive development. This flexibility and hope for their successful futures also makes them an especially dynamic and rewarding population to work. These firmly held beliefs were the impetus for this research.

Connection with SOGD communities. Finally, with regard to SOGD-identified individuals, our focus group team presented with a variety of levels of experience. All team members had some level of personal connection to SOGD-identified individuals, whether family members, friends, students, coworkers, or themselves. However, within the team there was a range in degree of connection and familiarity with SOGD topics. One team member identifies as queer and has been involved in the local SOGD community for over one decade, while another described growing up with several close family members who identify as SOGD, and a third became involved in SOGD activism during college and adulthood due to involvement with other social justice campaigns. Several team members also had extensive experience volunteering or working for community or national organizations that specifically serve SOGD individuals. In general, our focus group team was somewhat less familiar with concerns specific to individuals who identify outside the gender-binary, although members of the team also described intentional efforts to increase awareness about gender diversity.

The primary biases focus group team members expressed related to SOGD-identified individuals map closely onto the "struggle and success" identity portrayal described by Cohler and Hammack (2007). Focus group team members noted having the assumption that SOGD community members, and especially individuals who are transgender or gender non-binary, are subject to discrimination, rejection and oppression. However, all team members also noted a positive bias toward SOGD-identified individuals, whether due to a strong sense of connection or to respect for the strength and resilience demonstrated in overcoming societal barriers, the latter of which is very much in line with the dominant struggle and success representation for SOGD individuals. Team members expressed awareness of the impulse many privileged individuals have to rescue those with identities more marginalized than their own, and identified the tension inherent in leveraging privilege to advocate for a community to which the individual does not belong. All team members voiced a desire to avoid the rescuer impulse in order to stand in solidarity with SOGD-identified individuals to support their empowerment.

Rainbow Revolution outsiders. One of our focus group team members had extensive prior knowledge of Rainbow Revolution due to having a child who briefly participated in it as well as having attended the past ten years of Rainbow Revolution performances. They were therefore already somewhat personally acquainted with some adult leaders of Rainbow Revolution. Despite this surface-level familiarity with the organization, perhaps the most important perspective location we hold with regard to Rainbow Revolution was that of outsiders.

None of us had ever personally participated in Rainbow Revolution or any other group narrative performance troupe of their type. Additionally, all four of the members of our focus group research team are adults, making us outsiders to the developmental processes the young people in Rainbow Revolution were currently experiencing. Most of our initial team identified as

cisgender, white, and mostly straight, which also made us outsiders to many of the specific facets of identity the youth in Rainbow Revolution were negotiating. This outsider perspective meant that on the one hand, we were more likely to idealize Rainbow Revolution and the youth in it and to miss or misunderstand the nuances in the stories the youth share. However, on the other hand, we also had the potential to bring fresh perspectives and perceptions to the work of Rainbow Revolution that may not have been apparent to those immersed in it. In particular, as adults who were not directly involved in theatre but who were directly involved in counseling, we brought a unique perspective related to the broader picture of identity development, meaning making, and mental health.

3.3.2 Site Selection

This specific project was inspired by two of my own experiences with the power of story-telling and collective reflection on memories. First, in New York City I led a psycho-educational program with immigrant youth in which they wrote and then performed autobiographical narratives. This allowed me to witness how the act of creating and performing a narrative can shift author and audience perceptions. Second, Dr. Quintana and I attended a production by the LGBTQ Narratives Activist-Writers group titled *Conceal and Carry: Queers Exposed,* which featured pieces written by performers about their experiences as SOGD-identified individuals. It made us curious to better understand the meaning of such performative identity construction for SOGD communities. As a result, we reached out to the LGBTQ Narratives Activist-Writers about the possibility of collaborating with them on an exploratory qualitative project. Although the LGBTQ Narratives Activist-Writers group expressed interest in working with us, they were undergoing structural organizational changes that made it difficult to establish a consistent partnership with them.

We researched other local theatre groups and found Rainbow Revolution of Madison. Rainbow Revolution fit our research interests even more closely because its participants are all adolescents and therefore in the most active phase of identity construction (McAdams & Olson, 2010). In September of 2013, I emailed the leaders of Rainbow Revolution to describe our research interests and explore the possibility of collaborating with them. Throughout October and November we engaged in email correspondence and an in-person meeting with two of the adult group leaders, and they then carried our ideas for collaboration back to the youth leadership committee within the organization for their approval. Our partnership with Rainbow Revolution was finalized at the end of November, and I applied for Internal Review Board approval to conduct a preliminary focus group study with Rainbow Revolution, which we received in January of 2014.

3.4 Focus Groups

3.4.1 Focus Group Rationale

To obtain an initial understanding of how young people and audience members experienced Rainbow Revolution, we decided to conduct focus groups. Data from these focus groups will not be used directly in the present study. However, they are important to include here to provide a more complete understanding of the context of the present study.

These focus groups were intended to give feedback to Rainbow Revolution about the meaning their work had for audience members and youth to strengthen the program. Additionally, they were intended to inform the present study by providing an initial understanding of areas to inquire about in retrospective interviews with former members of Rainbow Revolution. The qualitative data from these focus groups laid the groundwork for both

the theoretical sampling and initial interview design we used with our individual interview participants.

3.4.2 Focus Group Design

In this exploratory portion of the study we chose to use focus groups rather than individual interviews so we could efficiently obtain the broadest possible array of perspectives from individuals (Hays & Singh, 2012). We also wanted to be mindful of our participants' developmental level and sense of safety, so by using focus groups we hoped to establish a relaxed and social atmosphere to allow participants to feel comfortable speaking with us (Hays & Singh, 2012). Finally, conducting individual interviews might have felt incongruous to the young people participating in Rainbow Revolution because so much of their creative and self-reflective work in Rainbow Revolution is done in a small group format.

To begin our work with the youth, we attended two Rainbow Revolution meetings to introduce ourselves and describe our study. Because SOGD communities have been historically marginalized in the field of psychological research, and because some of the youth in Rainbow Revolution had specifically had experiences with researchers in the past in which they felt their words had been misused, we wanted to be careful to maintain an egalitarian, transparent, and collaborative relationship with the youth. We explained that the youth could choose to participate or not participate at any time during the study, that they would have the opportunity to read and approve drafts of our findings throughout the research process, that they could change or redact any quote they did not feel comfortable having published, and that no identifying personal information would be connected to any quotes so as to protect their anonymity and safety.

3.4.3 Focus Group Procedures

Consent process. Some participants have families that are not accepting of SOGD identities, so we drafted guardian consent forms that described the nature of the project without specifying the SOGD focus of Rainbow Revolution's productions (Appendix A). Throughout the consent forms we were also mindful of using gender-neutral language to be as inclusive as possible, and we did not ask our participants to self-identify their sexual orientation so as not to force them to come out if they did not feel comfortable doing so. We did ask participants to indicate what gender pronouns they would like us to use when speaking with them so that we could be sensitive to diverse gender identities in our discussions. To emphasize our respect for their agency and self-determination as participants, and because it is required by the IRB, even though we had received guardian approval for their participation, we also asked each youth to sign an informed assent form indicating they understood the project and wished to participate.

Data collection. In consultation with a SOGD community member who is an expert in conducting qualitative focus groups, our team created a semi-structured interview protocol of seven open-ended questions. We also wrote an introductory statement that outlined group rules of respect and confidentiality for focus group leaders to read so that each group would have consistent expectations and a similar format, while allowing room for group leaders to pursue interesting avenues of discussion (Appendix B).

Team members each facilitated one initial 45- to 60-minute focus group, with one team member conducting two because some students were not able to attend the session when the other groups were conducted. No compensation was provided for participation, but the research team brought pizza and snacks as a token of appreciation. Any youth involved in the current season of Rainbow Revolution was invited to take part in the study. Those youth who returned

consent forms signed by their guardians were assigned to focus groups. Four focus groups consisted of four to five individuals, with the fifth only having two participants due to youth scheduling difficulties, for a total of 21 participants ranging in age from 12 to 17. Six of the youth were students of color while the rest identified as white, and a range of gender identities were represented, including cisgender female and male, transgender male, and gender queer.

The groups were divided by Rainbow Revolution adult mentors based on interpersonal dynamics of the group members, so that each group included youth who were participating in Rainbow Revolution for the first time as well as more experienced members, and consisted of youth who were most likely to work well together. We conducted a second round of focus groups with many of the same youth in the autumn following their final performance to explore how their perceptions might have changed and to deepen our understanding of their responses from the first cycle of focus groups (Appendix C).

Additionally, because identity is dialogical, we felt it was important to understand the meaning audience members make out of attending a Rainbow Revolution performance as well as how the youth make meaning out of participating in it. We therefore conducted focus groups with audience members immediately following Rainbow Revolution performances to deepen our understanding of the way Rainbow Revolution shapes communitywide co-construction of identities and to provide Rainbow Revolution with qualitative feedback on their production.

All audience focus group participants completed a similar informed consent process to that conducted with the youth (Appendix D). Participants were recruited through an announcement during the intermission of the show and a flyer in performance programs. We conducted five focus groups immediately following performances of the Rainbow Revolution spring production. The groups included participants as young as 10 years of age who received

guardian permission to participate, but consisted primarily of adults, including friends, family members, and educators of performers, and community members without specific connection to Rainbow Revolution performers. Focus groups with audience members were similar in structure and duration to the youth focus groups, with questions centered on audience members' experience of the production and the performers (Appendix E).

3.4.4 Focus Group Data Analysis

In order to ensure transcription accuracy, most focus groups were transcribed by the individual who conducted them, and those that were not transcribed by the facilitator were closely proof-read by them. The research team then began conducting open process coding on the focus group transcripts. In this initial phase of coding we assigned a code to each line of data that described the action taking place in that line (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2013). The objective of this stage of coding was to select words to define what was appearing in the data while remaining open to all possible theoretical directions (Charmaz, 2014).

When the team began process coding focus groups, all four research team members discussed the nature of process coding and practiced coding a portion of a transcript together. Each research team member then coded several pages independently and the group reconvened and read through the transcript line by line to arrive at consensus regarding codes to use. The transcripts were copied into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets so that each line of text received its own cell in the spreadsheet. Research team members entered their line-by-line process codes in the column next to the transcribed text. They continued coding independently and then meeting to discuss consensus codes until all coders seemed to be assigning similar codes to most transcript lines. At that point, the team members began meeting in pairs to assign consensus

codes and discussing portions of transcripts that posed challenges to the coding strategy. The consensus codes were then typed into a separate column of the spreadsheet.

3.4.5 Focus Group Outcomes

The findings of the focus groups were presented at the 2016 International American Psychological Association Convention. However, for the purpose of informing the present study, relevant findings will be briefly discussed below. Specifically, participants commented on the importance of having a safe space in which to be oneself, and the unique experience of sharing in a group act of expression in contrast to individual expression.

Many young people indicated Rainbow Revolution has been instrumental in promoting greater resilience, referring to it as a form of "group therapy." Participants described their experience in Rainbow Revolution as "healing," particularly because of the group aspect of the creative process. One young person commented: "it is therapeutic to be able to share your experiences in a group. And honestly I don't know what I would have done without Rainbow Revolution last year." Another illustrated the importance of the group process, stating: "I think that you can kind of see your story and then other people's perspective of it and then when you act it out, it's like other people get how you feel. It's empowering."

Overall, being a part of Rainbow Revolution appears to empower young people through helping them define their sense of self and find pride in their experiences through group connection. Attending the performance also helped audience members understand the youth's lived experiences and increased their level of respect for young people in general. Audience members described their respect for the youth, stating: "They have just amazing insight, through the spoken word, through the songs, through the skits, and adults need to realize that. We've got to stop discounting youth and have got to start respecting them and building them up" and "I

think that as a member of the LGBT community as an adult that these kids have a lot to teach us." This window into to the youth's experiences galvanized audience members to make changes in their own lives, as indicated through statements like:

> "One is a reminder to be courageous. To be able to reach out to other people or to give voice to your own pain… There are times where we are all hurting or something, and we need to reach out past our own pain to someone else."
>
> "If you can start out with something as simple as a pronoun, I'm not talking about 'f*****' and words like that that we all know are bad words, and they're hurtful words. But use the wrong pronoun in the very first sentence that you use to a person or about a person within earshot, and it's a mistake that I've made many times."

Not only did the performance shift audience members' perspectives of the youth, but it also helped them process their own identities. For instance, one audience member noted:

> "I think for an audience member, again there were five or six times when I could say 'that was me!' And they put it into a whole new perspective, they brought out something I was ashamed of, now I see I don't have to be."

Impact on research questions and theoretical sampling. These themes informed our interview schedule and sampling procedures. Because so many youth described the importance of having a safe and supportive group within which to forge a social or collective identity, our team explored how members of Rainbow Revolution carried the identities forged in Rainbow Revolution with them into other group contexts. These questions included such things as "how do Rainbow Revolution alumni enact their identities when they are no longer in Rainbow Revolution?" and "how do they perceive the ongoing influence of the group constructive process

on their identities? Does the healing power of the group process carry on when the group is no longer a regular part of the individual's life?"

Additionally, audience members described having renewed respect for young people, awareness of concerns within the local SOGD youth community, and dedication to standing up to oppression. They also expressed feeling powerfully affected by the honesty with which youth shared their stories such that in some cases witnessing that honesty catalyzed audience members' own identity integration. Thus avenues of inquiry included how Rainbow Revolution members perceived their performance to have impacted others, and in turn how that affected their relationships and their identity development process.

Because many of these questions concern the way individuals make meaning out of their experiences in Rainbow Revolution, it was important to engage in conversations with young people who had already completed at least one performance with Rainbow Revolution. This included some individuals who recently graduated from Rainbow Revolution, as well as those who performed with Rainbow Revolution several years ago. By collecting perspectives from young people at different degrees of temporal distance from the Rainbow Revolution experience, we hoped to gain a more complete view of how individuals make meaning of their experiences with Rainbow Revolution at different phases of life.

Additionally, because the theme of group connection was so central to the emerging data categories, we spoke with participants with varying levels of ongoing connection to Rainbow Revolution and to their local SOGD communities. This included individuals who were still actively involved with Rainbow Revolution as well as those who had not had significant ongoing contact with the organization, and also included both individuals who had continued to engage in significant advocacy and involvement in their SOGD community as well as those who were no

longer as directly involved. This sampling strategy allowed us to better understand how participants made meaning out of the group creative process of Rainbow Revolution, whether they continued to hold strongly to the social and collective identities forged in Rainbow Revolution or they no longer enacted them as clearly in their current lives.

3.5 The Present Study

3.5.1 Present Study Rationale

The focus groups our team conducted with Rainbow Revolution allowed us to explore how the process of crafting pieces based on collective memories takes place in their organization and how it affects the young people involved and those who attend their performances. Through our open coding, we identified categories within the data that pointed to the healing power of having a supportive community in which to share personal reflections and craft identities. Specifically youth identified the importance of having the space to be one's "true self" and to explore who that might be through connecting one's own experiences with those of others.

Although we gained a perspective about the proximal way youth perceive those processes to shape identity development and mental health, we did not yet have an understanding of how individuals who are no longer in that group environment continue to make meaning out of the experience. To better understand this perspective, it was necessary to conduct retrospective interviews with participants who had completed at least one season of performances with Rainbow Revolution.

3.5.2 Design

This project continued to use constructivist grounded theory methodology, building off the categories that emerged in focus group transcripts. We continued to collaborate with

Rainbow Revolution to determine optimal strategies for reaching out to alumni and collecting data that would address our own research questions and also prove useful to their organization.

Broadly this project consisted of retrospective interviews with alumni of Rainbow Revolution lasting 60 minutes on average, but up to 90 minutes. We interviewed 15 individuals before reaching saturation as determined by our simultaneous analysis of the data from the interview transcripts, in that the new interviews no longer contributed substantially new information about the categories under exploration (Charmaz, 2008). We then continued analyzing the interview transcripts to construct a comprehensive coding system that described how participants feel the Rainbow Revolution process impacted them and their sense of self.

3.5.3 New Research Team

In spring of 2016, it became apparent that the two graduate student members of the initial focus group team would not be able to continue with the project due to other commitments. As a result, I reached out to multiple departments and programs on campus to recruit research team members, including Psychology, Human Development and Family Systems, and the LGBT Campus Center. Based on their level of engagement at informational meetings meeting I selected five undergraduates as coders and four to assist with transcription. All 9 completed Human Subjects training and were added to the IRB protocol for this study.

In order to ensure that all research team members had sufficient understanding of the qualitative research process, they all attended three educational introductory meetings. These covered topics including philosophical tenets of constructivism and the contrast between qualitative and quantitative research, transcription and coding methodology, relevant terminology, discussion of biases and perspectives, and practice engaging in the line-by-line and category coding process. All team members were also provided examples of grounded theory

articles and graphical models to increase familiarity with the anticipated final products of this study. By providing this training to all team members, it ensured that everyone would understand all aspects of the project, even if they were not participating in that particular aspect. This helped coders to be more accepting and patient regarding confusing transcript lines due to understanding the challenges of the transcription process. It also allowed transcribers to appreciate the importance of accuracy in transcription, and to participate in discussions later in the theoretical coding process based on their broad and holistic view of the interviews they had transcribed.

Demographically the coders included one cisgender male and four cisgender females, all of whom identified as white. Two of the members of the coding team identified as queer, one identified as bisexual, and two identified as straight. All coders were undergraduates, one freshman, two sophomores, one junior, and one senior at the time of joining the team. They were pursuing a range of major areas of study, including neurobiology, psychology, human development and family studies, educational services, and sociology. As such, they brought a range of levels of knowledge and research experience, from two being members of another psychology lab, to others being familiar with the literature but with limited research experience. Three of the coders registered to receive summer research credit for working on the team.

Meanwhile, the four transcribers included one cisgender male who was an international student from Japan, and three cisgender females, one of whom was an international student from China. The remaining two transcribers identified as white and all transcribers identified as straight. Their major areas of study included human development and family studies, sociology, philosophy, and being pre-med. One of the transcribers registered for summer research credit. As with the focus groups, the primary investigator also transcribed 6 interviews, verified the accuracy of the transcription of all additional interviews, and coded all interviews.

Biases. As with our initial focus group team, we spent significant time with the new research team discussing biases and the diversity of our perspective, including both during introductory meetings and throughout the research process.

Theatre. Team members had positive feelings about theatre, whether due to being an enthusiastic audience member or having performed in theatre in high school. They generally associated theatre with fostering emotional attunement, developing close friendships, and supporting self-esteem, confidence, and self-expression. Notably, two people felt theatre had been transformative for them, either in terms of their future direction in life or "coming into their own" as individuals. However, some team members also noted that theatre takes a lot of commitment and that at times it can be associated with challenging interpersonal dynamics and strong negative emotions, like stage fright. One team member observed that adults working with youth theatre companies are sometimes demanding, demeaning, or disrespectful to performers.

Youth work. As undergraduates, many team members did not have explicit experience working in the community with children or adolescents, but several had relatives significantly younger than themselves who they drew insight from. As compared to theatre and SOGD communities, team members were most ambivalent in their opinions about youth. They identified childhood and adolescence as sensitive periods, when individuals undergo rapid cognitive development, but also experience peer pressure, increased risk-taking, and the onset of mental disorders. Some expressed planning to pursue a career in child therapy, in particular related to personal experiences and empathizing with youth who have been bullied. Others noted that middle and high school youth can be obnoxious and that it can be easy to be critical of them or to not take them seriously. One cited them as having a "pop cultural reputation for being mean, snotty, bullies, not intelligent." Despite some of these negative connotations, team

members felt that adolescents have "substance" and valid life experiences, and therefore merit respect, trust, and agency to advocate and organize for themselves.

Connection with SOGD communities. Although all team members expressed positive attitudes toward SOGD individuals, they varied widely with regard to awareness and involvement in SOGD communities. Some identified explicitly as allies, but without having much academic or interpersonal background related to SOGD topics. Often these team members expressed feeling there should be more awareness and understanding of these topics to reduce ignorance and increase acceptance. International students in particular reflected on the negative messages they learned in growing up about SOGD individuals and the shifts in their perspective since studying in the United States, and one transcriber also commented on their disagreement with the teaching of their childhood faith. Others described supporting their friends as they navigated coming out, or the ongoing process of figuring out their own sexual identity, while others volunteer with SOGD-related campus organizations such as PRIDE in Healthcare or the Ten Percent Society. One team member was pursuing a minor in LGBT studies in order to fully understand the complexities of SOGD issues in a societal context and fight for equal rights.

Rainbow Revolution outsiders. As with the initial focus group research team, this team of researchers had not been involved in Rainbow Revolution, although one team member did have a friend who had performed with Rainbow Revolution who had found it to be a very meaningful experience. We were careful to ensure that we did not interview the friend of this team member to prevent ethical challenges with confidentiality and anonymity. None of the team members had ever attended one of the Rainbow Revolution shows.

In contrast to the focus group research team, however, the core research team was close in age to the participants in Rainbow Revolution, with at least one team member approximately

the same age as members of the theatre group. This meant that the core research team might have been able to relate more directly to the experiences of Rainbow Revolution members. Ironically, though, these team members were also younger than most of our interview participants, who ranged in age between 18 to 32, with an average age of 25. Thus, with the exception of the primary investigator, the majority of the core research team may not have had as much opportunity to engage in the type of long-term retrospection and meaning making used by interviewees. Due to these differential ages, as well as levels of research experience and familiarity with Rainbow Revolution and literature on SOGD topics, it was helpful to create coding dyads in which the primary investigator was always paired with an undergraduate research team member to take advantage of the diverse perspectives on the team.

We watched some sketches from past Rainbow Revolution shows during our introductory research meetings, so that all team members could have an understanding of the pieces and annual production. Three of the coders on the research team, in addition to the primary investigator, also chose to attend the Rainbow Revolution spring show. We met to discuss reactions to the show, and the general consensus mirrored that of the audience focus group reactions. The team members felt the show was emotionally intense and very impressive and insightful. They noted that many of the themes covered were things they had not been aware of in high school and they wondered about how parents in the audience might respond to difficult pieces. They also reflected on specific pieces, and felt the most powerful were monologues and pieces that highlighting systemic gaps in support and resources. Team members related many of the pieces to experiences in their own lives, including other social issues, such as the limitations placed on teaching sex education and the lack of awareness of appropriate ways to screen for mental illness. Overall, the team felt seeing the performance allowed them to have more insight

into the overall creative process of Rainbow revolution and also to connect more personally with the interview transcripts due to being able to envision how genuine and raw that process is.

3.5.4 Interview Procedures

Prior to recruiting interview participants, the research team spoke with Rainbow Revolution coordinators to establish goals and strategies for conducting the interviews. We received a letter of support from Rainbow Revolution in November 2015, which we submitted to the University of Wisconsin – Madison's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We submitted the complete IRB proposal in December of 2015 and were approved to move forward with the study later that month.

Participant recruitment. We held another phone meeting with the founder of Rainbow Revolution in January of 2016 to finalize recruitment strategies. During this discussion, we described the diversity in terms of demographics and level of participation in Rainbow Revolution that we were looking for in our sample. The founder of the organization indicated that historically Rainbow Revolution members had been most responsive to communications via social media. Additionally, this would allow the founder to join conversations more easily to support recruitment and respond to questions about Rainbow Revolution's role in the study. The Rainbow Revolution founder provided social media contact information for 40 former Rainbow Revolution participants she felt would meet these specifications and be likely to take part.

A recruitment message was approved by Rainbow Revolution and the IRB, and was sent to the 40 former members of Rainbow Revolution in February 2016, via private social media messages. In March the founder of Rainbow Revolution assisted in sending more targeted messages to individuals who had not responded to the initial recruitment message. One reminder was sent to non-responders, and individuals who initially expressed some interest but did not

follow-up received two reminder messages. Because this strategy yielded a sufficiently rich sample to reach theoretical saturation, we did not need to engage in snowball sampling or recruitment of participants in other regional SOGD theatre organizations.

We engaged in maximum variation sampling because it is recommended for exploring themes that are presumed to cut across participant differences (Cutcliffe, 2000; Drauker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007). This is relevant for the current project because we hoped to explore the meaning constructed out of the Rainbow Revolution experience by youth who identify with a variety of gender identities and ethnic backgrounds. We therefore recruited 15 individuals representing diverse gender identities, sexual orientations, and ethnic backgrounds to ensure our constructed model of the process was not limited to individuals who identify within one particular identity category.

We targeted young people who had recently graduated from Rainbow Revolution as well as those who graduated several years ago. Our resulting sample included 6 participants who had graduated from Rainbow Revolution four or fewer years ago, and 9 participants who had graduated 6 or more years ago. Interviewing individuals from both recent and early generations of Rainbow Revolution allowed us to observe and differentiate between themes related to specific generations and those related to growth and identity construction. For example, in a private conversation, one of the founders of Rainbow Revolution noted that the most recent cohort has the largest number of transgender and nonbinary participants in the history of the organization, representing a potential generational shift in the enactment of gender identity.

We identified potential participants who were still involved with the organization as well as those who were no longer closely connected to it. We felt it was important to include individuals from as wide a range of levels of group involvement as possible, so that our resulting

constructed theory would not represent only the experiences of those who are uniquely motivated to engage in group processes. We felt it was possible that individuals who are attracted to performing with Rainbow Revolution might be already especially inclined toward group engagement. However, our initial focus groups with participants indicated this was unlikely to be the case for all participants because at least two focus group participants specifically commented on their usually introverted or asocial personalities. We felt it might be more likely that individuals who have participated in Rainbow Revolution might become more interested in engaging in group activities. We worried this may make it difficult to identify individuals who are no longer involved with Rainbow Revolution or a different community organization, but we attempted to specifically reach out to those individuals to ensure our categories related to group involvement were truly saturated.

We were able to recruit participants with a range of current and past Rainbow Revolution or local SOGD community involvement. Three of the participants were actively involved in Rainbow Revolution as mentors or board members at the time of their interview. Five had performed in reunion shows but had no ongoing collaboration with Rainbow Revolution, and one had been a mentor and a board member but was neither at the time of the interview. This meant that 7 of the participants had no further engagement with Rainbow Revolution following their last performance as a youth, other than potentially attending shows. Of those 7, two explicitly described involvement with social justice or the local SOGD community, while four implied a lack of current community involvement, and one did not indicate either. Thus it appears that our sampling strategy was effective for recruiting participants with a range of levels of current and past involvement with both Rainbow Revolution and other SOGD or social justice organizations.

Consent process. If an individual responded to a recruitment message, the primary investigator sent them a second message with additional study details and a copy of the IRB-approved consent documents (Appendix F). If they still wished to participate, arrangements were made to speak over the phone or in person with the primary investigator. Only one interviewee preferred to meet in person, with the rest of the interviews conducted via phone. Google Voice was used to record the phone interviews, and all participants gave their consent to be recorded using that platform. In order to ensure informed consent, all participants were asked if they had read the consent form and if they had any questions. The consent form was reviewed with participants who had not already read it and all additional requested information was provided to participants. All participants were reminded they could choose to not answer any question, to stop the interview at any time, or to redact any information they did provide in the interview. Additionally, all participants were given the option of reviewing transcripts and coding of their interview, and were reminded of this during the interview as well as in a follow-up message when data analysis was concluding. Seven of the 15 participants requested to review their transcripts and codes, and two provided feedback and redactions, which were made accordingly.

Interview protocol. The protocol for interviews was developed iteratively over the course of the project as data analysis from the focus groups and the first interviews took place. Semi-structured interview questions were initially selected in collaboration with dissertation committee members. Mentors working with Rainbow Revolution were encouraged to offer changes to the interview protocol to ensure relevance and appropriateness. They did not provide any substantive revisions to the proposed questions, but they did offer feedback about wording, noting that some phrases might not be accessible to all participants (e.g. “salient social identities”). Those questions were revised in accordance with their recommendations (see

Appendix G for initial protocol). In line with recommendations from Fassinger (2005), the questions followed a funnel format in which the initial question inquires about a broad topic and later questions focus more specifically on particular aspects of interest within that topic.

Within the interview protocol, all questions were open-ended to allow participants to respond as fully as possible (Charmaz, 2014). As Charmaz (2006) observes, "Through our methods, we first aim to see this world as our research participants do – from the inside" (p. 14). We attempted to restrict our protocol to as few core questions as possible to keep the interview focused on the most essential topics to the research project, and to allow our participants the freedom to elaborate fully on their responses within those topics without feeling constrained by time or interview agenda (Charmaz, 2006). However, we also developed multiple probes to encourage further discussion as needed. These shifted as categories in the data emerged to allow the interviewer to follow-up on participants' responses in a way that was grounded in the data while still attuned to the participant (Charmaz, 2014).

Specifically, one of the most significant changes was that as we continued interviews and coding, it became apparent that one of the most salient categories in the interviews was growth and change through learning about others, as well as well as through expressing one's self. We therefore began including questions about the impact of hearing others' stories as well as sharing one's own story. We also recognized that participants had trouble answering some of the more philosophically-oriented questions (e.g. "in what ways has your experience affected the way you perceive your social identities, like race, gender etc.") and we therefore tried to make questions more concrete (e.g. focusing on changes they noticed in themselves, ways they interact with others, etc.). Additionally, some participants commented that they did not "write" many pieces, but were still involved in the creation or performance of them in other ways. We broadened our

language to include other aspects of the creation process to capture a wider array of experiences. We also began to specifically ask about the impact of improvisation in addition to final performances, since numerous early participants commented on the impact of that part of the process. In terms of performing specific roles, it became apparent that there was a difference with regard to performing roles participants found to be like them versus those they felt were not (e.g. bullies). This was different from the initial question structure we had envisioned, which divided roles into those based on their own stories or the stories of others. We therefore shifted to asking questions about how they related to their various roles, and how those roles impacted them, which led to richer responses (Appendix H).

In order to come as close as possible to understanding our participants' experiences, we attended to eliciting individual and group-specific definitions of terms, situations, and events (Charmaz, 2006). This included ideas and terms that participants, and even the interviewers themselves, may take for granted as part of their daily experience (Charmaz, 2006). These included general phrases such as "like a family," as well as words related to Rainbow Revolution's process, such as "mentor" "youth advisory committee" and "improv." By better understanding the unique meanings ascribed to these particular phrases, we were better able to stay close to the data of the participants' experiences rather than projecting our own interpretations onto them based on our team's assumptions.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 Initial Coding

To construct a theory from raw interview data, we first fractured the data (Mills et al., 2006). The purpose of fracturing, or coding, data is to label each segment of data in a way that allows it to be categorized and summarized, such that each piece of data is accounted for when it

is reassembled in a conceptual and theoretical form (Charmaz, 2006; Mills et al., 2006). Thus through coding we not only defined what was happening in the data but also started considering what it meant (Charmaz, 2014). In grounded theory there are always at least two phases of coding, an initial phase that consists of naming each data segment followed by a selective phase that only makes use of the most significant or common initial codes (Charmaz, 2014).

The primary questions we addressed in the first round of coding were broad, including such ideas as: What is this data actually about? What does the data pronounce or omit? What theoretical category might this piece of the data refer to? (Charmaz, 2014). During the initial phase, our goal was to do a close reading of the interview transcripts by coding them line-by line, while remaining open to all potential directions of theory development and developing provisional concepts (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2008; Drauker et al., 2007).

Additionally, according to Charmaz, constructivist grounded theory research should focus on a process or action, which sets grounded theory apart from other forms of qualitative research (Charmaz, 2008; 2014; Floersch et al., 2010). She maintains that attending solely to the action in each line of transcript allows researchers to observe emerging categories while also preventing them from making interpretive leaps before they have completed the requisite analytic work (Charmaz, 2014). Using process codes is one specific strategy that allows action to become more apparent in the data (Saldaña, 2013). In process coding, the researcher labels each line with a gerund verb form describing what is taking place in that line of transcript. Like the initial coding conducted with focus group data, we continued using process coding by labeling each line of the interview transcript with a gerund describing the action the speaker is taking in that line (Charmaz, 2008; Saldaña, 2013). For instance, in our interviews, a participant stated “So

it was more informative for me than feeling some type of way, like uncomfortable, or whatever" and we coded it as "Feeling informed by RR rather than uncomfortable."

In order to gain consensus within the research team about how to conduct line-by-line process coding, we coded the first 100 lines of the first interview together. We discussed the codes and then coders completed the second portion of the sample at home and brought them back for further discussion at our next team meeting. Coders then read the complete transcripts for the first and second interviews. They continued practicing coding on those two interviews with feedback from the primary investigator, such that each team member coded lines in one of those two interviews until they felt confident in their ability to complete process coding. Each coder was then assigned one new transcript at a time to complete initial process coding independently. The primary investigator met individually with each coder in one to two hour weekly meetings to establish consensus codes for all lines of each transcript.

Constant comparison. One of the foundations of grounded theory is the iterative and reflective process known as the constant comparative method (Boieje, 2002; Charmaz, 2014). Using the constant comparative method, we looked for how codes related to one another within each interview and then how the codes were similar or different across interviews (Boieje, 2002). Through noting these patterns during the initial coding process, we began to develop an understanding of the boundaries of emerging categories, including clusters of codes that tended to appear together and general indicators of what characteristics might be necessary to define a category (Boieje, 2002). For instance, we recognized that there were many lines about different benefits Rainbow Revolution participants felt they received while in the group, from training in writing skills and public speaking, to a sounding board for emotional concerns, to a group of like-minded peers to engage with. This initially began as a broad category titled "RR provides."

As we continued line coding the broad category became further refined into 10 subcategories based on which lines clustered together, including the categories “RR provides skills” “RR provides community” and “RR provides support.”

We used these emerging categories to inform the selection of additional participants and interview questions, so that we could gain a deeper understanding of what made each category distinct and how those categories connected with one another (Charmaz, 2014). When we recognized that improvisation, focus on others (rather than self), and roles similar to and different from one’s self were emerging as potential categories, we began asking more targeted questions about those areas to better understand them. We also noticed that the idea of “trying on” an identity or role seemed to resonate especially with transgender individuals and less so with allies, so we endeavored to recruit participants who identified as transgender or straight to gain further insight into those ideas. Throughout all phases of coding we used this method of constant comparison so our codes and categories continued to be refined as we incorporated new information from additional interviews (Boieje, 2002).

Use of memos. As we engaged in constant comparison between codes, we used not only inductive but also abductive reasoning. Induction is the construction of general laws from particular instances (e.g. my pet parrot, the falcon across the street, and the bluebird the falcon is chasing can all fly, therefore it is likely that birds in general can fly; Rennie et al., 1988). Abduction is a more creative process that is used by researchers when there is a surprising finding in their data that is unexplained by their initial theory (Charmaz, 2014). In abductive reasoning, researchers consider all possible explanations for what they have observed and then they develop and test hypotheses for each idea until they find the most plausible explanation (e.g. the brownies I baked tasted odd - was it because the eggs were too old, or I didn’t add enough

sugar, or the oven was too hot, or I am developing a cold so everything tastes odd right now… I can test these hypotheses by baking several other batches of brownies; Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory explicitly makes use of this creative process by asking the researcher to pay special attention to surprising pieces of data and then go back to re-examine that data and gather even more data until the theory fits the data that was initially surprising (Charmaz, 2014).

In order to assist us in this process of noting interesting phenomena and developing tentative theories about them, we wrote memos. Memo writing is a pivotal part of the grounded theory process because it forces us to attend to our own tacit assumptions and reactions as we code, and ultimately helped us think about our data in more abstract terms by allowing us to trace the development of our thoughts (Charmaz, 2014; Rennie et al., 1988). As Glaser (1978) asserts, "memo-writing captures the 'frontier of the analyst's thinking" (p. 83) because they are in-the-moment reflections on what we notice emerging from the data. These memos gave us space to capture insights, describe patterns we noticed across and within interviews, and note any tensions we observed in our own process (Charmaz, 2008; 2014; Fassinger, 2005). Specifically, we used this frequently to resolve differences in coding strategies and to clarify the meaning of different codes or lines. Additionally, memos allowed us as investigators to introduce our unique perspectives into the research process so that our voices contributed with those of our participants to the co-construction of the theory (Mills et al., 2006). We used our memos to keep track of our ideas and to describe and delineate our emerging categories.

Theoretical sampling. Based on the categories we noticed emerging in our data, we shifted our participant selection and interview strategies to better understand those categories. For most of the categories, this meant encouraging greater discussion about particular emerging ideas during the interviews themselves. However, for some categories it also led to a shift in

sampling strategies through specifically reaching out to former participants who the founder of Rainbow Revolution felt would be able to speak to a particular idea.

Initially in our research project, we used selective sampling to choose participants based on the existing literature and accessible relevant populations (i.e. conducting phone or in-person interviews with whichever former Rainbow Revolution members responded to our initial recruitment message; Drauker et al., 2007). This allowed us to gather as much data initially as possible, so that we could begin to uncover patterns in codes (Drauker et al., 2007). However, as we used constant comparison to explore the emerging patterns in codes, we began to identify categories and what remained unknown about those categories, and then attempted to sample participants to learn more about them (Drauker et al., 2007). Specifically, this meant paying attention to pieces of data that did not appear to fit the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2014).

For example, we noticed that in the first interview we analyzed with someone who identified as straight there was much less focus on personal identity development and greater focus on others and on awareness of privilege. Therefore we began asking all participants more intentionally about such other-directed development, and also specifically recruited two more straight allies as well as more people of color to deepen our understanding of how learning about others might look for individuals with different levels of societal privilege.

We also noticed that several participants mentioned the way group members interacted with one another as an important factor in the impact of Rainbow Revolution. Most of our first participants had been in Rainbow Revolution two to four years prior, so we intentionally recruited participants from much earlier generations of Rainbow Revolution to gain a richer understanding of how different cohorts of performers viewed the group dynamics.

Through engaging in the iterative process of constant comparison and theoretical sampling, we continuously adjusted our choice of participants and the focus of our questions to construct a more fully formed theory that included as thorough an exploration of each category as possible (Charmaz, 2014). In this way we hoped the theory that emerged would not run the risk of solely supporting one of our own preconceived ideas because we were actively looking for exceptions to our emerging assumptions about categories (Drauker et al., 2007). We considered a category to have reached saturation when gathering more data shed no additional light on the properties of that category (Charmaz, 2008).

3.6.2 Focused Coding

After beginning line-by-line process coding, the team engaged in the process of focused coding, sometimes also known as "selective" coding, or on our team "category" coding (Drauker et al., 2007). The training and coding process we used for line-by-line coding was repeated for category coding, so that after all lines in a transcript had been process coded, the coding dyad would then read through the process codes and independently assign category codes to those lines before meeting to establish consensus. If a large portion of one transcript had complete line coding, category codes were sometimes assigned/created for that portion before completing all lines in the transcript, in order to attend to emerging themes and maximize the efficiency of in-person coding meetings (i.e. due to the similar meanings coders generally arrived at in line codes, creating category codes took more time to discuss, particularly during the first transcripts. Therefore some meetings included creating and discussing consensus category codes for the first portion of the interview immediately after finishing consensus line coding for that portion).

Although many processes in grounded theory are described as if they are linear, one strength of grounded theory is that this is not the case (Charmaz, 2008). Interacting with the data

often leads to new avenues of analysis, and thus we found ourselves returning to earlier data to re-code relevant portions after having already begun the focused coding process (Charmaz, 2014; Fassinger, 2005).

In particular, there were some categories that did not seem to hold together well when we started comparing line codes, such as the category initially called "engaging with interpersonal complexity," which encompassed difficult interpersonal interactions. However, we realized that many of the lines initially coded in that category would better fit within the category of "group dynamics" that had been created later, particularly those lines related to handling interpersonal conflicts. The rest of the lines grouped in "engaging with interpersonal complexity" actually described interacting directly with people from different backgrounds, and we therefore re-conceptualized the category as "embracing differences."

In focused coding, we studied the overall message our initial codes seemed to be conveying (Charmaz, 2014). This included looking for patterns in initial codes and exploring what emerged when codes were compared with one another (Charmaz, 2014). This meant that many of our focused codes were based on the most frequent initial codes, but some were based more on their significance or explanatory power than their frequency (Charmaz, 2014). As Charmaz (2014) writes, "If the code is telling, use it… The code can give you a flash of insight, a way of looking at your data. It's exhilarating! Allow these moments of exhilaration to occur" (p. 145). For example, although there were only 11 lines that were coded as such, we kept a category called "Meeting people like them" because it highlighted the identity-specific connection with other SOGD youth that the broader categories such as "Meeting people" or "Rainbow Revolution provides connection" did not.

Because focused coding highlighted those elements of the data that seemed most important, it condensed our line-by-line initial coding and allowed us to synthesize large quantities of data more efficiently (Charmaz, 2014). In this way, focused coding shifted us from immersion in the data to conducting analysis on it that allowed us to witness the emergence of a conceptual structure (Charmaz, 2008).

3.6.3 Theoretical Coding and Theory Construction

The goal of grounded theory is to construct a theory about how the categories that we developed through focused coding relate to one core category (Hernandez, 2009). The final process that allowed us to do this was theoretical coding, or as our team referred to it, "theme coding." Like with all phases of grounded theory, this was actually a continuous process throughout our constant comparison among codes because we began making memos about how different categories may connect to one another and organizing them into a higher order of themes almost as soon as we began developing category codes (Hernandez, 2009).

This allowed us to develop themes that seemed to be proximal or distal factors within the structure of Rainbow Revolution that contributed to overall life change. To do this, the individual line codes in each category were summarized into a main idea, with attention to capturing nuance and dimensions of the category. Then each coding team member read all the category codes and recommended potential themes they may fit in. We held two video conference calls to develop and refine the themes and then sort the categories into them. Finally, we described all the themes and created a document listing the main idea of each category within a particular theme and asked all team members to explore how the themes appeared to interact with one another based on the ways the main ideas of the categories were related. Each team member drew a graphical representation of the way in which they felt the themes fit together. The primary investigator

synthesized the diverse models into two potential summary models, and the team members unanimously selected the model featured in this manuscript as the best fit for the data, with some recommended amendments that were incorporated to the final model.

Our overall objective was to construct a theory in which the categories emerged directly from and fit closely with the data, and that could interpret the identity construction process in a way that was relevant to the field of SOGD youth development (Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003). The final product of our research should be credible, original, resonant, and useful (Charmaz, 2014). In other words, we hope it achieves a deep understanding of the way individuals make meaning out of their experiences in Rainbow Revolution that captures the fullness of the experience through logical and well-articulated connections between diverse data and overarching categories (Charmaz, 2014). We also hope it offers new insights into the experience and has social significance for the community and the field that can be used in everyday life (Charmaz, 2014).

3.6.4 Ensuring Empirical Rigor

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined steps to take to ensure qualitative findings are trustworthy. These include establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to confidence that the findings accurately reflect the phenomenon in question (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Within the current study, we sought to establish credibility through prolonged engagement with Rainbow Revolution (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although the research team members did not explicitly join the group, the primary investigator has been working with Rainbow Revolution in a research capacity for three years, including attending rehearsals and multiple performances, and communicating regularly with adult mentors in the organization. This has allowed for a more well-rounded

perspective on the multiple processes and factors that shape the Rainbow Revolution experience. It has also allowed for greater trust and rapport with interview participants, due to having a stronger connection with the Rainbow Revolution organization and personal referrals from the founder of Rainbow Revolution. This duration of association with Rainbow Revolution has also allowed for persistent observation so that we can describe in detail the most salient and unique processes in their creation of theatre. Additionally, we attempted to ensure credibility through triangulating our information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), gathering interviews from multiple and diverse participants, as well as factoring in findings from our focus groups with youth participants and audience members to inform our model. When cases arose that ran counter to our nascent theoretical ideas, we sought to understand the discrepancy and shifted categories or themes to account for all the data. Peer debriefing was used in an informal manner, particularly in the early stages of interviewing and coding, through consulting with a member of the focus group research team who had been unable to participate in the individual interview portion of this project. She provided feedback about emerging categories and themes as well as methodological challenges.

To be credible and trustworthy, our findings must resonate with our participants as well as other readers who have had an experience similar to that of performing in Rainbow Revolution (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Sandelowski, 1986). To ensure such credibility we strove to let our participants guide our research by constructing codes based on a close reading of their voices and by shifting interviews to address the themes emerging in the codes (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). As we constructed codes we engaged in member checking, directly asking participants about the relevance and meaning of the codes in their lives, so that the codes could be more fully understood and the relationships among them could be developed based directly on participants'

descriptions (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sandelowski, 1986). Throughout the process we also consulted with community members within Rainbow Revolution to create a relevant interview protocol, recruit participants in a sensitive manner, and verify transcript accuracy. During the interviews we consulted with participants about what ideas we may have missed in our understanding up to that point. We also solicited feedback from participants about the final model and findings, and two participants provided feedback, expressing agreement with the conceptualization presented and adding some additional details to emphasize. In this way through consulting with methodological experts and community members we enhanced the rigor of both our research process and findings.

Studies are believed to have met Lincoln and Guba's (1985) requirement for applicability when their findings can be confidently transferred to other contexts. To ensure transferability of our findings, we have provided a rich description of the Rainbow Revolution context, the context of these interviews, and the demographics of our interview participants, so that readers can evaluate how similar or dissimilar these may be to the context they wish to understand. This will allow a greater appreciation for the extent to which findings from this study might be applicable in that context.

Dependability refers to how consistent and repeatable the findings are (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To support the dependability of our findings, we created a detailed description of our methods in this report. We also consulted with faculty who are external to the project and familiar with grounded theory methods to review our research process to ensure we were ascribing to best research practices. The chair of this dissertation served as an auditor for the study, and provided feedback at multiple steps of the research process. To enable such auditing, we clearly delineated our process for recruiting and selecting participants, conducting coding,

and determining saturation (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Sandelowski, 1986), so that our auditor could understand what steps we took and why we took them (Sandelowski, 1986). The auditor provided feedback about the process, including verifying that theoretical saturation had been reached and that we had conducted our process with appropriate empirical rigor.

Finally, confirmability describes the extent to which findings are shaped by the participants and not by researchers' biases or motivations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We provided our auditor with all copies of transcripts, line codes, category codes, and emerging thematic structures. Therefore our auditor also lent support to this aspect of the trustworthiness of our study by assessing the goodness of fit between our codes and the words of the interviewees. He provided recommendations regarding re-organizing or clarifying some categories, such as separating a heterogeneous category into multiple categories or combining two similar categories into one. The research team agreed with and incorporated these suggestions into our model.

We used a journaling exercise at the beginning of our project to describe our expectations and experiences related to Rainbow Revolution, and memoing throughout the analysis to explore our ongoing assumptions about the data (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). This helped us remain attuned to ways in which our preconceived ideas might be influencing our coding and look for exceptions to those preconceptions (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Sandelowski, 1986). Additionally, by forming a team of diverse undergraduate students with a range of identities and levels of experience with topics related to this study, it helped ensure there were a variety of perspectives to inform our team discussions and approach to coding.

However, because the theory we constructed was based on the specific social interactions between ourselves and the participants, we tried to take the context of the interviews and the interpersonal dynamics occurring within the interview into account (Hall & Callery, 2001). We

also considered the ways in which we were connected with the participants in our study (e.g. the potential imbalance of power between academic "elites" and community members, relationships based on shared region of origin etc.) and the ways in which our perceptions and expectations of one another might have impacted the interviews (Hall & Callery, 2001; Sandelowski, 1986). I attempted to be aware of the strength of my own voice as an interviewer, and adapt it to fit the dynamics of the interviewee to create an open and supportive atmosphere that prevented their voices from being overpowered by my own (Hall & Callery, 2001). We also reflexively reflected on the interview process as we analyzed data and reported findings, so that we took the interpersonal process into account in our construction of codes to allow our readers to better understand those interactions (Hall & Callery, 2001).

Chapter 4: Findings

"It continued to shape my life in the sense that I had these new expectations for myself and for the world that I live in. It instilled in me this idea that I need to and I want to live as my authentic self in the world no matter where I am or how hard that is to do."

4.1 Findings Summary

4.1.1 Sample of the present study

The present study included interviews with 15 participants. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 32, most of whom were in their mid-twenties. The majority had participated in Rainbow Revolution around the age of 17-18, although some were youth performers starting at age 14-15, and others continued to age 19. Participants had spent between 1-4 years in Rainbow Revolution as performers, with most being part of the group for two years. Study participants were from a range of cohorts of Rainbow Revolution performers. Three of the study participants had been original members of Rainbow Revolution during its inaugural season, while one had been in the group as recently as last year. Study participants had therefore been out of Rainbow Revolution for 1 to 14 years, with most out of the group for between 5-9 years.

With regard to other demographic characteristics, participants represented a range of gender identities, sexual orientations, and ethnic backgrounds. Eight participants identified as cisgender women, three identified as cisgender men, two identified as transgender men, one identified as transgender and another identified as queer. In terms of sexual orientation, five identified as queer, three as gay, three as straight, one as bisexual, one as pansexual, one as lesbian, and one as asexual. Approximately half of the participants stated their sexual or gender identity had shifted during or following their involvement with Rainbow Revolution. The majority of the sample identified as white, with two participants identifying as black, one as

Latino, and two as having a mixed ethnic background. All participants had completed high school, many were pursuing or had completed a bachelor's degree, two were pursuing master's degrees, and one was about to enter a doctoral program at the time of the interviews. Several participants were full-time students, but others were employed in a variety of positions such as wait staff or medical technicians, or in client services, childcare, or real estate. Two participants reported having a disability or significant health condition, while the rest reported being currently able-bodied (See Appendix I, of note, not all demographic information is presented in the table and pseudonyms are used for all participants and other individuals referred to by name in order to protect participant anonymity).

4.1.2 Findings Overview

Through this study, I sought to understand how former members of a SOGD theatre group believe their participation in that group impacted their identity and well-being. We were specifically interested in gaining insight into how such an experience might shape their perception of their social identities, as well as their individual sense of self. Participants in this study unanimously agreed that their experiences in Rainbow Revolution shifted the way they engage with the world, including several who credited Rainbow Revolution with their survival during a difficult time in their lives. Interestingly, the specific ways in which they felt Rainbow Revolution impacted their sense of self and their life trajectory varied between participants.

Initially when we began to conduct theoretical coding, we attempted to use temporally-based themes (e.g. pre-Rainbow Revolution, during Rainbow Revolution, post-Rainbow Revolution), but soon realized that the relationship between the categories was much more circuitous than linear, and that some of the pivotal processes of Rainbow Revolution were occurring both within and outside of Rainbow Revolution. Additionally, although some

interviewees had explicitly linked their experience in Rainbow Revolution with identity development, many connected it more explicitly with greater understanding of others. Thus the overarching theme of identity development did not seem most appropriate as a core category, although it would have been most closely tied to the initial research question and assumptions of the primary investigator. However, all participants described having their lives changed through their involvement in the Rainbow Revolution, in terms of social development, individual growth, or psychological healing. Therefore we used the broad category of "Life Change" as the core category, with all other themes organized in relation with the institution of Rainbow Revolution.

Through detailed line-by-line coding of the interview transcripts for process and content themes, nine core themes emerged that were salient in all interviews reflecting the process of life change through Rainbow Revolution (See Appendix J for list of category codes within each core theme). Because our team coded each line of every transcript, there was some coded material that did not pertain directly to the research question (e.g. process comments about the interview itself). Therefore we also created a tenth theme, *Other*, for material we agreed was not helpful in informing the creation of our model.

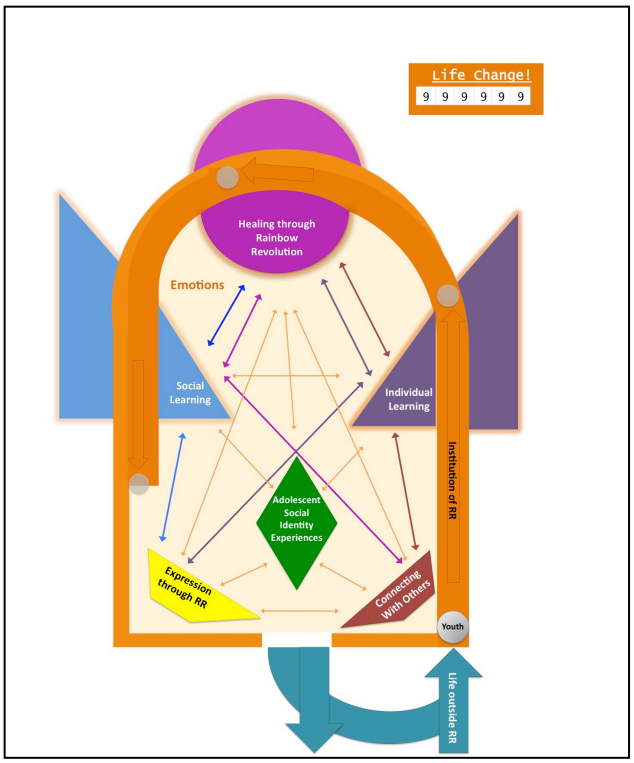
Of the nine core themes, two referred to contextual information. *Life Outside Rainbow Revolution* described external systems of context, such as societal, school, and family as well as social identity experiences before or outside of Rainbow Revolution. *The Institution of Rainbow Revolution* described the concrete elements of the Rainbow Revolution creative process, such as the outline of rehearsal activities or a description of specific pieces. Within Rainbow Revolution, *Emotions* referred to emotional processes as a pervasive catalyst throughout the life change process. As qualitative research, this study offers rich perspective-dependent descriptions but cannot make definitive statements about causal relationships between variables. However, our

research team identified three themes that appeared to be foundational process-oriented transformation agents, *Adolescent Social Identity Experiences, Connecting with Others* and *Expression through Rainbow Revolution*. Based on our data analysis, we noted that although the relationships between the themes could be multidirectional, these foundational agents often led to the development of the three higher-order, more insight or outcome-oriented, transformation agents of *Social Learning, Individual Learning,* and *Healing through Rainbow Revolution.*

4.1.3 Combining Themes into a Model

A primary goal of grounded theory research is to create a model integrating the fractured pieces of data that is cohesive, coherent, and contributes meaningfully to the understanding of the phenomenon in question. In the case of this research project, we sought to understand the ways in which former participants in Rainbow Revolution perceived it to have impacted their sense of self over time. Our research team developed a graphical model representing both the general way the nine themes fit together, as well as the individual pathways participants described experiencing during their experiences in Rainbow Revolution (Appendix K). Each theme will be described in greater detail in the following sections, but this model provides an overarching framework reflecting how they inform one another.

We based our graphical representation on the idea of a pinball machine. Although this does not fully acknowledge the agency of the young people in shaping their own experiences, it does capture the playfulness of Rainbow Revolution and the strong positive memories participants described, while also capturing the diversity of ways the foundational and higher order themes could interact to effect personal change. As in a game of pinball, we saw the initial input of *Life Outside Rainbow Revolution* as determining the force and trajectory with which the "ball" or youth would travel within Rainbow Revolution. The overall form of the pinball



machine represented *The Institution of Rainbow Revolution*, the structure containing and helping shape the change agents, while the air within the pinball machine represented the theme of *Emotions,* pervasive in the process and coloring all of the interactions between the other themes.

As in a game of pinball, the foundational themes of *Expression Through Rainbow Revolution, Adolescent Social Identity Experiences*, and *Connecting with Others,* are depicted by the elements at the bottom of the machine that balls are most likely to initially bounce off of and that generally determine the resulting direction of the ball's travel. The "flippers" that the pinball player has direct control over were used to represent *Expression through Rainbow Revolution* and *Connecting with Others,* because participants described making active choices to engage in both those processes. Additionally those two themes were most frequently cited as impactful for participants, and thus had a broader impact for most participants than the more specific theme of *Adolescent Social Identity Experiences*.

The higher order themes of *Social Learning, Individual Learning,* and *Healing through Rainbow Revolution,* are represented by the large triangles and circle toward the top of the machine that extend beyond the confines of the pinball structure. We selected this position within the game for these themes because in a game of pinball it is often the elements toward the top of the pinball machine that have the greatest impact on the overall score. Similarly, we felt

that these three themes had the greatest impact on participants' lives and sense of self outside Rainbow Revolution. Of note, there is no concrete delineation between the foundational themes and the higher order themes because the hierarchical structure of the themes was a permeable arrangement, with some codes within the foundational themes reflecting greater personal impact. We also included a "scoreboard" to represent the increasing impact on participants' lives the more they engaged with the change agents within Rainbow Revolution. However, to clarify that the three higher order change agents continued to positively affect participants' lives even after they had ceased "playing" the game of Rainbow Revolution, we extended those elements beyond the shape of the pinball machine.

Pathways similar to Hammack and Cohler (2011) identity representations. In some ways the pathways participants described seemed similar to the representations described by Hammack and Cohler (2011), in particular that of "struggle and success" and "emancipation." Some participants did outline their stories in terms of starting out with difficulty navigating hostile environments including negative peer interactions, bullying, rejecting family members, and academic disengagement. After joining Rainbow Revolution, these participants described gaining support, self-confidence, and a stronger sense of identity, which led to later success in life. Specifically, participants who performed in Rainbow Revolution a longer time ago and those with more marginalized identities tended to describe this redemptive story pattern. Rowan noted that they did not have "a really great home-life" but that they found their voice through Rainbow Revolution, so that when asked what their life would have been like without Rainbow Revolution they responded, "it's hard to even imagine. I don't think that I even would have ended up in college. Just I really needed that experience to shape me to even get to the next experience (31 years old, mixed race, queer)." Similarly Morgan described experiencing many

adverse childhood events to the extent that "statistically [her] life should be in ruins," but she feels she went down a "completely different road" compared to her siblings due to Rainbow Revolution (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian).

Some participants also described identity that fit the "emancipation" description, such as Jaden (21 years old, White, cis man, gay) who described Rainbow Revolution as helpful because it showed him engaging in activism was not the only way to connect with other queer youth, and that he did not have to do everything "with some queer lens" just because he identifies as gay. Instead, he described making an effort to connect with individuals across ethnic and language differences, and expressed appreciating having had "a diversified experience of queerness early" through Rainbow Revolution. Others discussed the decision to identify outside the sexual orientation or gender identity categories most commonly used, such as Noelle who described her experience of questioning and refining her understanding of her own identity through Rainbow Revolution, stating "it helped me feel more comfortable advocating for myself and also exploring my own identity and eventually realizing that lesbian didn't really work for me as a label and queer felt more comfortable for a lot of reasons (21 years old, White, cis woman, queer)." Linden described their sexual orientation and gender identity as "fluid and all-encompassing," clarifying "although I probably identify as transgender, I don't want to identify as a male because for me that feels restricting" and similarly using the label "queer," asking, "why would we restrict who we love? (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)"

However, as with the specific pathway trends identified within the model, some participants' description of their experiences did not fit any of these patterns, or fit both in some ways. Most participants focused their descriptions on personal growth, or a shift in personality traits and skills, rather than describing specific identity-related challenges they overcame. For

instance, Emery described herself as someone "looking to be something more" her first year in Rainbow Revolution, such that by the end she reflected "I thought of myself as more of a leader than I had ever thought of myself at that point. And then I finally had this creative confidence that I hadn't previously (22 years old, White, cis woman, queer)." Thus although there appeared to be a trend supporting some of the identity structures proposed by Hammack and Cohler (2011), participants in this study did not consistently align their experiences in Rainbow Revolution with those structures.

4.2 Contextual Themes

We adopted the reference made by one participant who described Rainbow Revolution as a "safe bubble." The contextual themes are those that describe the experiences participants had outside of that bubble as well as the general structure of the bubble of Rainbow Revolution itself, rather than the inner transformational processes. These themes include *Life Outside Rainbow Revolution* and *The Institution of Rainbow Revolution*.

4.2.1 Life Outside Rainbow Revolution

Over the course of the interviews, participants described numerous aspects of their lives outside of Rainbow Revolution. Often this allowed them to provide context for why they felt Rainbow Revolution had been so impactful, using descriptions of life outside the "bubble" to highlight the positive or transformative aspects of Rainbow Revolution by contrasting them with their experiences outside Rainbow Revolution.

Many of the participants described basic descriptions of their life context around the time of their engagement with Rainbow Revolution. These included descriptions of other extracurricular activities, their general high school atmosphere, and prior experiences with the performing arts. One participant commented on excelling in high school, but several participants

described their own poor academic performance or experiencing high school as segregated and hostile based on social identities. Of note, although many participants expressed involvement in other activities, particularly SOGD advocacy and leadership through their school's Gay-Straight Alliance or a local youth support program, several participants commented on their lack of engagement in extracurricular activities prior to participation with Rainbow Revolution. As Ash stated, "Prior to that, I really struggled with the feeling of having something to contribute because I never did well in school, and I wasn't involved in any kind of way (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)."

Participants also described how they viewed themselves prior to engaging with Rainbow Revolution. Some recalled themselves feeling lonely, different, or with little self-efficacy within their high school or home context. As Taren reported, "…. my attitude at the time was that nothing I could write or do would be good (24 years old, Latino, trans man, gay)." Many of the participants commented on having been very quiet or shy before their participation in Rainbow Revolution, although some indicated they had been "class clowns" or rebellious, with Kelly describing herself by saying "I was a jerk; I was kind of a bad kid (25 years old, White, cis woman, straight)." Participants also frequently commented on having had a more limited perspective on their social world prior to their involvement with Rainbow Revolution, including less understanding of experiences of oppression or harassment as well as having little basic knowledge of SOGD topics. Finally, all but three of the participants described having substantial personal difficulties outside of Rainbow Revolution, from conflictual homes to mental health concerns, and in some cases losing loved ones to suicide or contemplating taking their own lives.

Additionally study participants described their life outside Rainbow Revolution in terms of their relationships with others. This included their relationships with adults outside their

family, such as teachers; their relationships with parents; with other family members; and their friendships and romantic relationships outside of Rainbow Revolution. Participants generally described their experiences with adults as being distant or confusing. Linden highlighted this when describing the adult mentors in Rainbow Revolution, stating "The mentors were a huge part because they were adults in my life that were able to model a type of love and compassion that I had never experienced before in terms of my own experiences in the world (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)."

Participants described having a wide range of parental relationships, from very accepting and supportive ("It was nice to know that my parents were listening and understanding. They've always been really supportive") to hurtful and potentially abusive ("my mom… decided to move out for three months instead of stay there and terrorize me," "my dad was a jerk"). The most common experiences participants described related to their sexual and gender identities were those that occurred within their families. Some described their parents as accepting or actively supportive of the local SOGD community (e.g. "I also have two lesbian moms who were very connected with some of the communities"), while others described overtly hostile family environments (e.g. "she grounded me indefinitely for being a lesbian"). Most described parents whose level of understanding and acceptance fell between those two extremes and shifted over time (e.g. "my parents aren't homophobic, but we were at a point in our relationship where they were uncomfortable, and they were confused"). In some cases these family dynamics included significant tension related to the young person's participation in Rainbow Revolution. Former Rainbow Revolution performers sometimes identified their friendships outside Rainbow Revolution as more superficial, while others commented on having the same long-term friends since early childhood.

In some cases, participants linked their limited level of romantic engagement in adolescence back to the general societal context, such as Ash, who stated, "none of the romance narratives I learned growing up resonated with me, and then in my later teen years it almost felt like being asexualized. Like you didn't have a sexual or romantic identity because people couldn't comprehend the idea (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)." Participants also commented regularly on other aspects of the societal perspectives they observed growing up. Some noticed a local rhetoric of "colorblindness" related to racial relations and ignoring differences in their hometown and others commented on how remote the possibility of same-sex marriage was while they were young.

Given the nature of Rainbow Revolution and this study, it is perhaps unsurprising that all participants commented on experiences related to their social identities during adolescence that occurred outside Rainbow Revolution. Most frequently, participants commented on experiences related to identifying as SOGD, but they also reflected on racial identities, and assumptions or perceptions of others. For many these experiences included feeling different, alone, or explicitly victimized due to their sexual or gender identity. Rowan connected with a piece they performed with Rainbow Revolution, noting "I was beat up in a similar circle pushing situation, and I wasn't even out yet. I was maybe 10 or 11, but I was already really queer, you know? Like everyone knew that there was something different about me (31 years old, mixed race, queer)."

High school in particular was described as generally being non-accepting environment for SOGD youth, and some interviewees also commented on the ways in which society was also less accepting or informed during the time they were adolescents. Specifically they described the limited opportunities outside of activism for queer youth to socialize with each other or with

queer adults. They also noted that SOGD youth may naturally seek one another out in ways that can lead to problematic outcomes, as Morgan described, saying:

> They feel like they don't fit in other places so they go and seek out others like them who are in the queer community. But statistically because of all these adverse things that happened in their childhood they're at higher risk for smoking cigarettes, unprotected sex, all of these things. … It's pretty much people who are lost trying to seek out others who are lost and be lost together (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian).

An overall summary of the *Life Outside Rainbow Revolution* theme was that leaving Rainbow Revolution, whether due to graduating from the group or just going home from rehearsal, was as referred to by one participant "reality check" because life outside the group was so different from the environment within the group. This was not to say that Rainbow Revolution distorted their view of reality or made it more difficult for them to function outside the organization, so much as indicating that the culture within Rainbow Revolution was so inclusive that it caused participants to more fully realize ways in which the outside world was not as accepting. As Daria noted, "it was hard to be there and be so supported and then go back to reality and recognize that I wasn't as safe sharing who I was (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)." Several participants described Rainbow Revolution as a haven or safe bubble, as Crystal asserted, saying "it's like you go there to feel safe but once you're out of there you're in the real world. It's not a safe environment, so you still get bullied, you still get talked about, you still get assaulted (28 years old, Black, cis woman, straight)." For some these unsafe experiences included feeling less accepted at home, as Taren noted: "I still battled a bit with feeling I couldn't be this person at home, at least not in its entirety (24 years old, Latino, trans man, gay)." Participants described having challenges graduating from Rainbow Revolution and finding

similarly meaningful and safe spaces, to the extent that four participants expressed wishing there were a group like Rainbow Revolution for adults.

4.2.2 The Institution of Rainbow Revolution

All study participants described specific aspects of the creative process within Rainbow Revolution. As a team, we decided that in order to be considered part of the theme of *Institution of Rainbow Revolution,* the line and category code had to be descriptive in nature without including higher levels of emotional content or self-reflection about their time as a youth performer. Most frequently these descriptions were also general to all group members and not specific to the speaker's experiences (e.g. "We had a youth leadership council" rather than "I gained leadership skills through being on the youth council").

This theme included very concrete elements of the process, such as how they learned about Rainbow Revolution, the frequency and location of meetings or descriptions of specific pieces or roles. The primary structural aspects participants commented on included the youth-directed nature of Rainbow revolution and its experientially educational nature, teaching theatre skills and writing. Rainbow Revolution was noted to be similar to other theatre organizations with regard to specific activities at rehearsals (e.g. warm-up exercises), but different because it features identity-based work written by young people. When describing specific pieces, the most frequently cited piece was about bullying that was performed by multiple generations of performers but resonated across cohorts.

The descriptive theme of *The Institution of Rainbow Revolution* also included some interpersonal or intrapersonal aspects of involvement with Rainbow Revolution. Participants described their process of working with the adult mentors within the group, the youth leadership opportunities within Rainbow Revolution, variations in participant's level of involvement, and

the general group dynamics present within the organization. Participants noted that despite the overall egalitarian approach of Rainbow Revolution, there was an internal hierarchy based on seniority within the group as well as more formalized youth leadership and adult mentor positions. Some study participants indicated they had held leadership positions, while others noted they had not been as actively involved in the creative process as they could have been, and still others commented that they were pushed to take risks by mentors or more senior group members. Some participants noted that the act of just continuing to show up to rehearsal weekly had required a new level of commitment for them. A general trend was that participants were able to "jump in" more fully after their first year in the group, as summarized by a participant who had been in Rainbow Revolution for two years who stated "after the first year I think I really understood my place in Rainbow Revolution, the things you can do with Rainbow Revolution. And the second year I was just like 'All right, let's do it as much as we can."

In terms of group dynamics, study participants commented on Rainbow Revolution being a generally welcoming and relationship-focused organization, in which participants felt committed to a common goal. Daria described the group saying, "Everyone really did put themselves out there for the group and for the sake of letting what needed to be said be said (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)." While Emery noted "it wasn't necessarily the most challenging aspect, but I think that we spent the most time trying to build the relationships, then make sure that everybody felt heard, and there wasn't anything preventing the creative aspect of Rainbow Revolution (22 years old, White, cis woman, queer)." Rainbow Revolution's overall group dynamic was seen as being similar to other groups in that young people could meet others. However, it was also seen as unique because in general it encouraged young people to talk

openly and think critically about their own identities and privilege, and because it provided more space for sharing experiences and feeling validated.

Participants often described the act of creating pieces in detail. This included enumerating the specific steps of the process, such as participating in small group discussions, engaging in improvisation based on ideas discussed in the small groups, forming small working groups to write scripts based on the improvised pieces, and finally editing and offering feedback and scripts. Improvisation was one of the categories we had not initially inquired specifically about, but over the course of interviews it became apparent that that was a core and emotionally important aspect of the process. For many young people, engaging with improvisation exercises was challenging but also allowed for raw and spontaneous portrayals of experiences that provided an important foundation for the final pieces. Some participants noted they preferred performing in the internal improvisation exercises over the final performance because it was fun and less pressure, but still allowed the opportunity to try on different ways of being. Participants described doing library or internet searches for the pieces they helped write, and working on several different pieces that they had to write quickly.

Participants also commented regularly on how the pieces were revised from their original forms through editing. Some preferred editing to originating ideas, while others felt uncomfortable providing critical feedback. One notable aspect of editing and feedback was that participants often felt surprise at receiving positive feedback. As Taren expressed:

> I ended up writing an entire piece. It was read, and it was good. That was shocking to me to hear someone say, I mean, not just 'someone' but multiple people in the group, youth and mentors alike, saying that it was good, and that was awesome (24 years old, Latino, trans man, gay).

Another notable aspect of the editing process within Rainbow Revolution was that although there were sometimes disagreements about what pieces or elements should be included in the final performance, group members compromised to ensure everyone was able to share what they needed to. This was summarized by Emery, who stated:

> Sometimes through the final editing processes you might feel like 'oh, this one piece I feel like my input isn't necessarily there as much anymore,' because it's been edited a couple of times by a lot of different people. But then you look at the next piece and you're like 'well, but here is all this that I wanted to say,' and then you recognize 'oh well, someone obviously felt really strongly about changing the piece to go this direction because of their personal experience. And so it's kind of a respect thing, and everyone realizing we need to put out there what people need to be put out there (22 years old, White, cis woman, queer).

After scripts for pieces had undergone the revision process, participants in Rainbow Revolution auditioned to play specific roles in the final performance and were then cast by their youth advisory committee and the mentors into roles, sometimes different from those for which they had initially auditioned. Interviewees described auditioning for roles based on what they thought would be fun or interesting. They often clarified that the casting of roles was not based on individuals' actual sexual or gender identities, and that performers were sometimes cast in roles they did not even audition for. Sometimes participants indicated they were cast in pieces they had written or pieces based on their own experiences, which posed unique creative and personal challenges. Other participants described being cast in a role that was based on a specific other person, such as a fellow performer or a friend outside Rainbow Revolution.

Interview participants commented on wanting to use the performance of Rainbow Revolution to teach others or offer a new perspective to audience members. Some hoped this would be a point of connection for other young people, as Morgan described, "we started feeling a little bit like we were superheroes, you know? Like there are closeted kids out there and if they see us, maybe we can affect them in a positive way (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." Others remarked on wanting audience members to have a new perspective or understanding when they left the show, as noted by Greg, saying "it's actually a learning experience for the audience… this is something that is very real and that people should definitely walk away a little bit different after seeing a [Rainbow Revolution] show (24 years old, White, cis man, straight)." Participants also differentiated between the final performance and those presented to smaller community groups. As interviewees commented, every audience member at the final performance independently chose to attend and therefore some participants felt that show was "preaching to the choir," whereas performances for schools or other organizations were often invited by specific administrators but performed for all students or staff, whether or not they were individually interested in attending. Therefore, as Noelle noted, performing in schools and churches encouraged audience members to begin to think differently about political and social ideas, and thereby "bringing our theatre to people who haven't necessarily signed up to see it felt like a very political act (21 years old, White, cis woman, queer)."

Finally, this study centered on the impact of the experiences individuals had as youth performers with Rainbow Revolution. However, over half of our interviewees had also participated in Rainbow Revolution in another capacity, whether performing in reunion shows, serving on the board, or acting as an adult mentor for youth performers, or "actorvists" as one interviewee described them. For many, these experiences were also very impactful, but often in a

different way than their initial involvement in the organization. Interviewees described how acting as a mentor or even performing in a reunion show allowed them reflect on their own time as youth performers. Morgan described mentoring as being rewarding but "triggering," describing watching as youth experience "the pain that I know very well, but also having lived enough life to know that if they hold on for long enough to work on themselves, their strength, their identity, they'll get through it. Having that is really powerful (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." Similarly, Taren stated, "I've hung up a few letters and gifts that the kids have given me and other mentors… it reminds me of where I was and how shy I was, and now I'm able to help out (24 years old, Latino, trans man, gay)." Even for those interviewees who were no longer actively involved with Rainbow Revolution, many indicated they would like to be more involved so that, as Emery states: "I would give back as much as I could because of how much they've given me (22 years old, White, cis woman, queer)."

4.2.3 Emotions

This overall sense of gratitude or indebtedness also carried through into the theme *Emotions.* The contextual theme of *Life Outside of Rainbow Revolution* could be seen as the "input" that influences what each individual brings to Rainbow Revolution, while *The Institution of Rainbow Revolution* is the outlined structure that contains the transformation process for each individual. The themes of *Adolescent Social Identity Experiences*, *Connecting with Others, Expression through Rainbow Revolution, Social Learning, Individual Learning,* and *Healing through Rainbow Revolution* represent the elements within Rainbow Revolution that allow that change process to occur. However, within the structure of *The Institution of Rainbow Revolution,* and coloring all elements of the change process, were the strong emotions participants described experiencing. Thus *Emotions* was a pervasive theme, the atmosphere in which the change

process took place, and a catalyst heightening the impact of each specific element of that process. Most interviewees described a similar course of emotions across their experiences in Rainbow Revolution, beginning with feeling insecure or nervous, then opening up more and having fun in the midst of hard, vulnerable work, and finally feeling the overall experience was powerful and rewarding to the extent that they look back on their experience with gratefulness.

Although some participants were able to jump directly into taking risks within Rainbow Revolution, most participants described feeling unsure what to expect at their first meeting, and nervous interacting with other members. As Emery noted, "There are some really impressive people in Rainbow Revolution, so I was a little nervous, you know? Because when you're around really talented people it's not as easy to find your own place there (22 years old, White, cis woman, queer)." Taren likened the initial experience to feeling he had fallen into a musical about diverse and dramatic SOGD characters, saying, "it was like I walked into a scene of 'Rent,' right? But being really shy… I wasn't ready yet to be all in the mix (24 years old, Latino, trans man, gay)." Even when participants described having warmed up to the other individuals in the group, they still expressed significant insecurity related to specific aspects of the creative process. For most participants this included improvising, writing pieces, or performing in front of an audience. Noelle described the challenge of writing pieces drawn from many lived experiences, noting she did not often write scripts because "I didn't feel super confident as a creative writer but also because I think I was afraid of trying to articulate someone else's story (21 years old, White, cis woman, queer)." Meanwhile, Morgan described her intense stage fright, recalling "at the time I was like 'nope. I'm not going to make it through. I'm going to die,' standing on stage (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." Thus, especially during their

initial involvement, participants tended to feel uncomfortable due to lack of confidence in their interpersonal and creative abilities.

Participants also described the process as emotionally stressful and demanding. This included stress due to the rigorous schedule and push to produce a high quality performance. As Greg commented, they poured "a lot of blood sweat and tears into it… It's very emotionally draining (24 years old, White, cis man, straight)." However, for many participants, engaging in Rainbow Revolution was difficult because it evoked strong emotions and required being vulnerable in front of others. Jaden described leaving the stage in tears, explaining that sometimes actors had to "dissociate" from the emotional content because "if you don't do that, you'll literally not be able to get through certain scenes without crying your eyes out (21 years old, White, cis man, gay)." At times the strong emotions came from wanting to do justice to portraying the experiences of others, as Ash expressed:

> It was real nice to show people 'ok this is life.' But I think that was also kind of the hardest part for me because I didn't have any experience being on a stage and it involves a big amount of vulnerability, especially since you're working with content that is actually based on people's lives. And it's people you know who are standing right next to you, so you want to do a good job (26 years old, White, trans man, queer).

For others, performing autobiographical roles were the most anxiety provoking. Sky contrasted having an easier time accurately acting out roles similar to herself, "but in an emotional sense it was difficult to bring those experiences in and portray them to so many people (18 years old, White, cis woman, asexual)." With regard to expressing personal content, monologues were perceived as the most emotionally risky because as Brooke notes, "that was just me talking about me, and I couldn't hide behind a character so much (21 years old, White, cis woman, bisexual)."

Overall, participants found these difficult emotional experiences to be powerful and rewarding. Hearing a positive response from the audience during the performance provided validation for experiences, so that as Noelle commented about performing a role similar to herself "it was like validation because it was a really big group of people and I felt like the audience cared for what I was saying. They thought it was important (21 years old, White, cis woman, queer)." Linden similarly shared even when the experiences they portrayed were not literally autobiographical "it very much often actually felt like [they were]. So any time I improv-ed or acted on stage I was very much positively rewarded just in the feedback and applause and people hearing what we were saying in our pieces (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)." Participants also indicated they felt more comfortable playing roles different from themselves than they usually would have because in the context of Rainbow Revolution it felt meaningful to do so. Interviewees felt this process of portraying lived experiences was empowering and cathartic. Rowan described the actors crying after performing a piece and then moving on, noting "I feel like that's how you get out of cycles of self-harming thoughts… to be able to just exorcise that out so you don't get into those self-doubt loops (31 years old, mixed race, queer)." As a result, performers felt accomplished due to having overcome fears. Sky explained, "Coming into it I didn't think I would be able to do it… But at the end it was just the feeling of 'Wow! I did this thing! We did this thing!' Just the feeling of pride (18 years old, White, cis woman, asexual)." Within the participants in this study, all expressed a version of this pride in their accomplishments through Rainbow Revolution.

Despite the stress and emotional challenges, participants also commented on the pure enjoyment they ultimately derived from Rainbow Revolution. They described laughing frequently, in particular when doing improvisation or sharing their own experiences. Noelle

commented on enjoying improvisation warm-up activities when "we would just do silly theatre games to try and totally let go. I think that was really important for me in terms of being able to just play again (21 years old, White, cis woman, queer)." Phoenix recalled sharing one of his own stories and hearing his colleagues' positive response, saying, "it was funny because everyone would laugh. We couldn't even write because we were still laughing. In Rainbow Revolution if we had a blooper moment that would be it (32 years old, Black, cis male, gay)." Therefore despite the fact that participants found Rainbow Revolution grueling in many ways, they also found it to be a joyful experience. For some attending Rainbow Revolution was highlighted as the one bright moment in an otherwise dark week outside the bubble of Rainbow Revolution.

In reflecting on their overall feelings about Rainbow Revolution, participants emphasized their gratefulness and happiness that they had engaged in the process. Several noted they wish they had contributed more or "let go" more and taken more risks. Linden commented they would "jump more deeply into the process and into the experience (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)" or as Emery described her inner monologue "I was like 'Don't look silly! Don't look silly!' but it's like, 'Everyone looks silly, dude. You need to just do it!' I would just tell myself to let go (22 years old, White, cis woman, queer)." At the end of the day participants expressed feeling the entire experience was incredibly impactful. Greg described it as "a gift," Ash summarized his feeling toward Rainbow Revolution as "indebtedness," and Daria stated, "I know this group has saved people's lives and changed people's lives. It's really something special. It's hard to do it justice but it's on a whole other level (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)." In this way, although Rainbow Revolution was incredibly emotionally challenging, it was perceived to be a highly constructive and transformative process.

4.3 Foundational Transformation Agents

Participants described the external context of Rainbow Revolution through the theme *Life outside Rainbow Revolution* and the internal structural context of Rainbow Revolution through *The Institution of Rainbow Revolution* and *Emotions.* Those themes, while essential to understanding the environment of Rainbow Revolution, did not capture why Rainbow Revolution evokes such strong emotional responses and ultimately contributes to personal transformation. Our team identified six themes that explained how participants' sense of self was changed through Rainbow Revolution. These included three "foundational" transformation agents that represented the first, more concrete steps in change for most participants, and three "higher order" transformation agents that appeared to build upon those foundational elements. Thus although we cannot specifically ascribe causality, in general it appeared that the foundational transformation agents often led to and supported the development of the transformation agents we are terming "higher order." The foundational transformation agents include *Adolescent Social Identity Experiences*, *Connecting with Others,* and *Expression through Rainbow Revolution.*

4.3.1 Adolescent Social Identity Experiences

As much as identity-specific experiences were an important aspect of the context surrounding Rainbow Revolution, they were also an important aspect of what participants found to be impactful within Rainbow Revolution. In a very tangible way, many participants commented on the fact that Rainbow Revolution was an important source of information about SOGD topics as well as exposure to individuals who identified along the SOGD spectrum. Some participants noted they learned about SOGD history through research they conducted to write pieces, which provided them with a better sense of context for their own experiences and hope

for the future as well as validation of their experiences and identities. Others commented they had not known basic facts about terms used within SOGD communities such as "PGP" for "preferred gender pronouns." In particular, being exposed to adults and youth who identified as SOGD was important for many participants. Jaden described feeling it was helpful being able to have healthy relationships modeled and discussed within Rainbow Revolution:

> Seeing [healthy queer relationships] and experiencing that on a weekly basis and being around things that are helpful, healthy relationship advice for queer people was extremely indispensable in my life. Because I didn't get any of that from my parents or my family, not because they didn't want to give it to me but because they didn't know how… not that most people want to have those conversations with their parents, but if they're heterosexual they still have it anyway and they still learn from it. This is the space to have those sorts of conversations and experiences that I wouldn't normally have access to (21 years old, White, cis man, gay).

Having exposure to SOGD topics and individuals with SOGD identities led to participants feeling more hope about their own futures. Some commented on discussing the possibility of marriage equality becoming a reality, while others described realizing there were likely to be other SOGD individuals like them even in contexts where they were not visible. For Linden this exposure allowed him to feel greater hope while he was in Rainbow Revolution, but it also gave him a point of reference to reflect on in adulthood. As a youth performer he described seeing other youth grow as well as their parents, which "instilled this hope in me that no matter where my parents started from, there would be that growth and that openness to sort of learn and develop as our relationships did (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)." He also described using the exposure to individuals of many different sexual orientations and gender identities

within Rainbow Revolution to inform his transition to a different gender identity after no longer being part of Rainbow Revolution:

> It gave me this reference to their stories and their experiences, because even though I didn't identify that way when I was in high school I still carried their experiences with me. And so those were things that I was able to reflect on and use as an adult to help walk through this process of shifting my identity from lesbian to transgender.

Thus for many youth performers, learning about SOGD topics and gaining exposure to other individuals and families with SOGD identities was pivotal for instilling hope, gaining better understanding of themselves, and informing their future choices.

Interview participants also described feeling connected to something larger than themselves as a result of their involvement with Rainbow Revolution, specifically connected to the wider world of SOGD advocacy. Sky commented on the uniqueness of using youth voices in activism, stating "I feel it's a really cool and important concept to be making change and fighting for justice through art, and especially because everything in the show is created by youth. It's just a very powerful thing (18 years old, White, cis woman, asexual)." Meanwhile, Kelly felt that Rainbow Revolution was pivotal in her life due to inspiring her to care about anything at all. She described Rainbow Revolution as "an opportunity to really care about something in a way I'd never cared about anything else in my life…it felt like I was a part of something bigger, instead of feeling like I wasn't a part of anything (25 years old, White, cis woman, straight)."

Finally, participants also described being able to try on identities within Rainbow Revolution. Initially our team had assumed that experimenting with identities would mostly take place in the form of actually embodying specific roles different from themselves, and for some performers that was the case, particularly those who identified as transgender. Linden described

playing the parent of a transgender character as feeling like a "practice run" because "I literally remember before I came out to my parents as trans… I was able to pull from that role how or what I could do in my own situation (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)." Ash, who also identifies as transgender, noted that performing specific roles that aligned with his gender identity allowed others to see him more fully with that identity, saying, "in a literal sense I always got to have male roles, which was big (26 years old, White, queer)." Noelle also specifically identified the physicality of pieces, such as movement and dance, as being impactful in being able to articulate her identity differently, commenting, "especially as I was starting to transition from identifying as lesbian to identifying as queer… Through the process of theatre I could really explore that part of my identity in a way that I felt was really important (21 years old, White, cis woman, queer)."

In addition to the direct impact of performing specific roles, participants also noted that Rainbow Revolution as a whole was a space where different versions of identities could be practiced. Taren described Rainbow Revolution as a consistently safe place to enact his gender identity in contrast to other spaces, saying:

> I still battled a bit with feeling I couldn't be this person at home, at least not in its entirety, but people started calling me by the name I chose at the time. They started acknowledging me as male. The friends I gained through Rainbow Revolution would stand up and if somebody mis-gendered me, they would correct them or they would help me correct them (24 years old, Latino, trans man, gay).

Some found it helpful to be able to explore different forms of identities within Rainbow Revolution. Through having the freedom to enact a wide range of identity presentations, participants were able to discover what did and did not work for them. Jaden described his

journey, noting he learned, "wearing queerness on your sleeve didn't work for me, but I had a safe place to try that sort of identity without getting beaten and thrown into a side street (21 years old, White, cis man, gay)." Jaden also noted that young people generally do not receive adequate socialization into queer culture, which can create a very difficult transition during adolescence and early adulthood. However, he described Rainbow Revolution as a place where youth can get introduced "into queerness and the queer world without having the 'fish out of water,' being drowned essentially, feeling of it."

4.3.2 Connecting with Others

One of the most frequently cited sources of both pleasure and growth within Rainbow Revolution was the opportunity to connect with others. This theme encompassed any direct interpersonal interactions that occurred as a result of Rainbow Revolution. This included meeting people like themselves, engaging with people who were quite different from themselves, learning to work cooperatively, and forging a support network.

As indicated in the *Adolescent Social Identity Experiences* theme, many Rainbow Revolution performers felt alone or different within their home communities and families. Therefore many participants commented on the importance of being able to meet other young people with whom they could connect, and specifically the importance of meeting other young people who identified similarly to themselves. As Morgan describes, "actually seeing that there were other people, people that were blending in just like me, coming together and having this in common, and there were even kids of color. It was amazing to see (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." Ash notes that being around other youth like him helped facilitate his own coming out process, stating "I got to meet other queer trans kids, which is like, statistically the numbers weren't on my side. It provided this place where I could meet people and be like 'ok, I

have this encouragement and structure to come out (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)." Similarly, Linden felt empowered to follow the examples of other group members, remarking "being in a space with other people who identified similarly to me, and other people who were having as hard as a time but also had the courage to go out and face the struggle and the challenges that came with just being our authentic selves. Having those peers and those adults to sort of model that for me and share a space with me I think that made the biggest difference (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)."

As pivotal as it was for many interviewees to meet youth like them, it was also important to meet young people who were very different and to interact with those people on a very "real level, not a politically correct level," as Morgan noted (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian). Kelly described this opportunity in contrast to the usual social homogeneity of high school, commenting:

> When you're in high school you feel really divvied up by location, and by age, and by race, and by gender, and by all these different things. And I was able to be in a place where that wasn't true. I was with people from many different ages, and of different races, and different backgrounds, and from different areas, and I think it really created a sense of community that I didn't have other opportunities to have (25 years old, White, cis woman, straight).

Rainbow Revolution not only allowed young people to connect across social identity divides, but also across divides based on temperaments or first impressions. Daria indicated that people who are very creative can easily come across as not "normal." She therefore described the youth in Rainbow Revolution as "a collection of people who are kind of outcasts, or who sometimes get written off… it challenged me to be a better person and to stop looking past the people that

sometimes I would normally look past (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)." The collaborative nature of the work within Rainbow Revolution solidified the connections across these differences, because as Linden described it created a sense that "even though we were all different, we could come together and create this really beautiful process that was more profound than had we just created a piece based on one person's experience (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)."

Given the diversity of personalities within Rainbow Revolution and the intensity and collaborative nature of their creative process, it was inevitable that disagreements would occur. Some participants noted this potential for conflict as one of the challenges of working with such a large group. However, as several interviewees noted, what was unique about Rainbow Revolution was that it allowed young people to develop the skills to resolve such conflicts amicably. Participants indicated this conflict resolution process was youth driven, with adult mentors very rarely becoming involved. As a result, Morgan described how Rainbow Revolution helped adolescents practice "taking the time to use our brains, use our intellects, and talk these things out instead of gut-reacting… to learn to find common ground (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." Jaden also noted that for young people from more privileged backgrounds it was particularly helpful to have to work through conflicts and stay connected, because so frequently in other areas of life such youth are able to "walk away from problems and not deal with them and have them just sorted out for them (21 years old, White, cis man, gay)."

Finally, the most salient aspect of the *Connecting with Others* theme was that participants described forming a stronger support network through Rainbow Revolution. Four participants explicitly described Rainbow Revolution as a "family," but all of them remarked upon the strong community forged within Rainbow Revolution. As Phoenix noted, "getting to hear that other

kids are going through the same thing, I didn't feel alone no more (32 years old, Black, cis male, gay)," and Daria commented "even if I had a bad week outside of Rainbow Revolution, there was always Rainbow Revolution. I could always go back there and feel comfort and feel like I had a place where I belonged (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)." Morgan described having grown up with many adverse life circumstances, which should have predisposed her for a more negative life trajectory. However, she credits her current success to the community of Rainbow Revolution, stating:

> I had a lifeline at a time where I could've gone down one road or another, but I had a lifeline and people that were already heading down that positive road being like 'come join us!' And that is so different than having to figure it all out on your own (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian).

Similar to the importance of the entire Rainbow Revolution community, many participants commented on the importance of specific relationships formed through Rainbow Revolution. While some noted they wished they had forged closer relationships with all members of the group rather than just some, interviewees often described having met their closest friends through Rainbow Revolution and maintaining connections across many years. Kelly appreciated forming lasting friendships that may never have occurred otherwise, stating, "I am still really connected with a lot of people. I was in a group ten years ago, so I think Rainbow Revolution is really cool for that. At school we would have never met (25 years old, White, cis woman, straight)." Similarly, Rowan describes, "we're gonna be friends forever because of that shared experience (31 years old, mixed race, queer)." Noelle felt the friendships within Rainbow Revolution impacted other community engagement, commenting:

> These were a lot of my best friends in high school, the people who I did a lot of organizing with about LGBTQ issues. I think because we had this experience in Rainbow Revolution together we sort of felt like we could have each other's backs when we were doing that organizing and we were just more confident about it (21 years old, White, cis woman, queer).

For some participants, Rainbow Revolution offered the first space where they could form romantic relationships, and particularly queer relationships. Several interviewees described either previously feeling left out of the culture of romance or experiencing abusive relationships. Ash identified his relationship in Rainbow Revolution as "a big starting point, where I could see 'ok… I am sure I will find love in my life (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)" while Linden felt theirs "was the first person that I ever really loved fully and really had what I thought at the time a healthy relationship (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)." In providing feedback on the preliminary findings, Daria emphasized that being in Rainbow Revolution:

> … Gave us the confidence to engage in queer relationships and it also gave us a space to find people who we could engage in these relationships with…. I think a lot of us learned how to navigate our first queer romantic relationships through the group, which is important because that's not always something that society teaches us (21 years old, White, cis female, pansexual).

For others, connecting with adults who had positive expectations for them was particularly influential. Rowan, like many participants, described feeling comfortable confiding in the mentors, stating, "if there was ever something that needed to be worked through, we knew there were people that we could talk to (31 years old, mixed race, queer)." Some participants described forming strong and long lasting relationships with the adult mentors, with Phoenix

referring to a mentor as being "like a father to me. I am so honored to have met him (32 years old, Black, cis male, gay)." Morgan poignantly portrayed a chance meeting with one of the mentors many years after her involvement in Rainbow Revolution, saying:

> If someone asked me how I know Starry Smith, they would expect me to say, 'Oh we are both [professional title].' No, how do I know Starry Smith? Are you kidding me? She is part of my DNA. It goes deeper than 'I know her from this event,' or 'I know her from this group' or something. I know her because she is part of me; it is deep. I know her from her helping me to get to know myself (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian).

4.3.3 Expression through Rainbow Revolution

The third foundational change agent theme that participants discussed was that of expressing truths through Rainbow Revolution. Participants reported that whether they were crafting and performing a monologue, dance, or collaborative group sketch, they were able to express a piece of themselves. Brooke noted "even the pieces you're collaboratively writing you still get very attached to them, and they still get really personal even if they're not your exact story (21 years old, White, cis woman, bisexual)." As was previously indicated in the group dynamics of the *Institution of Rainbow Revolution*, youth performers prioritized ensuring everyone was able to share the truths they needed to.

Most participants explicitly described the Rainbow Revolution process as helping them "find their voice." As Rowan stated Rainbow Revolution was a space where they could "find my own voice and how to share my experiences constructively with other people (31 years old, mixed race, queer)," while Linden described the process as "identifying my own voice and then putting that voice to words and then sharing that voice with others that I felt safe with, and then

using that to change my life and other people's lives (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)." Some interviewees contrasted their ability to express their perspectives in Rainbow Revolution with how rarely they felt heard in other areas of life. Ash described feeling he had the "right" to speak at Rainbow Revolution performances "because I'm on a stage and everyone has to listen. But in my day-to-day life I felt the opposite way, like I can't really talk because most people aren't going to listen (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)." Similarly, Morgan commented "it kind of feels good to have everyone focusing on you, especially when you feel like your voice isn't heard very often. To have what literally feels like the world listening to you in that moment, it builds you up (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." She identified this new confidence in her voice as something that grounded her and allowed her to navigate challenges related to her social identities when she attended college, reporting "Before I got to a very suffocating, oppressive campus, I had already found my voice so it wasn't able to actually suffocate me, it wasn't able to oppress me. I had something to hold onto."

Often what participants described sharing through their improvisations and their final performances were emotions that were raw and real. They commented on how authentic the performances were, "very original, very true to the… personality and the experiences of everyone involved in the whole project," as described by Greg (24 years old, White, cis man, straight). Kelly noted "you'd really see people be unapologetically themselves (25 years old, White, cis woman, straight)." Because pieces were expressions of individual youth voices and experiences, they were often complex, personal, and ambiguous, without the easy endings or clear conclusions found in most theatre. Ash described this contrast, noting:

> We've all seen this kind of dynamic between what people think kids want or need, and then allowing kids or anyone to say what they want to talk about. When you allow people

> to say it, then I think you get obviously a more genuine story and it becomes more complicated, and kind of tricky (26 years old, White, trans man, queer).

Even for performers who identified as allies, the fact that the skits were based on people's lived experiences made performing those skits an impactful experience. Many performers described wanting to do justice to the roles by being as accurate to the author's intentions and emotions as possible, or as Crystal stated: "It made me want to act harder… to do a good job and make it more realistic (28 years old, Black, cis woman, straight)."

In part the expression participants engaged in through Rainbow Revolution was so raw and emotional because many were sharing aspects of themselves they had never previously disclosed. Rainbow Revolution allowed youth to feel safe sharing due to the supportive mentors and peers, and an atmosphere that encourages sharing without forcing it. The partial anonymity conferred by the theatre was also described as key for some participants in sharing hidden aspects of themselves on stage. A disclaimer is made before all performances that the roles actors portray may not be similar to their own identities or experiences. As a result, some participants noted they felt more comfortable sharing difficult truths because "through theatre I could be really honest about it and not feel like I was super vulnerable" (Noelle, 21 years old, White, cis woman, queer). For some this included discovering shared personality traits with a disliked character, which were then broadcast through the performance as Daria depicted: "the harder part though is when you realize something about the character that you don't necessarily like and then you find that in yourself… It challenges you to think about who you are as a person (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)." Several participants described sharing their sexual or gender identities for the first time on the Rainbow Revolution stage, as Morgan reported, "that part that was feeling so ashamed and so like I wasn't supposed to be here, and the whole of me

didn't belong in the world because of this one part, they were allowing me to express that part (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." Daria also summarized this experience, saying, "I think that was the first time I really threw my identity out there and put it out there really confidently for an audience (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)."

Most participants described wanting the audience in general to learn something from the show and gain new perspective, but several also commented specifically on the impact of expressing themselves to specific people. Some wanted to express themselves to their friends or family so they could understand them better, while others hoped their family would not attend for fear of how they would respond. Morgan evocatively describes searching for her family members in the audience and being moved by their attendance at her final performance, saying:

> What I remember the most from those performances, for instance, when my mom actually told me that she was coming to the show, or when I saw her in the audience. We're not supposed to, but you peek between the curtains and look and see if someone who showed up who would be there for you. So it really said a lot to me that she showed up. She actually showed up. I don't remember much from our first performance, I really, really don't. … But what I remember is watching my mom and my sister find their seats (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian).

She then described feeling she had communicated with her family through the performance, saying, "My mom ended up coming to the performance, and my sister, and my cousins, and my aunt, and it helped them to see a different side of me when I performed." Similarly, Ash stated his parents had been in denial about his male gender identity, but "when they came to the show and they got to see me in this new light as these characters…in a very tangible way it helped my parents see me as the person I was (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)."

However, some performers were not able to use Rainbow Revolution to communicate as they had hoped with their family. Some knew their parents would refuse to attend the show, as Phoenix portrayed in a reenacted conversation with his father: "If you'd come check it out you would see how I see you and maybe we could sit down and talk. But you never wanted to. You fought me more than you would try to understand (32 years old, Black, cis male, gay)." Meanwhile others searched the audience for familiar faces, but were disappointed, as Taren described:

> I had assumed my family would come see it. They didn't come that first night, and that was actually very hard for me, even though I tried to hide it. There was a big part of me that wanted them to see it… Because I had come out in the piece, and my hope was that my family would see it and start putting two and two together…. My hope was that my mom would see it and understand that the way I was portraying her was the way I was seeing her, whether or not she meant it to be that way. To this day I'm not quite sure she saw it (24 years old, Latino, trans man, gay).

Even for participants who were unable to share their voice with their family, they still frequently commented on feeling empowered through sharing their voice with the world at large. For some it was important to express experiences that could be sources of shame due to societal biases. For instance Emery felt it "helped a lot of us talk about issues that were kind of stigmatized, especially around mental health, around suicide, around a lot of different issues, helped us feel empowered about sharing our narratives about that (22 years old, White, cis woman, queer)." While for others sharing any aspect of themselves, no matter how mundane, still felt empowering because it allowed them to be seen by the world. As Kelly described "I wasn't sharing anything important or doing anything important, but in a way it felt

empowering… because you're seen and you're seen by a lot of people on a stage. You're really seen (25 years old, White, cis woman, straight)." Through finding their voice and being truly "seen" by others, youth felt empowered and carried that empowerment with them into other aspects of their lives. Emery stated "I feel like pieces of my identity that may have held me back previously, those barriers have vanished so much more because I've been able to express those parts of my identity on stage (22 years old, White, cis woman, queer)," while Linden described literally using their confident voice to "stand up for myself and to stand up for others (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)." In these ways participants described being able to find their voices through Rainbow Revolution and express themselves in and outside the organization. For many, connecting with others, having positive identity experiences, and having the opportunity to express themselves contributed to further ongoing identity development and personal growth.

4.4 Higher Order Transformational Agents

Some participants focused primarily on the foundational transformational agents of *Adolescent Social Identity Experiences*, *Connecting with Others,* and *Expression through Rainbow Revolution* to describe their process in Rainbow Revolution. These foundational themes were largely process-oriented. However, for many participants, the themes they described most frequently were those that resulted from or built upon the identity-related interactions, connections with others, and self-expression they experienced through Rainbow Revolution. Our research team termed these themes "higher order change agents," and they represented reorganization and consolidation of the insights gained from their foundational experiences in Rainbow Revolution. It was these more abstract epiphanies and learning outcomes that our research team felt were most likely to carry over into participants' lives outside Rainbow

Revolution. The higher order change agents included the themes *Social Learning, Individual Learning,* and *Healing through Rainbow Revolution.*

4.4.1 Social Learning

One of the quotes that surprised me most in the interviews was when an ally stated, "I didn't really have a ton of personal stuff to share, which also gave me an opportunity to shut up." That particular participant was one who emphasized how important it had been for her to focus on others instead of on herself, and how that in turn had allowed her to grow as an individual. Because the emphasis of my initial conceptualization of this project had been about how this theatre process changes an individual's identity, I had been approaching interview questions and coding from the assumption that it was individually-centered actions that would have the most impact (e.g. i.e. actions taken by the individual or directly benefiting them; e.g. expressing one's self, forming friendships, learning about SOGD topics). I had not sufficiently considered that for some the most powerful aspect of the process might be actions that were explicitly not self-centered. As a result of this quote, we began expanding our questions to include more discussion of social learning, which resulted in the emergence of one of the core themes described by participants. Through bearing witness to others' stories unrelated to their own, group members felt they were better able to connect with others, which made them stronger allies and friends, and helped them broaden their perspective and have a new understanding of their own privileges and greater interpersonal awareness. In most cases, they explicitly commented on carrying those lessons with them into their adult lives, shifting the way they understand others different from themselves and engage in relationships and community involvement.

Rainbow Revolution was noteworthy in the intensity of its interpersonal focus. As indicated above, some participants commented that this was the first time they really had to

consider the perspectives of others. This was particularly true for allies in the group who had not experienced many of the challenges faced by their peers, as Crystal noted "It wasn't about me, let's just say that. It was about the LGBT community (28 years old, Black, cis woman, straight)" while Kelly stated "it was the first time in my entire life that everything wasn't about me, and it felt awesome! Just incredible (25 years old, White, cis woman, straight)."

Taking on the roles of people different from themselves allowed participants to briefly live the experiences of others and feel the intensity of emotions associated with those experiences, which served as a particularly poignant catalyst for social learning. For some this included increasing empathy for other SOGD individuals who had experienced bullying. Noelle argued "I think playing that role of being a trans person in high school who was being harassed helped me understand that experience in a different way, in a more real way (21 years old, White, cis woman, queer)," while Phoenix commented "I felt like 'damn, people actually go through this! People actually get pushed down, get called names (32 years old, Black, cis male, gay)." Emery described having to play a bully in a piece, and described the impact it had on her ability to relate with others, saying:

> Until that point I'd never been in a boy's bathroom being called a f*g but I felt like I was in there and I felt those words. You know what I mean? And although it was on stage and I was the one saying them, just like the heat of the moment and feeling those raw feelings coming every time that I performed that piece, I think that it helped me relate to people that have been through that (22 years old, White, cis woman, queer).

This expanded understanding and perspective fostered by embodying roles even extended to those who were bullies themselves as Ash stated, "playing that character kind of forced me to think … some people are homophobic and are actually morally wrong but there's still some need

there that's not getting met (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)." In this way because participants were not just talking about the lives of others but actually living them for a short period of time they were able to gain deeper insight into and greater empathy for people different from themselves.

This process was challenging, as Greg asserted, "the hardest part was really just trying to understand someone who was facing these problems (24 years old, White, cis man, straight)." However, hearing the stories of others and playing roles different from themselves caused many participants to gain a broader perspective on others, such as Ash who commented "Doing things collaboratively made me a little less self-involved… Seeing other people's stories, I just thought about them more and wondered more about their own lives (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)." Participants especially commented on gaining a new understanding of people who were different from themselves, often through playing roles based on the experience of such people. Gaining understanding of other SOGD experiences helped some participants recognize their own privilege. Jaden described this, asserting that gay men like him do not experience the same oppression as others but that he learned about their experiences through the close communication in Rainbow Revolution, which helped him "understand and see that a lot of behaviors that I am doing as well are problematic… in terms of oppression of women and people of color (21 years old, White, cis man, gay)." Thus Rainbow Revolution supported participants in gaining compassion for others as well as recognizing their own privilege.

As a result of this perspective taking that was fostered within Rainbow Revolution, participants felt they now are better able to continue embracing diversity in a genuine and authentic manner. Morgan described her work at a faith-based organization despite not belonging to that faith, noting, "We don't need to see eye to eye on everything to get along. And I'm not

better than them, they're not better than me, it's something to respect. I think that's something that Rainbow Revolution did help me realize (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." Many participants commented on having a greater appreciation for the unique stories of others, including strangers and people they might not have interacted with otherwise. Greg described thinking through his conversation choices differently because now he is more "conscious of the way I talk to people. I was really conscious about people's history… especially the new people that you don't really know and you don't know the hardships that they faced or the troubles they're having (24 years old, White, cis man, straight)." Other participants described this change in their interactions with others as having more respect, "making less black-and-white distinctions" (Jaden, 21 years old, White, cis man, gay), and approaching interactions with "more open eyes and open heart" (Crystal, 28 years old, Black, cis woman, straight). Overall, the prevailing impact interviewees described was an increase in empathy, listening ability, and open-mindedness, such that as Daria described "It challenged me to be a better person and to stop looking past the people that sometimes I would normally look past, because I'm guilty of that. That's one of the biggest things that I've learned – get to know people, don't ever judge (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)."

Not only did participants describe gaining perspective on the lives of others, they also described gaining hopeful perspectives on their own lives and improved relationship skills through their connections with others in Rainbow Revolution. For some it was the recognition of commonality across diverse identities, as Rowan described, "we'd be working through stuff and somebody else would start telling your story because it's their story too (31 years old, mixed race, queer)." While others gained hope through looking up to role-models, as Daria commented:

> Getting to see strong leaders who were at a different point in life and still being activists, and still comfortable with who they are, and progressing, and being in homosexual relationships, and things like that, it was a good example for me because it gave me hope that I could do that too (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual).

More specifically, several interviewees explained they had learned to have hope about their own relationships, and to expect more from those relationships. This hopefulness about future relationships came from not only observing successful adults and older adolescents, but also from experiencing supportive relationships in Rainbow Revolution. Brooke stated "it showed me how to be treated correctly in any type of relationship. Not necessarily just romantic but friendships as well (21 years old, White, cis woman, bisexual)," while Ash described first recognizing he could have fulfilling romantic relationships, saying "For me it was helpful in that, 'oh somebody can love me or be attracted to me.' That hadn't really been something that I had knowingly experienced (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)." As Daria summarizes, because of the unconditional love she received in Rainbow Revolution she has taken more risks to proudly embrace a relationship with another woman, saying, "I've carried that with me to the point that when it came to this relationship I was really able to open up and open my heart up because I felt like I would have that support no matter what (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)."

In addition, former performers described learning specific interpersonal skills or changing their interactions with their families or other groups as a result of Rainbow Revolution. Similar to the hope participants felt for their relationships, the way they navigated relationships was impacted by specific practices and interactions within Rainbow Revolution as well as their overall increase in self-confidence and self-worth. Emery described the former, reporting "It

really helped me figure out how to build even better relationships because of how much relationship building goes on behind the scenes in Rainbow Revolution, intentionally and unintentionally because of all the time we spend together (22 years old, White, cis woman, queer)," while Linden described the latter, stating "my relationships with people, really they shifted profoundly because I was able to show up for them and I wanted to show up for them versus feeling sort of like 'do I deserve to show up for these things? (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)."

This impacted the relationships participants had with their family and friends. Daria felt it strengthened her relationships "because it challenged them but it also gave people opportunity to progress in friendships and help my parents show 'ok we support you (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)." Similarly Linden described feeling their relationship with their parents became both easier and more challenging, indicating it got easier because "they saw the confidence that I had and they felt a little less worried about my emotional health. But it got harder in the sense that I had a voice, I wanted to be heard now (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)." Several participants described this feeling of having more of a voice in their interactions within their family, such that for some it impacted the way they came out to their relatives or engaged in discussions of identity with greater confidence. Some participants also described having a chance to connect with their parents, whether through allowing their parents to provide direct support by driving them to rehearsal, or through sharing their perspective with their parents through the performance. Ash noted he had learned to have more empathy for his parents, which improved his relationship with them, stating "Even though I wished my parents were behaving differently, I think it allowed me to be more patient and

compassionate toward them and give them more space to find what their needs and feelings were about this pretty intense thing (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)."

Finally, participants described becoming more vocal and involved in social justice as a result of Rainbow Revolution. They noted that in some ways the performances of Rainbow Revolution themselves were an act of advocacy through educating audience members and serving as a model of empowerment for youth in the audience. However, they also described feeling more commitment to other social topics and movements as a result of gaining a more diverse perspective through Rainbow Revolution. For instance, Jaden stated, "It was really eye-opening and it gives a better appreciation and a better willingness to help with the other issues that are going on in our community (21 years old, White, cis man, gay)." Other participants credited their entire career trajectory to the impact of Rainbow Revolution, such as Daria who reported "I'm going to a school that the focus is on social justice. I chose this school because the whole goal is to fight for a better society and I think that Rainbow Revolution really gave me that passion (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)."

4.4.2 Individual Learning

In addition to gaining perspective on and skills in navigating relationships, participants emphasized the importance of gaining perspective on themselves and their own experiences. They described experiencing a cognitive shift in the way they perceived the world and themselves in it. Morgan felt like a "victim from my own life" but reported that through Rainbow Revolution she came to appreciate that "the experiences I had, both good and bad, they actually have value now; I'm able to help other people. It gave a little bit more meaning to the shit that I went through (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." Similarly Linden stated that due to Rainbow Revolution they began "owning" the difficult experiences in their life and

"recognizing them and giving them space without giving them power (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)."

As in *Social Learning,* for many participants it was especially important for them to embody roles and try on different ways of being in order to learn about themselves. Taren noted that the roles he played "shaped who I am… I have a lot easier time now being who I am (24 years old, Latino, trans man, gay)," while Greg stated playing different characters "made me realize who I really was and who I can relate most to… and who I would definitely never be in real life (24 years old, White, cis man, straight)." Enacting roles also allowed them recognize difficult truths about themselves, and either change their behavior or accept aspects that they cannot change, as Daria noted:

> "I think it was really good for me to find myself associating with some of the not-so-good things about a character. Because you can't like every aspect of yourself either, and maybe sometimes there were things that you couldn't necessarily change but it helps you come to terms with it. Like 'Well I may not like this thing about this character and I may not like this about myself, but at the same time this is still a badass character and I can be awesome too (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)."

Because of their experiences with self-expression and engaging with their social identities through embodying different roles, they reported gaining assertiveness, self-confidence, and increased understanding and acceptance of their own identities. Ash described Rainbow Revolution as "a stepping stone for me to be able to be more proactive and assertive in my day to day life in other realms (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)" and Noelle specified "I do feel confident in being able to share really honestly what I'm feeling and thinking. I'm not afraid of that, and I think that also comes from my work with Rainbow Revolution (21 years old,

White, cis woman, queer).” She went on to state that as a result of the confidence Rainbow Revolution fostered, “it helped me feel more comfortable advocating for myself and also exploring my own identity and eventually realizing that lesbian didn’t really work for me as a label and queer felt more comfortable.” Numerous participants emphasized that link between their increase in general personal confidence and their increased comfort in their own identities. Emery commented that her sexual orientation and gender identity, “those pieces that may have held me back, don’t as much as they could, and I think that it might be because I’ve had practice being myself on stage in front of people (22 years old, White, cis woman, queer).” Rainbow Revolution allowed some to embrace their sexual and gender identities more fully and openly. Daria stated, “I do identify as pansexual. I am with a woman. I’m not scared to say that because I think Rainbow Revolution really taught me how … to handle situations where I might not feel as accepted (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual).” Similarly Linden expressed “I was able to show up as my authentic self no matter how much push back I got because of that courage that I had and the support that I had (29 years old, White, transgender, queer),” and Rowan asserted, “At the end of the Rainbow Revolution experience it was like, I couldn’t imagine not being authentic in my being queer everywhere I went (31 years old, mixed race, queer).”

In addition to improving their understanding of themselves, and increasing their overall confidence and comfort with their identities, Rainbow Revolution also provided participants with numerous concrete behavior changes. These ranged from making personal changes, like choosing to become sober, to improving their leadership skills. Sky described translating their risk-taking in Rainbow Revolution into increased courage outside of theatre, noting, “knowing that stepping out of my comfort zone can be a really good thing. I feel like I can bring that to other opportunities that might present themselves throughout the rest of my life (18 years old,

White, cis woman, asexual)." Several participants described being in leadership roles within Rainbow Revolution that caused them to recognize their own potential as leaders and practice taking on responsibilities, as Morgan describes "I could be a leader and express myself and people would truly listen (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." Some participants commented on practicing skills learned in Rainbow Revolution in order to engage in productive group work or become more outgoing, such as Taren, who stated that learning to be "theatrical has helped me out in moments when I would like to not be so loud, or kind of be that shy person, where instead I forced myself to be more outgoing until it started to feel real (24 years old, Latino, trans man, gay)." Others observed that having the opportunity to practice enacting emotionally charged scenes allowed them to practice coping with emotions they had not yet personally experienced. Jaden described this form of *Individual Learning,* stating "Having the privilege to have toes in the water, initiation to those sorts of feelings, helped me a lot in life with dealing with the shock of extremely devastating emotions (21 years old, White, cis man, gay)."

Many also commented on specific skills and learning they gained through their involvement in Rainbow Revolution. Several described learning how to speak more clearly, both in formal public speaking venues and in casual conversations or classroom discussions. Based on their roles within Rainbow Revolution, they also expressed developing skills in specific domains, such as budgeting, creative writing, and performing comedy. Many described using the concrete skills they gained from Rainbow Revolution in their daily lives, whether in customer relations, waiting tables, mental health services, or community advocacy. Interviewees stated they continue to reflect on and draw from their experiences within Rainbow Revolution, whether specific pieces they wrote or roles they performed, or the experience as a whole. This provides a

powerful emotional reminder of their own courage and competence, as well as a marker in time that allows them to recognize their growth since their time as performers.

The most resounding message that participants communicated within the theme of *Individual Learning* was that they perceived their experiences in Rainbow Revolution to have profoundly changed their lives and sense of self. There were many examples of this, such as "I think Rainbow Revolution has changed my whole life! (Kelly, 25 years old, White, cis woman, straight)," and "I would not be here without them (Morgan, 31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." Many participants explicitly credited Rainbow Revolution with shaping the trajectory of their life and future. Rowan envisioned Rainbow Revolution as a pivotal link in the chain of life events, saying "I feel like had I not done theatre I would be a very different person… if you took one link out of the chain I don't know where the rest of my life would even be at this point (31 years old, mixed race, queer)." Both Jaden and Phoenix expressed believing their lives would be explicitly worse had it not been for Rainbow Revolution, respectively saying "I've made some pretty crappy decisions in my short life, but I think I would have made twice as many had I not had that sort of experience (21 years old, White, cis man, gay)," and "There would have been no [me] without Rainbow Revolution. I probably would have ended up on drugs or dead somewhere or in jail… I just want to say Rainbow Revolution influenced me a lot. It influenced me to keep going (32 years old, Black, cis male, gay)."

4.4.3 Healing through Rainbow Revolution

The final higher order theme that emerged from the interviews with former Rainbow Revolution participants was that of *Healing Through Rainbow Revolution.* In this theme participants spoke about not just learning about themselves but about feeling supported, accepted, and validated through their connections within Rainbow Revolution and voicing their

truth in a way that allowed them to feel more whole. Many participants explicitly equated Rainbow Revolution with therapy, or even argued that it was more effective than therapy in promoting healing and a positive sense of self and life direction.

Many participants described the environment of Rainbow Revolution as a "safe space." Some participants reported Rainbow Revolution was a safe space in very concrete ways, such as providing a network of safe homes where youth could stay if their family made them leave their own, and as a literal escape from an abusive relationship. However, many described the safety of Rainbow Revolution as emotional in nature because the group dynamics, structure of the organization, and even themes within pieces communicated consistent acceptance and validation of previously marginalized experiences or aspects of identity. Taren noted that it could feel scary to place trust in the group, stating "I needed to at least put some faith in these folks that they would do everything in their power to make sure I would not be hurt. That was kind of a lot to take in (24 years old, Latino, trans man, gay)." Interviewees described feeling more trusting toward the group over time as they took risks to share and found themselves unfailingly supported. As Morgan described "They were allowing me to express that part, they were accepting that piece of me that no other part of society was at the time (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)," while Rowan summarized "It's totally what the whole group was about. Take away all that stigma that everyone else had placed on us and come back with something positive (31 years old, mixed race, queer)." Other participants asserted that the Rainbow Revolution environment accepted all of who they were and recognized their personal strengths that others had failed to see. They felt being in such an environment allowed them to have more positive regard for themselves, as Brooke stated:

> I really did not like myself at that time, but I had other people there who did and that helped me. Even if I couldn't like myself, I could say 'well, there are these other people who see these good qualities in me (21 years old, White, cis woman, bisexual).

Because youth felt safe at Rainbow Revolution they were able to take risks and practice ways of being they could not in less forgiving spaces. For Daria, "Rainbow Revolution gave me this safe space to explore my sexuality which I had never had before (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)," while Kelly described being able to actively practice challenging her own biases commenting, "It's nice that I have a place to practice not being that way, not be racist (25 years old, White, cis woman, straight)," and Jaden expressed being able to take interpersonal risks to learn how to be yourself and relate to others, saying "You can fall off your bike as many times as you want there. You're gonna have somebody to kiss your booboos, whereas in real life you are not gonna really get that (21 years old, White, cis man, gay)."

In addition to feeling supported and accepted in Rainbow Revolution, participants commented on the transformative power of having a source of stability, positive expectations, and levity in their lives. Ash and Rowan described the importance of the regularity of having somewhere productive to be, respectively stating, "I went every week and that was one of the great things, that it added structure to my life, you know? I didn't really have a very structured teenage life, or at least a very structured productive good one (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)" and "It was kind of a source of stability in my life and a place to be around adults who wanted positive things for me (31 years old, mixed race, queer)." While some interviewees noted the importance of having a productive activity to engage in, others also commented on the importance of having fun at Rainbow Revolution. For participants with very difficult childhoods, Rainbow Revolution functioned as "something to look forward to every Saturday morning"

(Phoenix, 32 years old, Black, cis male, gay), and the source of positive memories. As Morgan described "I came from a very unfortunate childhood. So I really value those moments when I find myself thinking back to things that make me smile (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." Even for participants who felt supported in their outside lives but also felt pressure to excel, the fun of Rainbow Revolution helped them find balance, as Neoelle indicated:

> I think that was really important for me in terms of being able to just play again because I hadn't done that in such a long time, in so many years. And I think that helped me really de-stress and helped me sort of reconnect with who I was on that level (21 years old, White, cis woman, queer).

The support, acceptance, safety, and positive structure provided by Rainbow Revolution allowed participants to find hope and meaning in their lives. This was true on a daily basis during adolescence for some, like Daria who said "I think that the fact that Rainbow Revolution was weekly gave me a lot of strength and hope because even if I had a bad week outside of Rainbow Revolution there was always Rainbow Revolution (21 years old, White, cis woman, pansexual)." While for other participants the hope and meaning they gained from Rainbow Revolution continued into their adult lives, as Morgan described Rainbow Revolution keeping her "from feeling completely hopeless even the points where I was at my lowest… Whether or not people believe things happen for a reason, but I can say I can at least give meaning to what happened (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)."

As a result of these cathartic and healing processes, numerous participants explicitly described Rainbow Revolution as therapeutic. Several participants highlighted ways in which Rainbow Revolution actually felt more effective than therapy. Linden indicated that for many people Rainbow Revolution felt safer than psychotherapy, stating "Even when I had gone to

different spaces such as [psycho]therapy or gone to different adults, I never had that space in my life that I felt safe to honestly share those experiences and how they made me feel (29 years old, White, transgender, queer)." While Noelle described feeling that psychotherapy alone is sometimes not enough to provide sufficient support, saying "there's only so much that can do, and there's a lot of healing that can take place in a community context and when people who have experienced similar traumas can connect with each other (21 years old, White, cis woman, queer)." Finally, Rowan noted that in group psychotherapy there is the assumption that everyone is attending because they are "broken" but in contrast Rainbow Revolution was empowering because "we were all there because we were gay but nobody was there because there was something wrong with us… We were all fine. It was society that needs to hear this message about how not to be a bunch of jerks (31 years old, mixed race, queer)."

Even when they did not explicitly compare Rainbow Revolution with personal experience in therapy, many participants described it as therapeutic and life saving. Although they noted the adult mentors were very explicit in explaining that Rainbow Revolution was not therapy, they also consistently felt it had a similar impact on their lives as therapy. For some it was an intervention that prevented them from acting on suicidal ideation, such as Morgan who reported, "Being a part of that group may have literally saved my life. It's like I had forgotten that the worst that life has… is actually something to be lived and not something to be dreaded (31 years old, mixed race, cis woman, lesbian)." Similarly Noelle compared Rainbow Revolution to psychotherapy, saying, "I think both save a lot of people's life and I think both provide people the chance to say what they need to say and really give people a voice (21 years old, White, cis woman, queer)." Ash also described Rainbow Revolution as having improved his mental health, stating, "It was a mental health intervention in my life. Like, I came to it at a very low point and I

think it really helped me leave at a much higher one (26 years old, White, trans man, queer)." Linden summarized this overall therapeutic theme of *Healing through Rainbow Revolution* when they commented:

> It very much became a space of healing where even just sharing stories and experiences I had as a kid that we then were able to put into different pieces and monologues, that in itself really became the core piece as Rainbow Revolution in my life. That place for me to go, show up, be heard, share my story, and then feel like that story and those experiences are making differences not only in my life, just being able to experience that process of sharing and being supported by them, but then also in other people's lives. So it's just a pretty profound experience that I didn't grasp when I first entered Rainbow Revolution but I did very much so when I left Rainbow Revolution (29 years old, White, transgender, queer).

4.5 Specific pathways within Rainbow Revolution

In addition to looking at the themes across participants, we also looked for patterns of theme representation within participants to discern specific pathways participants may have through the Rainbow Revolution process. Although the primary conclusion was that participants described unique combinations of themes, there were four different pathways that emerged with regard to relationships between the two most frequently described foundational and higher order change agents. These four pathways are emphasized in the visual model through bolded and differently colored arrows. However, it should be noted that one participant (7) described all four of these themes with equal frequency and thus did not appear to fall into any of the groupings. Also these groupings do not include the many other ways that participants differed in the frequency of their descriptions within other themes (e.g. *Adolescent Social Identity Experiences,*

Healing through Rainbow Revolution, etc.), and thus these groupings are a very simplified representation of the individual pathway each participant followed through Rainbow Revolution.

4.5.1 Privilege-Related Pathways

Five participants had *Expression through Rainbow Revolution* as their most frequent foundational change agent and *Individual Learning* as their most frequent higher order change agent, indicating a potential path from self-expression to personal growth. These participants (1, 9, 11, 12, and 15), were similar in that they were more likely to describe having families that were unsupportive while they were in Rainbow Revolution or that they worried would be disappointed in them. They also were more likely to identify as transgender or to have shifted sexual or gender identities during their time in Rainbow Revolution than participants who fell into the other combinations of themes. For several of the participants in this group, their families did become more accepting over time, in part through witnessing their performances in Rainbow Revolution. Thus especially for SOGD individuals who are concerned about not being accepted by their families or who are transitioning identities, opportunities to express their experiences and find their voice may be helpful in fostering self-actualization and confidence.

The other group of participants whose codes fell most frequently into the higher order theme of *Individual Learning,* but who highlighted *Connecting with Others* as their primary foundational theme, had several similarities to those who emphasized *Individual Learning* and *Self-Expression.* Two of the three also had families who they perceived as unsupportive, but unlike those in the preceding group, their families were less likely to have been described as changing to become more accepting over time. Also like the prior group, these participants were more likely to hold multiple marginalized identities, including identifying as female, gender queer, mixed race, lesbian, and queer in sexual orientation, and were more likely to emphasize

overcoming challenges and finding their own voice in their interviews. For these participants, there was less stress on finding or expressing their own identity, and instead more stress on connecting with mentors and peers to forge positive relationships that impacted their understanding of themselves.

Whether they used *Connecting with Others* or *Expression through Rainbow Revolution* most frequently as a foundational change agent, all the participants who emphasized *Social Learning* over *Individual Learning* held more privileged identities. All three allies that were interviewed fell within this grouping, and the three who identified as non-straight held sexual minority identities that are often invisible within our society (pansexual, asexual, bisexual). All participants who spoke more about *Social Learning* were cisgender and all described their families as supportive. It appears that for participants who have greater family support and fewer marginalized identities, especially allies, Rainbow Revolution was pivotal in shaping their ability to engage in perspective taking and openness to diversity. However, these participants were also substantially younger on average than those who emphasized *Individual Learning* (22.8 years vs. 27.1 years). Thus it is possible that initially former Rainbow Revolution members are able to most clearly reflect on their growth in interpersonal domains, while over time they increasingly recognize their own personal growth. Further research would be needed to clarify factors that may predispose participants to make meaning out of their experience in Rainbow Revolution in a primarily social rather than individual manner.

4.5.2 Pathways Related to Time Since Involvement

An additional interesting finding that emerged was that the pattern of themes participants emphasized varied based on when they had graduated from Rainbow Revolution. Although most participants had the highest number of coded lines within the theme of *The Institution of*

Rainbow Revolution, those who had graduated from Rainbow Revolution within the past two years tended to have substantially more codes in that theme in comparison to the other themes, while those who graduated over three years prior tended to spend less time describing the organization and more time describing the foundational and higher order themes. There was also a shift in which transformational themes participants expressed most frequently. Those who had graduated from Rainbow Revolution more recently tended to highlight *Social Learning* most, while those who graduated from Rainbow Revolution 10 or more years prior were much more likely to emphasize *Individual Learning*.

This may reflect cohort differences in participants, such as differences in structure or emphasis within Rainbow Revolution at the time they participated. However, I feel it more likely reflects the ongoing constructive process of integrating specific memories into identities. Many participants commented on the social aspects of Rainbow Revolution being most novel or surprising to them because it was the first time they interacted deeply with individuals very different from or similar to themselves. Thus, it may be that the lessons learned with regard to interpersonal topics were most salient to them and therefore the ones they were most readily aware of in the first few years that followed their participation.

Also, research in the field of neurodevelopment indicates that brain regions responsible for social cognition begin to be reorganized, consolidated, and developed in adolescence and this developmental process continues through emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2015). From a contextual standpoint, younger study participants were also more likely to be engaged in navigating the complex social transitions and dynamics of college. Therefore both neurologically and contextually younger study participants may have been primed for greater awareness of the social implications of their involvement in Rainbow Revolution. In contrast, those who had

graduated over one decade ago had a greater expanse of personal experiences to draw from, in addition to the more salient social interactions, and thus had greater depth of perspective regarding how their involvement had shaped them as individuals.

4.6 Summary of Findings

In the more than 5,000 lines of interview transcript that we analyzed, 9 core themes emerged highlighting the ways in which former performers in Rainbow Revolution perceive it to have impacted their lives, and specifically the ways in which it shaped their perception of their social and personal identities and overall well-being. These themes were divided into three primary domains: contextual themes, foundational transformation agents, and higher order transformation agents.

All participants described their personal and societal life context at the time they were involved in Rainbow Revolution, as well as the essential procedural elements of Rainbow Revolution. *Life Outside of Rainbow Revolution* described factors external to Rainbow Revolution, and in many cases participants used these themes to highlight the importance of Rainbow Revolution in their lives by describing the sense of differentness or isolation that preceded their involvement with the group. Meanwhile, the themes of *Institution of Rainbow Revolution* and *Emotions* described the overall process within and the emotional response to Rainbow Revolution. These themes set the scene for the change agents within Rainbow Revolution that allowed participants to shift their understandings of themselves and the social world around them.

The three foundational processes that participants described as impacting their identity were *Adolescent Social Identity Experiences*, *Connecting with Others* and *Expression through Rainbow Revolution.* Participants described being able to forge positive relationships with others

who shared their identities as well as those who had very different life experiences. They emphasized the importance of being able to find and share their voice with their friends, loved ones, and the community at large through crafting and performing collaborative autobiographical pieces, which allowed them to be seen and heard and accepted for who they truly were.

These positive experiences engaging in supportive social connections and expressing their truth contributed to the higher order themes of *Social Learning, Individual Learning,* and *Healing through Rainbow Revolution.* Participants described maintaining a more open and empathic approach to relating with diverse others, increasing their commitment to community and social justice work, and having more hopeful and affirming expectations for their own relationships as a result of their involvement in Rainbow Revolution. They reported having increased their self-confidence, assertiveness, and depth of self-awareness, as well as learning specific skills that they use in daily life, such as public speaking and strategies for leading group projects. This increased self-confidence included greater comfort and confidence in their own social identities. Several described having been able to practice or "try on" ways of being in Rainbow Revolution that allowed them to live more authentically as their full selves outside of Rainbow Revolution. Importantly, most participants explicitly described Rainbow Revolution as a therapeutic and healing process, with some participants crediting Rainbow Revolution as having literally saved their lives.

It appears that participants who identified as having more marginalized identities and less accepting families, or who had graduated from Rainbow Revolution longer ago were more attuned to having achieved greater personal competence, while younger participants with greater support and fewer marginalized identities were more attuned to having increased social competence. However, each participant's pathway to personal and interpersonal growth was

ultimately as unique as the participants themselves. Because Rainbow Revolution allows its members to enact diverse identities in a context of support and appreciation, form meaningful and positive connections with other youth and adults, and express themselves fully, members of Rainbow Revolution were able to learn not only how to embody their sexual and gender identities but also how to be more effective in all domains of their identities and life in general. They became better friends and community members, more assertive allies and advocates, and more emotionally healthy and whole.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Integrating Emergent Themes into the Existing Literature

The process of creating autobiographical theatre in Rainbow Revolution fundamentally shifted both the tone and direction of the identity descriptions of former performers. In many ways, the core themes echo those identified in previous research on the positive qualities of identifying as SOGD, such as having the freedom to redefine how to enact gender and sexuality, having more empathy for others, gaining personal insight and authenticity, and forging a strong community and families of choice (Riggle, Whitman, Olson, Rostosky, & Strong, 2008). Participants described having a more optimistic outlook on their story, in the form of greater self-confidence, hope, and a more positive self-concept. They also described having different life outcomes than they might have otherwise, whether due to developing new specific skills, relationships, or perspectives on others, or choosing to follow a different life path, such as pursuing social justice advocacy and college degrees. Thus participants felt that the collective identity of their involvement with Rainbow Revolution is central to how they envision the rest of their identity, similar to the collective identity construction processes posited by Ashmore et al. (2004) in which individuals construct a story of themselves as a member of a group that includes their past experiences in the group and how their membership in the group continues to impact their current and future sense of self.

Several participants described their involvement as being so intertwined with their overall life story that they had difficulty identifying the many ripple effects it has had over time. Rowan memorably described it as an essential "link" in the chain making up their life, such that if you removed the link it was unclear what turn their life might have taken. Not only did participants feel Rainbow Revolution shifted the course of their life stories through intervening at one

particular point in time, but they also described it as a living presence influencing how they currently embody their identities. They noted that they still reflect on specific pieces and roles to inform how they interact with individuals experiencing similar situations, draw from their collaboration with diverse Rainbow Revolution peers to forge relationships across differences, and call upon positive memories of their experiences in Rainbow Revolution to provide hope in times of personal darkness.

It is apparent that participants in this study credited Rainbow Revolution with impacting their individual, social, and collective identities in fundamental ways that have persisted over time. The themes that emerged from this study reflect the processes through which Rainbow Revolution was perceived to have such a transformative effect. These themes roughly mirror the core tenets of positive youth development and social justice youth development, while also emphasizing self-expression above and beyond those tenets.

5.1.1 Rainbow Revolution as Positive Youth Development

Rainbow Revolution meets the criteria of being both a positive youth development program and a social justice youth development program. From its inception, Rainbow Revolution has been founded on a strength-based and youth-centered approach that values youth voices and culture, which is consistent with the literature on positive youth development (Ginwright & James, 2002; Lerner et al., 2005). These ideas were highlighted in the interviews with participants in this study and formed a core aspect of the theme *The Institution of Rainbow Revolution.* Although much of that theme included concrete descriptions of rehearsals or the creative process, it also reflected the uniqueness of the youth-driven nature of Rainbow Revolution. The category code “Leadership” spoke to the opportunities young people had within Rainbow Revolution to direct the course of the production and take on responsibilities to

organize and work with other youth. Within the categories about mentors (e.g. "Mentors," "Mentors – Creating Theatre," "Mentors – talking to"), many participants described the importance of mentors' ongoing belief in their potential, despite challenges in other areas of life, such as academic failure. Thus the program climate is infused with faith in the youths' capability to create a high quality production and is structured in a manner that prioritizes youth leadership, in direct correspondence with the youth-empowerment ideals of positive youth development and social justice youth development programs (Ginwright & James, 2002; Lerner et al., 2005). This faith in the young people appears well founded; through the support of the mentors and peers and the overall structure of Rainbow Revolution, the youth do ultimately create powerful and high quality productions, as indicated by the overwhelmingly positive responses from audience members in post-show focus groups.

Many of the primary process themes identified in this study could be seen as approximate analogues to the five Cs of the positive youth development model. As Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) explain, "Connection" describes positive bidirectional relationships between the young person and other individuals and institutions. "Caring" indicates empathy and sympathy for others, and can be related to the social justice youth development goals of "self-awareness" and "global awareness," when related to recognition of personal privilege and empathy for the oppression of others, respectively (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). "Competence" refers to developing abilities in specific domains and a positive view of those abilities or actions, "Confidence" denotes internal global self-regard akin to the self-awareness fostered in social justice youth development, and "Character" regards morality and integrity as well as respect for cultural rules (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Several important aspects of the Rainbow Revolution experience expressed in these interviews

are not represented by the 5 C's of positive youth development, but are reflected in social justice youth development. Namely, these include a central focus on identity, promoting healing, and encouraging systemic change (Ginwright & James, 2002).

Connection. One foundational transformative process that emerged was *Connecting with Others*. Participants described the importance of the relationships they forged within Rainbow Revolution with mentors and other youth, as well as the way Rainbow Revolution shifted their relationships with family members, and their relationship with Rainbow Revolution as a whole. Although these ideas were most clearly present in *Connecting with Others,* some categories that featured the bidirectional relationships outlined in the positive youth development literature were also present in themes such as *The Institution of Rainbow Revolution* and *Social Learning* (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Thus the positive youth development value of "connection" was a core aspect of the Rainbow Revolution experience, and youth identified it as contributing significantly to their ultimate growth and positive life outcomes.

Participants described forming strong personal relationships within Rainbow Revolution. This included meeting new people, finding specific role models and confidants, and entering into queer romantic relationships. They described experiencing more challenging but also authentic relationships with family members and friends outside of Rainbow Revolution. Thus Rainbow Revolution helps provide social support necessary for fostering resilience in the context of minority stress (Bariola et al., 2016; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005). This increased level of supportive connections with others may well have contributed to a decrease in depressive symptoms, as previous research has indicated a positive association between peer and family support and mental health (Budge et al., 2014; Friedman, Koeske, Silvestre, Kerr, & Sites, 2006; Rosario et al., 2011; Waller, 2001).

Not only did participants in Rainbow Revolution describe connecting with other specific individuals, but they also described connecting with the institution of Rainbow Revolution as a whole. Categories such as "Rainbow Revolution provides community" and "Rainbow Revolution provides family" emphasize this connection to the entire group and the sense of belonging participants experienced. Due to the positive emotional experience of performing with Rainbow Revolution, participants forged a strong collective identity within Rainbow Revolution that many continue to incorporate into their own personal identities (Fominaya, 2001; Polletta & Jasper 2001). They described feeling emotional resonance with the organization, such that they still identify as part of Rainbow Revolution, wish they could still perform with them, and want to support Rainbow Revolution's ongoing productions. Again, this identification with a collective identity that allows them to be their unique selves within a community may have helped participants feel greater life satisfaction (Barr, Budge, & Adelson, 2016; Brewer, 1991; Gabriel & Young, 2011; Leonardelli et al., 2010), in particular during the pivotal time they were in Rainbow Revolution, but potentially over time as well.

Caring. The second of the five Cs of positive youth development, "caring," was also emphasized in the themes that emerged within this study (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Specifically the theme *Social Learning* most exemplified this component of positive youth development, although some categories within *Connecting with Others* were also indicative of it. Within the interviews, participants described developing empathy through bearing witness to others' stories and playing roles different from themselves. Through those key aspects of the Rainbow Revolution creative process, participants described recognizing their own privilege, having to focus on others rather than themselves, broadening their perspective, and embracing differences with others.

Specifically youth described gaining awareness of their own privilege through focusing on learning about the experiences of others, which reflects the social justice youth development goal of increasing self-awareness (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). The participants who identified as SOGD allies all remarked on this recognition of privilege, but so too did several of the individuals who identified as SOGD. When participants did have a social identity that had the potential to confer them unearned social advantages (e.g. cisgender, male, white), they commented on developing consciousness about that privilege through hearing others' stories. They also described gaining a deeper understanding of specific negative experiences others were coping with, such as bullying or a harsh family context, and appreciation for their own lack of personal experience with those. Participants associated recognition of privilege and advantage in experiences with increased empathy, and in some cases with dedication to advocating for diverse social justice causes. This reflects recent research that has found that being able to recognize and critically reflect on privileged identities as well as intersecting marginalized identities has been associated with engaging in activism as an ally (Curtin, Kende, & Kende, 2016).

Even participants who did not directly reflect on their own privilege described feeling more empathic toward others experiencing difficulty or holding other marginalized identities. Participants described being able to relate to those different from themselves due to learning about the experiences of others in the community, playing roles based on other people's real experiences, and working collaboratively with individuals who were different from themselves in terms of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and socioeconomic status. Both perspective taking and intergroup contact have been posited to promote an inclusive form of consciousness in which individuals with one marginalized identity advocate for those with a different marginalized identity (Vollhardt, 2015). Additionally, in studies on intersectional

identity, those with a privileged identity in one domain often described feeling empathic and able to relate to those who were less privileged in that domain due to their own experiences of marginalization in other identity domains (Croteau, Talbot, Lance, & Evans, 2002). This pattern within Rainbow Revolution reflects the social justice youth development goal of "global awareness," in which young people become aware of historical and systemic forms of oppression and begin to empathize and connect with the suffering of other oppressed people (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002).

Finally one pervasive idea in these interviews that demonstrates the positive youth development domain of "caring" was that participants described having greater curiosity and appreciation for the stories of everyone around them due to their involvement in Rainbow Revolution. As a result they felt greater respect for others from all walks of life, and had a more nuanced perspective of those people rather than seeing them in black-and-white terms. This aligns with the goal of social justice youth development framework to "strive to value the 'humanness' in everyone" (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 91).

Competence. Positive youth development programs include fostering development of competence, whether that includes academic, social, or vocational skills (Lerner et al., 2005). In the case of Rainbow Revolution, the theme *Individual Learning* generally corresponds with this idea of increased competence. Participants in this study described developing artistic abilities through their involvement, including writing, editing, acting, and public speaking skills. They also expressed improving their leadership ability, and even their business and budgeting skills. With regard to social skills, within the *Social Learning* theme, participants indicated feeling they developed new social skills and felt more competent in their abilities to hold conversations on sensitive topics, navigate interpersonal conflicts, and form and maintain relationships.

Confidence. Within the theme of *Individual Learning,* participants from Rainbow Revolution also described gaining increased global self-confidence and self-esteem, in alignment with the fourth C of positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2005; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). They reported expanding their comfort zone and having a more positive self-concept thanks to taking risks and persevering through challenges in Rainbow Revolution. They described gaining a new perspective on themselves, including learning to value their differences and accept their own growth areas. This corresponds with prior research on youth theatre programs, which has found that such programs improve self-awareness and self-concept, especially for young people with poor self-concepts at the start of their participation (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Wright, 2006). Given that many of the participants in this study described their life context and sense of self in negative terms prior to their participation in Rainbow Revolution, it seems likely that Rainbow Revolution may have been particularly helpful in supporting their development of a more positive sense of self and, for some, reversing a negative trajectory of attitudes about themselves.

Character. The final "C" within the positive youth development literature is "character," referring to respect for societal and cultural rules as well as a sense of integrity and morality (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Although Rainbow Revolution provided an important opportunity to challenge cultural norms related to SOGD and other social identities, it also provided participants with structure to support leading individually authentic but also successful lives. In *Individual Learning,* participants reflected on the centrality of Rainbow Revolution in helping them develop life paths that would be considered successful by dominant societal standards. Participants commented on pursuing college, entering business, and becoming a community leader, all as a result of their involvement in Rainbow Revolution. In addition to feeling Rainbow

Revolution shaped their overall life course, they also expressed feeling they were able to make more effective choices in daily interactions, in part due to acting out similar scenarios in Rainbow Revolution. They described choosing to change their behavior to support greater success navigating daily challenges, including thinking before they act, being kinder to others, and choosing not to use substances. Thus, despite Rainbow Revolution's emphasis on challenging society's hegemonic narratives, it also provided young people the opportunity to make effective decisions and forge satisfying lives for themselves within the constraints of modern society.

5.1.2 Rainbow Revolution as Social Justice Youth Development

Centrality of Identity Exploration. One important element of Rainbow Revolution that was not explicitly a reflection of the 5 C's of positive youth development, but which did correspond with the ideals of social justice youth development, was the emphasis on exploring and understanding personal identity (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright & James, 2002). Specifically Ginwright and James (2002) proposed that identity should be central and celebrated within the youth development organization in a way that supports greater understanding of privileges and stereotypes associated with individuals' identities. Within our model of transformation through Rainbow Revolution, *Adolescent Social Identity Experiences* was a foundational process that aligns closely with that aspect of social justice youth development.

Participants in this study described feeling it was pivotal to have the opportunity to gain support directly related to navigating their sexual orientation and gender identity. They commented on the importance of meeting not just other people, but other people "like them." The openness of the Rainbow Revolution atmosphere and the central focus on SOGD topics allowed participants to discuss their own experiences and learn from the experiences of others,

which many participants described as a critical opportunity for them. This echoes previous research on SOGD youth theatre which has found that storytelling helped youth connect with others and feel a greater sense of community empowerment (Wernick, Kulick, & Woodford, 2014). It also supports research that has indicated social support that is specifically related to SOGD identity might be especially effective in bolstering the resilience of SOGD youth (Bregman et al., 2013; Doty et al., 2010; Rosario et al., 2011).

The importance of identity-specific social support may be due to its role in allowing youth to develop detypified identities, or more flexible conceptualizations and positive feelings about what it means to be a SOGD individual (Halverson, 2010b; Jenness, 1992). It has been argued that identity development includes detypification, or "the process of refining and subsequently reassessing the social category… such that it acquires increasingly concrete and precise meanings, positive connotations, and personal applicability" (Jenness, 1992, p. 66). As in the present study, research with a different SOGD youth theatre organization found young people came to redefine SOGD identities so that they were more nuanced and no longer centered on stereotypes through sharing with and learning from peers who had similar identities but diverse experiences and forms of self-expression (Halverson, 2010b). This ability to make conscious choices to craft a new identity for authentic selfhood that challenges dominant societal portrayals of social identities has also been reported in other participatory theatre organizations for young people from marginalized backgrounds (Sonn, Quayle, Belanji, & Baker, 2015), and receiving social support directly related to SOGD identity has been highlighted as a core healing element in other SOGD youth theatre programs (Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007). Thus through connecting with other SOGD young people, participants in Rainbow Revolution were able to view SOGD identities in more complex ways and feel more positive about their own identities.

Because of this social support directly related to SOGD identity, participants described exploring new ways to enact their identities. Some participants noted that they had come to identify with different social identity labels over the course of their time in Rainbow Revolution or after it, due in part to their exposure to diverse identities in that group. Others indicated they did not necessarily shift the label they used to describe their identity, but did try on different ways of expressing and enacting their SOGD identity. This included using lessons learned from Rainbow Revolution performance pieces to approach coming out to their parents in a different way, becoming more open about their identity but consciously avoiding spaces where it might not be safe to be their authentic self, and in some cases trying out a SOGD identity or particular style of interacting and realizing it actually was not a good fit for them. Thus having a space where youth felt supported in expressing their SOGD identities and where they were encouraged to literally try on different roles as part of the theatrical production process allowed them to find ways of being fully themselves that were not based on the limited SOGD identity representations offered in dominant culture (Halverson, 2010b).

Importantly, several participants also described the value of having positive role models who shared their SOGD identities. Through working closely with mentors and more experienced youth performers, they saw examples of successful community members and therefore were able to envision a more hopeful future for themselves. This allowed them to learn specific strategies for successfully navigating challenges related to SOGD identity through the example set by role models. More generally though, it allowed them to use the scaffolding provided by the role models' identity enactment to shift the direction of their own identity construction (Hammack, 2008; Kuper & Mustanski, 2014; Rappaport, 1995).

Finally, participants indicated that the SOGD-focused nature of Rainbow Revolution allowed them to not only develop their own individual identity differently, but also allowed them to have greater understanding and appreciation of the social identities associated with SOGD communities. They described learning specific facts about SOGD topics, including specific terminology, cultural norms within the local adult SOGD community, and historical parallels with other marginalized identity groups. This is similar to the research of Suyemoto, Day, and Schwartz (2014), who found that participants in their social justice youth development program with Asian American youth learned about their own personal racial and ethnic identities as well as the collective historical narratives of privilege and oppression associated with them.

Older participants also reflected on how attending Rainbow Revolution performances has allowed them to recognize changes in SOGD social identities over time, noting the increase in exploration of non-binary genders and greater openness in discussing sex. In this way Rainbow Revolution allows participants to engage in constructive boundary work of what it means to identify as part of the SOGD and Rainbow Revolution social identities (Fominaya, 2010; Holland, Fox, & Daro, 2008; Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003).

Healing. Although the positive youth development literature emphasizes increasing self-confidence and responsible community engagement, the social justice youth development model also highlights the importance of fostering personal healing (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). In particular this can be essential for youth from historically marginalized backgrounds who have experienced not only oppression due to invisible societal forces but also in many cases explicit discrimination and bullying (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012). Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) posited that through sharing with and learning from other youth with similar identities, young people can increase their sense of self-worth and purpose.

Indeed, *Healing through Rainbow Revolution* was a powerful higher order theme that emerged from participants in these interviews. They described feeling more hopeful and better able to cope with social and emotional challenges following their engagement in Rainbow Revolution. In particular, they noted being able to perceive even negative life events as having meaning, and no longer feeling like they were victims in their own lives. They recognized that they could learn from difficulties and use those challenging experiences to help others. This ability to find meaning and a positive outcome from otherwise ostensibly negative events is likely to also support the overall well-being of Rainbow Revolution participants, as previous research has indicated that individuals who view their life in terms of such redemptive sequences are more likely to feel satisfied with their life and have better psychological health (McAdams, et al., 2001). Additionally, some voiced recognizing that, contrary to the dominant cultural SOGD identity portrayals, it is society that has the "problems" not them. These shifts in meaning-making within their own life stories reflect the core objectives of narrative therapy, namely to support individuals in developing richer, more flexible and strength-based identities for themselves (Payne, 2000; White & Epston, 1990).

Participants found their engagement with Rainbow Revolution to be such a transformative and healing experience that many explicitly likened it to participation in psychotherapy, and some noted they found it even more effective than therapy. In fact, it could be argued that Rainbow Revolution does contain the four common factors of psychotherapy proposed by Frank and Frank (1993), namely an emotionally charged and confiding relationship, a healing context, a shared explanation of the source of suffering and strategy for relief, and enactment of a process to achieve that relief (Wampold, 2010). In Rainbow Revolution the participants have authentic relationships with one another and with adult mentors, and these

relationships are able to withstand the sharing of difficult emotional material that is kept confidential within the group. There is a safe context in which participants meet regularly with the youth leaders and mentors, whom they perceive as role models that can help foster their own artistic and personal development. The participants and mentors share the belief that SOGD youth experience challenges due to societal oppression, and that producing youth theatre and speaking out is an effective method to promote youth empowerment and create a more accepting society. Finally, the youth meet weekly for rehearsals in which they participate in structured activities designed to facilitate sharing experiences, crafting and rehearsing theatre pieces, and ultimately producing a high quality social justice oriented show that privileges youth voices. Thus although Rainbow Revolution is not officially a form of therapy, which the adult mentors are quick to point out, in many ways it could functionally be seen as sharing many of the qualities that make psychotherapy effective. It is therefore not surprising that *Healing through Rainbow Revolution* was a core theme within these interviews.

Collective Social Action. "Contribution" has been posited as a sixth core "C" within the positive youth development framework due to research indicating such programs result in greater community contribution (Jelicic et al., 2007; Lerner, 2004). However, another way social justice youth development goes beyond the standard elements of positive youth development is through encouraging collective social action to change unfair systems, rather than just encouraging general community involvement (Ginwright & James, 2002). Feeling empowered to effect sociopolitical change has been found to mediate the relationship between self-esteem and other indicators of mental health and ecological supports, such as family cohesion and social support (Christens & Peterson, 2012). Thus social justice youth development programs allow youth to

not only be more resilient but also empower them to work to change the systems responsible for necessitating their resilience (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002).

In the present study participants described feeling connected with the community at large, including their audiences and other youth with marginalized identities. Within the theme *The Institution of Rainbow Revolution* a category emerged titled "wanting to change/impact minds" which included all instances of participants describing attempts to educate or support other unknown individuals, frequently audience members. In this way through their performances Rainbow Revolution participants aspired to engage in collective action to shift the understanding of their audience members and thereby the community. This aligns with previous qualitative explorations of SOGD theatre programs, which also have highlighted the importance of increasing community awareness through performance (Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007; Wernick, Kulick, & Woodford, 2014).

In this study participants also described becoming more intentional in the way they live their daily lives and interact with others, including speaking up more in class about social justice topics, taking on leadership roles in social justice-oriented organizations, and being mindful of how their own actions may be harming or oppressing others and seeking to disrupt that pattern. These daily actions, in addition to the broader goal of attempting to impact the social climate through their performances, reflect this effort to create a better world through their everyday behavior (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002).

5.1.3 What is missing from these models? Self-Expression

One of the foundational themes identified as transformative for our participants was not represented in the models of positive youth development or social justice youth development, namely *Expression through Rainbow Revolution.* Although the social justice youth development

literature discusses sharing with others to support development of self-awareness, it does not isolate self-expression as a core element of its practice. However, in these interviews with former Rainbow Revolution participants, being able to express oneself, find one's voice, and speak with a collective voice were seen as crucial to the transformative power of Rainbow Revolution. This corresponds with previous research; when asked to generate their own strategies for promoting mental health, SOGD youth stated that peer support and safe spaces for youth to express themselves were two of the most important elements (Davis, Saltzburg, & Locke, 2009). Research on other SOGD youth theatre projects has also identified self-expression as a core aspect that allowed participants to feel liberated (Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007). Theatre projects with youth from other marginalized backgrounds have also found self-expression to be a core transformative element, such as programs with Hmong young people (Ngo, 2017) and ethnically diverse youth in Australia (Sonn, Quayle, Belanji, & Baker, 2015). Thus "the process of telling, adapting, and performing narratives of personal experience is fundamentally about constructing a representation of self, whatever 'self' may be" (Halverson, 2010b, p. 13).

This centrality of expression as part of the identity development process has been identified in a previous qualitative study using conversational discourse analysis with youth in a different SOGD theatre organization (Halverson, 2010a). In that research, youth were noted to thematically or structurally chain their stories to their peers' stories to create "kernel structures" for specific types of stories (Halverson, 2010a). For example, in Rainbow Revolution one frequently referenced story was that of experiencing and overcoming bullying, and another was about coming out to parents. These kernel structures are essentially story "seeds" that the members of the group are familiar with and can then build off of or refer to in their own personal narratives (Halverson, 2010a; Kalcik, 1975). It is this shared meaning and story structure that

youth develop through disclosing their experiences to one another in a group format, which contributes to a stronger sense of social and collective identity and scaffolding to support making meaning out of their own experiences (Halverson, 2010a).

The self-expressive nature of Rainbow Revolution also shares many qualities with other forms of therapy, and particularly narrative and theatre-based therapy. Broadly related to the impact of self-expression, the disclosure of personal and emotionally charged information in a safe space is considered central to the healing power of psychotherapy (Wampold, 2010). In a very literal way, the Rainbow Revolution process also reflects the self-expression that occurs within Jacob Moreno's psychodrama (1946). Participants described playing characters similar to themselves and to others in their lives, and giving voice to previously unexpressed experiences through their performance (Corey, 2004).

Additionally, narrative therapy asserts that it is important to not only describe life events to a therapist, but then to also engage in a process of shifting the interpretation of those events to create a more flexible and strength-based identity, and finally to share that identity with audience members from the individual's life (Payne, 2000). This reflects participants' descriptions in this study of finding new meaning in their own stories and memories through the sharing and editing process, as well as their ultimate performance of those stories for community audience members. Several participants noted they had hoped they would be able to communicate truths about themselves to their family members through the Rainbow Revolution performance. Some were successful in that while others had family members who chose not to see the show, and therefore chose not to recognize the participant's self-story. However, participants still expressed feeling empowered through expressing themselves to the community members in the audience, who did validate and honor their experiences. This echoes previous research that has found that young

people who have expressed their SOGD identity to a larger number of supportive people have higher levels of self-esteem and overall mental health (Jordan & Deluty, 1998; Russell et al., 2014; Wright & Perry, 2006). In other theatre interventions, such as one with ethnically diverse youth in Australia, participants identified similar themes of wanting to share their concerns and challenge stereotypes in a public environment where they felt truly heard (Sonn, Quayle, Belanji, & Baker, 2015). It also is reminiscent of the work of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed in which performers express feeling validated and empowered by being able to share their truth through performing narratives based on collective experiences (Clark, 2009).

5.2 Limitations of the Present Study

Although the themes that emerged from the present study align with and build upon previous research, there are several study limitations that must be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions. First, an inherent limitation in qualitative research is that it relies on a smaller sample size and is necessarily subjective by nature (Creswell, 2013). This allows for a rich understanding of the specific phenomenon within one particular context, but any application of the findings to other populations and contexts must be done with caution (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to support our readers in using these findings to shed light on the broader fields of identity development and youth programming, we have provided detailed descriptions of the study sample and context, so that comparisons with other situations may be made judiciously (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Additionally the lens through which we analyzed the data emphasized identity development broadly, and SOGD identity and mental health more specifically. Therefore we focused our questions and our analyses on those areas. However, there are numerous other factors that may have impacted the growth process in Rainbow Revolution that we did not

explore in depth. For example, although we did ask participants about social class and race as a prompt in our full interview and in our demographics questions, we did not bring them as explicitly into the interview or data analysis process as themes related to SOGD identity or psychological well-being. Therefore interpretive lenses that center on social class or race may have resulted in a somewhat different constellation of emergent themes.

In particular, it should be noted that this research is focused solely on one theatre organization that may be exceptional compared to other positive youth development groups and thereby limit its applicability to other contexts. Specifically, the history of Rainbow Revolution and training background of the adult mentors was likely to emphasize youth leadership and personal healing. Rainbow Revolution was founded by a young adolescent, and thus from its inception has privileged youth decision-making and honored youth culture. Additionally, some adult mentors have training in the mental health field. Therefore although they were explicit in reminding participants that Rainbow Revolution should not be a substitute for psychotherapy, it is possible that positive interpersonal dynamics and mental health may be more closely attended to and fostered than in other performing arts organizations. Despite these limitations it is clear that even if Rainbow Revolution is exceptional in its philosophy and structure, in many ways it does share features with other youth theatre and positive youth development programs. Therefore findings can still inform the field and be applied broadly to other programs, with adaptation to adjust for ways in which those programs may be different from Rainbow Revolution.

Also inherent to the qualitative research process is that the participants' responses were shaped by the context of the conversation (Charmaz, 2014; Hall & Callery, 2001). Because it was an interpersonal interaction, they were automatically sharing their perspective while taking into consideration my perspective as an interviewer who was clearly interested in the impact of

Rainbow Revolution. Therefore participants may have felt more compelled to respond in a way they thought I would want them to, such as emphasizing the impact of Rainbow Revolution and minimizing aspects of the process they disliked. However, I attempted to gain a well-rounded understanding of their experiences through explicitly asking about challenging or less preferred elements of Rainbow Revolution, and also framed most questions in an open, neutral way to minimize the projection of an assumed valence for their response (e.g. "how did it impact your life, if at all?" rather than "how did it improve your life?").

The specific identity factors of the research team and participants are also important to acknowledge. Despite efforts to recruit a diverse research team, due to scheduling constraints and limited responsiveness of other potential team members, all members of the primary research team were ultimately white and college-educated. This is likely to have impacted our perspective on intersectional identities, especially those related to race, ethnicity, and social class. We attempted to take this into consideration in our analysis through explicitly acknowledging our perspective during the analysis and requesting feedback from all participants about the accuracy of their interview transcripts and the codes applied to them.

In addition to recognizing the homogeneity within the team, it is also important to note that Rainbow Revolution only works with a specific subset of youth and the participants who took part in the study also were likely to represent a specific subset of former performers in Rainbow Revolution. Because Rainbow Revolution emphasizes working with SOGD youth, it is unclear if these same themes would emerge from a similar program that focused on working with other stigmatized groups of youth. Also, there are systemic limitations to who is able to participate in Rainbow Revolution in the first place. For example, although the mentors try to coordinate carpools for rehearsals it may have been more difficult for youth from lower social

class backgrounds to find transportation to attend. Relatedly, most youth described learning about Rainbow Revolution from other young people, and therefore in order to participate youth had to have a large enough social network or be enrolled in an accepting enough school system to hear about the organization. Thus the group itself represents a specific subset of youth. Beyond that limitation, based on our recruitment strategy of targeting specific individuals known to the founder of Rainbow Revolution, only those individuals who completed an entire season with Rainbow Revolution and were fairly engaged in the process were likely to be included in our initial recruitment messages. Out of those individuals, only those who did feel an ongoing connection to Rainbow Revolution and who had an interest in and availability for discussing it at length were likely to respond to our messages. It is likely that some performers did not feel Rainbow Revolution resonated long-term for them, and those performers were less likely to have volunteered for this study. However, this does not negate the importance of the findings reflected in this manuscript: for many performers, Rainbow Revolution is considered a powerful and pivotal force in their lives.

5.3 Implications for Practice

5.3.1 Therapy and Rainbow Revolution

The transformational processes that support Rainbow Revolution performers in evolving their individual and social identities echo the core components of positive youth development and social justice youth development programs, with emphasis on self-expression as an additional critical component. Of note, for many participants in this study, Rainbow Revolution was highlighted as an organically therapeutic intervention in their lives, often above and beyond engaging in actual psychotherapy. This has numerous implications for practice in the field of counseling psychology and beyond.

Some participants commented on feeling pathologized within a traditional therapy setting. Indeed, previous research has found that many therapists have little training in working with SOGD individuals, and that many SOGD therapy clients experience microaggressions, such as the therapist avoiding or minimizing sexual orientation or gender identity, or assuming that those identity facets are responsible for presenting concerns (Benson, 2013; Israel, Gorcheva, Burnes, & Walther, 2008l Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011). Clearly at a bare minimum it is essential for therapists to receive training and establish competence in working with SOGD individuals, including developing awareness of the therapist's own biases as well as the historical and current social context impacting individuals with SOGD identities (Benson, 2013; Boroughs, Bedoya, O'Cleirigh, & Safren, 2015).

Although attempting to apply findings of the present study to specific theoretical psychotherapy approaches stretches well beyond the scope of those findings, there are parallels between the themes that emerged in this study and core tenets of several theoretical approaches to counseling. It may therefore be helpful to consider approaching therapy with young clients from marginalized backgrounds from one of the following theoretical perspectives.

Narrative therapy. Narrative therapy was one of the foundations upon which this project was based. Therefore it is unsurprising that the findings of the interviews align with several narrative therapy tenets. Narrative therapy seeks to externalize problems in order to re-envision one's life story in a more flexible and positive manner (White & Epston, 1990). It highlights the importance of self-expression and having an audience to bear witness to the truth of young people's experiences and identities in order to foster healing (Payne, 2000), as reflected in the theme of *Self-Expression*. It also reflects how useful participants found it to be to externalize the source of their challenges, recognizing that it is society that is flawed and not them. Participants

in this study often explicitly described having achieved the primary goals of narrative therapy through their involvement with Rainbow Revolution, specifically being able to make new more positive meanings out of negative life events and perceiving an overall hopeful and prosocial life trajectory for themselves. Thus Rainbow Revolution appears to inherently harness many of the processes of narrative therapy, indicating that conversely it may be possible to incorporate those elements from Rainbow Revolution that were most impactful into a narrative therapy context.

Positive psychology. Positive psychology emphasizes resilience rather than pathology and seeks to foster optimism, empathy, self-efficacy, and meaning-making (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). This speaks to the strength-based model of Rainbow Revolution and the transformational processes of *Individual Learning* (e.g. increased confidence, development of specific skills), *Social Learning* (e.g. relating with diverse others, forming healthy relationships), and *Healing through Rainbow Revolution* (e.g. instilling hope, finding meaning in experiences). Historically positive psychology has not specifically acknowledged the unique cultural variables and societal stressors associated with SOGD identities, but recently models have been developed to tailor traditional positive psychology to be more culturally responsive to the needs of SOGD individuals (Dominguez, Bobele, Coppock, & Pena, 2015).

Feminist and multicultural therapy. Finally feminist and multicultural approaches to therapy emphasize giving voice to previously silenced groups, raising consciousness about diverse identities, and supporting empowerment for all (Brown, 2006; Goodman et al., 2004; Worell & Remer, 2003). Feminist therapists seek to understand the ways that gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, ability status, and other social identities form interconnected layers of complexity in their clients' lives (Brown, 2006). One primary goal within these theories of counseling is to help clients identify the impact of societal structures on their lives and their

sense of self, and to evaluate how they would like to enact their authentic selves with that impact in mind (Goodman et al., 2004; Worell & Remer, 2003). Like narrative and positive therapy approaches, they emphasize valuing the strengths and perspective of the individual and forming an egalitarian relationship between client and therapist (Goodman et al., 2004; Worell & Remer, 2003). By focusing on subverting the dominant societal narratives, feminist and multicultural therapy speak to the theme of *Adolescent Social Identity Experiences* (Brown, 2006), and how developing individual, social, and global awareness can ultimately contribute to *Healing.*

Incorporating themes across theory. Regardless of the theoretical approach used, it may be helpful to integrate specific elements of the Rainbow Revolution experience into the therapeutic context. One potential model for this would be to conduct group therapy with SOGD adolescents that features explicit discussion of experiences of oppression and discrimination as well as sexual orientation and gender identity. This would combine the themes of *Adolescent Social Identity Experiences,* and *Connecting with Others.* In one study with SOGD adults, group cognitive-behavioral therapy that included such discussions was found to reduce symptoms of depression and increase self-esteem (Ross, Doctor, Dimito, Kuehl, & Armstrong, 2007). Support groups for transgender individuals that offer open exploration of ways to enact gender have also been suggested as a potentially effective mental health intervention (dickey & Loewy, 2010).

Integrating expressive interventions, such as psychodrama, dance, creative writing, or art may also be important, particularly when these can be shared with a wider audience such as community or family members to support development of a positive identity. Several qualitative studies suggest that participating in creative arts therapy interventions may promote social connection, support coping with trauma, increase self-efficacy and self-discovery, and improve overall psychological well-being, although there is limited quantitative data from controlled-

trials (Eaton, Doherty, & Widrick, 2007; Leckey, 2011; Mueller, Alie, Jonas, Brown, & Sherr, 2011; Van Lith, Schofield, & Fenner, 2013). Specifically, theoretical publications in the field have suggested that art therapy interventions may help support SOGD youth in navigating coming out (Pelton-Sweet & Sherry, 2008). Additionally, whether in individual or group therapy, therapists could adopt a stance similar to that of the mentors in Rainbow Revolution that is egalitarian and privileges the strengths and voice of the clients in directing the course of therapy.

5.3.2 Implications outside the therapy room

Although this project was developed in the field of counseling psychology, one important implication for practitioners is that for some SOGD youth identity development may be more effectively supported through a social justice youth development program rather than in individual therapy. The very act of attending therapy may be perceived as pathologizing because clients may see it as a tacit statement that they are in need of being "cured" of something, even if that is not how the therapist perceives the client and their presenting concern. Instead, engagement in a community program that allows young people to work together toward a common prosocial goal carries no such stigma. As social justice-oriented community members, we should therefore not only incorporate the themes reflected in this study into therapy practice, but also advocate for and support positive youth development and social justice youth development programs for SOGD youth that emphasize self-expression.

5.4 Implications for Future Research

This study builds upon previous literature in the fields of identity development and positive/social justice youth development, but there are many questions remaining to be addressed. As noted in the limitations section of this manuscript, this study offers a rich description of the transformative processes at work in one specific organization. Therefore

further research should explore a broader sample of groups with individuals with different identities to assess how well the core processes identified in this study apply to other contexts. Additionally, it will be important to better understand the specific core components and potential diverse pathways for identity development to hone program design and implementation.

One avenue for further research will be to identify if the processes identified in Rainbow Revolution as transformative for identity development would be similar for groups designed for youth with other marginalized identities. Some research suggests this may be the case. For example, a participatory theatre program with ethnically diverse youth in Australia identified many themes similar to those that emerged in the present study, including the importance of self-expression and individual learning with an emphasis on developing critical consciousness related to social identities (Sonn, Quayle, Belanji, & Baker, 2015). A case study of a poetry program for youth from historically marginalized ethnic groups living in urban areas also highlighted the themes of developing confidence, social consciousness, and self-awareness as central in supporting identity development (Jocson, 2006). A theatre program for Hmong youth identified the importance of telling and re-scripting personal experiences to support development of agentic identities (Ngo, 2017), while one for youth who had experienced abuse described the process of identity development to include recognizing and expressing personal experiences, embodying roles, and publically disclosing identity in front of an audience (Hammock, 2011). Finally, through evaluating the impact of several community programs on the ethnic identity development of African American youth, researchers developed a conceptual model for effective programs very similar to the one that emerged from our data (Loyd & Williams, 2017). Their model included taking into account life context, encouraging socialization related to identity, and facilitating positive interpersonal interactions, all of which is posited to lead to improved coping,

engagement, self-concept, and meaning-making, and ultimately identity development (Loyd & Williams, 2017). Thus it seems probable that many of the themes identified as transformative within our study might hold true across different social identity groups. However, much of the existing research focuses on working with youth with either specific racial and ethnic identities or specific SOGD identities. Further research is therefore warranted to explore potential processes for youth along other social identity facets, such as social class and ability status.

Specifically, it will be important to explore which aspects of programs are most effective in tandem. Rainbow Revolution is unique in that it is highly attuned to not only theatre production but also to the mental health and interpersonal dynamics of the group participants. It may be that when youth have adequate support from adult mentors and peers, self-expression is conducive to positive identity development and empowerment, but that when there is limited attention to the emotional risks of such public self-disclosure, participants are more likely to "burn out" or feel overwhelmed by the stress and vulnerability of such a performance. Indeed, some prior research indicates that it may be important for facilitators of programs that emphasize self-expression to be trained in mental health for just that reason (Hammock, 2013).

Just as it will be important to explore whether the themes identified in this study hold true as transformative processes for youth with other social identities, it will also be important to identify which components are necessary for supporting identity development through increasing methodological diversity in research in this area. There are very few controlled-trial studies, or even quantitative studies, assessing the processes through which such youth development programs may impact identity development. Therefore it remains difficult to determine which factors might be core causal, moderating, or mediating variables. Although participants highlighted self-expression as an essential process facilitating their growth in Rainbow

Revolution, there are mixed findings from other quantitatively assessed theatre-based interventions. One arts-based community intervention for children in South Africa affected by HIV and AIDS found that children who participated in the intervention had increased self-efficacy compared to controls (Mueller et al., 2011). Meanwhile, a randomized-control trial of a classroom-based theatre intervention for immigrant and refugee youth found that the theatre program reduced self-reported mental health impairment for first-generation but not second-generation youth (Rosseau et al., 2014). A review of studies evaluating the efficacy of creativity-based interventions found variable results, with some indication that arts-based programs can support healthier choices and self-esteem, but it did not isolate self-expression through art from more passive forms of artistic engagement (e.g. listening to music; Bungay & Vella-Burrows, 2013). In this way, research with greater methodological diversity is needed to isolate the core components of the processes that support identity development and resilience, and specifically there is a need for more quantitative research on the impact of self-expression in youth programs.

Finally, it appears that there were diverse pathways toward identity development for youth within the present study. This study did not have a primary goal of identifying the SOGD identity portrayal patterns proposed by Cohler and Hammack (2007), but in some interviews they did emerge within participants' descriptions. Based on preliminary exploration, it appeared that the "struggle and success" representation was more apparent in the interviews with participants who were from older generations or who had comparatively less privilege based on their social identities and family context. Meanwhile the idea of "emancipation" was also apparent in some narratives, at times within the same interviews that featured elements of "struggle and success." It would be interesting for future research to more intentionally assess whether the identity patterns identified by Cohler and Hammack (2007) are pervasive in SOGD youth self-stories,

and how those different patterns may be related to mental health and resilience. It seems likely that there may be different pathways for identity development based on each individual's unique context and current identity narrative.

Relatedly, individuals who had comparatively more privilege, and particularly who identified as allies, were somewhat more likely to emphasize developing social learning rather than individual growth and healing. Although allies did discuss personal growth in addition to social learning, they appear to have been most impacted by factors described in Gordon Allport's contact theory (1954), specifically working toward a common goal with individuals from diverse groups. This aligns with previous research, which has found that such intergroup contact reduces prejudice in general (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), and that forming close relationships with SOGD individuals is associated with instilling more accepting attitudes toward SOGD communities (Baunach, Burgess, & Muse, 2010; Collier, Bos, Sandfort, 2012; Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Poteat & DiGiovinni, 2013). Future research should continue to explore the pathways through which engaging in a social justice youth development program might facilitate both individual and social learning for youth who hold comparatively more privileged and less privileged identities. Clarifying the pathways of identity development that might be most effective for different types of youth participants might support the design of more targeted and therefore effective interventions to promote individual resilience as well as global critical consciousness.

5.5 Summary and Conclusion

This study has sought to better understand how previous members of a SOGD youth theatre group perceive their participation to have impacted their life, and their sense of personal and social identity. Participants identified nine core themes within their Rainbow Revolution experience that they felt contributed to their growth. They described contextual factors, such as

Life Outside Rainbow Revolution, the *Institution of Rainbow Revolution* itself*,* and *Emotions* throughout the creative process as providing the environment and structure that shaped and contained the other transformational processes. Within the Rainbow Revolution experience, participants described the importance of *Connecting with Others,* engaging in *Expression through Rainbow Revolution,* and undergoing positive *Adolescent Social Identity Experiences.* These foundational processes contributed to amassing knowledge and experiences, which then led to higher order transformational processes of *Individual Learning, Social Learning,* and ultimately *Healing through Rainbow Revolution.*

Although further research is warranted into the efficacy of such programs in supporting the resilience of historically marginalized young people, the themes that emerged in the present study align with the core tenets of positive youth development and social justice youth development programs, providing support for the potential impact such programs can have in the lives of young people. The model that emerged in this study also highlights the specific importance of self-expression in allowing for the construction of a detypified identity. In the therapy setting, engaging in self-expression activities that address societal structures and re-script personal experiences may be a particularly helpful way to support youth in developing empowered identities. However, for many young people it may be the community setting that is most healing for them. Through allocating resources to social justice youth development community programs that highlight self-expression in an emotionally supportive context, we can help marginalized youth find their voices, safely explore their identity expression, connect with other diverse young people, develop global consciousness and empathy, and shift their life narratives toward a bright future.

6.1 Appendices

6.1.1 Appendix A.

Guardian Focus Group Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Information and Consent Form for Parents/Guardians

Title of the Study: The Impact of Crafting and Performing Narratives on Youth Identity Development: A Preliminary Case Study

Principal Investigator: Stephen Quintana, PhD, 608-262-6987, quintana@education.wisc.edu
Student Researcher: Julia Benjamin, MA, jzbenjamin@wisc.edu

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Your youth is invited to participate in a study about how writing and performing about their life experiences with Rainbow Revolution has affected them. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how performance impacts the way young people see themselves. Also we want to learn more about the impact of Rainbow Revolution on the community.

We will make audio recordings of these discussions so we don't miss anything important. Only research team members will have access to them and they will be destroyed by the start of the 2014-15 school year.

WHAT WILL PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you allow your young person to participate, they will be asked to take part in two small discussion groups at the Rainbow Revolution rehearsal space about their time in Rainbow Revolution. We will ask them what their reactions have been to the whole process, what they feel they have gotten out of it, and what it feels like to write and perform their stories. One discussion will happen before their spring performance, and the other will be just after it. Each discussion will last 1-2 hours, or 2-4 hours total. Also the research team will observe some rehearsals to learn more about how Rainbow Revolution operates.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS?

We do not expect there to be any more risk than what they encounter in daily life talking with friends or family. However, it may feel uncomfortable for them to discuss their thoughts and feelings in a group, and it is possible that they may end up sharing information that is personal or sensitive, or that would make it possible for other people to identify who they are. Also, there is the chance that someone in the group could share information they say in the group with others outside the group.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS?

We also do not expect this study to give any specific benefits directly to the young people. In general though, it will give them the chance to think about their experiences, and promote understanding of the organization and the process of creative theatre. They will not receive any

money for participating in this study, but we will bring pizza and snacks to the discussion groups as a way of saying "thank you."

HOW WILL CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

Hopefully we will be able to write a paper to share our findings about Rainbow Revolution based on what we learn from in the discussions. We would like to be able to quote the young people directly without using their names, so if you agree to let us quote your youth in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form. No matter what, if they take part in the discussions, their name will not be used in any paper we write, and all quotes will be changed so nobody will be able to identify them. We will give them the chance to look over the paper before it gets published, so if there is anything they feel uncomfortable about they can let us know and we will remove it. We will also ask group members not to share any information about the discussion outside the group, and the members of the research team will keep discussions confidential.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You can ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research, you should contact the Principal Investigator Dr. Stephen Quintana at 608-262-6987. You may also call the student researcher, Julia Benjamin at jzbenjamin@wisc.edu.

If you are not satisfied with the response of the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your young person's rights as a participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your youth's participation is totally their choice. They can choose not to participate at any time and to not answer any questions they don't want to.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your young person's participation in this research, and voluntarily consent to allowing your young person to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print):_____

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____ I give permission for my youth to be quoted directly in publications without using their name.

IRB Approval Date: 1/21/2014
Date IRB Approval Expires: 1/20/2015
FWA00005399 ED/SBS IRB
University of Wisconsin – Madison

6.1.2 Appendix B.

Youth Focus Group Protocol #1

Introduction

First, I just want to thank you for talking with us today! We are really interested in hearing about your experiences in Rainbow Revolution because we want to understand what it is like for young people to write and perform their own stories. We will talk for 45 minutes to an hour today and will try to get through six or seven main questions about your engagement in the group. There are no right or wrong answers because we are most interested in getting your perspective to see things the way you see them.

Before we get started, I want to lay out some basic guidelines for our discussion. We encourage you not to talk too much about what we say in here with others in the group, just so everyone can feel safe sharing honest impressions. Also, we would prefer if everyone focuses on their own experiences without naming names involved in particular interactions because we want to protect everyone's privacy. We will record the conversation and use quotes from you all in our write-up, but we won't connect those quotes to specific individuals or names.

Second, we only have a certain amount of time to hear from you. This means that even though everything you're saying is important, I might have to interrupt you or shift topics so we can hear as much from the group as possible. I hate stopping you, but I'll probably have to in the interest of time.

Finally, you are all here because your perspective is valuable. If we haven't heard from you, I might ask you to share your thoughts so we get to hear everyone's voice.
Does anyone have any questions so far?

1. First, can you each briefly share how you got involved with Rainbow Revolution?

2. Each of you has chosen to tell a story in the performance, and I'm wondering if you could tell me the story of that story.
    - If needed, clarify - Not the stories themselves, how did you choose what to tell?
    - How do you decide what gets left out? What has to be kept in?

3. One interesting part of your process is that it sounds like you perform group stories as well as individual stories. How does being a part of a group story feel different from telling an individual story?
    - How does it change your relationships with each other?
    - How do you think differently about yourself?

4. Since we've been talking about group stories, what does this group as a group mean to you, if anything?
    - What do you all mean to each other?

5. How do you feel differently about yourself or your life since you have been in Rainbow Revolution?
    - If needed, make it more concrete - Different friends? Different activities? Different feelings? Different routines?

6. How would you like audience members to think, behave, or believe differently as a result of your performance?
    - How would you know if the performances had the effect you hope for?

7. What questions would you want us to ask them?

General prompt throughout:

- Does anyone see it differently?

6.1.3 Appendix C.

Youth Focus Group Protocol #2

Introduction

First, I just want to thank you for talking with us again! We really loved getting to speak with you this past spring, and to attend your incredible performances. We would love to hear about what performing with Rainbow Revolution was like for you. We will talk for 30-45 minutes today and will try to get through four or five main questions. There are no right or wrong answers because we are most interested in getting your perspective to see things the way you see them.

Before we get started, I want to lay out the same basic guidelines for our discussion as last time we spoke. First, we encourage you not to talk too much about what we say in here with others in the group, just so everyone can feel safe sharing honest impressions. Also, we would prefer if everyone focuses on their own experiences without naming names involved in particular interactions because we want to protect everyone's privacy. We will record the conversation and use quotes from you all in our write-up, but we won't connect those quotes to specific individuals or names.

Second, we only have a certain amount of time to hear from you. This means that even though everything you're saying is important, I might have to interrupt you or shift topics so we can hear as much from the group as possible. I hate stopping you, but I'll probably have to in the interest of time.

Finally, you are all here because your perspective is valuable. If we haven't heard from you, I might ask you to share your thoughts so we get to hear everyone's voice.
Does anyone have any questions so far?

General prompt throughout:

- Does anyone see it differently?

Focus Group #2 (After Performance)

1. In a sentence or two, what surprised you most about your experiences performing this past spring (What did you enjoy most or find most difficult)?

2. You all had been rehearsing these pieces for months before you performed them in the community. How was sharing the pieces in front of an audience different from performing them in practice for one another?
    - What would have been lost if the performance hadn't happened, if the group had stopped at just having rehearsals?
    - What was it like to share a part of yourself with a larger audience?
    - How did it feel?
    - What moments stood out to you?

3. Now, looking back on it, how do you feel performing has impacted you?

- How are you different because of this group? How would you be different if you had never performed?
- In what ways does having performed with Rainbow Revolution continue to affect your daily life?
- How has it affected your current role in the group and your perspective on performing this year?

4. What brought you back this year?
    a. What do you want more of this year?
    b. What would you like to be different?

5. What else feels important for us to know about your performance experience?

6.1.4 Appendix D.

Audience Focus Group Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Research Participant Information and Consent Form (Audience)

Title of the Study: The Impact of Crafting and Performing Narratives on Youth Identity Development: A Preliminary Case Study

Principal Investigator: Stephen Quintana, PhD, 608-262-6987, quintana@education.wisc.edu

Student Researcher: Julia Benjamin, MA, jzbenjamin@wisc.edu

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

You are invited to participate in a study about how original theatre performances by young people affects people. The purpose of the study is to learn more about how performing impacts the way people see themselves as well as how performances affect audience members. Also we want to learn more about the specific impact of Rainbow Revolution on youth and on the community.

We will make audio recordings of these discussions to help us remember exactly what happened during our discussions so we don't miss anything important. Only research team members will have access to them and they will be destroyed by the start of the 2014-15 school year.

WHAT WILL PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in one 1-2 hour small discussion group at the Rainbow Revolution rehearsal space about what it was like attending a Rainbow Revolution production. We will ask you about what your reactions were, and about what you feel you have gotten out of it.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS?

We do not expect there to be any more risk than what you encounter in daily life talking with friends or family. However, it may feel uncomfortable discussing your thoughts and feelings in a group, and it is possible that you may end up sharing information that is personal or sensitive, or that would make it possible for other people to identify who you are. Also, there is the chance that someone in the group could share information you say in the group with others outside the group.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

We also do not expect this study to give any specific benefits to you personally. In general though, it will give you the chance to think about your experiences, and to promote greater understanding of the organization and the process of creative theatre.

IRB Approval Date: 1/21/2014, Date IRB Approval Expires: 1/20/2015, FWA00005399 ED/SBS IRB

University of Wisconsin – Madison

You will not receive any money for participating in this study, but we will bring pizza and snacks to the discussion groups as a way of saying "thank you."

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?
Hopefully we will be able to write a paper to share our findings about Rainbow Revolution based on what we learn from you in our discussions. We would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name, so if you agree to let us quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form. No matter what, if you take part in the discussions, your name will not be used in any paper we write, and all quotes will be changed so nobody will be able to identify you. We will ask group members not to share any information about the discussion outside the group, and the members of the research team will also keep information from discussions confidential.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
You can ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions, please contact the Principal Investigator Dr. Stephen Quintana at 608-262-6987. You may also call the student researcher, Julia Benjamin at jzbenjamin@wisc.edu.

If you are not satisfied with the response of the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.
Your participation is completely your choice. You can choose not to participate at any time and to not answer any questions you don't want to.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print):_____

_____ _____
Signature Date
_____ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

IRB Approval Date: 1/21/2014
Date IRB Approval Expires: 1/20/2015
FWA00005399 ED/SBS IRB

6.1.5 Appendix E.

Audience Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

First, I just want to thank you for talking with us! We are really interested in hearing about your experiences of the Rainbow Revolution performance because we want to understand how such youth-written productions impact audiences. We will talk for 20-30 minutes and will try to get through five main questions. There are no right or wrong answers because we are most interested in getting your perspective to see things the way you see them.

Before we get started, I want to lay out some basic guidelines for our discussion. We would ask that you keep specific content from tonight's discussion confidential so people can feel comfortable sharing honestly. We will record the conversation and use quotes from you in our write-up, but we won't connect those quotes to specific individuals or names. Also, in the discussion please focus on your own experience of the performance and be respectful of others' experiences.

We have a limited amount of time to hear from you, so even though everything you're saying is important, I might have to interrupt you or shift topics so we can hear as much from the group as possible.

Finally, you are all here because your perspective is valuable. If we haven't heard from you, I might ask you to share your thoughts so we get to hear everyone's voice.
Does anyone have any questions so far?

General prompt throughout:

- Does anyone see it differently?

Focus Group - Audience

1. First, where are you now, having just experienced the production?
   - Overall reaction or response?

2. What moments stuck out most to you during the performance? What was it about those moments that spoke to you?
   - Strongest emotions?
   - Most surprised by? Why?
   - Enjoyed? Ones you found difficult? Why?

3. How has witnessing this performance affected the way you see or understand the young people who participated in the production?

4. What would you like us to convey to the youth?
   - Do you have any further feedback for the youth?

5. What will you take with you from this production?
    - Impacted the way you view yourself or the world?
    - What has it meant to you to be an audience member at this performance?
    - What elements of the youths' stories reflect aspects of your own life? Is it a true reflection, or do the youths' narratives provide a different perspective?
    - Anything else?
    - Other things that feel important for us to know about your experience of the production?

6.1.6 Appendix F.

Participant Informed Consent Document

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Title of the Study: A Grounded Theory Exploration of Constructing Individual and Collective Identities Through Theatre

Principal Investigator: Stephen Quintana, PhD, 608-262-6987, quintana@education.wisc.edu

Student Researcher: Julia Benjamin, MA, jzbenjamin@wisc.edu

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

You are invited to participate in a study about how individuals are affected by writing and performing about life experiences as members of a youth theatre company. The purpose of the study is to learn more about how performance impacts the way people see themselves.

We will make audio recordings of these interviews so we don't miss anything important. Only research team members will have access to them and they will be destroyed by May 2017.

WHAT WILL PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in one 1-hour semi-structured interview, either via phone or in person on the UW-Madison campus. There is also the possibility that we will ask to conduct an additional follow-up interview with you if there are particular topics we feel it would be important for us to understand more deeply. We will ask you about what your experiences were like in the theatre group, and about any influence you feel those experiences have had on other areas of your life.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS?

We do not expect there to be any more risk than what you encounter in daily life talking with friends or family. However, it may feel uncomfortable discussing your thoughts and feelings, and it is possible that you may end up sharing information that is personal or sensitive, or that would make it possible for other people to identify who you are.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

We also do not expect this study to give any specific benefits to you personally and you will not receive any money for participating in this study. In general though, it will give you the chance to think about your experiences, and to promote greater understanding of the process and impact of creative theater.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

We plan to write a paper to share our findings based on what we learn from you. We would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name, so if you agree to let us quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form. No matter what, if you take part in the interview, your name will not be used in any paper we write, and all quotes will be changed so nobody will be able to identify you. We will give you the chance to look over the paper we write before it gets published, so if there is anything you feel uncomfortable about you can let us know and we will remove it. Members of the research team will keep information from interviews confidential.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You can ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions, please contact the Principal Investigator Dr. Stephen Quintana at 608-262-6987. You may also call the student researcher, Julia Benjamin at jzbenjamin@wisc.edu.

If you are not satisfied with the response of the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is totally your choice. You can choose not to participate at any time and to not answer any questions you don't want to.

You will be asked if you have read this consent form and will have an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research. At that point, we will ask you to give your voluntary verbal consent to participate.

Oral Consent Script for "A Grounded Theory Exploration of Constructing Individual and Collective Identities Through Theatre"

1. Did you receive a copy of the consent document for this project?

2. Have you had a chance to read that document?

    a. If not, please take a moment to do so now.

3. What questions do you have for me about the consent document or the project in general?

4. Having read the consent document and asked any questions you might have, do you voluntarily consent to participate in this project?

6.1.7 Appendix G.

Initial Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me the story of your experience with Rainbow Revolution.
    a. What were the beginning, middle, and end of your involvement like?
    b. What was most challenging about the experience? What was most rewarding?
2. How did being involved with Rainbow Revolution affect you at the time when you were a youth participant in the group?
    a. How did being involved affect the way you saw yourself?
        i. What contributed to that way of seeing yourself?
        ii. How would you describe the person you were before your involvement with Rainbow Revolution? During your involvement? Immediately after?
    b. How do you feel performing impacted the way others saw you?
    c. How did it affect your relationships with people in and outside Rainbow Revolution? (E.g. friends, classmates, teachers, family members)
3. I'm very interested in the idea that we think of our lives in stories and create an overall "life story" for ourselves. In what ways, if any, has your experience with Rainbow Revolution continued to shape your own personal life story? (Since no longer performing with them)
    a. In what ways has your experience with Rainbow Revolution affected the way you perceive or incorporate your various social identities into your life?
    b. How has your engagement with groups related to SOGD or other salient identities been influenced by your participation in Rainbow Revolution?

   c. How has engaging in Rainbow Revolution influenced the way you handle challenging experiences related to aspects of your identity? How has it influenced the way you experience positive situations related to aspects of your identity?
   d. Does it continue to influence your interactions with others? If so, how?
4. Now I'd like to focus specifically on your experience of writing pieces with the group. During your time in Rainbow Revolution, you combined stories of your own life experiences with those of others in the group. What was the experience of combining your experiences with those of others like for you?
   a. Are there particular stories you wrote with the group that still resonate strongly for you? How do those stories continue to impact you?
5. I would also like to know a bit more about the specific roles you played in the Rainbow Revolution performances. What was it like for you to play the roles you did?
   a. Were those roles based on your own experiences?
   b. For you, what were the benefits and challenges of playing autobiographical roles? What were the benefits and challenges of playing roles based on the experiences of other group members?
   c. Have you continued to incorporate any aspects of the roles you played on stage into your current life? In what way?
6. What other influence do you feel Rainbow Revolution has had on your life that we have not already covered?
   a. If you could go back in time to the time to when you had just begun performing with Rainbow Revolution, what advice would you give yourself?

   b. What implications, if any, do you think Rainbow Revolution and programs like it could have for the field of psychology and health services?
   c. Is there anything else you feel is important for us to know?
   d. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Demographic Questions

1. How long ago were you a performer with Rainbow Revolution?
   a. How many seasons did you perform with them?
   b. How old were you when you started and when you finished as a performer with Rainbow Revolution?
   c. Are you still actively involved with the organization? In what capacity?
   d. How did you get involved? Why did you leave? (If not addressed earlier)
2. How do you currently describe your gender identity?
3. How do you currently describe your sexual orientation?
4. How do you currently describe your race or ethnicity?
5. How do you currently describe your socioeconomic status?
6. How do you currently describe your ability status?
7. For the prior questions about gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, SES, and ability status, how did you identify during your time in Rainbow Revolution?
   a. Have any of your identities changed over time? If so, which ones?
8. What is your current age?
9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
10. What is your current occupation?

6.1.8 Appendix H.

Approximate Updated Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me the story of your experience with Rainbow Revolution.
    a. What were the beginning, middle, and end of your involvement like?
    b. What was most challenging about the experience? What was most rewarding?
2. How did being involved with Rainbow Revolution affect you at the time when you were a youth participant in the group?
    a. How did being involved affect the way you saw yourself?
    b. How do you feel performing impacted the way others saw you?
    c. How did it affect your relationships with people in and outside Rainbow Revolution? (E.g. friends, classmates, teachers, family members)
3. I'm very interested in the idea that we think of our lives in stories and create an overall "life story" for ourselves. In what ways, if any, has your experience with Rainbow Revolution continued to shape your own personal life story?
    a. How do you feel you have changed as a result?
    b. Does it continue to influence your interactions with others? If so, how? What about other groups?
    c. How is your life different?
4. Now I'd like to focus specifically on your experience of creating pieces with the group. What was that process like for you?
    a. What was it like sharing your own stories?
    b. What was it like hearing others' stories?
    c. What was it like combining your experiences with others' to create a piece?

   d. Are there particular stories you created with the group that still resonate strongly for you? How do those stories continue to impact you?
   e. Improvisation sounds like it was a big part of the creative process. How did that impact you?

5. I would also like to know a bit more about the specific roles you played in the Rainbow Revolution performances.
   a. What types of roles did you play?
   b. What was it like playing roles you related to?
   c. What was it like playing roles that were different from yourself?
   d. Have you continued to incorporate any aspects of the roles you played on stage into your current life? In what way?
6. What other influence do you feel Rainbow Revolution has had on your life that we have not already covered?
   a. If you could go back in time to the time to when you had just begun performing with Rainbow Revolution, what advice would you give yourself?
   b. What implications, if any, do you think Rainbow Revolution and programs like it could have for the field of psychology and health services?
   c. Is there anything else you feel is important for us to know?
   d. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Demographic Questions

11. How long ago were you a performer with Rainbow Revolution?
    a. How many seasons did you perform with them?

   b. How old were you when you started and when you finished as a performer with Rainbow Revolution?
   c. Are you still actively involved with the organization? In what capacity?

12. How do you currently describe your gender identity?
13. How do you currently describe your sexual orientation?
14. How do you currently describe your race or ethnicity?
15. How do you currently describe your ability status?
16. For the prior questions about gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, SES, and ability status, how did you identify during your time in Rainbow Revolution?
    a. Have any of your identities changed over time? If so, which ones?
17. What is your current age?
18. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
19. What is your current occupation?

6.1.9 Appendix I.

Demographics of Study Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender ID	Sexual Orientation	Ethnicity	Years in RR	Extra Involvement in RR
Ash	26	Trans Man	Queer	White	1	No
Brooke	21	Cis Woman	Bisexual	White	2	Reunion show
Crystal	28	Cis Woman	Straight	Black	3-4	No
Daria	21	Cis Woman	Pansexual	White	2	No
Emery	22	Cis Woman	Queer	White	2	No
Greg	24	Cis Man	Straight	White	1	No
Jaden	21	Cis Man	Gay	White	2	On board
Kelly	25	Cis Woman	Straight	White	3	Mentor, 4 yrs
Linden	29	Transgender	Queer	White	2	Reunion show
Morgan	31	Cis Woman	Lesbian	Mixed	2.5	Formerly mentor and on board
Noelle	21	Cis Woman	Queer	White	3	No
Phoenix	32	Cis Male	Gay	Black	3	Reunion show
Rowan	31	Queer	Queer	Mixed	4	Reunion show
Sky	18	Cis Woman	Asexual	White	1	No
Taren	25	Trans Man	Gay	Latino	2	Mentor

6.1.10 Appendix J.

Category Code Titles Organized by Theme

Contextual Themes		
Life Outside Rainbow Revolution	**The Institution of Rainbow Revolution**	**Emotions**
Comparing RR to other groups/Spaces - "Reality Check"	Characteristics of RR.	Creating Theatre - feelings.
Comparison between now and teen years - LGBT.	Comparing RR to other groups/spaces.	Creating Theatre – writing insecurity.
Extracurricular involvement.	Comparing RR to other spaces/groups – Theater	Improv - feelings.
Group dynamics - desire to change	Comparison between now and teen years - RR.	Initial experiences in RR
High School	Creating Theatre	Overall attitude toward RR.
High School - LGBT+ experiences.	Creating Theatre - challenges	Perception by others - concern.
Improv - learning to navigate life	Creating Theatre - editing/feedback.	Performance - audience response.
Initiating involvement	Creating Theatre - feedback/Performance – audience	Performance - feelings.
LGBT experiences - unwelcoming spaces.	Creating Theatre - piece description.	Performance - reward
LGBT+ experiences - other challenges.	Creating Theatre - sharing/Pieces based on life - collective story	Pieces based on life - feelings
LGBT+ experiences - queer socialization.	Creating Theatre – writing logistics.	Post-RR involvement - wishing to still be a part.
LGBT+ experiences - specific others	Gaining RR awareness.	Roles - based on others impact on friends
LGBT+ experiences – in family.	Group dynamics	Roles - different from self (feelings).
Personal issues outside of RR.	Group dynamics - composition	Roles - feelings
Pre-RR self - art.	Improv process.	Roles - similar to self (feelings)
Pre-RR self - limited perspective on others.	Leadership	Sharing - feelings.
Pre-RR self - lonely/different.	Mentors	Variations in involvement - alternative choices
Pre-RR self - poor self-concept/self-esteem.	Mentors - Creating Theatre.	
Pre-RR self - quiet/shy.	Perception by others - of RR.	
Pre-RR self - wild/goofy/unmotivated.	Performance - audience	
Pre-RR self.	Performance - description.	
Pre-RR stage experience	Post-RR involvement - Mentoring.	
Psychology - personal experience.	Post-RR involvement - show.	
RR family involvement - Tension	Post-RR involvement.	
Relationships - adults.	Roles	

Relationships - family. Relationships - friends Relationships - parents Relationships - romantic. Societal Context Transition out of RR.	Roles - based on others. Roles - casting/auditioning. Roles - description. Sharing ideas Variation in involvement Variation in involvement - attending. Wanting to change/impact minds - RR outreach. Wanting to change/impact minds.	

Foundational Themes		
Adolescent Social Identity Experiences	**Connecting with Others**	**Expression Through Rainbow Revolution**
Comparing RR to other spaces/groups - LGBT Freedom of Expression - trying on identities Group dynamics and LGBT themes Identity labels Identity labels - feelings. LGBT experiences - coming out (self). LGBT experiences - identity confusion/transition LGBT experiences - positive experiences/pride. LGBT+ experiences - differentness/alone. Perception by others Perception by others - assumption of sexual orientation. RR provides - connection to something larger. RR provides - LGBT learning and exposure Roles - different from self (feelings)/Perception by others - concern. Roles - growth/LGBT+ experiences - coming out (self)	Creating Theatre – collaboration Embracing differences Group dynamics - navigating conflict Improv - Group dynamics. Initial experience in RR/mentors. Meeting people - like them Meeting people. Mentors - talking to. Mentors/Ongoing resonance RR family involvement RR provides - community RR provides - family RR provides - support/Mentors Relationships - through RR. Relationships through RR – romantic Creating Theatre – collaboration Embracing differences Group dynamics - navigating conflict	Creating Theatre - individual creation Creating Theatre - sharing/Performance - audience Creating Theatre - writing depth and impact. Freedom of expression. Group dynamics - inclusion of voice. Group dynamics -- openly addressing personal topics Improv - self expression Mentor/Freedom of expression. Perception by others - post-performance Performance - family seeing Performance - friends seeing Performance - wanting to do justice. Pieces based on life - authenticity. Pieces based on life - collective story. Pieces based on life - communication with family. Pieces based on life - confidentiality Pieces based on life - connection. Pieces based on life - own story.

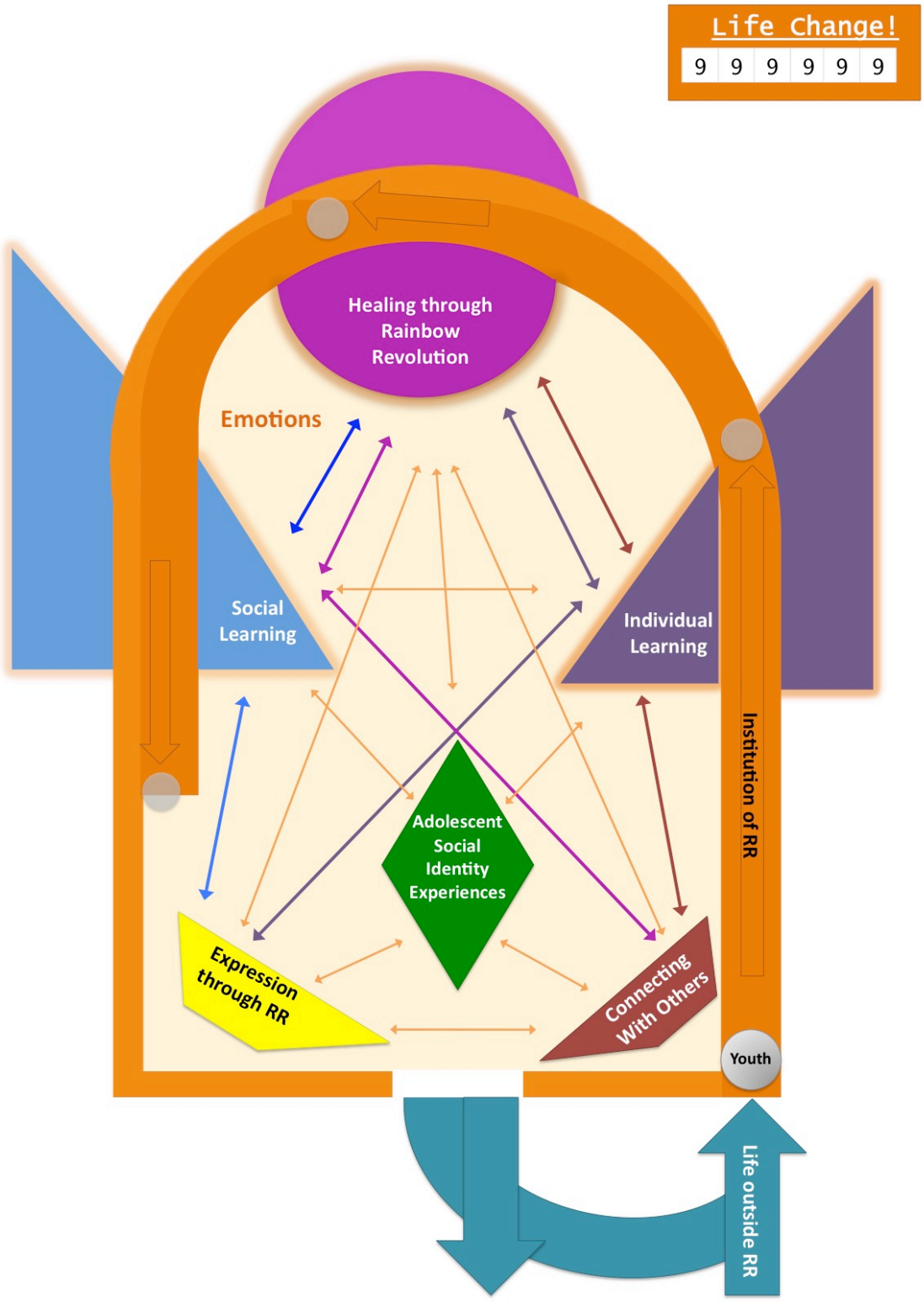
	Improv - Group dynamics. Initial experience in RR/mentors. Meeting people - like them Meeting people. Mentors - talking to. Mentors/Ongoing resonance RR family involvement RR provides - community RR provides - family RR provides - support/Mentors Relationships - through RR. Relationships through RR – romantic	Pieces based on life. Role - different from self (feelings)/Freedom of expression. Roles - immersion Roles - similar to self Sharing stories. Variation in Involvement - Watching vs. sharing.

Higher Order Themes		
Social Learning	**Individual Learning**	**Healing Through Rainbow Revolution**
Comparison of life experiences - being adult. Comparison of life experiences - recognizing privilege. Comparison of life experiences through sharing Comparison of life experiences. Focus on others - learning about. Focus on others - learning from Focus on others. Group Dynamics/Perception by others. Interpersonal growth Interpersonal growth - embracing other perspectives Interpersonal growth - group/SJ involvement. Interpersonal growth - hearing/bearing witness. Interpersonal growth - personal	Comparison between now and teen years – Self Intrapersonal growth - assertiveness. Intrapersonal growth - basic life competence. Intrapersonal growth - behavior change. Intrapersonal growth - confidence/self-esteem Intrapersonal growth - emotion regulation. Intrapersonal growth - expanding comfort zone. Intrapersonal growth - general growth. Intrapersonal growth - growing up/maturity. Intrapersonal growth - identity specific. Intrapersonal growth - knowledge. Intrapersonal growth - leadership. Intrapersonal growth - New	Comparison between groups/spaces - Therapy Creating Theatre - sharing/therapeutic Intrapersonal growth - hope/meaning RR provides - acceptance/validation. RR provides - Levity RR provides - levity/ongoing resonance RR provides - positive life direction. RR provides - safe space. RR provides - support Therapeutic.

relationship skills. Interpersonal growth - recognizing impact of own actions. Interpersonal growth - sharing ideas/talking. Intrapersonal growth - relationship expectations Intrapersonal growth/Focus on others Pieces based on life - others. RR broadens perspectives. RR broadens perspectives. RR impact - on family. RR impact - on family. Roles - different from self. Roles - perspective taking.	perspective on self. Intrapersonal growth - perspective change. Life path. Ongoing Resonance Ongoing resonance - specific piece. Overall attitude toward RR – reflection Perception by others - post-RR. Post-RR involvement - growth RR impact. RR provides - risk-taking RR provides - skills Roles – growth Self-actualization. Using RR skills in daily life	

6.1.11 Appendix K.

Model of Emergent Themes



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